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ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- 1 MAY TO 1 NOV 71

To be read in conjunction with AN ASSESSMENT TO THE THREAT TO SECURITY
IN NORTHERN IRELAND (21 Apr 71).

REVIEW OF THE PAST SIX MONTHS

1. Five criteria have regulated operational policy to date:
 - a. The need to sustain the credibility of government;
 - b. The credibility of the security forces;
 - c. The requirements of the law;
 - d. The tolerance of the community;
 - e. The availability of intelligence.
2. None of these are exclusive. The need to sustain the credibility of government has necessitated from time to time the committal of the security forces to tasks which offer small prospects of tactical success but assist in the maintenance of public confidence. In such cases, however, it has been important to ensure that they have not been drawn on into some sterile course or one beyond their capacity simply to satisfy the demands of one or another section of the public. Frequent committal in response to popular clamour will tend to bring the credibility of the forces into question. Moreover, it may well involve them in operations outside the law.
3. Amongst a divided community, it has been particularly necessary to demonstrate that operations are conducted within the requirements of the law. This has sometimes imposed restraints and denied quick, spectacular results. However, the credibility of the security forces does not rest on a few ephemeral triumphs but on the general level of their success in quelling lawlessness over a prolonged period.

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4. The manifestation of scruple and restraint over a period has increased the tolerance of the community towards security operations, even in traditionally Republican areas. It may be noted that when a petrol bomber was shot by the Army in August 1970, there were 6 days of rioting in Belfast. When 2 terrorists were shot in the Ardoyne in March 1971, there was no disorderly reaction in any part of the city. Amplification of public tolerance has also extended the scope for enterprise in operations and has contributed to the availability of intelligence.

5. The intelligence product has continued to improve over the past six months, a consequence inter alia of the closer working relationship between the intelligence staffs of the security forces. Though detailed tactical intelligence remains far from complete, the flow of reliable material is now fully sufficient to permit regular and substantially accurate assessments of the threat to be made.

The Threat to Security

6. The principal threat to the security of Northern Ireland stems still from the Irish Republican Army; a secondary threat being identified in the activities of diffuse groups of Protestant extremists loosely known as the Ulster Volunteer Force.

7. The split in the IRA appears to be irreconcilable. The result of the differences in their ideology is reflected in their working methods:

- a. Political action backed by terrorism and intimidation on the part of the Official or Goulding group;
- b. Terrorism and intimidation towards a limited political end being the usage of the Provisional or Brady group.

A common characteristic evident amongst both factions is indiscipline at unit

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and individual level when their addiction to political conspiracy is overcome by a compulsion to violence. Hence the persistence of numerous splinter groups ranging from two or three men temporarily bent on personal vengeance to a more permanent body such as Saor Eire.

X 8. Violent action by the 'UVF' is not to be discounted, not so much because of its potential power - it is comprised, almost certainly, of small, disorganised and largely unrelated cells - but because its intervention at some politically sensitive moment may, wittingly or unwittingly, precipitate a crisis.

9. In association with both factions of the IRA or the UVF is the hooligan element of the working class in Catholic/Republican or Protestant urban areas: sometimes providing spontaneously an occasion of disorder to be exploited by extremists; sometimes acting directly as agents, particularly of the IRA, in raising a riot to promote their cause. Finally, there is the participation by professional criminals of Britain and Ireland with one or another faction or community, sometimes with both. In recent months, the association of professional with political criminals has tended to increase.

Analysis of Security Force Operations

10. Alone or in company with the RUC, the Army has engaged in 6 types of security operation to date:

- a. Surveillance;
- b. Patrolling:
 - (1) In vehicles, or
 - (2) On foot, including small-scale ambushes.
- c. Vehicle and pedestrian checks;
- d. Searches of:
 - (1) Occupied buildings;

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- (2) Unoccupied buildings;
 - (3) Enclosed and/or open ground;
 - e. Point and area guards, including:
 - (1) KP guards;
 - (2) Guards between factions;
 - (3) Route guards for processions;
 - f. Riot pre-emption or suppression.
11. In Belfast, the most productive combination of these operations has been:
- a. Surveillance and)
 .) in areas of traditional IRA influence;
patrolling)
 - b. Vehicle and pedestrian checks throughout the city.

