



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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TO: Anglo Irish Division
 FOR: David Donoghue

FROM: Embassy, London
 FROM: S O'Neill

Statement on Army Cuts

You will have already received the relevant section of King's speech. The vast majority of the time was taken up by British MPs. However, the following points arose:

- Seamus Mallon said that many in Northern Ireland would wish to give King's statement a fair wind. Was King aware however of the paradox of dispensing with some 40,000 professional soldiers and yet maintaining a part-time militia element in the new Royal Irish Regiment? Anyone who knew their Irish history would know that such militias always end up as an embarrassing failure. King said that Mallon should recognise that it was an imaginative proposal. It was not originated by him but came to him from the army staff and he was very encouraged by the support it had received from all sides of the House.
- Ken Maginnis said that his party shared with a number of senior and distinguished officers the concern at such a drastic cutback in the strength of the army. As regards the UDR, he said that King would know that any such changes are traditionally viewed with suspicion in Northern Ireland. That said, however, it would be with pride that members of the UDR would take their place in a "Royal" regiment. He believed that it was something that the brave men and women of the UDR fully deserved and had earned by their service over the past 20 years. He asked King to reassure him - as the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had - that there would be no tampering with the part-time element and that they would be used for as long as required to support the RUC in the fight against terrorism. King replied that it was a very imaginative and constructive approach. It would be very much in the interest of the career development of those in the UDR to have the opportunity of serving outside of Northern Ireland.

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In addition, the UDR would be able to draw on the experience of the officers currently serving in the Royal Irish Rangers. He said that Maginnis would know that there has been a move towards more full-time members in the UDR. The Government would certainly wish however to maintain a very significant part-time element and there would be no change in that. Ian Paisley questioned how the UDR could be brought more fully into the army by the amalgamation since the Act which set them up specifies that members of the UDR are members of the Crown Forces. Was King aware of the deep outrage, concern and anger in Northern Ireland and among UDR members and their families, especially when 240 had been killed by the IRA? Was today's decision a result of the vicious campaign launched against the UDR by Dublin? Was Dublin consulted, was it raised through the Conference, was it part of the Anglo Irish Agreement? King refuted the latter suggestions and said that it was an army decision made by those legitimately concerned with army affairs. He asked Paisley to look objectively at the decision and said that Paisley would know his support and concern for the Province. It was not an underhand or seditious move. He bowed to none in his admiration for the courage of the UDR - the casualty figures were well known to him. He firmly believed that the decision was in the interest of those who serve both in the UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers. There was no hidden agenda.

23 July 1991