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Confidential

UDR/Irish Rangers - letter from Mr. Brooke to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

1. The British Ambassador, Sir Nicholas Fenn, called on me in the late afternoon of Monday, 22 July 1991. He left with me the attached letter from the Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr. Brooke addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (who is in Moscow on an official visit at present).

2. The letter informs the Minister in strictest confidence that the Secretary of State for Defence, Tom King will announce in the House of Commons tomorrow (Tuesday) afternoon at 3.30 pm a series of changes in British defence structures. These will include the amalgamation of the existing UDR and the Royal Irish Rangers in a single new regiment to be called by the new name "The Royal Irish Regiment". The new regiment will have a single regimental HQ and a new uniform (still to be selected). It will have one general service battalion and up to seven NI based battalions, all professionally trained and with some degree of movement between them.

3. Ambassador Fenn said that Mr. Brooke had very much wished to convey this information to the Minister personally in advance of the House of Commons announcement but in the Minister's absence abroad he had agreed that the letter should be forwarded through me. He had asked that the Minister be advised of its contents.

4. The Ambassador said that Mr. Brooke would be informing the party leaders in Northern Ireland (Seamus Mallon in the absence of John Hume) that evening and on the following morning before the Tuesday afternoon announcement in the House of Commons. It might not be easy to get all concerned to accept the decision which had been made.

K | 5. Reading from his instructions, he went on to say that "this is a real opportunity to build a new, highly trained, integrated body to do the job which has to be done in Northern Ireland professionally and with wider community and public confidence than was given to the UDR". The British side were "convinced that this reform, which makes a real effort to respond to your (ie Irish Government) concerns is an opportunity for a fresh start". Mr. Brooke would be glad to answer any further questions which the Minister might have and in the Minister's absence, Lord Belstead (Deputy Secretary of State and Paymaster General) who is fully briefed would be glad to respond to any queries which the Minister for Justice, Mr. Burke might raise.

6. The Ambassador said that Mr. Brooke fully understands that the Irish Government may wish to make a statement when the news

in announced on Tuesday afternoon. He hoped however that, granted the difficulties they might face in other quarters, we would find it possible to limit what we had to say to a minimum and in particular that we should "neither crow over it on the one hand nor rubbish it on the other".

7. Ambassador Fenn said he was instructed to ask me for any reactions. I said that at that stage, pending consideration at political level, I could do no more than give a personal comment. I said that (i) we had always stressed the importance of impartial and even handed policing (and military support for the civil power where necessary) in building wider public confidence for the security forces in a divided community. From this viewpoint the aim and intention of the present decision as stated in the letter and as he had stated it to me seemed right; (ii) we would however need to study the proposals closely before being able to say how far they seemed likely to meet that aim; and (iii) as they would no doubt agree, while the constitution and conduct of the police/security forces was a key element, any effort to address it in a new and more positive way would in time run into the ground unless it were accompanied by, and supportive of, progress on the political front.

8. Ambassador Fenn noted my comments as a personal reaction only. I said I would ensure that the Minister was informed as soon as possible of Mr. Brookes letter and of what he had conveyed to me. (I subsequently telexed the Minister in Moscow and informed Mr. Nally of the letter for the information of the Taoiseach. I have also advised Mr. Brosnan for the information of his Minister)



N Dorr  
Secretary DFA  
23 July 1991