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File

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From J McKervill  
SPOB  
12 January 1990

Mr Dodds

cc PS/PUS (B&L)  
Mr Ledlie  
Mr Burns  
Mr A Wilson  
Mr Miles  
Mr Bell  
Mr Blackwell  
Mr Shannon/  
Mr McClelland

WORKING GROUP ON ACCOMPANIMENT

It was agreed that in advance of the first formal Working Group meeting the British side would prepare a paper describing what is already being done to ensure that RUC accompaniment of military patrols takes place wherever possible and examining the scope for increasing current levels of accompaniment. This is attached. I should be grateful if you would hand it over to your Irish colleagues as soon as possible.

(signed JMCK)

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USSEC 15103

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JOINT WORKING GROUP ON ACCOMPANIMENT OF MILITARY PATROLS BY  
THE RUC

PAPER BY THE BRITISH SIDE

At the Intergovernmental Conference meeting on 30 November, it was agreed that, in advance of the first formal meeting of the Joint Working Group on accompaniment the British side would prepare a paper. The intention was that this should describe what is already being done to ensure that RUC accompaniment of military patrols takes place whenever possible and then go on to examine the scope for increasing current levels of accompaniment.

2. The British side is firm in its resolve to seek to raise the existing level of accompaniment of all patrols which are likely to involve direct contact between the Armed Forces and the community; and it is particularly concerned that this should be the case in what the two sides are agreed may be called "sensitive" areas. It is also mindful of the particular importance of accompaniment when the military element in a patrol is provided by the UDR. At the same time, the British side has several times emphasised and now repeats in this paper that its willingness to see every practical step taken to secure more accompaniment is balanced by a determination to safeguard the operational independence of security force commanders and by an awareness of the opportunity cost of accompaniment in certain situations.

3. As the Irish side are aware, on the British side an internal working party, including representatives of the Police and Army, has been looking at practical matters. The intention was and is that the conclusions of that internal group should inform the British side's contribution to the discussions of the Joint Working Group.

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4. Discussion within the internal working group has been positive and constructive. There is unanimity of view on the desirability, in principle, of ensuring that all Army patrols likely to meet members of the public in 'sensitive areas' should, wherever possible, be accompanied by the RUC. In the light of this discussion, the British side is in no doubt that this commitment at senior HQ levels in the RUC is shared by those local police commanders at sub-divisional level who are responsible for the tasking of patrols. There has, in fact, been a renewed emphasis on accompaniment in recent months which has had a discernible effect on the ground.

5. But the discussion also showed that, given that the vast majority of patrols mounted by the Army on behalf of the RUC are likely to have some contact with the public, it is not possible, within present resource constraints, to ensure accompaniment throughout the whole of the tasking commitment. Leaving aside patrols carried out by the Regular Army, almost 4,000 UDR patrols, are mounted each month. Priority in assigning police officers to accompany military patrols is, therefore, given to patrols in "sensitive" areas, particularly those which operate at night which are thought to be amongst those most likely to encounter difficulties.

6. There has already been inter-Governmental discussion, via the Secretariat, of what constitutes a 'sensitive area'. This issue has been further discussed with the security forces. As a result, the British side is convinced that 'sensitive areas' cannot be seen as a 'static' geographical concept. In addition to geographical or demographic considerations, there are a number of specific factors which can also help to determine the 'sensitivity' of a particular area. These include

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- (a) tension within a particular area following a recent incident in a particular location - for example, a road traffic accident involving a military vehicle;
- (b) the imminence of a parade or other social/religious event which might result in an increase in the number of nationalists entering the area about to be patrolled - for example, a major Hibernian parade, an anniversary march, or a major GAA sporting fixture;
- (c) the need to mount VCPs on 'feeder routes' running into predominantly nationalist areas: for example, Stockman's Lane in Belfast and the Foyle Bridges in Londonderry.

Such factors are, however, only indicative. The RUC must continue to retain operational independence and flexibility in deciding when and where to accompany. The internal working group has explored apparent differences in the level of unaccompanied UDR patrols in comparable geographic and demographic areas. The conclusion drawn was that these exist primarily because RUC Divisional Commanders do not always have the resources to permit the accompaniment of military patrols. Whenever that is the case, policy is, if possible, to deploy unaccompanied patrols in less 'sensitive' areas.

