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UDR: POLICY OPTIONS

This paper suggests a number of options which we could consider putting to the British. Setting aside the objective merits of each option, it may be tactically useful to raise seriously the options of phasing-out the UDR or integrating the regiment fully into the regular Army in order to provoke fundamental thinking on the British side.

Option: Disbandment

This is SDLP policy. If agreed as an immediate measure, it would have an enormous positive psychological effect on the nationalist community and a corresponding negative effect on unionists. Nationalist pleasure would be mixed, however, with real trepidation. Granted the view on the unionists side that the UDR exists for their protection and granted that some 30,000 people have been trained in the UDR in the last 20 years, a major loyalist paramilitary problem could be anticipated. The RUC and/or the British Army would need to be augmented not only to take up the present security duties of the UDR but also to deal with the likely increased loyalist threat following disbandment.

There is no realistic chance that the British would agree to consider disbandment as an immediate measure. Moreover, they would be unlikely to regard it as a sensible option for discussion.

Option 2: (Variation) Phasing-out

This option was recommended by the Kilbrandon committee of enquiry in 1984 (a private group commissioned by the BIA under the chairmanship of Lord Kilbrandon, a British judge and constitutional expert). It could involve initially running down the regiment's strength and gradually transferring its duties to the RUC and the British Army and at a later point absorbing approved current members in the RUC, RUC Reserve (in the case of

part-timers), regular British Army regiments (possibly those with Irish connections such as the Inniskillings and the Rangers) and the Territorial Army which is organised in the North but has no operational duties there.

This option could be supplemented in the immediate term by the elements in Option 3 below. The difficulty would lie in persuading the British to make such a major change in policy. One ground for hope is that the part-time UDR has been decreased in strength over the years notwithstanding the major reduction in regular Army forces (18,382 in 1972 to 11,164 at end 1988). In 1973 the UDR stood at 9000 members (about 11% full time); the figure at end 1988 was 6,310 (about 45% full-time).

Option 3: Better control, discipline, screening, security

The British agreed in 1985 to increase the full-time element, bring in more British regular officers including especially NCOs, train selected Northern officers at Sandhurst, improve training at Ballykinlar, have the UDR accompanied by the RUC in direct contacts with civilians and restrict arrest powers to the RUC. Implementation of the accompaniment policy has fallen far short of the British commitment at Hillsborough. Whatever the extent of the implementation of the other measures - we know they have been brought in at least to some extent - they have not prevented a continuance of harassment and an appalling criminal record which we estimate on the basis of published British figures at one conviction for serious violent crime per month since 1985. Perhaps more seriously, the very efforts to "professionalise" the UDR seem to us to have led to greater responsibility for patrolling and other security functions. We believe the UDR now has military responsibility in place of the regular British regiments everywhere in the North except North and West Belfast and the border area from Newry to Strabane with the exception of West Fermanagh. We also suspect that the UDR and British Army consider that if the full-time UDR is now "professional" and on a par with regular soldiers, why should they not have plastic bullets, patrol nationalist areas, deal with civilians on the same basis as their colleagues? We detect

at least a testing of the ground by the Army authorities. These views fit with the policy of "Ulsterisation". That policy as it applies to the maintenance of a locally-recruited militia poses basic problems for us. Even if recruitment requirements were more rigorous (as are the RUC's) and even if the UDR ranks were better controlled by their British officers (instead of, as we think, often controlling them), nationalists would not accept the UDR because fundamentally they represent the idea of a protestant militia for a protestant people. In the absence of a comprehensive political settlement, when some kind of joint catholic/protestant force might prove possible, we can expect the UDR tendency towards crime and collusion to continue together with the nationalist reaction of distrust and rejection. It is unlikely that efforts at better control, discipline, RUC accompaniment etc will significantly reduce the problem.

Option 4: Transfer to other duties

The idea here would be to restrict the UDR to static guard duties at army bases and vital installations and, perhaps, limited security patrolling which would involve no contact with nationalist civilians. This could be an element in a solution but is unlikely to work by itself. There is limited need for such duties and, in any event, the raison d'être for a loyalist to join the UDR is to protect his community by rooting out republican paramilitaries. UDR men who were continued on duty but excluded from any role in the business of "rooting out" republicans would be more likely to become involved with loyalist paramilitaries: the rate of collusion and crime would increase, quite possibly by major proportions.

Option 5: Full integration in the regular British Army

Members of the UDR are not required to serve or train outside the North under the Reserve Forces Act 1980 which replaced the UDR Act 1969 containing the same provision. But, formally, such service does not appear to be prohibited by statute and, indeed, training in Britain does occur. The aim here would be to diminish the local militia character of the force. Members living in vulnerable areas would be moved to barracks; they

would be required for service outside the North; and better control could probably be exercised over units of the regiment operating in Northern Ireland. The "professionalisation" of the UDR has probably produced members who would welcome periods of service elsewhere. This proposal would, however, be strongly resisted by the British who see the UDR by definition as limited to Northern Ireland and, however high their public praise for the bravery and professionalism of the regiment, would not consider bringing it fully inside the regular Army. The UDR, furthermore, provides a cheap method of raising troops; soldiers who live at home are economical in the words of the Ministry of Defence.

Discussion of the option could nonetheless throw up real British views of the UDR and its problems.



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14 September 1989