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British Army Policy in the North

1. The policy followed between August 1969 and July 1970 was one clearly designed to conciliate the minority. For example barricades were "talked down" not "smashed down" and there was considerable contact at local level between army officers and community leaders.
2. Following an incident on the last weekend in June 1970 in East Belfast (St. Mathew's church area) Lord Balniel and CIGS were in Belfast. Their visit, which was followed by the Falls road curfew, may have brought about a change in policy. After the curfew Balniel is known to have said that one of the reasons for the arm search in the Falls road area was that shots had come from there the previous weekend. This in fact was not true - East Belfast is across the river at a sizeable distance away from the Falls Road.
3. Thereafter the Catholic ghettos became suspicious of the intentions of the British army and relations soured. The subsequent arm searches took place almost exclusively in Catholic areas and were well publicised. Occasional searches in Protestant areas, which were alleged to have discovered sizeable quantities of arms, were not publicised to the same extent. In the meantime the Stormont Government was permitting the issue of quantities of new gun licences and creation of rifle clubs composed of ex B Specials.
4. This came to a head in December 1970 when questions in Stormont began to put on the public record the activities of the Stormont authorities in relation to gun licences and gun clubs. The information on which the questions were based came indirectly from the British army to my certain knowledge. Promises were subsequently made both in Stormont and at Westminster that something would be done about legal weapons. Out of the 102,000 licensed guns in the North about 1,650 have been handed over to the authorities - which claimed

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this as a successful act of disarming! At our meeting at official level in London last December the Ambassador and I suggested that the political control of the British army in the North seemed to us to reside too much in the Ministry of Defence and received little if any influence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office. Nothing appears to have been done about this.

5. General Tuzo is believed to have opposed internment. Informed rumour has it that Lord Carrington finally came down in favour of internment. Once again both the Home Secretary and the Foreign Secretary would not appear to have had much influence.

6. From all the above it could be argued that too much of British policy in the North has been influenced by the Ministry of Defence. It could even be argued that the Military officers themselves had better political intelligence than the political chiefs of the Ministry of Defence.