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On his recent retirement as Chief Constable of the R.U.C., Sir Jamie Flanagan, the first Catholic ever to hold the post, spoke briefly of the primacy of the police as a priority policy. In this, Sir Jamie was merely echoing what has been the long-term policy of the British Government in regard to security in Northern Ireland - that security must be primarily a matter for a locally-recruited civilianised police, with whatever necessary back-up support from the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Rees, announced in the House of Commons on 12 January 1976 the establishment of a ministerial group to examine "the action and resources required for the next few years to maintain law and order in Northern Ireland". It is now understood that the preliminary report has been presented to Mr. Rees but that publication of its recommendations is unlikely. On the basis of available information, however, fears of a gradual withdrawal of British forces have been growing, fuelled by two recent developments -

- it has been confirmed by the Northern Ireland Police Authority that the R.U.C. is to be supplied with 7.62 mm self-loading rifles to replace their present .303 Lee Enfields. This contrasts with the fact that, technically, the R.U.C., in the light of the Hunt Report, is an unarmed force. The force is also equipped with Sterling sub-machine guns and Waltler pistols. It was also announced that three new armoured personnel carriers are to be brought into service along with four "Hotspur" petrol vehicles.
- in a series of unpublicised moves, the British Army has left the east Belfast Mountpottinger barracks, leaving the predominantly loyalist east of the city without Army presence for the first time in seven years. In another move also apparently connected with the intention to decrease the role of the Army where possible and increase that of the R.U.C., 500 members of the Green Howards Regiment are to leave Northern Ireland this week. The Spearhead Regiment was flown in last January for patrol duty after the murder of 11 Protestant workmen. They will not be replaced. In addition, 500 soldiers of the Ulster Defence Regiment are presently undergoing training

at Warcop in Cumbria, England. In all, it is planned to send four of the Regiment's eleven battalions to the English training camp.

The present strength of the security forces is as follows:-
(on the departure of the Green Howards)

	Full-time	Part-time
R.U.C.	5,700 ⁺	4,000
U.D.R.	1,500	6,100
ARMY	14,200	-

⁺Including 700 full-time members of the RUC Reserve

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