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RBS/83/87

cc. 1 PS/Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Innes

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Mr Wood
Mr McConnell
Mr Templeton
Mr Cornick



PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY

Attached is a first draft of a minute which Dr Mawhinney might send to the Secretary of State.

I would welcome comments **by the end of the week** so that a revised version can be issued for discussion at next week's PSG meeting.

RBS

R B SPENCE
Central Secretariat
11 March 1987
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DRAFT/RBS/83/87 - 11 MARCH 1987

cc. Mr Scott (B&L)
Mr Needham (B&L)
Lord Lyell (B&L)
PUS (B&L)
Mr Bloomfield
Mr Stephens
Mr Burns
Mr Innes
Mr Chesterton
PSG Members

Secretary of State (B&L)

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SECURITY

Introduction

1. You invited the Presentational Strategy Group to consider how we might promote greater understanding of HMG's security policy, the terrorist threat and the action of the security forces. This minute sets out our ideas which have been developed after discussion with senior NIO(B) officials and the Army's and RUC's information experts.
2. We have been concerned with presentation, and have not, therefore, sought to question policy on "police primacy", or other issues like the relationship between the RUC and the Police Authority.

The terrorist threat and security police

3. We believe that every opportunity should be taken by Ministers to talk in public

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and in private about the nature of the terrorist threat and the policies which Government is adopting to overcome that threat.

4. The basic points which need to be highlighted again and again are well set out in the attached note which was prepared in the context of "the frameworks for policy statements".
5. We recommend strongly that you should make a major policy statement on security drawing on this note and highlighting tangible examples of the progress being made especially in relation to cross-border co-operation. You have an engagement on 27 March which would be a very appropriate occasion. On the assumption that you will accept this recommendation, NIO(B) have begun work on the speech and the Information Service is considering how to maximise publicity.
6. Such a major restatement of policy can be followed up by Ministers and senior officials using the arguments in the speech in their formal and informal contacts with people throughout NI.
7. I regard achievement of a better understanding of the nature of the security threat and of HMG's approach to security as forming a central and crucial part of the wider climate changing exercise to ease the political log-jam which we will be undertaking over the coming months.
- [8. You may also wish to consider whether it would be sensible to encourage the

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Chief Constable to supplement your statement by taking suitable public occasions to reinforce some of your arguments about terrorism as a cancer in society and the need for the support of everyone in destroying it].

Image of the security forces

9. We have also considered what further measures might be taken to enhance the image of the security forces and their standing with all sections of the NI community.

10. The emphasis must be on improving further the image of the RUC. Present policy requires the army to keep a low public relations profile in NI and, while not under-playing their importance, to maintain their position as one of supporting the RUC. There are special problems in relation to the perception of the UDR by the minority community which we have not addressed in this exercise.

11. We want to project the RUC as a force which is carrying out the full range of police duties, including combatting terrorism, on behalf of the whole community. The RUC have been giving good publicity to normal police work like combatting vandalism, road traffic and drug abuse. We would regard as particularly important, giving a higher profile to ordinary police work in nationalist areas. However, there are dangers; for example we were advised that giving a higher public profile to the RUC's community relations work could be counter-productive and might invite terrorist attacks on organisers and participants.

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12. The police are handling well the immediate public response to major security incidents, with all senior officers now trained to speak to the media. There would be dangers in trying to do more on this front. Too quick a response to a major incident has often in the past proved to be wrong, incomplete or misleading, and has had to be corrected to everyone's embarrassment.

13. Our main conclusion is that we would like to see more progress in increasing contact between the police and people of standing in local communities. Some steps have already been taken in this direction and, I understand, ideas have been tabled by the Irish under Article 7(c) of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Force regulations require senior officers to carry out positive presentation of the RUC and local commanders are encouraged to use their initiative on this matter. [The Police Authority has also, of course, an important role].

14. Given the present unionist protest action in local government and the SDLP's continuing reluctance to give wholehearted support to the RUC, it would be unwise to try at present to push for formal police liaison arrangements based around district councillors. The existence of formal structures provides an opportunity for someone to seek publicity by a boycott or withdrawal. Rather, we should - through PAB and other contacts - use every opportunity to encourage councillors, clergy, Chambers of Commerce and Trade, local community leaders, etc, to seek regular meetings with senior RUC officers to discuss local problems.

15. I believe also that Government Departments and public bodies should, as a

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matter of course, invite senior local police officers to attend meetings of officials convened to discuss any problem which has a law and order implication. For example, local police could make a useful contribution to discussions about local road traffic problems, vandalism in public parks or planning a new development. This occurs to some extent now, but it is too patchy.

16. In addition, we should seek to ensure that local senior police officers are normally invited to local ceremonies and functions, including any organised by NIO. I see merit in Ministers inviting more senior policemen to some of the informal dinners and lunches at Hillsborough and Stormont House being organised for important people in NI public life.

Conclusion

17. To sum up, PSG recommends that:
 - 17.1 you should make, on 27 March, a major speech on the security threat and our policies for tackling it;
 - 17.2 Ministers and officials should use the arguments in this speech in their contacts in NI;
 - 17.3 we should continue to project the RUC as a force carrying out the full range of police duties on behalf of the whole community;

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17.4 we should take every opportunity to increase the contacts between the police and those of standing in public and local community life in NI.

B MAWHINNEY

March 1987

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