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FROM: J K LEDLIE
6 February 1992

cc PS/Mr Needham (L, DOE&DED)
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Semple (DFP)
Mr Murray (DOE)
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Wilson - B
Mr Mackenzie, DOE Commonwealth Hse
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr McConnell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Cornick
Mr Sloan (PANI)
Mr McAuley (DOE)
Mr Fraser (DOE, Hydebank)
Mr McCartney - B
Mr Thompson
ACC McLaughlin, RUC Castlereagh
Brig Jackson, Comd 39 Inf Bde

1. PS/MINISTER OF STATE (B&L) - B
2. PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L)

BELFAST ECONOMIC AND SECURITY COMMITTEE: 29 JANUARY MEETING

PS/Secretary of State's minute of 14 January noted that I was to chair the newly established Belfast Economic and Security Committee (BESC). The first meeting of the Committee (whose membership includes senior representatives from the security forces and the Department of the Environment (NI), as well as colleagues from the NIO and other Departments) accordingly took place on 29 January. The Committee considered two related issues:

- i) possible introduction of further segments in Belfast City Centre;
- ii) future development of the Civilian Search Unit (CSU).

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This submission invites Ministers to endorse the conclusions which the Committee reached on these issues.

Possible Additional Segments in Belfast

2. As a result of the intensified PIRA bombing campaign aimed at Belfast City Centre which began in November 1991, Mr Needham suggested that consideration should be given to the creation of additional permanent segments in Belfast to diminish the threat from vehicle-borne IEDs. Specifically, he proposed:

- (a) the extension of the existing Segment Area along High Street to protect River House from further attack;
- (b) the creation of a new Segment Area west of the City Hall to restrict access to Queen Street and safeguard offices in that area;
- (c) the creation of a new Segment Area south of the City Hall to protect office buildings such as Windsor House, Bedford House and the BBC; and
- (d) access to Glengall Street to be controlled by vehicle checkpoints, to protect the Opera House and the Europa Hotel.

These suggestions sought to balance an improvement in security against the need for traffic to be able to enter and leave the Central Belfast area.

3. When SPM discussed these proposals on 13 January, the point was made that, although the scheme would provide extra protection for some key buildings, there were numerous disadvantages (terrorist attacks might simply be deflected elsewhere; appearance of normality would be reduced; significant public expenditure and manpower implications; danger of tying security forces down to new static duties). The Chief Constable commented that he was in general opposed to any widespread further segmenting of Belfast City Centre

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while the threat was containable by heightened but flexible security force activity. SPM agreed that the position should be further considered in the Belfast Economic and Security Committee.

4. In the BESC discussion, the RUC and Army noted that the security equation had not greatly changed since SPM. PIRA was still capable of bypassing the extra security provided by segments by attacking different targets, or by attacking the City Centre through different means (eg much smaller Semtex devices which could be carried into the segment). It was noted that the proposed extension to the existing segment area might not be fully successful in its main aim of protecting River House. At the same time, it was argued that there was a case for introducing measures to protect what could be protected, while recognising that the terrorists would still be able to find alternative targets if they wanted to. In addition, public pressure for new permanent security measures might well grow if the vehicle bomb campaign in the city centre resumed.

5. After a full discussion, the Committee agreed on balance that we should not at this stage recommend the creation of new segments to protect the City Centre, but that more detailed evaluative and planning work on the proposals should be undertaken, so that if in the future Ministers did decide, after further consultation with the security forces, to go for this option, it would be possible to implement it rapidly. Mr Murray agreed that DOE would establish a sub-group of the Committee to take forward this work and ensure that contingency plans would be available for consideration by Ministers at short notice.

Civilian Search Unit

6. The Civilian Search Unit (CSU) has since 1974 been carrying out the search function in the Belfast City Centre Secure Zone (the "segment"). Currently, this function consists of searching vehicles entering through designated access gates. Were any new segments to be created, they would be manned by the CSU in the same way as the existing segment.

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7. A recent management review of the Unit by the NIO and Police Authority indicated that the Unit is seriously overmanned, largely as a result of working to an overcomplicated and less than efficient rota scheme. The Management Manpower Review Division (MMRD) of DFP were therefore asked to draw up a revised rota scheme. This is now available. Subject to detailed negotiation, the implementation of the revised rota scheme could achieve:

- (i) a reduction in manpower of over 20%;
- (ii) virtual elimination of overtime.

This would result in savings of some £500k per annum. In addition:

- (i) the CSU would man the High Street gate (the one gate into the present segment which is open overnight) 24 hours a day and would also open the other gates in the morning and lock them at night. (At present the CSU refuse to lock/unlock or to man the High Street gate between 11pm and 7am. The UDR accordingly do this; and Commander 39 Bde is very anxious for them to shed this static commitment); and
- (ii) improved training and better supervision should ensure a much more efficient and flexible search operation.

8. The advantages are therefore considerable; and the Committee agreed that, subject to Ministerial approval, negotiations should be opened with the CSU with a view to the new rota system being introduced with a minimum of delay. However the extra duties and loss of overtime will make the changes unpopular and there is a possibility that the CSU may resort to industrial action. In that event, RUC support to secure the Segment Area would be required. ACC Belfast assured the Committee that the RUC would provide the manpower that would be needed to cover the segment during any industrial action. It is accordingly proposed that consultation with the CSU about the proposed changes should be initiated as soon as possible.

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Conclusion

9. Ministers are invited to agree that:

(i) for the time being, the existing Belfast Segment Area should not be extended and no additional Segment Areas should be created;

(ii) contingency plans for the further extension/creation of Segment Areas in Belfast should be drawn up;

(iii) reforms to increase the efficiency of the CSU should be introduced as soon as practicable (on the basis that any industrial action by members of the Unit will be offset by RUC cover).

Signed JKL

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