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CGSVISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND COMMAND

1. I visited NORTHERN IRELAND COMMAND on 30 - 31 Mar, in order to bring myself up-to-date on the IRA threat and the measures required to deal with it. I had discussions with the Army Commander, the Inspector-General, Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Commissioner of Police for BELFAST, the Speaker of the Senate and the Minister for Home Affairs. The main points which arose are summarised below.

2. The IRA Threat

2. The IG, RUC gave me a detailed assessment of the threat (which he had very recently passed to a member of the Security Service for the attention of the JIC) from which it is clear that there is a very real likelihood of trouble, of two main

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IRA Terrorism on the EOKA model - eg: attacks on key individuals such as leading members of the Administration, the Police (especially officers of Special Branch) and the Services, combined with action against Police Stations, military establishments (notably armouries) and public utilities.

Sectarian Conflict most probably in BELFAST, which can lead to communal rioting of a particularly virulent sort.

It is thought that trouble is most likely to begin on the weekend after Easter - ie; 16/17 Apr. The IG reported that he plans to take certain preliminary measures on Friday 15 Apr, which will include searches and the arrest and interrogation of certain known IRA ringleaders in the hope that their projected operations may thus be dislocated and/or postponed for a few days.

3. The IG made it clear that the expected trouble will not be 'a one-shot affair' confined to the Easter period; his information indicates that it will mark the beginning of a campaign designed to last indefinitely. A full appreciation is being prepared to reach the JIC in the very near future.

4. Throughout our discussion I was struck by the IG's sober, balanced and 'down-to-earth' approach; his conclusions had obviously been formed on a basis of reliable information, cross-checked and carefully weighed against a background of wide experience of the IRA problem over a number of years.

Military Support

5. I was glad to see the very close and friendly relationship that has been established between the Army Commander, the IG and the Minister for Home Affairs. Both the Minister and the IG expressed their warm appreciation of the help already provided by the Army in the way of Ferrets, SLRs and ammunition, and were particularly grateful for the promptness with which their requests were met.

6. The main point of concern to the Minister, the IG and the Army Commander is the availability of infantry over the period from Easter to about 20 May during which time 1 MX depart for BRITISH GUIANA, and 1 KINGS return, not becoming fully operational until 20 May. They appreciate the value of the temporary presence of 1 R SUSSEX (from 27 Mar - 27 Apr) but feel

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strongly that the garrison should be at full strength between the time 1 R SUSSEX return to the UK (27 Apr) and 1 KINGS become operational again (20 May). This can only be achieved by providing another battalion from the UK, under the guise of taking part in a training exercise.

7. The time by which this battalion should arrive is governed by the expectation of trouble over the week-end 16/17 Apr. The Minister particularly asked that the leading elements (e.g. the Advance Party and a company) should arrive not later than Fri 15 Apr - the remainder of the battalion to follow between 18 and 20 Apr; and he was insistent that we should avoid as far as possible the despatch of any reinforcements after trouble had broken out. (This coincides with the view expressed by the Home Secretary to the PM at a meeting on 2 Mar). This was strongly supported by both the IG and the Army Commander.

8. I agreed with the Minister that the ostensible reason for the second battalion's arrival would be a training exercise, and the Minister saw advantages in making a press-release to this effect as soon as a decision has been made. The Army Commander would propose to station the battalion in HOLYWOOD Barracks just outside BELFAST, which houses the Rear Party of 1 MX. Its primary role would be the general support of the BELFAST police as required, and to assist in guarding the RII Aircraft Repair Yard which is near the barracks, and is a large and very vulnerable target.

Conclusion

9. All that I saw and heard has convinced me of the need for a second battalion to reinforce NORTHERN IRELAND from 15 - 20 Apr for about one month, and I therefore request your authority to initiate the necessary action.

After note.

The report referred to in para 3 above has since been received, and a paper (JIC 289/66) has been circulated for clearance by the JIC today, 1 Apr.

G. R. BAKER

VCGS.

| Apr 66.

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