7. The present inability of the RUC to meet 100% accompaniment throughout Northern Ireland is also a consequence of a difference in 'Conditions of Service' between the RUC and Army. To take one important example of this, members of the RUC work an 8 hour day, rostered a year in advance; in contrast, soldiers serving in Northern Ireland in a roulement battalion are expected to be available to work 18 hours out of every 24. Re-rostering of police resources is not only very expensive, it is also constrained by a Federation agreement to give 28 days notice of any changes to the roster.

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8. The tasking of a patrol is also far from a simple matter. A patrol might be tasked to carry out tasks of a purely military nature where the presence of police would be inappropriate. Also, a patrol might need to be tasked by the police to undertake a variety of duties or activities and, at various times in its tour of duty, there might be no requirement against any of the criteria usually applied, indicating a need for accompaniment. For example, a patrol moving across open land to set up one or more VCPs (for which a police presence would be essential) might not need that presence in the course of its movement - to the control point(s). In such circumstances there is no easy way of 'injecting' a police presence for those tasks; travel by road could very well be hazardous; and helicopters are a scarce and highly expensive resource. The availability of greater resources would not, of itself, resolve such inherent difficulties. In these cases, a decision has to be made at the outset on the accompaniment issue; and, at some opportunity cost, it is usually in favour of accompaniment.

9. Nonetheless, a major constraint on the extent to which higher levels of police accompaniment can be achieved is the present level of RUC manpower. This is, directly related to the size of the police manpower budget. It is estimated that a 10% increase in the level of accompaniment would require approximately £7.0m in additional finance. By any standard this is a substantial additional cost for which any prudent controlling authority would need to see some measurable return. Against a background of a Government policy of restraint on public expenditure, it is difficult to see any realistic prospect of achieving extra provision of that magnitude. Even if HM Treasury could be persuaded to authorise a substantial increase in manpower levels, it is likely that a stipulation would be that the cost of the increase should be found from within the Northern Ireland block. It would be impossible to secure this without substantial sacrifice in respect of other expenditure

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plans. At risk might be the programme for 'Making Belfast Work' and the recent Londonderry initiative. Moreover, it is the British side's view if substantial new resources could be found to fund the anti-terrorism efforts of the police and the Army, that it might not be the most appropriate use of that new provision if it were all applied in order to secure an increase in accompaniment.

10. An alternative approach, to which the British side has already given some preliminary consideration, is to look at the opportunity cost, within existing resources, of increasing levels of accompaniment. The RUC mount approximately 450 mobile patrols and 180 beat patrols daily. It is estimated that, within existing resources, a 5% increase on the present level of accompaniment could entail the loss of as many as 60 of these patrols. A 20% increase in accompaniment levels would mean the loss of more than half of the total number of daily mobile patrols. The difficulty of providing the necessary manpower to provide more accompaniment, without substantially cutting the number of police patrols, which would cause a serious deterioration in both security and normal policing, is further compounded by the need for patrols to be of a certain numerical strength in order to protect the police officers involved. The removal of one officer from a police patrol accompanying a military patrol might make that whole patrol no longer viable.

11. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the British side is glad of this opportunity to reaffirm the importance it attaches to giving effect to the principle embodied in paragraph 5 of the Joint Statement issued after the Conference meeting on 18 October. It can, however, make no firm commitment to achieve particular levels of accompaniment by particular dates, because as the Secretary of State has emphasised, the Chief Constable must continue to be able to deploy the resources available to him in the

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most effective way in order to defeat terrorism. The Secretary of State is unwilling to build operational inflexibilities into the efforts of the security forces to counter a flexible and ruthless opponent.

Conclusions

12. The British side has begun the task of examining ways of further increasing current levels of police accompaniment of military patrols. But, as this paper has shown, there are major logistical obstacles in the way of rapid change. It is evident, however, that within existing restraints a great deal is being done to maximise the practicable levels of accompaniment and to prioritise the use of scarce resources so as to ensure that the patrols which are accompanied are those in respect of which accompaniment is most desirable. The British side will continue these efforts, which it believes are already having a useful effect, and it would now welcome an input to this exercise from the Irish side.

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