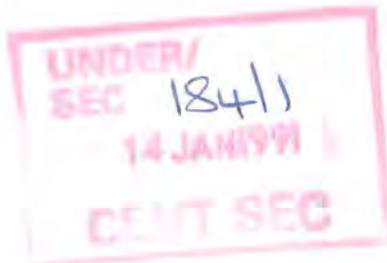


C O N F I D E N T I A L

FROM: PS/PUS
11 JANUARY 1991



cc. PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr A P Wilson - B
Mr Hamilton 141 - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Petch - B
Mr J McConnell - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr McNeill - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SECURITY POLICY IN WEST BELFAST

The PUS held a meeting on Monday 7 January in his room in Stormont Castle with copy recipients (except Sir Kenneth Bloomfield) to discuss issues relating to security policy in West Belfast following Mr Bell's note of 22 November on a briefing session he had given to 39 Brigade in Holywood, and related correspondence. The meeting had before it Mr Bell's annotated agenda of 7 January.

2. Anecdotal evidence over the past couple of months showed that the tendency for both the Army and the police to point to the other's shortcomings had not diminished. The Army felt:

- (i) the police did not make best use of their resources and skills;
- (ii) that security operations in West Belfast were not conducted on an effective basis either in political or operational terms;
- (iii) that the level of deployment of soldiers in West Belfast was too high;
- (iv) that the police did not put across a good public relations image; and
- (v) that police deployment was slow thereby constraining their action against terrorism.

3. On the other hand, the police were critical of the Army in the following respects:

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- (i) their overwhelming concentration on terrorism as the evil which must be addressed at all costs, meant they had a narrow perception of community concern and a lack of understanding of why local people reacted in the way they sometimes did;
- (ii) the shorter periods of time they spent in West Belfast particularly meant no rapport could be built up with local people and this made the Army seem anonymous (but see paragraph 5).

Community Perceptions

4. The community believed the Army was the dominant security force, notwithstanding all assertions of police primacy. The Security Force issues on which community feelings ran highest were:

- (i) shooting joy riders;
- (ii) house searches which affected whole streets, and would thus be perceived to be indiscriminate;
- (iii) stopping young men randomly in the street and questioning them; and
- (iv) perceived slow RUC response to ordinary crime, often of a minor nature. This left something of a vacuum that the paramilitaries filled by knee capping, and occasional threats to families ordering them to leave a particular area.

5. More generally there was a difficulty for the Security Forces in dealing with non terrorist crime in an appropriate way. There was a widespread feeling that incidents such as the death of the joy riders, and of the three men robbing the bookmakers shop on the Whiterock Road junction were examples of the Security Forces reacting to a terrorist situation where none existed. Lethal force was no way to deal with ordinary crimes.

Community Relations

6. Both the Army and the police paid lip-service to the concept that any successful terrorist policy needed to carry the community with it. However local Divisional and Sub-Divisional Commanders in the RUC often seemed to believe that community relations was a subject to be dealt with by the Community Relations Branch of the RUC and Headquarters. For the Army, the problem was somewhat different in that the short periods of time spent in West Belfast meant that local people complaining could not be sure that corrective action taken for one Battalion would be apply to the following one. The short periods also meant that the Army had a less good understanding of the environment they were working in, especially as they were not generally from Northern Ireland. The

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Army were skilled however in their public dealings with the community, with a large number of articulate officers willing to listen to people's concerns. They sometimes put across a better public image than the police, who nevertheless had a much better understanding of local concerns because of their greater exposure to them. Police relations with the community were often good on a micro-level, but policies tended to be less well explained more widely.

Conclusions on Solutions

7. A number of ideas were put forward as possible contributions towards a solution to the knot of problems outlined in Mr Bell's agenda (in addition to those suggested in his final paragraph).

- Joint briefings were an important way to address the RUC and the Army together. Where possible these should be developed to become mutual briefing sessions, with the Security Forces offering their on-the-ground experience of the way projects were working. It was essential that civil government and its concerns should be prominent in this process, if we were to convince the police that the NIO was not straying from its rightful territory. Police sensitivity at their respective role vis-a-vis of the NIO and the Army was exacerbated because the RUC were not one of several forces covering an area, but rather the sole force with responsibility for the whole of Northern Ireland. The policy level was thus not distanced from the force level within the police service.
- Joint area studies was another subject on which the NIO and Army both saw considerable merits. However, after reflection, the RUC had rejected one such proposal in relation to Londonderry. The aim of reaching an agreed view of the problems and of how to tackle them from the security point of view was one which should not be lost sight of.
- Use of networking to ensure that key opinion formers met regularly with Security Force representatives was to be encouraged. There were a number of opportunities in the entertaining done by Ministers, and it could become more normal practice for Security Force representatives to be invited to receptions no matter what the subject matter. Ministers could also play a more proactive part in their day-to-day visits. The previous Minister of State, together with the Secretary of State, had undertaken an extensive round of Security Force visits which had been well received. It may also be possible to bring local community representatives in to meet the Minister when on such visits, whether for a meal or something less formal.

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- The civil side of Government should seek to get closer to the RUC Community Relations Branch. The ultimate aim would be to enhance the role played by that section of the RUC and to seek to introduce throughout the force a greater understanding of the importance good relations with the community played in securing the overall success of policing.
- The weakness of the Nationalist constitutional party in West Belfast was one source of weakness and concern. If, in some way, this could be bolstered, and formal and effective relationships fostered between the SDLP and the police, then matters would be greatly improved.
- An independent complaints system was also mentioned as one possibility for heightening the confidence of the community. However in Great Britain this had not been particularly successful in these terms.
- The RUC should be encouraged to develop a better public relations image. The community had fundamental lack of understanding of the aims of security policy and the RUC was not good at explaining why it acted as it did.
- That the forthcoming visit by HMCIC may allow some of the structural problems of the RUC to be addressed.

8. It was agreed that the group would reconvene in early February (now set up for 4 February at 1600) to consider the issues further.

Signed:

PETER MAY
PS/PUS
11 JANUARY 1991

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