

FROM: N P PERRY
 SECURITY POLICY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION 1
 26 SEPTEMBER 1994

AMENDED VERSION

cc: PS/PUS (B&L) - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Steele o/r - B
Mr Brooke - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood - B
Mr Marsh - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mrs Collins - B
Director, TFU - B
Mr May - B
Mr Pope
Mr Beeton - B
Mr McAleer - B
Mr Maye

UNDER/ 1306/9
 SEC
 26SEP1994
 CENT SEC

C

in SIG M.

Mr Williams - B

SIG: PRESENTATION OF SECURITY FORCE RESPONSE TO CEASEFIRE

It would, I think - subject to your views - be timely at this week's SIG meeting to discuss with the RUC and Army how best to present the security forces' response to the ceasefire over the next few weeks, and in particular whether we should now adopt a more proactive strategy.

2. The current policy position, confirmed at the last SPM, is that the relaxation of security measures continues to be a matter for the security forces, based on their assessment of the threat. This is sensible, given the continuing loyalist and INLA threats and uncertainty over PIRA's intentions in the medium term; it is also defensible presentationally, provided that we can demonstrate that the security forces are being flexible and responsive to local

C O N F I D E N T I A L

concerns (as in many areas I believe they are), and that this incremental approach is having a real effect on the ground.

3. The high profile but low risk operational measures taken so far (berets instead of helmets etc) have been well received, as have the announced border reopenings. Pressure will continue to build, however, for further substantive changes, including reductions in troop levels and the dismantling of security force installations; Sinn Fein is already focusing on these issues and moderate nationalist opinion, while generally understanding at the moment, is likely to become increasingly impatient. Acceptance by HMG that the PIRA ceasefire is permanent will increase these pressures markedly.

4. Ministers will over the next few weeks be taking an initial look at future force levels and the way ahead for the security works programme: it remains to be seen, however, whether decisions will be taken at this stage which lend themselves to public announcement; and even if they are, these are likely to be some weeks off. Given, therefore, that we will not in the short term be able to meet all nationalist expectations, and that unionist opinion still has to be reassured, there are strong arguments for retaining the initiative by spelling out what our current policy is, publicising the steps that have already been taken under it, and explaining where appropriate why it is not possible to move further at this stage.

5. The rolling programme of border reopenings has already received a good deal of coverage, but there may be scope for highlighting other operational decisions, whether implemented Province-wide (eg restrictions on the use of helicopters, including numbers of aircraft, low level and night-time flying, and landing in built-up areas) or decided on locally (opening of security barriers, changes in patrolling patterns/military support levels etc). The aim would be to demonstrate that our approach, while sensibly cautious, is also producing results in terms of a less obvious security presence wherever possible. The security forces have been reluctant so far to draw attention to these operational adjustments.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

HL/4389/G5

C O N F I D E N T I A L

preferring to let them speak for themselves; many of the changes
have indeed been noticed and welcomed locally, but we are now
reaching a stage where the security forces could usefully claim
wider credit for the steps they have already taken (even if
reference to them is made only in general terms). The mechanics of
doing so would be for SIG: any statement of policy should perhaps
come from Ministers, but information on particular measures could be
released in various ways, including, for example, by background
briefing.

6. There are a number of Government decisions pending which will
also impact on our presentation of security measures on the ground.
The most obvious is the acceptance of permanence (the lifting of
exclusion orders is another); while this will not, I think, overturn
our existing policy on security responses, it will make that policy
more awkward to present. It will also increase expectations of a
further, and rapid, relaxation of security measures, which I hope
could at least in part be met (though this will be made no easier if
PIRA targetting, punishment beatings and orchestrated street
disorder continue). SIG might wish also to take an initial view on
how we should respond in these circumstances.

7. I should be happy to discuss, if you wished, or to attend
Wednesday's SIG if you thought that helpful (though Mr Marsh will of
course be present to represent SPOB's views to the Group).

[signed]

N P PERRY
SHA Ext 27028

C O N F I D E N T I A L

HL/4389/G5