It is primarily these methods which have yielded, since January 1971, the greatest dividend in the arrest of terrorists and their associates, not infrequently in possession of weapons, and in the inhibition of local operations by the IRA against the security forces or the civil populace.

12. In Londonderry city, operations have primarily been confined to surveillance and patrolling, including daily foot patrolling by unarmed RUC and military police in the Bogside and Creggan districts. These, coupled with occasional demonstrations of quick and heavy military reinforcement, have preserved, with few exceptions, a long period of peace in what is largely a Catholic city west of the river Foyle.

13. In rural areas and along the Border, the principal combination has been:
- a. Patrolling;
 - b. Vehicle and pedestrian checks;
 - c. Searches.

AIM

14. To appreciate the capabilities of subversive forces in Northern Ireland during the next 6 months and to recommend an operational policy to counter them.

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FACTORS

The Seasons

15. Two periods are involved: the marching season of spring and summer; and the autumn period in which both the IRA and Protestant extremists/hooligans have tended to be active in both Belfast and Londonderry.

16. The season of traditional marching ceremonies and processions runs from April to August inclusive. Numbering almost 1500 separate events, and associated for the most part with the Protestant community, a high proportion occur in country districts where they are unlikely to cause trouble. However, several hundred are due to take place in Belfast, Londonderry and certain towns and villages amongst divided communities with a history of mutual antagonism.

In these areas, marching and ceremonial is liable:

- a. Either to provoke inter-communal violence spontaneously, or,
- b. To provide subversive forces with opportunities to exploit. For example, a massed presence of the Apprentice Boys on the old city walls of Londonderry in high summer might or might not rouse the inhabitants of the Bogside or Creggan to spontaneous rioting. But the presence would offer an excellent target to an IRA assassin; and certainly a multiple murder initiated from amongst the houses of the Bogside would result in a widespread resumption of inter-communal strife even though no dwellers in the Bogside had been involved in the shooting.

Traditional marches remind the community of traditional animosities and the widespread publicity for important marches or ceremonies provides terrorists with an ample choice of soft and sensitive targets.

17. By the end of the summer, the football season will have been resumed and the

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hooligan mobs which attend these have been responsible over the past 2 years for much disorder in September and October. They recognise that the onset of winter will drive themselves and their sympathisers indoors. Autumn is therefore an opportunity to enjoy a final fling. Similarly, terrorists and political activists have attempted campaigns during the past 3 years in the autumn in an attempt to score before the winter closes the season.

IRA - Officials

18. The political issues used by the diverse Marxist, Trotskyite, anarchist and republican groups to provoke the present disorders in 1968 are no longer potent: legislative reform has been set in hand progressively by government; death and injuries, imprisonment of those engaged in disorder, damage to property and a fearful tension have disenchanted many adults and adolescents who massed formerly in the streets.

19. The Officials must now find or create popular issues if they are to carry forward their cause in the North. In this they will have support from many extreme left-wing organisations, a fragment of the Catholic church and certain minority 'defence' associations. What they will lack is the hard-core of simple intransigent Republicans of the old school who have departed with the Provisionals. Amongst these latter will be the terrorists whose opportunities for violence will arouse envy amongst the young 'soldiers' of the Official remnant. If these bloods are to be retained in the service of Goulding interests it will be necessary to permit them to initiate terrorism of their own from time to time. The Officials are therefore in this dilemma: their Sinn Fein political organisation is striving for overt political support to gain parliamentary seats and hence should eschew terrorist attacks; but if they do not maintain a manifest level of terrorist action much of their 'military' membership will either desert to the Provisionals or initiate violence at random.

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IRA - Provisionals

20. At a glance, the position of the Provisionals would appear to be stronger than the Officials. At the time of the split, they gained wide support in Belfast and a number of towns, driving out or effacing those remaining with Goulding. Whilst they did not manage to carry off the best of the weapons, they had more available to them than was at first credited. Their funds have fluctuated but criminal activities have maintained adequate balances. For a time, their programme of violence and subversion attracted zealots and intimidated the faint-hearted. However, these manifestations have also attracted the attentions of the security forces and they have lost numbers of 'officers, volunteers and auxiliaries', almost 3 dozen killed, others sentenced by the courts and some on the run in Britain or the South. Of the high number of weapons discovered, the greater number are Provisional in origin. As the casualties amongst the membership have increased, the security forces have intensified their harassing and inhibiting tactics - high rates of patrolling, frequent road checks, multiple surveillance. All these have reduced the freedom of movement and the prestige of the Provisional membership in the areas they have deemed to be in their control.

