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STORMONT CASTLE,
BELFAST, 4.

BT4 3ST

7th May, 1969.

Dear Greeves,

On Sunday, 19th April, I was asked to find out from the Home Office what the attitude of the British Government would be towards the use of troops for law and order enforcement if the Government of Northern Ireland were to announce their acceptance in principle of universal adult suffrage for local government elections. In the event I was given the attached statement of H.M.G.'s attitude; this, in fact, was of little use for our purposes but you may care to have a copy since it purports to set out the common law position.

It is important that everyone concerned in Northern Ireland should understand the point made in the fourth paragraph, viz., that an initial request for military assistance or, in present circumstances, a request for an extension of the role of the military requires - save in the most extraordinary and exceptional circumstances - the prior agreement of both Governments. Such a request must, of course, be transmitted through the Cabinet Offices/Home Office channel.

I am sending a copy of this letter and enclosure to the Inspector General.

Yours sincerely,

W. Blair

J.E. Greeves, Esq., C.B.,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Stormont,
Belfast.

1 Parliamentary Secretary
2 Minister
To see

J.E. Greeves
8/5/69

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It is not possible for Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to give any secret pledges of military assistance.

At common law it is the duty of the military, at the request of the civil power, to take whatever steps the military judge necessary to maintain order, it being clearly understood that the judgement of the necessity for military forces and the degree of forces used are entirely the responsibility of the military commander.

This is no new statement of policy on behalf of Her Majesty's Government; it is a statement of the law as it is and always has been.

The General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland is under orders to seek prior instructions from the Ministry of Defence, if humanly possible, if a request for military assistance is made; and both Governments have accepted that before the civil authorities in Northern Ireland make any such request there will be prior consultation at Government level.

It is clear that if troops need to be used in this way Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would be bound to keep under consideration the implications of this commitment.

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