

PAB/7349/SM/RN

FROM: S A MARSH, PAB
DATE: 21 AUGUST 1991

Mr A Wilson - B

cc Mr Alston - B
Mr Hamilton - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Maxwell - B
Mr Petch - B
Dr Rosborough - B
Mrs Black

THE OVERALL MESSAGE: A PAPER FOR ISG

As we discussed briefly this morning, I attach the draft of a paper which might go to the next meeting of ISG(O) and thence to ISG(M) at the end of September. It attempts to pull together two pieces of work which you have already seen and commented upon; it also introduces to Ministers the concept of making more use of past successes in addressing the nationalist agenda, a topic on which Mr Ledlie and Mr Alston have exchanged minutes.

2. The main thing which is new is the proposed adoption of border road closures as a pilot project for the idea of targetting key security areas. For the present I have simply suggested ways in which this particular subject might be approached; you (or others) might feel that we should be putting more flesh on the bones.

3. All this work clearly complements what is happening on the SECRASP front; I have hinted at this in paragraph 2 of the draft paper but given that the final version will be going to the RUC and Army it would probably be best for the time being not to refer to it in terms.

4. I should be grateful for any comments within the next couple of weeks; I should like to be able to give the next version of the paper the full ISG(O) circulation some time in the week beginning 15 September.

[Signed]

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THE OVERALL MESSAGE: NOTE FROM ISG(O)

ISG(O) has been engaged on a programme of work aimed at ensuring that the Government's overall message is properly co-ordinated and targetted and that what we have to say in terms of security policy is set firmly in the context of messages about Government activity in general. This work divides naturally into three distinct, but complementary, areas.

2. The primary aim is to contribute to reducing 'alienation' in the nationalist community thereby making it more difficult for the Provisional movement to sustain or increase support from that community. By stressing as appropriate elements of "good government" it would also aim to increase support for constitutional politics. The approach complements work on the policy issues involved.

Key security messages

3. There would be advantage in seeking to establish, on a regular basis, a set of key messages about the Government's security policy which could be deployed by the Secretary of State and other Government spokesmen, as well as by members of the security forces, at any suitable opportunity. Such messages would need to be tailored to suit specific audiences, and in particular to maintain a balance between reminding people of the benefits of good government while making absolutely clear that those who carry out or encourage acts of terrorism will be dealt with vigorously.

4. Attached at Annex A is an illustrative set of messages which build on the Statement of Security Policy issued in November 1990. The list is broken down in terms of general themes, those which have more of the "carrot" and those which have more "stick". It is intended as a menu from which thoughts can be drawn for specific circumstances. It might be sensible to review it every six months.

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5. In order to be effective, such a list would have to be disseminated thoroughly throughout the Government machine, and also to those in the RUC and Army who have a representational role. This might be accompanied by an exhortation to all those concerned to draw from the list appropriate extracts for appropriate occasions. In the NIO the Secretary of State might wish to minute his Ministerial colleagues and senior officials and invite Mr Fell to take an early opportunity to place it on the agenda of PCC.

Targetting key security areas

6. At Annex B is a paper which outlines the concept of selecting from time to time major areas in the security field for more comprehensive and sophisticated treatment using a range of techniques to penetrate the perceived target audience.

7. A suitable pilot area might be border road closures, a subject which has presentational peaks and troughs, but which is always to a greater or lesser degree in the public eye. The target audience of any campaign aimed at explaining our rationale would fall largely in the categories in paragraph 3(i),(ii) and (iv) of the Annex. In other words, the messages will have to strike a balance between reassuring uncommitted nationalists of HMG's good intentions, stressing that those who use illegal methods will not prevail and reassuring unionists of the Government's determination to protect law-abiding people and bring terrorism to an end. The audience will also be predominantly rural and typically live in small and isolated communities.

8. On this analysis, the methods to be used in any sustained campaign might include any or all of the following options from paragraph 5 of the Annex:-

- (a) A couple of paragraphs in a well-publicised speech by a Minister on a visit to the area;
- (b) Representatives from the NIO, RUC and Army taking the opportunity to explain the facts to local opinion formers; and

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- (c) The placing of articles and/or interviews in Enniskillen-based newspapers catering for both political persuasions.

9. If this approach, and the subject for a pilot scheme, finds favour with ISG(M), officials will work up a more detailed plan and put it into effect over the coming months.

