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FROM: MARTIN HOWARD  
PS/SECRETARY OF STATE  
13 MARCH 1995

DESK IMMEDIATE



COPY NO OF 18  
cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) [2&3]  
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) [4&5]  
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) [6&7]  
PS/PUS (L&B) [8&9]  
PS/Mr Feil [10]  
Mr Legge [11]  
Mr Thomas [12]  
Mr Williams [13]  
Mr Leach [14]  
Mr Bell [15]  
Mr Wood (L&B) [16]  
Mr Stephens [17]  
Mr Bramley [18]

MR STEELE [1]

NORTHERN IRELAND FORCE LEVELS

I attach a copy of a letter from No 10 confirming the Prime Minister's agreement to the announcement of the withdrawal of the Drummad Rulemount Battalion tomorrow, 14 March. The Secretary of State has agreed that we should work on the assumption that the announcement will be made at 12 noon.

2. You will see from the No 10 letter, that there is a good deal of pre-briefing and preparation to be done in advance of the announcement. The Secretary of State would like us to proceed as follows:

- (a) I will arrange for the Secretary of State to talk to Archbishop Eames this evening.
- (b) The Secretary of State is seeing Andrew Hunter this evening and will brief him then. It would be helpful if Sir John Wheeler could arrange to brief other key backbenchers tomorrow morning.

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- (c) Could you arrange to adapt the Q and A into a bull points briefing which can be given quite wide distribution to other interested backbenchers, covering the kind of issues mentioned in the No 10 letter.
- (d) The Secretary of State will talk to Molyneaux and Kilfedder in advance of the announcement. It would be helpful if Sir John Wheeler could talk to Maginnis.
- (e) You, in conjunction with Mr Williams and Mr Stephens, should arrange to brief the US and Irish Governments in the way suggested by No 10.
- (f) You and Mr Wood should arrange for appropriate press briefing to be set up. You and he will wish to take into account the specific suggestions made in the No 10 minute.

3. In the meantime it would be helpful to have, by 1500 this afternoon, a final version of the statement and of the Q and A.

SIGNED

MARTIN HOWARD  
PS/Secretary of State



MS-CSCE BUDAPEST.

2 MAR 95 10:23

PG.02

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10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

12 March 1995

#### FORCE LEVELS

I have discussed the force levels announcement with the Prime Minister again on the flight to Israel. Because of today's mendacious Sunday Times story, he thinks that Tuesday would be a better day for the announcement than Monday; but it should not be any closer to St Patrick's Day.

The Prime Minister remains concerned about the political side effects of the announcement. He has agreed to the announcement on the understanding that delaying it until the roulement is already due to take place (after Easter) would cause serious operational problems, because the troops are now cooped up in unsatisfactory barracks where they can neither train nor rest properly. There are other factors militating against a short-term delay: St Patrick's Day, Ministerial entry into the exploratory dialogue, Easter and so on.

The announcement may therefore be made on Tuesday if (after further consultation between NIC and No 10, who should in turn talk to the Whips), your Secretary of State judges that there is no over-riding political obstacle; and if other members of NI Committee are content. That is not a judgement which the Prime Minister can easily make from the Middle East.

Before the announcement is made, the Prime Minister would like the ground to be prepared as thoroughly as possible, so that we are not beset by the misinformation which distorted your Secretary of State's statement on decommissioning in Washington. The message must be put across very clearly that this decision is taken on the strong recommendation of the commanders of the security forces and is based purely and one hundred per cent on operational reasons.

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MS CSCE BUDAPEST.

2 MAR 95 16:24

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**CONFIDENTIAL**

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The Prime Minister thinks it would be sensible to consult Archbishop Eames on Monday. Before the statement is made on Tuesday, and under embargo as appropriate, you should brief the following:

- Andrew Hunter, James Cran, and other leading backbenchers should be given a full briefing. Where appropriate, they should be told in confidence that we have consulted the UUP through Ken Maginnis over a period of weeks, and at his request held off this announcement until after Sinn Féin's Ard Fheis.
- Other interested backbenchers should be given a general briefing. Could you provide them with a sheet of bull points which recalls the circumstances under which additional troops were deployed to Northern Ireland; describes the number of troops and RUC still there; makes the point that this is an operational decision, and that nothing has been done in the security field which is not quickly reversible; and describes the operational problems of keeping roulement units cooped up in temporary barracks. The bull points should make clear that a roulement unit can most effectively deploy to Northern Ireland from a home base in which it has been able to train and repair.
- Those given advance notice of the announcement should include Molyneaux, Maginnis and Kilfedder. Please do not forget the latter.
- The Irish and US Government should be briefed, and should be told that it would be most unhelpful if they were to put a political spin on this announcement. They should be asked to say that security in Northern Ireland is entirely a matter for the British Government (except as regards cross border security co-operation); that it is not for them to comment on our operational decisions; and that we are right to take no risks in this area.

It is most important that the press should be briefed carefully, so that their initial reporting comes out in the right way. It would probably be helpful if a senior army officer in Northern Ireland gave a background briefing on the operational reasons and the strength of our continuing defences to the likes of Tom Bradby and Dennis Murray. You might consider whether Bradby and Murray should be offered a facility before the announcement on Tuesday to film the Drummad Unir in its temporary accommodation, and talk to its commanding

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OCHS-CSCE BUDAPEST.

2 MAR 95 16:26

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officer about the problems his troops are encountering. Appropriate newspaper correspondents should also be given advance background briefing under embargo.

I am copying this letter to Alex Allan, Edward Oakden and Jonathan Haslam at No 10; John Sawers (FCO) and Paul Lever and Melanie Leech in the Cabinet Office.

**RODERIC LYNE**

Martin Howard Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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