

PRESENT:

The Home Secretary
The Secretary of State for Defence
The Minister of State at the Home
C.G.S. Office
The G.O.C.
Sir Philip Allen
Mr. P. Woodfield
Mr. G. Angel

The Prime Minister
Sir Harold Black
Mr. K.P. Bloomfield
Mr. B.R. Cummings

Reinforcements

The Prime Minister opened the discussion and spoke of the rapidly deteriorating political situation. He said that there had been a large number of marches by Trade Unionists from Harland & Wolff, I.C.L. and other large industries within the past couple of days, involving many thousands of workers. He pointed out that this was a new aspect of the situation and symptomatic of the fear which many people felt arising out of the murder of the three soldiers. He said that the immediate need was for substantial reinforcements. The Prime Minister felt that those reinforcements would be needed if the Army was to live in the riot areas, and if they were to do sealing off operations and to impose limited curfews. He felt that a larger force could assist in restoring the R.U.C. presence in the difficult areas. He argued that the consequences of the implementation of such tactics would be either to force the I.R.A. to withdraw from the areas and therefore intimidation etc. would stop, or they would be forced to react and a confrontation would be brought on. He stressed that action must be taken at once otherwise it would be impossible for his Government to survive.

Lord Carrington said that his chief concern was that even if additional battalions were sent they could not possibly prevent the type of murder which had occurred last week. He wondered what military objective would be achieved by reinforcements and he was extremely worried that even more requests for additional reinforcements would be forthcoming in the future and he pointed out that there simply was not a bottomless pit.

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The G.O.C. expressed the view that in his opinion he had sufficient forces at the moment to do anything that was required and in his opinion additional troops could not be justified on military grounds.

Sir Harold Black said that it was essential to restore public confidence and in addition he did feel that on occasions the Army had expressed the view that they were unable to carry out certain operations because of limited manpower.

The Prime Minister stressed the necessity of trying to bring events to a head rather than let the situation ramble on for years.

Lord Carrington doubted whether the I.R.A. would react in the way in which the Prime Minister hoped.

? Mr. Sharples said that it was essential to have a police presence everywhere and he wondered how many additional troops would be required to ensure that objective.

The G.O.C. expressed his willingness to support the police in arresting felons, doing mobile and foot patrols in any of the difficult areas and he argued that his present resources were sufficient. He said that he had very grave doubts about the establishment of permanent military posts in riot areas as he felt that they would create targets.

The Prime Minister emphasised that he could not see the present Government surviving for more than three days if action was not taken at once.

The Home Secretary said that he appreciated the need for troops to be seen to be doing things.

Lord Carrington expressed the view that the riot situation could be brought under control but he wondered how the problem of the I.R.A. could be resolved.

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The G.O.C. said that it was largely an intelligence problem and if this aspect could be improved he felt sure that the problem could be sorted out. He said that it was known to the security forces who the I.R.A. were and where they lived but it was a different matter to bring them before the Courts, charged with offences which would stick.

The Home Secretary said that in his view there were two aspects of the problem. First, the military one, and second, the political question. He felt that the security forces should be deployed in a way which would help both the military and the political aspects.

The Chief of the General Staff said that he felt it should be possible to take much more overt action and in his view the only limiting factor was the durability of the soldiers.

The G.O.C. said that one of the major problems at the present time was that if the security forces were too tough or took action of a repressive kind then immediately they were greeted by a wall of silence and even less intelligence was received.

Internment

The Prime Minister turned to the subject of internment and said that he had not yet received a full assessment from the Chief Constable but the Head of Special Branch did appear to be moving towards internment.

The G.O.C. pointed out that it would take an extra two battalions of troops simply to do the major operation which was involved in interning large numbers of terrorists but he emphasised that these two battalions would not be sufficient to handle any resulting riots.