The nationalist agenda

10. In general, the perceptions of Government among nationalists especially in key areas of the Province, are themselves a critical factor in the fight against terrorism. It is common ground that we should seek every available means to reduce support for the terrorists within their own community, and reinforce support from within that community for constitutional politics. Over the past ten years or so much has been done by Government to address the causes of nationalist alienation set out by, for example, Cardinal Daly, John Hume and Seamus Mallon since the early 1980s and before. There is scope to do more to publicise this and to encourage the leaders of the nationalist community and the Irish Government to themselves do more to acknowledge it, and thus increase confidence within the community which looks to them for an example. While it would not break into the hard core of support for the IRA, it would do something to do influence the broader and more porous community which surrounds it and which is capable of being influenced by the execution and presentation of Government policy.

11. If this thesis is accepted we already have an impressive record of seeking to create confidence between alienated sections of the public and the government machine in general. We might seek recognition for those efforts. Major planks would include:-

- (i) the primacy the Secretary of State has given to the search for ways of revitalizing political processes which will command general consent;
- (ii) the priority given in public expenditure and other terms to a range of economic and social policies such as the Belfast

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and Londonderry regeneration programmes as well as the CRISP programme, the greater emphasis on rural development, targetting social need, Fair Employment, and housing;

- (iii) the Community Relations Initiative and associated programmes in the educational field;
- (iv) the principles of security policy as set out in the Security Policy Statement, the steps taken to implement these and the channels of redress, offset by the need for exceptional powers and measures to ensure that the IRA does not get its way; and
- (v) prisons policy.

12. Officials have already begun to consider how this might be put into effect; broadly speaking the approach outlined in Annex B to this paper would be appropriate here too. But there is further work to be done, both in terms of policy and of presentation; and it may be that we do already receive all the credit from leaders of the nationalist community which we are entitled to expect. We shall report further.

Conclusion

13. In conclusion, ISG(M) is invited to:-

- (i) endorse the promulgation within the system and use of the key security messages (paragraphs 3-5 and Annex A);
- (ii) Endorse the concept of targetting key security areas and agree to the working up of border road closures as a pilot scheme (paragraphs 6-9 and Annex B); and
- (iii) Note the work in hand on ensuring that people get the message that Government has in recent years gone a long way towards addressing the basic nationalist agenda (paragraphs 10-12).

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ANNEX A

KEY SECURITY MESSAGES: AUGUST 1991

General

- The Government's aims are:-
 - (a) to maintain the rule of law;
 - (b) to ensure that all the people of Northern Ireland are free to express their political opinions without inhibition, fear of discrimination or reprisal;
 - (c) to defend the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland against those who try to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence; and
 - (d) to create in Northern Ireland the conditions for a just, peaceful and prosperous society in which local people can exercise greater control over their own affairs.

- The Army's operational role in Northern Ireland is to support the police where and when the security situation makes it necessary.

"Carrot"

- Government is implementing effective measures in the political, social and economic fields in order to promote equality of treatment, economic well-being and stable democratic institutions. These complement and reinforce the Government's security strategy.

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- The Government is committed to strengthening the Northern Ireland economy and improving the competitiveness of Northern Ireland industry. In so doing it will seek to promote equality of opportunity in employment for all.
- The Government has established the targeting of social need as a major public expenditure priority. This is intended to tackle social and economic differentials between the two sides of the community.
- The Government will continue to promote special initiatives for socially deprived areas of Belfast and Londonderry.
- The Government is addressing the causes of communal division by promoting greater cross-community contact and respect for cultural diversity. It is also committed to promoting equality of opportunity and esteem.
- The Government is in the process of developing structures to assist the self-help regeneration of the most deprived rural areas. It is also prepared to support projects or initiatives of a cross-border nature which are of benefit to the citizens of Northern Ireland.
- The IRA's attacks on so-called 'commercial targets' simply put at risk investment and jeopardise or destroy jobs. They also mean that money which might have been put to more productive use has to be diverted to repair the damage.
- Our goal is to restore normality, with the ultimate aim that all military support to the police should be removed when the security situation permits.
- There is no shoot to kill policy. The security forces only use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances to prevent crime or make a lawful arrest. If members of the security forces break the law they, like all other citizens, will be liable to prosecution.

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- We call on all men and women of goodwill to co-operate with the security forces as they carry out their duty to protect the community. This may mean, regrettably, some inconvenience. The terrorists bear the ultimate responsibility for that inconvenience.

