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Reference.....

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NORTHERN IRELAND

1. A signal has been received from GHQ Northern Ireland reporting that:-

- (a) The RUC have evidence that recent bomb attacks on post offices were the work of IRA.
- (b) It is believed that sabotage attacks in Northern Ireland are being organised by a man who only recently (and probably to cloak IRA connection with incidents) resigned from the IRA Council.
- (c) The RUC consider that the IRA may now turn to attacks on military camps and installations, and on RUC stations in border areas.
- (d) That the RUC may shortly ask for Army patrols in border areas - GHQ Northern Ireland said that this has always been part of their task, but in present sensitive situation request confirmation that they can accede to such a request.
- (e) GHQ Northern Ireland request that the Battalion PWO available for the existing reinforcement plan (1 PWO) should be brought to 48 hours notice.

2. The Defence Operations Executive (with representatives of the FCO and the Home Office) discussed this signal this afternoon and (in the absence of the Chiefs of Staff at CDS's Conference) agreed that there were good military reasons for acceding to the requests at (d) and (e) above.

3. Border police stations are mostly in isolated areas, and it is easy for the IRA to attack them from across the frontier and then withdraw. The Army has in the past provided border patrols - not to guard the stations but partly to act as a deterrent and partly to have some military force readily available in an area where a border police post might be attacked. Such patrols can be carried out by Infantry in landrovers, by armoured cars, or by helicopter surveillance.

4. The main reasons in favour of putting on 48 hours notice a reinforcement Infantry Battalion (with its organic helicopters and a field troop of Royal Engineers) are that with current commitments the reserve available to HQ Northern Ireland amounts only to one Company (less half a platoon) of 2 Queens and two platoons of 1 LI; and that either the initiation of border patrols (if requested and agreed), any increased risk of IRA

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attacks on military installations or additional requests to guard civil VPs against increasing IRA activity would place a quite unacceptable strain upon the resources available to GOC Northern Ireland.

5. At the same time the Defence Operations Executive recognised the political sensitivity of any steps which might seem to indicate that the UK Government was preparing to intervene forcefully in Northern Ireland. It was therefore agreed that S of S should be informed of GHQ Northern Ireland's request, of the military arguments in favour of acceding to it, and invited to propose to the Prime Minister that a meeting of Ministers concerned should be convened as soon as possible. The element of urgency is that if the Battalion is to be brought to 48 hours notice before personnel begin to disperse for the weekend, a decision should be taken not later than twelve o'clock noon tomorrow, Friday.

6. A draft minute to the Prime Minister is attached for the Secretary of State's consideration.

A. P. HOCKADAY

A.U.S.(G.S.)
24th April, 1969

DRAFT MINUTE TO THE PRIME MINISTER

I have received a report from GHQ Northern Ireland to the effect that the RUC has evidence that recent bomb attacks on post offices were the work of the IRA, and has reason to believe that sabotage attacks in Northern Ireland are being organised by a recently (and perhaps deceptively) resigned member of the IRA Council, and considers that the IRA may now turn to attacks on military camps and installations and on RUC stations in border areas. The report states that the Inspector General of the RUC may shortly ask for Army patrols in border areas. The Army has in the past provided such patrols as part of its task, but in the present sensitive situation GHQ Northern Ireland have asked for confirmation that such a request may be granted if made, and have also asked that the Battalion earmarked for the Northern Ireland reinforcement plan may be brought to 48 hours notice.

2. The military arguments are clearly in favour of granting these requests. The Army would not guard RUC stations, but would patrol to provide both a deterrent and a tangible military force in an area where a border police post might be attacked. The assumption of this commitment or any increase in the requirement to guard military or civil vital points against increasing IRA activity would place an unacceptable strain upon the resources of the GOC Northern Ireland, which are already stretched by the commitments that he has undertaken.

3. At the same time you will obviously wish to consider carefully the political aspects of proposed actions which might give the impression of preparation by the UK Government to

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intervene more forcefully in Northern Ireland.

4. There is a factor of urgency in that if the Battalion is to be brought to 48 hours notice before the weekend, a decision should be taken not later than twelve o'clock noon tomorrow. May I therefore suggest that you may wish to call an early meeting of some of our colleagues to consider these latest developments.

5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, and the Secretary of the Cabinet.