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BRITISH INFORMATION SERVICES

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POLICY STATEMENTS

43/69. NORTHERN IRELAND

Home Office statements of August 14 and 15, and statement from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, August 14, 1969:

Following a meeting between the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, and the Home Secretary, Mr. James Callaghan, at St. Mawgan, Cornwall, on the afternoon of August 14, to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland, and a request for assistance received shortly afterwards from the Northern Ireland Government, a statement was issued by the Home Office. This announced a limited operation to relieve a police force which had been continuously on duty in arduous conditions for more than 48 hours and to restore peace to the riot-torn city of Londonderry. Three hundred men of the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, who had been stationed in Ulster, were moved into the town immediately.

An airlift of 600 additional troops was scheduled to be carried out the following day, and troops were then moved into Belfast also**.

The Home Office statement further reaffirmed British responsibility for Northern Ireland, as an integral part of the United Kingdom. It read:

"The Government of Northern Ireland has informed the United Kingdom Government that as a result of the severe and prolonged rioting in Londonderry it has no alternative but to ask for the assistance of the troops, at present stationed in Northern Ireland, to prevent breakdown of law and order.

"After three days and two nights of continuous duty, the Royal Ulster Constabulary find it necessary to fall back on their police stations, thus exposing the citizens of Londonderry to the prospect of looting and of danger to life.

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**See page 3.

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"The United Kingdom Government has received assessments of the situation from the Northern Ireland Government and the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland, and have agreed to this request, in order to restore order in Londonderry with the greatest possible speed.

"The GOC Northern Ireland has been instructed to take all the necessary steps, acting impartially between citizen and citizen, to restore law and order. Troops will be withdrawn as soon as this is accomplished. This is a limited operation and during it the troops will remain under direct and exclusive control of the GOC who will continue to be responsible to the United Kingdom Government.

"The Ireland Act of 1949 affirms that neither Northern Ireland nor any part of it will in any event cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom Government reaffirms the pledges previously given that this will remain the position so long as the people of Northern Ireland wish.

"The United Kingdom Government has ultimate responsibility for the protection of those who live in Northern Ireland when, as on this occasion, a breakdown of law and order has occurred."

A statement later from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, issued in reply to a broadcast by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, Mr. Lynch, stressed that events in Northern Ireland are an internal matter and therefore not a matter for the United Nations.

The statement said, in part:

"The Government of the United Kingdom tonight reaffirmed that they have no intention of departing from the pledges previously given that Northern Ireland should not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland...

"As to Mr. Lynch's suggestion that the United Nations should be asked to appoint a peace-keeping force in Northern Ireland, the British Government point out that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and that the affairs of Northern Ireland are thus an internal matter."

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A second request, for troops to assist in restoring order in Belfast, was received on August 15. The Home Office responded with the following statement:

"The Government of Northern Ireland has asked the United Kingdom Government for the assistance of troops to restore law and order in Belfast.

"The U.K. Government has acceded to this request on the same terms as similar assistance was provided in Londonderry last night.

"The Home Secretary said they were going to Belfast as friends of all the people in that city in order to ensure that if humanly possible there would be no further loss of life.

"He has also sent to Northern Ireland this afternoon two senior police officers to observe the situation on his behalf and to report to him, and also to act as consultants to the Northern Ireland Government and the Royal Ulster Constabulary ..."

(Prev. Ref. 27/69)

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