- The Government hopes that anyone who believes they have a genuine complaint about the conduct of a police officer or member of the armed forces will use the statutory procedures which exist for the investigation and remedy of such complaints. An Independent Assessor of Armed Forces Complaints will soon complement the Independent Commission for Police Complaints.

- Only around one third of all crossing points along the border are closed. In the great majority of cases crossing on foot remains possible. The first duty of the Government must be to protect life, and provide as much protection as possible for the whole community.

"Stick"

- The first priority of the Government is to eliminate terrorism. There is no acceptable level of violence. All violence will be met with by a firm and resolute response.

- Emergency legislation, including in particular the Emergency Provisions (NI) Act 1991, is so framed to ensure that the police and armed forces have the legal means necessary to protect the community effectively and at the same time to provide appropriate safeguards for individuals. The need for further powers, and the possibility of allowing existing ones to lapse, is kept under constant review.

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- The Government will continue to ensure that the police and armed forces have the resources they need to undertake their difficult and dangerous work on behalf of all the people of Northern Ireland.

- Terrorists will be dealt with through the energetic, but even-handed, enforcement of the criminal law.

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ANNEX B

TARGETTING KEY SECURITY AREAS

1. In parallel with establishing a menu of key messages there would be benefit from time to time in identifying a number of major areas in the security field for more comprehensive and sophisticated treatment. Possible candidates might be: those in which we had a good story to tell which for some reason was not getting across (eg the evolution of RUC and Army complaints procedures); those in which there was ground to be made up in terms of public perception (eg whether or not the security forces operate a "shoot to kill" policy); or topical issues in which we had an interest in getting our views firmly on the record (eg the rationale for border road closures).

2. As ever, once a decision to develop a key area has been taken selectivity and targetting are all-important. For any given message the recipients are likely to fall into some or all of the following categories:-

- (i) the potential or actual Sinn Fein/PIRA supporter to whom it must be made clear that terrorist activity will not prevail;
- (ii) the uncommitted nationalist who may need to be reminded of the benefits good government will bring him;
- (iii) the human rights enthusiast who will wish to be persuaded that the activities of the security forces are absolutely fair and have due regard to the rights of individuals;
- (iv) the person (mainly but not exclusively unionist) who seeks reassurance that the campaign against terrorism is being prosecuted with all due vigour; and
- (v) the unionist who needs to be kept on the Government's side.

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3. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the Province is split into a number of geographical areas each with its own profile and characteristics. In this context the difference between urban and rural is of paramount importance, particularly in terms of potential and actual Sinn Fein supporters. In urban areas, the motivating factor of such people may well be material deprivation, coupled with an alienation from society in general, which finds expression in militant republicanism often because it is perceived to be the only effective political outlet available. In the more rural areas this general alienation is unlikely to be so high, and the driving force is more likely to be genuine republicanism, often fostered by generations of tradition. Taking these issues into account the audience (and the most appropriate medium) for any message will be different in, say, Fermanagh (rural, isolated and mixed unionist and nationalist), mid-Ulster (rural and overwhelmingly traditional republican) and West Belfast (polarised, socially deprived, and with many conventional inner-city characteristics). It is worth taking the time to devise strategies which will have the maximum penetration in any given target area.

4. Against this background, there is a range of techniques which might be selectively deployed to get messages across. A not necessarily exhaustive list is as follows:-

- (i) major Ministerial speeches, or portions of speeches, together with press releases;
- (ii) a systematic drip-feed of comments on key issues by Ministers and others in contact with opinion-formers; including churchmen, councillors, and members of public bodies;
- (iii) taking key opinion-formers into our confidence on specific issues by giving them off-the-record information;
- (iv) orchestrated visits by Ministers or senior officials to the relevant geographical areas;

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- (v) closer contact with the local press, including the placing of articles, interviews, etc, for example an article on border road closures in the Fermanagh Herald; and
- (vi) in selected cases commercial advertising tactics, for example the recent series of television commercials publicising the existence of the confidential telephone.

5. But for any of these techniques to work it is of crucial importance that the message is not perceived to be too different from what people are observing for themselves on the ground; thus, a campaign stressing the accessibility of procedures for making complaints against the security forces will only bring the system into disrepute if the systems themselves are perceived to be difficult to operate and slow in yielding results. Getting the timing right is also of the essence.

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