

~~TOP SECRET~~Copy No 15 of 45D/DS6/7/153/44DRAFTNORTHERN IRELANDDraft Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence

1. At the Cabinet's discussion on Northern Ireland on 7th May, it was suggested that the use of troops in sporadic disturbances of a relatively minor character might well tend to lead progressively to their use in more serious disorders, ending in full military intervention, and that the best course might be to withdraw our troops from Northern Ireland now. I was therefore invited, in consultation with the Home Secretary, to consider the possibility and implications of such a policy.

ROLES OF THE SERVICES

2. Servicemen and Service installations are located in Northern Ireland as part of the normal deployment of our forces throughout the United Kingdom. The desirability of stationing land forces there is reinforced by the existence of the land frontier with the Irish Republic, and the long history of infiltration and disturbance by the I.R.A. The main roles of the RAF in Northern Ireland are long range maritime reconnaissance from Ballykelly and maritime strike and air defence from Aldergrove, both in fulfilment of NATO commitments; support for Buccaneers, Canberras, Phantoms, and Varsitys at the civilian-manned maintenance unit at Aldergrove; and operation of the Air Traffic Control/Air Defence Radar at Bishop's Court. The primary role of the Royal Navy is training, centred on the Joint Anti Submarine School at Londonderry, but important support tasks are carried out at Belfast RN Aircraft Yard and Antrim RN Armament Depot.

Numbers of Personnel

3. There are 45 separate units or establishments in Northern Ireland (see Annex A). Total numbers of Service personnel and civilians are as follows:

/Royal

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~
- 2 -

	<u>Service Personnel</u>	<u>Dependents</u>	<u>Civilian Employees</u>
Royal Navy	400	1000 (approx)	2110
Army	3420 (includes recent re-inforcements)	1200	1460
Royal Air Force	1600	2450	1500
	<u>5420</u>	<u>4650</u>	<u>5070</u>

Almost all of the civilians are locally employed Irishmen. Of these 2490 are established and would therefore be offered transfer to the U.K. mainland.

IMPLICATIONS OF WITHDRAWAL

4. It would not make sense to withdraw Army field force units but leave behind training and T & AVR elements, their support and administrative backing, and RN and RAF units. The withdrawal of field force units would in itself tend to exacerbate the situation as brought out in paragraph 9 below. There would, however, no longer be combat forces available to provide, by their presence, for the security of the remaining units and installations; conversely there would remain in Northern Ireland service personnel with an obligation in common law to assist the civil power in the maintenance of law and order if called upon to do so. We have, therefore, considered only the implications of a total withdrawal of all service personnel from Northern Ireland.
5. From an operational point of view, no RN role is dependent upon a naval presence in Northern Ireland, neither would the RAF suffer any significant loss of operational capability if Ballykelly and Aldergrove were evacuated. The Army's direct operational concern is only related to Northern Ireland itself. There are, therefore, no direct operational reasons why the withdrawal of all service facilities from Northern Ireland should not be feasible. If all service facilities were withdrawn, assuming that the necessary sea and air transport resources were made available, the withdrawal of personnel with their dependents, stores, fuel, ammunition and vehicles and equipment would take about three months. Hasty temporary arrangements would have to be made to provide the necessary accommodation in Great Britain, but this could be done. There are, however, a number of serious logistic implications some of which would affect operational capabilities.

/s.

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 3 -

6. As explained in greater detail in Annex B, it would be necessary to reprovide in Great Britain certain important facilities at present in Northern Ireland. The financial cost of doing so has not been worked out in detail, but would run to tens of millions of pounds. The operational cost would be measured in terms of delay in the coming into service of important weapons systems, particularly the modern aircraft upon which we are relying for the re-equipment of the Royal Air Force. We should be likely to incur criticism on this count within NATO. A further aspect would be the serious effect upon the morale and recruiting of the Northern Irish Regiments, and it is doubtful if they could continue in being. In terms, too, of morale, the necessity for a sudden domestic (and in many cases educational) upheaval would have to be carefully explained to the servicemen and their families.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

7. But I wish particularly to draw the attention of my colleagues to the political implications of a decision to withdraw. In the first place such a decision would have an unfavourable effect on the Northern Ireland economy; some 2500 civilian employees would be dismissed and the spending power of the Services, amounting to several million pounds a year, would be removed. The economic difficulties of the province would therefore be increased, and with them the social and political problems which the decision would be intended to reduce. The United Kingdom Government would be seen to be directly responsible.

