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NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE ON FRIDAY  
18 JANUARY 1980 AT 1200PM

Present

Mr Marshall	Chairman
Mr Moriarty )	
Mr Buxton )	
Mr Jones )	
Mr Bengier )	NIO
Mr Stephen )	
Mr Stephens )	
Mr Rotheram )	
Mr Williams )	MOD
Lt Col Bateman )	
Capt Duff )	
Capt Ramsey )	
Mr Heaton	Home Office
Mr Newington	FCO

#### Force Reductions

Mr Stephen said that the Government should be prepared to comment on the fact that the number of major units in the Province was being reduced despite the fact that the Press had not yet picked the matter up. If anything needed to be said, it should be on the lines that redeployment of Army Units within Northern Ireland had been looked at again, and it had been found possible to dispense with one major unit. The Spearhead Battalion could be despatched to the Province immediately if needed. If it became necessary to call in the Spearhead Battalion frequently this would indicate that the force levels were too low, on the other hand if there was no need to call on the battalion it would show that existing force levels were adequate. It had not been so needed for a long time. The Chairman said that NIO was examining whether to take the initiative to let news of the force reduction become known; naturally MOD would be consulted before any action was taken. Essentially the problem was political in that it was difficult to pass the matter over in silence at a time when the Secretary of State was in frequent touch with the local political leaders in the Constitutional Conference, particularly as Mr Paisley had only consented to attend the Conference after receiving assurances on security. It was possible that the Secretary of State might elect to inform Mr Paisley personally in the margins of the Conference. Mr Moriarty thought it possible that the issue might arise in connection with the modifications to arrangements for protecting the Civilian Search Unit in the Belfast segment. The Chairman mentioned that the "Irish Press" had stated that the Army's claims that there were 13,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland might be inaccurate. Mr Stephen said that MOD would disclose the current number of troops to anyone who asked. He thought that it should be clearly stated that no force level was sacrosanct and that ultimately Ministers, and not local politicians, decided on the force levels appropriate.



Reviews of Security Policy

Mr Stephens said that three separate strands in the consideration of force levels should be kept linked. Firstly there was Sir Maurice Oldfield's study of four 'hard' areas which was bound to be concerned with force levels. Secondly, the Chief of the General Staff had instructed the new GOC to review force levels, deployment and tactics throughout the whole Province with a view to reporting within six weeks. Clearly these two studies would overlap but not completely. Finally there were the matters arising out of the Prime Minister's visit to MOD on 4 January when she had queried deployment in South Armagh and force levels generally. The Chairman said that NIO had just commented on the letter of 10 January from MOD to No 10 about the Prime Minister's visit. Sir Maurice Oldfield's conclusions would no doubt come before OD, which would give an opportunity for Ministerial discussion.

The Yellow Card

The Chairman said that NIO would wish to give careful thought to the terms of the revised draft Yellow Card before commenting; a reply would be sent as soon as possible.

Irish Named Regiments

The Chairman said that a reply would be sent shortly; it was likely that it would be favourable.

Arms for the RUC

The Chairman said that the Prime Minister's visit to Washington had not produced a satisfactory result on this issue and it had to be assumed that no arms would be supplied in the immediate future. A review of the various options, which included obtaining supplies from West Germany or France or simply holding our hand for a further year, had been instituted. Mr Newington concurred that it was unlikely that export licences would be issued in the foreseeable future given the current political situation. Given the Irish Government's clear disapproval of both NORAID and the INC it might well better not to stir things up by further insistence on the issue of licences, which carried political risks without prospect of practical results.

Possible Meeting between Secretary of State and Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Chairman said that it had been 3½ months since the Secretary of State had met the Minister for Foreign Affairs. As in that time the Government, and the Minister had changed, a further meeting was desirable despite the fact that the Conference was now in session. It would be necessary to consider cross-border security and in that context it would be helpful if the issue of air-safety when helicopters crossed the border could be resolved beforehand. Mr Newington wondered - seeing that we had raised the issue ourselves - whether we could not take the position that no formal agreement was necessary; we could undertake not to fly during bad weather conditions (night flights being precluded anyway). Mr Stephens said that MOD would inquire into the matter as soon as possible.

Meetings between the GOC and politicians

Mr Stephen said that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Army would be visiting Northern Ireland in the near future, and it



should be possible for the GOC to hold a drinks party at Lisburn to which local politicians could be invited; he would be grateful if NIO could provide a list of suitable invitees. /Mr Burns has undertaken to pursue this/. The Chairman said that it was important that local politicians should not have access 'by right' to the GOC and that the GOC should remain firm on the position that he would discuss particular incidents factually but decline to discuss security policy which was a matter for Ministers. Mr Stephen agreed and said that the new GOC would be reminded of this.

#### BBC Series on Camberley

Mr Stephens said that the third programme on this series would refer to Northern Ireland and would include addresses from the Secretary of State, the former GOC and extracts from syndicate discussions, some of which would be "hawkish".

#### The Constitutional Conference

The Chairman said that the Conference would meet again on Monday to discuss the order of business. So far the discussion had been heavily concerned with procedural matters but it was clear that the SDLP and DUP wanted to continue as both had passed up chances to withdraw. The nub of the problem was the range of topics which had been excluded by the Working Party eg Irish unity. Mr Hume had pressed for, and got, some expansion of the limits, but not perhaps as great as he supposed.

Two points of value had, however, emerged. The various parties had tabled their respective papers and although there had been disagreement over the order of business it seemed probably that they could be resolved. Further, an additional series of meetings outside the Conference to cover matters which could not be discussed within the Conference had been arranged; both the SDLP and Alliance, but not the DUP, had agreed to attend. Also it was clear that neither Mr Paisley nor Mr Hume exercised the complete domination over their parties which had hitherto been assumed.

It was possible that the Conference would move to matters of substance on Monday 21 January and the parties had been told that the Government wanted substantial agreement by Easter, although it had to be admitted that this hope might not be fulfilled. One potential problem was that Mr Paisley had indicated a desire to talk about the role of the head of a future devolved administration in formulating security policy; this was not within the terms of the Working Paper and might lead to difficulties.

21 January 1980



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