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DUS(P)
AUS(D. Staff)
Head of D36
Defence Ops Centre

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NORTHERN IRELAND

I attach the record of a meeting held in Minister(A)'s Office on the 8th August on the subject of Northern Ireland.

W. P. King-Davies

APS/Minister(A)
4 August, 1969

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RECORD OF A MEETING HELD IN MINISTER(A)'S OFFICE ON

8TH AUGUST 1969

Present: Minister(A)
VCDS
VCGS
DUG(P)
AUS(D. Staff)
Head of DSG
Col. Curtis (Defence Ops Centre)

NORTHERN IRELAND

Minister(A) stated that he wished to discuss the current position in Northern Ireland, with particular reference to the problems which would be encountered in the event of the use of troops.

2. With reference to the decision taken to relax the conditions under which the Northern Ireland Government would be authorised to use CS gas in riot conditions, Minister(A) enquired what the worst possible effects of the use of the gas might be. It was generally considered that the use of gas was, on balance, less objectionable than the effects of a violent baton charge by police. On the publicity aspect, it was felt that it was already publicly known that the Northern Ireland Government possessed CS gas and that it would not be advisable to publicise this further since it was more likely that this would have a provocative rather than a deterrent effect. It would be clear, if the gas was used, that its use had had the approval of HMG; however, in defending our position it would not be desirable to give the impression that CS gas had been used solely to avoid the use of troops. Minister(A) concluded that the least role which HMG played in the use of gas, the better.

3. Minister(A) then enquired about the implications of the use of troops in Northern Ireland and referred to the Home Secretary's apparent view that troops could perhaps, in certain circumstances, be used in isolated instances. It was felt that once troops were used it would be difficult to withdraw them or withhold them in future, and HMG could not thus avoid increasingly taking direct responsibility for Northern Irish affairs to a very large degree; among other things, this was due to the military command structure, under which GOC Northern Ireland's responsibilities were primarily directed to the Ministry of Defence London and not to Stormont. From the purely military angle, it was felt that if troops were used, it would be unlikely that we would be able to prevent our commitment from reaching sizeable proportions. Scenarios had been prepared showing to what extent we could become involved in various situations in Northern Ireland. Before committing ourselves, therefore, we should consider very closely what we would be letting ourselves in for beyond the short term. In view of this, it was agreed that a letter should be sent to the Home Office at official level pointing out the difficulties involved from our point of view, and emphasizing the need for close consultation between the two Departments before any hasty decision was taken.

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4. Head of D36 referred to the GOC Northern Ireland's plan to remove the Wessex Helicopter Squadron on the 18th August. It was pointed out that the Squadron would still be in Northern Ireland during the immediate period when further serious disturbances might be expected and, in any case, it could be brought back from the UK within 72 hours. Minister(A) agreed that the Wessex Squadron should be withdrawn under these conditions.
5. It was noted that the Secretary of State was being kept informed of the situation.

8th August, 1969