Working Party on future roles of Police and Army

The Prime Minister then referred to the Working Party on the Future Role of the Police and Army and said that in his opinion some kind of riot force was necessary which would fill the vacuum which would exist when the Army returned to its garrison position. He felt that the force would need to be a full-time force, very highly trained, armed if necessary, and independent of the R.U.C. He said it would be highly undesirable for the activities of such a riot force to affect the image of the civilianised R.U.C. He felt that some announcement should be made right away to make it known that consideration was being given to the creation of such a force.

The Chief of the General Staff suggested that a marked increase in the size of the Special Patrol Group might fill the bill. He thought that this force could operate under the Chief Constable.

The Home Secretary said that it seemed to him that the need for such a force was a long way ahead and, in addition, he could not contemplate such a force having the use of firearms as, in his view, any armed force which acted in support of the civil power would need to be under the control of Her Majesty's Government. He said that he certainly appreciated that there must be armed support for the civil power but he could not contemplate this support being under the control of the Northern Ireland Government.

The Chief of the General Staff said that, in his view, when a riot situation developed in which firearms were used he felt this was the point in time when the Army should be called in to assist the civil power.

The Prime Minister indicated that all he wished to say was that the two Governments had been considering what force would fill the vacuum when the Army returned to its garrison position. He said that in the present political situation the Government's credibility

had been completely removed and he stressed that unless immediate reinforcements arrived in Northern Ireland to carry out the kind of tasks which he had outlined, then he felt the Government would not survive.

General discussion

The G.O.C. said that he felt there was a massive public relations job to be done and he had already started doing more overt-type operations. He referred to the major cordon road block operation which had been done at the weekend and he felt there had been a very good response to it and, in addition, he felt that it had achieved a military objective in that an attack which had been planned had not been carried out. He said that he was fully prepared when the peace was broken to act ruthlessly within the rules already laid down. He was worried about provoking a confrontation and felt that if the military had a continuing presence in some of these difficult areas then a confrontation would occur, but the effects of that would be to alienate many of the decent Catholics and this would make the Army's position more difficult. He agreed with the Prime Minister that we probably were past the stage of being too gentle.

The Home Secretary said that he appreciated that there should be continual harassing types of action but these should not be punitive. He felt, in addition, that they should give very detailed consideration to the request for more troops and they should also look at the possibility of a political statement being made by Ted Heath either in Belfast or from London.

Lord Carrington said that he appreciated the Prime Minister's problems but, as the strength of the British Army was only 46 Battalions, additional reinforcements could not be sent to Northern Ireland ad infinitum. He said the major problem facing the Army today was recruitment and when men were separated from their wives

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and homes for lengthy periods morale was affected, but he affirmed that if it was necessary for this to be done then they would not shrink from it. He said the chief difficulty was that in military terms there did not appear to be any necessity for sending reinforcements but he could see that they might be justified on political grounds. He thought that it might be advantageous to wait until the military situation was right and then send reinforcements, as indeed it was already contemplated that reinforcements would be sent when the marching season got under way. He emphasised that the decision to send troops could not be justified on military grounds.

The Prime Minister said that he appreciated Lord Carrington's view but he could not guarantee that additional troops would not be asked for at some future date. He argued that the harsh reality facing the Northern Ireland Government was that it could not survive unless immediate action was taken.

The G.O.C. said that there was difficulty in analysing the present situation in Northern Ireland as undoubtedly soldiers would continue to be targets and, in addition, bombings would continue. He appreciated the need to show a greater physical presence and to harass the terrorists as much as possible.

Lord Carrington expressed some anxiety about possible Catholic reaction if troops were continuously in some of the trouble areas.

The Prime Minister emphasised that he was not asking for punitive time measures involving troops tramping through houses and ripping up floor boards but he could not accept that a greater physical presence of the Army in riot areas was sufficient grounds to justify

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disorder. He said that the possibility of a Protestant revolt was very real in the next few days and he felt that if decisions were not taken before then he could not possibly carry on.

The G.O.C. undertook to re-examine the question of establishing static posts in difficult areas and to look at the reinforcements which would be needed to show a marked increase in present patrolling. It was suggested that it might be possible to sit in one of the difficult areas and at a later date to extend the operation to other areas.

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