8. Secondly, if the withdrawal of troops is intended as a public demonstration that we will not allow them to be used, or appear to be used, as the agents of a regressive regime, it would be hard to explain their withdrawal at a time when a Northern Ireland Government was pursuing liberal policies. If, however, these policies gave place to a regressive regime, withdrawal might lead to accusations that we were abandoning the minority. The effect of this upon our standing in the world and its repercussions in other countries where we still bear special responsibilities would be incalculable, for the accusations would not lack point. Regressive policies would breed intercommunal violence, and the deterrent effect of the presence of troops would probably provide some degree of protection for the minority.

/9.

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 4 -

9. Thirdly, if, despite these presentational difficulties, the troops were withdrawn now, the Northern Ireland Government and the Ulster Unionist Party would undoubtedly feel that they had been betrayed. *and left defenceless at no notice.* They might well think it necessary to adopt more repressive measures to compensate for the reduction in the resources available to them for safeguarding essential installations. At the same time, the more extreme factions in the civil rights movement and the I.R.A. might well see the decision as an opportunity to plunge the province into even greater disorder, perhaps leading eventually to the collapse of the Government. The Government of the Republic of Ireland would probably not encourage the extremists directly, but politically would find it hard to discourage them and would almost certainly feel obliged to reassert its claim to sovereignty over the whole of Ireland and exert pressure to that end in the United Nations and elsewhere. Although for historical and emotional reasons the Republican Government has to deplore the presence of British troops publicly, it would be likely to regret withdrawal of U.K. forces as tending to leave the field to extremists. So far from reducing tension, a decision to withdraw the troops would be more likely to increase it and widen the area of argument generally. It could also call in question the determination of Her Majesty's Government to fulfil its overall responsibility (a responsibility which we would have to admit to the United Nations) for the integrity of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.

10. A final consideration is whether, if the Northern Ireland Government found itself wholly unable to maintain order, or if it collapsed altogether, the troops would have to return. If lives were being lost and property destroyed on a large scale, or if democratic government in Northern Ireland had come to an end, both domestic and world opinion would be critical and would demand that HMG should intervene directly, on whatever scale might be necessary, in what would after all remain a part of the United Kingdom. If, as is probable, this intervention could not be achieved without the use of troops, their task would be very much more difficult if they had severed the contacts which provide them with local intelligence, had lost their existing bases, and were obliged to undertake what might almost amount to the invasion of a hostile country.

/Deployment

~~TOP SECRET~~

© Crown Copyright

~~TOP SECRET~~

- 5 -

Deployment would be complicated, local intelligence wholly lacking, a greater logistic effort would be required, and reaction times would be slower, with the consequent probability that a greater degree of intervention would be required than if we were able to take swift action to prevent a conflagration with forces available on the ground.

CONCLUSION

11. In short I conclude, after consultation with the Home Secretary, that the withdrawal of UK Armed Forces from Northern Ireland, although militarily feasible, would be a cumbersome and embarrassing operation, and should not be pursued for the following reasons:

- (a) Politically, the situation in Northern Ireland would be likely to be aggravated, and we might well be regarded - in practical and moral, if not in constitutional or legal terms - as intending to disown our responsibilities; the effect of this upon public opinion both inside and outside the UK (and particularly among the minority groups in Northern Ireland) would be incalculable.
- (b) Militarily, while the difficulties would not be insuperable, the logistic consequences (including problems of accommodation, movement and timing) would be formidable, and would have serious repercussions on operational capability.
- (c) Financially, the reprovision of vital facilities currently available in Northern Ireland would be very costly.
- (d) Economically, there would be significant effects in terms both of loss of jobs to locally engaged civilians, and of the withdrawal of a substantial volume of spending power.

~~TOP SECRET~~