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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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CABINET OFFICE
A 9006
20 MAY 1969
FILE NO

PRIME MINISTERNORTHERN IRELAND

The Chief of the General Staff has just returned from a short visit to Northern Ireland to review our military dispositions and to examine the sources of our intelligence.

2. I am attaching a copy of his report to me which I am sure that you and the Home Secretary will wish to study before you see the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on Wednesday. I need hardly say that I entirely agree with CGS's conclusions. An improvement in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and particularly in its intelligence assessments, is primarily a matter for the Home Secretary; and he will no doubt be taking up the points CGS has made. I for my part am most anxious that our position on the military role is made completely clear to Major Chichester-Clark.

3. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Social Services, the Home Secretary, the Lord President, the Attorney General and the Secretary to the Cabinet.

Dury

19th May 1969

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NORTHERN IRELAND

REPORT BY C.G.S.

1. I have just returned from a three day visit to Northern Ireland, and am reporting to you on two main subjects before their Prime Minister arrives in London on 21st May.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

2. There is no doubt that the RUC is behind the times, poorly led and administered, and with a sadly inefficient Special Branch. Of all its weaknesses, the latter requires the most urgent action to rectify. It is badly organised and run, with the result that speculation and guesswork largely replace intelligence. Happily, an experienced Security Liaison Officer and a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer have recently been attached from the UK and already are having an impact. There is no doubt that, if their recommendations are fully implemented, great improvements will result but this is bound to take time. We should then get a clear definition of the threat (in all its forms) and a more economical use of police and military manpower. As yet neither the SB nor the Northern Ireland Government have the remotest idea as to who was behind the recent sabotage incidents.

3. The RUC is jealous of its independence; the Inspector General objects to what he calls "interference from Ministers" with the result that there is no mutual confidence or trust. The Minister for Home Affairs (Mr Porter) is now well aware of this deficiency, and that, specifically, he is being told only what the Inspector General deems it fit that he should hear.

4. I had an hour's session on 14th May with the Prime Minister and Mr Porter (General Harris and the Secretary to the Cabinet were also present). I first stressed the inadequacy of the present Intelligence products and the supreme importance in the scheme of things to get this right. I asked the Prime Minister to see the Security Liaison Officer at the earliest opportunity so that he could get the facts from an expert. (As a result, Mr Porter had a 4-hour interview with the Security Liaison Officer later the same day and the Prime Minister had him to a working lunch the next day. I have subsequently seen the Security Liaison Officer who assured me that he pulled no punches, and that the Prime Minister and Mr Porter were under no illusions any longer as to the specific weaknesses, not only in the Intelligence organisation but also in other areas of the RUC. This is an important break through and an essential preliminary to achieving any success).

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5. I also told the Prime Minister that, if there was a requirement in his view for any more expert advice on Police matters from outside the RUC, I felt that the Home Office would lend a sympathetic ear. He said he would certainly consider this, but was only too well aware of the sensitivities of the RUC to "outsiders" and the possible damaging effect on their morale.

The Military Role

6. I reminded the Prime Minister (and later the Inspector General) of HMG's general attitude towards military involvement. I explained why, for example, in the present circumstances at least, it was not considered right to put soldiers into the Belfast Port Area. The Prime Minister appeared to accept this; Mr Porter admitted that there was scope for better coordination of the existing security arrangements in the Docks, and that perhaps they had been a bit hasty in seeking military assistance. I added that advice, if required, was one thing; physical involvement quite another.

7. I went on to stress the need to reduce the present heavy load on the 3 battalions with static guards (49 VPs are presently being guarded). I was far from convinced that all of these were essential in the first place; and secondly, that a greater effort could not be provided either from the call-up of more B Specials or, if this were impracticable, by the special recruitment of "bluebottles" (on the lines of the WD Constabulary) by the Public Utility Companies. A third possibility seemed to be to make greater use of private organisations such as Securicor. The Army could not continue indefinitely with the present scale of guards as the standard of training and the morale of the troops would soon suffer, and anyway we would like to see the third battalion released before long.

8. In this respect, there is no doubt that the Northern Ireland Government must do more to stand on its own feet. It is too easy a solution for them to fall back on the use of soldiers. It may well be that only the threat of a sizeable reduction in the military guards will spur them into taking positive action.

9. The Prime Minister and Mr Porter both appreciated my point of view and promised to investigate ways and means.

10. I also had a discussion with the Governor in which I covered the above points. He agreed with my views, and made some pertinent comments of his own in the same sense.

Conclusions

11. I recommend that during Major Chichester-Clark's visit to London the following points should be included in discussion:

- a. The general state of the RUC, and in particular the SB, with a view to offering any further assistance from the UK that is considered necessary and acceptable. The need for tact in this area will be self-evident to you!

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b. The need for the Northern Ireland Government to establish a greater degree of self-sufficiency in its means for ensuring the security of its high priority Vital Points, and thus being able to release the Army for us, when required, on its accepted more mobile anti-IRA role.

CGS
19th May 1969

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