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284 June 1988

MR STEPHENS
MR CHESTERTON
MR INNES
MR HEWITT
MR JMC CONNELL
MR KIRK

3/SOFS TO SEE

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Dear Tom,

INFORMATION POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

We agreed during the meeting to review policy options for Northern Ireland on 20th April that there should be an examination of information policy in the Province with a view to bringing forward proposals for improving the information effort and, in particular, the speed and effectiveness of our response to Sinn Fein propaganda.

Clearly, the presentation of Government policy in Northern Ireland is your responsibility. But you may find it helpful to have one or two thoughts on the issue, as I believe that the Army could make a worthwhile contribution to ensuring, in conjunction with the RUC, that our overall policy in the Province is put across positively and in the best possible light. I attach a Note which has been drawn up by the staffs here based on some proposals put forward by Headquarters Northern Ireland, which you may find helpful. I believe this is something which you will wish to discuss more fully with the GOC and with the Chief Constable but I should be grateful to be consulted about the outcome in due course.

4. I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe and Douglas Hurd, and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours ver,
George

George Younger

The Rt Hon Tom King MP

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NOTE ON INFORMATION POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

"In one department, namely publicity, [Sinn Fein] was unrivalled. This department was energetic, subtle and exceptionally skilful in mixing truth, falsehood and exaggeration and was perhaps the most powerful and least fought arm of the Sinn Fein forces"

War Office Record of the Rebellion in Ireland - 1922.

1. An essential element of any successful anti-terrorist campaign lies in winning over those who have previously supported terrorism. Sinn Fein's and PIRA's skill in manipulating the media is well honed and very effective. They have the capacity to initiate and exploit situations and, moreover, they now have a Member in the House and fifty eight Councillors to articulate their propaganda. There is a need for a dynamic and integrated information policy organisation to counter this propaganda and to demonstrate the nature of IRA terrorism and the pointlessness of its campaign.

2. What may be lacking for our part is a clear identification of strategic aims and methods for a coordinated public information campaign against Sinn Fein and PIRA. Although an ad hoc group, consisting of information officers from the RUC, the Army and the NIO was set up recently and it was used very effectively as the vehicle for launching the Confidential Telephone campaign, its power to act on overall PR strategy is limited.

3. In our view, there is a need for an "Information Policy

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Group" to be formed, comprising senior representatives from the NIO, RUC and the Army charged with giving clear overall direction on information policy in the Province and coordinating the activities of the information officers of all three agencies. Its objectives would be to lay down the strategic and long-term measures aimed at undermining the esteem and credibility of the terrorist organisations; and justifying the role and methods employed by the security forces in the Province both at home and overseas. As you may know in a defence crisis the MOD would plan to form such a group under the chairmanship of the PUS; we believe a similar strategic PR planning group would prove invaluable in Northern Ireland. The group should be established at Stormont and be responsible directly to the Secretary of State.

4. There are a number of other proposals for improving the projection of the Government's security policies in the Province, concerning such matters as how best to enhance the UDR's image, which should be considered in due course by the Information Policy Group when it has been formed. It will also need to give consideration to how to address the crucial international dimension more forcefully.