21. If the Provisional element in the North is to recover its position, it must return to some form of activity which will display its capability for violence both to attract recruits and to enable it to terrorise the populace.

Hooligans

22. Hooligan elements are present among both Catholic and Protestant communities. Inevitably, they tend to be more numerous in the cities - BELFAST and LONDONDERRY - and their basic character is that of hooligans in cities everywhere: vicious, feckless, superficially courageous, destructive. In Northern Ireland, these are

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overlaid by the bigotry of Republican or Loyalist extremism.

23. Republican hooligans are a menace to law and order because they are so unstable, engaged one day in vandalism or commotion for its own sake, engaged similarly on the next as a protective screen for an IRA operation. When caught, their punishment provides grist to the propaganda mill of both wings of the IRA and the left wing associates of the Officials.

24. Loyalist hooligans are an even greater menace. They are a pervasive influence towards communal polarisation. Their verbal and/or physical attacks against Catholics incline or persuade moderate Catholics to resort to the 'defence' offered to them by IRA agents. The apparent tolerance of the Loyalist mobs by Army and RUC, the association of these same mobs with Orange and fraternal order processions - even though abhorred by the orders concerned - give credence to the Republican propagandists' allegations of majority licence, minority oppression. Not least, such penalties as these hooligans suffer, however slight, provide the stuff of protest for the demagogues of Protestant extremism.

Security Forces

25. During the period of mass rioting in 1969-70, the initiative lay for the most part with those engaged in subversion and terrorism. Public disenchantment with mass action has, however, permitted the initiative to pass largely to the security forces and their advantages in discipline, mobility, equipment and communications to prevail. Thus gunmen are no longer eager to engage in firefights with the forces and are hard put to it to move with weapons about the former Republican enclaves; thus rioters are quickly suppressed; hence the tally of criminals convicted by the courts from among their ranks.

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26. Yet in two senses the initiative lies still with the enemies of the state: in local propaganda; and in opportunities for movement and action outside their traditional bases.

27. The latter initiative arises because it is impracticable for the security forces to cover every square yard of a city such as BELFAST, a border such as that between Eire and Northern Ireland and the towns, villages and open country. In default of detailed tactical intelligence and joint operational control at subordinate levels, the security forces rely on their superior quality to effect deterrence and on random encounters to reduce the hostile initiative.

28. In the matter of local propaganda, police and military are inhibited by the problem of appearing always to be on the defensive, a problem which arises because of the necessary restraints on public statements by government servants and the tendentious nature of the propaganda attacks against the establishment.

COURSES OPEN TO THE IRA

Officials

29. Assuming the split with the Provisionals to be irreconcilable, there are essentially two courses open to the Goulding wing:

- a. Wholly to renounce physical violence to assist their emergence in association with extreme socialist elements as a legitimate political party representing both Catholic and Protestant workers in parliament.
- b. To persevere towards political legitimacy while retaining an armed membership.

30. Adoption of 29 a. is unlikely because the organisation in the North would no longer be able to prevent a Provisional incursion or to 'defend' its areas of support against the security forces. This course would certainly also mean the loss of its younger military membership by desertion with their arms either to the Brady camp or to splinter forces whose instability might precipitate a Brady onslaught into Official territory. Not unimportantly, it would run counter

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to two strong influences in its ranks: the old tradition of the Irish Citizens' Army as an armed body in the struggle against the 'English'; and the new tradition of the National Liberation Front as a politico-military organisation. Adherence to both these traditions will maintain, too, access to a wider range of funds.

31. The most likely course to be taken by the Officials, therefore - and the worst course it could take for the security forces - is 29 b. Adoption of this need not necessarily mean frequent engagement in gun battles. The bomb offers excellent opportunities for violence. It is a weapon of disruption and coercion yet deniable by a party seeking legitimacy. It is the weapon most likely to be used in the six months ahead.

