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FROM: P N BELL  
SECURITY POLICY AND OPERATIONS DIVISION  
DATE: 1 AUGUST 1990

1. Mr Ledlie
2. PS/Minister of State (B)
- cc PS/Minister of State (L)\* - B  
PS/Dr Mawhinney (L&B) - B  
PS/PUS (L&B)\* - B  
Mr Wilson\* - B  
Mr Alston\* - B  
Mr Thomas\* - B  
Mr Blackwell\* - B  
Mr D Hill\* - B  
Mr J McConnell\* - B  
Mr N Hamilton\* - B 3/8  
\* without Appendices
- 6/8  
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POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SECURITY POLICY

The Meeting

At our recent meeting, Dr Mawhinney tasked officials with preparing papers on the topics listed in paragraph 2 of Mr Kyle's note of 16 July (not to all). His objective was to use these to stimulate further discussion, leading to recommendations for further action to the Secretary of State.

The Context

2. Papers are duly attached at Annexes A, B and C (the two papers commissioned on wall building have collapsed into a single paper). But they need reading with the following considerations in mind:

- (a) we are already exploring a wide range of incremental changes (notably on training, and community relations) with the security forces - on which we can expand at the meeting;
- (b) the political considerations are cast, since these are SPOB papers, in general terms (although we have asked PAB to see if they can inject any political 'fine tuning');

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- (c) there are (at least) two difficult trade-offs that have to be struck with policy making the security field: first, a 'lighter touch' by the security forces designed to achieve 'political' advantages, risks meaning more security force (and other) casualties; second, what is politically advantageous in nationalist terms may not be in Unionist (and vice versa);
- (d) politically motivated criticism of the security forces does not necessarily mean that the security forces (or the security policies they are implementing) are at fault. The criticisms may reflect wider political and social attitudes, or individual political imperatives; and,
- (e) the operational independence of the Chief Constable, who is not susceptible to directives from Government.

The Papers

3. Against that background, and having gone over the basics in my brief of 7 July to PS/Minister of State and, more particularly, in its Annexes, our papers seek not only to range over the domain indicated by Dr Mawhinney, but also to:

- (a) provide a checklist of some elements of security force practice which might, provided we take the police and Army with us, in which there may be the possibility of further changes likely to enhance the 'sensitivity' ('political benefits') of security force operations without, however, diminishing their operational effectiveness (Annex A);
- (b) put into context allegations of inadequate and inefficient policing in some (predominantly Nationalist) areas (Annex B); and
- (c) similarly put in the political context the genesis of peacelines etc (Annex C).

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The Meeting - Agenda

4. You may want to:

- (a) review the numerous areas where we are seeking to modify security force behaviour in ways likely to generate 'political' benefits;
- (b) examine areas - including areas hitherto overlooked - where further work might be done;

(Under (a) and (b), I suspect we are likely to major on: Training/Briefing; building links with community; patrolling; even VCPs.)

- (c) identify any areas in which more precise political assessment was required;
- (d) examine how we can go, as it were, on to the attack.

(We must not accept the presumption of our critics and enemies that, either in principle or in practice, the operations of the security forces in Northern Ireland are oppressive and insensitive (or that they are feeble either). Given the difficulty of the task with which they are confronted (a highly sophisticated chief terrorist opponent in PIRA; the political context of a modern, liberal democracy; the need to operate in potentially very hostile areas) they do an extraordinarily good, dare I say sensitive job? Perhaps we ought, therefore, to examine further:

- ways of explaining (more?) effectively, using all the media and channels available to us, (and particularly to the local residents and their elected representatives) the realities of policing in difficult areas; and,
- how we could do more, for instance, to encourage the SDLP to educate, rather than to follow their electorate, and give the RUC public support.

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These seem political and informational tasks of high importance in building political support for defeating terrorism. Unless we get that right, all the sophistication that has increasingly characterised police and Army operations over the years - and whatever further improvements they may make - will not score to the full.)

The Next Steps

5. In the light of that discussion, we might summarise our conclusions for the Secretary of State's benefit, together with any proposals for making further progress. Paragraph 10 of my brief of 7 July remains relevant here: if Government is to bring the security forces to a fuller understanding of the kind of strategy outlined in our Defeating Terrorism papers (which includes operating in a 'politically helpful' way), then it is essential, at all levels, that the police and Army are brought along with tact and diplomacy. More important than any new 'machinery', or demarche on the part of Ministers, is the need to foster the relationship of confidence and understanding between, in the first instance, the Secretary of State and his Principal Security Advisers. This finds its most formal expression in the approximately monthly meetings of SPM. In a sense, we are helping prepare our Secretary of State's brief.

(signed)

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POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SECURITY FORCE ACTIVITY - A CHECKLIST

1. The Objectives of Security Force Activity

1.1 To contribute to the defeat of terrorism by:

- reassuring law abiding members of the community (Unionist and Nationalist);
- deterring terrorists (of whatever hue);
- attrition of terrorists within the law.

1.2 To be fully successful, this requires the security forces to win and retain the confidence of both communities, by demonstrating their operational effectiveness as well as their evenhandedness, impartiality and sensitivity: all comprising 'professionalism' in the broadest sense.

2. The Problem

2.1 With these objectives:

- how can we maximise the favourable, and minimise the unfavourable consequences of the security force activities (eg by reducing ill feeling left amongst people who have had their homes searched, their neighbours, friends and relatives)? and,
- what additional mechanisms are needed to measure and address the political consequences of security force action, before and after?

2.2 Areas for closer examination include those set out below.

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3. Framework

3.1 Security force operations take place within a framework determined by:

- HMG's security policy (see 'Defeating Terrorism' and other papers attached to Mr Bell's brief of 7 July);
- the law (anti-terrorist legislation plus the ordinary criminal law).

