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Private Secretary,
Minister for Defence.

16th March, 1977.

Transmitted please for information.

Mr. E. O'Connor,
5 The Crescent, Station Road,
Dublin 5.

F. MURRAY.

Dear Mr. O'Connor,

The Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, has asked me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th March about the matter of confidence in the Army.

In replying he has asked me to explain briefly the role which the Army plays in the security sphere. At first he has asked me to mention that primary responsibility for internal security - which was the theme of your letter - rests with the Garda Síochána. The role assigned to the Defence Forces is that of rendering aid to the civil power assisting the Gardai as required. In the past few years there has been a significant increase in the scope of such assistance, the main activities with which the Defence Forces are concerned being:-

- the provision of Border patrols including assistance in dealing with Border incidents;
- assisting the Gardai at road check-points;
- the protection of explosive materials used for industrial purposes;
- guarding of installations of vital national importance;
- the provision of bomb disposal teams;
- assisting the Gardai in guarding and escorting prisoners.

To enable it to discharge these many and onerous responsibilities, the regular Army has been increased in strength by almost 4,000 and now has almost 14,500 men in its ranks.

As regards the matter of co-operation between the security forces north and south of the border in combating subversive activities, the Taoiseach wishes me to mention that the British Government have repeatedly expressed their satisfaction in this regard. In fact, less than a year ago a communiqué issued following a meeting which the Taoiseach had with the then British Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, stating "The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister reviewed the arrangements for co-operation in security and expressed satisfaction at the excellent results that had been achieved". This co-operation continues and is being improved upon wherever and whenever possible.

Finally, the Taoiseach has asked me to assure you that the Irish Government are determined to continue and, if necessary, intensify their operations against the small minority in these islands using violence for political ends.

Yours sincerely,

Private Secretary.

5 The Crescent.
Station Road. Dublin.5.
10th March 1977.

Office of the Taoiseach.
Upper Merrion Street.
Dublin. 2.

15 MAR 1977

Dear Sirs,

I would, ^{like} the Taoiseach to be aware that many of the Protestant Minority have now lost complete confidence in the Army. This decline in confidence commenced some years ago after the unseemly haste and insistence on the part of the Army to 'finish off' the Monument to Lord Nelson which had been damaged by dynamiters. This Monument could have been restored, and was a source of income for Protestant charities. No dynamiter was ever apprehended for this deed.

Next the Army stood aside while the arsonists took over the British Embassy and burnt it to the ground. No arsonist was ever apprehended for this deed.

The failure of Army Engineers and Sappers to keep the road between the British Embassy and town unmined resulted in the death of the British Ambassador. No person was apprehended for this crime.

Lastly the vindictiveness shown by the Army in arresting and the subsequent prosecution of the 8 soldiers. The humiliation of these men has disturbed many of our Protestant people, as these soldiers were protecting the lives of our Northern Protestant Brethern in the South Armagh area where our people have suffered very badly, even if they had crossed the Border in their efforts to save Protestant life and property, is this such a terrible crime. Where were our Army patrols yesterday when a Protestant U.D.R., man was shot dead in Monaghan and his body dumped on the Border - looking for S.A.S. men? Before there can be a return to complete confidence in the Army again it will have to prove its sincerity to the Protestant People.

Yours faithfully,

E. O'Donnell

c.c. Minister for Defence.
Chief of Staff, Army H.Q.