Provisionals

32. Without violence, the Brady wing is nothing. In the general sense, therefore, it has only one course if it is to survive. But resumption of the former small arms actions and associated tactics in BELFAST during the marching and autumn seasons will scarcely be practicable if the security forces continue their pressure in the Provisional areas. A profitable short-term course would be to accept domination of the base areas by the security forces and to confine action to the exterior. Its adoption would certainly put both Army and RUC in a difficult position; for they would either feel obliged to thin out from the base areas the better to operate in the exterior - when Brady suzerainty would once more be restored within - or maintain the same large forces in the dense urban areas and deprive themselves of the numbers needed to suppress terrorism outside.

Fortunately, this is not a course the Provisionals are likely to take; the loss of prestige inherent in abandonment of the enclaves would be insufferable to them; they would fear also an infiltration by the Goulding wing in their absence.

33. The alternative and more likely course is to attempt yet another campaign

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with the aim of breaking the nerve of the Stormont government and forcing it to resign. In the worst case, such a campaign would include murder of those holding influential appointments in the Army, RUC and public life and the kidnapping of individual politicians, troops or police or their dependents. Direct shooting actions would tend to be kept away from the enclaves except for the occasions when marches or some political cause gathered crowds. Bombing and demolition would be used widely to heighten terror.

34. To accomplish this it will be necessary for the Provisionals to recruit, to replenish funds and stocks of weapons. Both in this period and during the following campaign they may be expected to observe the truce with the Goulding wing. During the preparatory phase, it would be necessary to maintain the Provisionals' influence in the base areas by militant propaganda and intimidation in the guise of social work.

Summary of Assumptions

35. a. The Officials will retain a capability for violence and will be obliged to use it intermittently - probably by bombing - to retain allegiance of militants.
- b. They are unlikely to initiate a full-scale campaign.
- c. The Provisionals will attempt to maintain roughly their present deployment and will strive to weaken the hold of the security forces in these areas by propaganda and by guile - for example, collecting money openly on the pretence of doing so for social organisations.
- d. They will initiate a new campaign against the security forces during the summer.
- e. The Officials will, if practicable, remain aloof from participation, but will hope to see the Provisionals weakened in numbers thereby and the security forces diminished in prestige.

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f. The split between the factions will remain irreconcilable; the truce will persist but splinter elements on either side may precipitate renewed strife.

g. Hooligan elements in either community may precipitate spontaneously or as the agents of subversion a recrudescence of inter-communal violence. They are certain to take part in any disorders.

OPERATIONS BY SECURITY FORCES

36. Operational policy for the security forces must provide for two prime requirements:

a. The defeat of a renewed campaign by the Provisionals. To which may be added a secondary requirement, to invalidate any violence initiated by the Officials.

b. Prevention of inter-communal strife.

37. Defeat of a Provisionals' campaign and violence by the Officials. The initiative in timing, location and nature of events lies with the IRA leadership in both wings - principally the local leadership. It will be necessary to:

- a. Disrupt preparations to as great a degree as possible,
- b. Maintain close surveillance of IRA base areas,
- c. Reduce opportunities for mass support or cover for acts of terrorism.

The last of these measures is directly connected with the relationship between the two communities.

38. Prevention of inter-communal strife. The need to maintain peace between the two communities is clearly necessary for the sake of public order. When terrorists are operating, it is the more important in order to deny gunmen or bombers the cover of massed impassioned crowds. In the period under review, the events most likely to provide the occasions of inter-communal clashes are the

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traditional marches and ceremonies of spring and summer. It will be essential for the security forces to scrutinise the programme of these and to confine them to areas in which they are unlikely to provoke violence. Where it is apparent that a massed confrontation cannot be avoided, it will be necessary to request a ban on the event.

CONCLUSION

39. Despite the recent lull and the success of recent security force operations, the danger of terrorism and rioting is not yet past. Indeed, there is every likelihood of a renewed outbreak in the weeks immediately ahead.

40. If counter-operations are to be effective, some curtailment in traditional practices will have to be accepted by the public and a degree of disruption in their movements.

41. The security forces must themselves continue to develop joint intelligence, planning and action to make use of their numbers and individual characteristics to the maximum effect.

42. Finally, there will be a continuing need for the forces to contribute to public confidence, both in the field of operations and that of public information. The growth of propaganda emanating from the extremist elements - republican and 'loyalist' - cannot be ignored. It must be countered by frequent publication of the facts, and accurate statements will similarly dispel exaggeration and rumours which spring from public apprehension. To achieve this, Government, RUC and Army will need to cooperate yet more closely their information agencies.

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