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FROM: J A Dew  
BRITISH EMBASSY, DUBLIN  
DATE: 5 January 1995

Mr Perry - B

- cc: PS/PUS - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr Lamont, RID - B

*HQ:*  
 This would make sense if we had the information available - or the justification - to defend the continuing level of military activity in NI. Also, this is not the case.  
 Bell  
 5/1/95

**BRITISH ARMY ACTIVITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

1. You probably saw an article by Garret FitzGerald in the Irish Times on Saturday 31 December, entitled "Security tactics in North endangering peace process". The Ambassador wonders whether anything can be done to put the record straight given that the article gives a less than fair picture of Army activity, reflecting some of the many bees in Dr FitzGerald's capacious bonnet.

2. Dr FitzGerald's article relies heavily on surmise and hypothesis rather than straightforward assertion ("it is hard to understand ...", "we are perhaps faced ...", "it is of course possible"). But it will have reinforced unhelpful attitudes, and given respectability to what is a fairly common view here - that we are indeed dragging our feet and endangering the peace process.

3. I attach a brief summary of his main points. It would be tempting to reply, eg via a letter from the Ambassador to the Irish Times. It would be worth showing that there is a different, more positive, view and not allow Dr FitzGerald's tendentious approach to appear to hold water by defaults.

4. I attach a possible outline draft text. But before we take this any further, we would need:

- some more specific reason why the RUC still insist on Army patrols in Belfast (ie the obstacle to 100% removal of soldiers from the streets);

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- some hard hitting facts summarising the reductions that have taken place, and taking credit for them.
- to be able to carry conviction (ie not just flat assertion) that the allegations of increased harassment of nationalists by soldiers from the Royal Marines and Parachute Regiment are indeed rubbish.

Unless you can provide significant additional ammunition on these points, enabling us to fire off one convincing burst and avoid any risk of getting entangled in prolonged exchanges, we would probably do better to leave things as they are. Dr FitzGerald believes that never in his life has he been wrong (his autobiography devoted 500 weary pages to prove this). We could well prompt a series of articles in reply. The most effective response of all might be a more upfront approach, to publicise changes that are taking place and readiness to take credit for them on the lines set out in Mr Williams's minute of 4 January, after the SPM(O) discussion on 9 January.

(Signed)

J A Dew



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ANNEX A

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

1. Dr FitzGerald's main point is that "it is hard to understand what security considerations can lie behind the continued presence of armed patrols in other areas like Belfast" given that they have been removed from areas such as Derry. He also expresses this in terms of "the failure of the British authorities to offer any intelligible explanation for not having transferred full responsibility for patrolling in peaceful conditions to a police force ...", and talks about the negative impact of "the continued militarisation of security" being aggravated by the insistence of the MOD on "rotating aggressive regiments to Northern Ireland at this delicate time".

2. He also argues that we are taking an unhelpful and unimaginative approach to prisoner release. He expresses this in terms of how "the failure to effect any early release of prisoners seems to involve a spurning of an opportunity to consolidate the cessation of violence". He uses this to link the fact that fewer prisoners qualified for Christmas parole this year (which he surmises may have been "an accidental consequence on the failure to loosen criteria ... when the numbers covered by these criteria were declining") with the hypothesis that we are planning to trade prisoners for arms. And he throws in an announcement by Mr Nicholas Scott, then an NIO Minister, in 1986 that "if the organisations committed to violence ... were to renounce violence as a way of achieving their political ends that would obviously effect the judgement that I, and my Rt Hon friend The Secretary of State, have to make about the release of prisoners".

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ANNEX B

POSSIBLE BASIS FOR A DRAFT LETTER FROM HMA DUBLIN TO THE IRISH TIMES

I hope you will allow me to reply to several points made by Dr Garret FitzGerald in his article on Saturday 31 December.

Decisions about army patrolling in particular areas are made by the RUC on the basis of how they perceive the level of threat. There is no reason why such judgements should be the same in Belfast as in Derry. Nor is it, regrettably, yet possible to take soldiers off the streets altogether. Para-military activities of various kinds have by no means stopped despite the ceasefires.

But even where the RUC believe it is still necessary, Army patrolling has been very substantially reduced, and continues to be reduced. It is unfortunate that readers of Dr FitzGerald's article would have received the opposite impression.

The Army does not operate independently in Northern Ireland. It neither decides security policy, nor pursues a separate security policy of its own. It operates exclusively in support of the RUC.

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There is no perverse "insistence on rotating aggressive regiments". All British infantry units take their due turn for service in Northern Ireland, in a programme which involves eight months of training and preparation before they arrive - much of it designed to ensure that every man is fully aware of the political sensitivities. Making arbitrary changes to this programme would mean deploying untrained, or at best partly trained, soldiers. But there would be no justification for withdrawing any selected units in any case. The Parachute Regiment, for example, has served in Belfast during X out of the last few years: it is only recently that people have noticed.

Complaints that the security forces in Northern Ireland have become more active than before in "harassing and assaulting young people" have been made recently by both sides in Northern Ireland. That does not make them true. There are obvious reasons why such allegations should be made.

All those responsible for the conduct and operations of the Army, and the RUC, in Northern Ireland are fully aware of their responsibility to consolidate progress towards lasting peace.

Dr FitzGerald builds up speculation that the British Government are withholding early release of prisoners against agreement by the IRA to decommission arms and explosives. This is not the case.



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It is understandable that nationalists should be impatient about the removal of security measures in their areas. Dr FitzGerald is fully entitled to argue a case for faster progress. Your readers are no less entitled to a fuller and more balanced picture.