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Press Notice

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NIO/9/4

Stormont Castle, Belfast

22 September 1978

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, THE RT HON ROY MASON MP, WHEN SPEAKING TO JOURNALISTS IN BARNSELY TODAY:-

There has been a stir in the last few days about pulling out the troops from Northern Ireland. Suppose the troops were pulled out, what would be left behind? There would be a surge of violence from the Provisional IRA who would scent victory. Their aim is a military takeover of Northern Ireland. There would be rapid retaliation by other paramilitary organisations leading to sectarian violence on an unprecedented scale.

Why press for a pull out now? The Royal Ulster Constabulary, which has the prime responsibility for the maintenance of law and order, has made and is continuing to make great progress. The army is there in a backup role to provide support and assistance as necessary. The proportion of soldiers in the resident battalions is increasing and those battalions have settled in well. We have not highlighted the reductions in troop numbers but the progress has been steady. This last year alone saw a reduction of a thousand troops.

Our soldiers will remain there in the numbers appropriate to the security situation. It is right for them to be there to provide assurance to the community as a whole. Our security policy is now more widely acceptable in the community than ever before. Business confidence is now being rebuilt and there is new investment in the Province.

This position is recognised by all the major parties at Westminster and in Northern Ireland. It is a reasoned - and determined - policy. The Government will not be diverted by ill-informed comment.

~~W VJ way~~ WVK
26.9.78
Do see please
JH