3.2 Within that framework, the security policy applied and implemented is determined by a hierarchy of committees (SPM (and SCM); OCG, RACs, DACs etc) (of which the first two have NIO participation).

3.3 A key feature of the situation is the operational independence of the Chief Constable; Army acts in support of the RUC, and tasked by them. Police are in the lead (with partial exception in 3 Brigade).

3.4 Operational decisions are based on the informed professional judgement, commonsense, and experience of the appropriate security force commanders. Inevitably this will in varying degrees involve the exercise of 'political' judgement (and, in the case of some major Army operations, eg OP TANTALUS, the NIO will be consulted). NB: The relationship, at all levels, between the NIO and the security forces is highly sensitive.

4. Training etc

4.1 The 'political awareness' of the security forces is developed and reinforced by:

- training (regular training for both arms, plus pre-tour training for Army etc);
- experience (RUC; building up of expertise in the Regular Army over many tours; the UDR);

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- ad hoc briefing (including briefings by NIO/Central Secretariat officials) of police and Army; (more briefings planned especially of roulement battalions);
- formal liaison with the community (eg police liaison committees);
- informal contact between the security forces, local community leaders, politicians etc;
- standing orders/codes of practice;
- complaints procedures.

4.2 The need to ensure that political awareness/sensitivity at higher levels transmitted to soldiers/policemen on the ground.

4.3 What scope is there now for:

- improvements in training/briefing;
- for improving links between RUC, Army and community?

### 5. Conduct of Operations

5.1 Effectiveness in achieving objectives 'on the street' require a clear understanding:

- of strategic/tactical objectives of any given operation or series thereof;
- the inter-relationship between those objectives and political and social forces in the community, and how security force actions impinge on them.

5.2 Success in maximising the favourable, and minimising the unfavourable impact of security force activities. These circumstances are a function of professional training (eg on how to

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carry out a house search/PVCP, OP etc) which also includes sensitivity to the general public (cf enhanced UDR training on dealing with the public).

5.3 This 'sensitivity' to the public will be a function of:

- training etc (see above)
- the perceived priorities of the security forces themselves right down the line (including at lower levels: company/SDC)
- organisational ethos (policemen as 'caring professional', social composition of police; possible difference in attitudes in resident/roulement battalions)
- who carries out operation (Regular Army, UDR - and if so, whether accompanied?), RUC/DMSU.

5.4 The type and intensity of security force operations is also relevant:

- some evidence that intense levels of patrolling (police plus Army in urban areas) are an irritant (on the other hand, no patrolling could recreate no-go areas; but is there scope for reduction?). NB: This is an extremely sensitive and complex issue;
- presence of soldiers 'unnatural' in urban, as opposed to rural areas (hence to be reduced, wherever safe to do so?)

5.5 Better intelligence means more precisely targetted operations (and therefore less (politically counter-productive) inconvenience to the public) - but difficulties of source protection.

5.6 What further improvements can be made in reducing inconvenience caused by those activities (PVCPs, house searches,

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some patrolling) regarded by the public as most intrusive and most controversial? What scope for increasing 'normal' police activity (eg response to crime in harder areas)?

6. After care, and feedback

6.1 Importance of the role of CIVREPs in terms of:

- briefing the security forces (Army especially) before operations on their likely consequences;
- clearing up afterwards, arranging compensation (up to £500 on the spot), organising general 'after care', reporting back on impact;
- anticipating, defusing, and processing complaints.

6.2 Other feedback mechanisms include:

- police liaison committees etc (scope for greater/more overt SDLP participation - also on PANI);
- security force contacts with community leaders/politicians etc;
- NIO contacts with security forces, local leaders etc;
- the Irish (via the Secretariat).

6.3 Complaints machinery, formal and informal including:

- against the Army;
- against the police (not forgetting ICPC);
- PQs, MCs, the Irish up to and including the IGC;
- civil legal action (including ECHR).

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6.4 Is it desirable, and if so, what scope is there for:

- improving these feedback mechanisms?
- adding new ones (research: CHS; Prof Darby).
- improving complaints machinery (work already in hand in the follow-up to Lord Colville).

7. Selling the Product

7.1 What scope is there for (more effectively?):

- getting across more effectively (speeches, media, through informal contact? eg security forces, CIVREPs, political contacts) what our security policies are, how and why security force operations are conducted the way they are; true realities of policing ;
- rebutting Republican disinformation?
- educating the SDLP (not to mention the Irish)?

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## POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND EFFECTIVE POLICING

The Context

The police in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the UK, seek to serve the whole community. This can be especially difficult in Northern Ireland where the continuing terrorist campaign forces the police to be very cautious in areas where the threat of terrorist attack is high; it has also made the public in some areas reluctant to approach the police for help, not only for fear of the consequences of being seen to do so by terrorists, but also because they would not wish their request for assistance to bring any policeman into actual physical danger. There remain traditional fears and mistrusts, exploited by the terrorists and their fellow travellers, which also constrain the support for the police of those who are nevertheless wholly law abiding.

Allegations of inadequate policing

2. It is against this background that complaints, not confined to the RUC, of alleged inadequacy and ineffectiveness must be assessed. The RUC's record, however, bears comparison with that of any police force, in dealing with the "ordinary decent criminal", anywhere in the United Kingdom, or indeed further afield. Clear-up rates in Northern Ireland, even in the more difficult areas, are on a par with, in some cases better, than those on the UK mainland (especially if one recalls their difficulties in dealing with crime in, say, 'B' Division) (at Appendix A). Measures of public satisfaction with the police similarly show that the RUC have little to fear from comparison with the forces world wide. (See the NIO statistics and Research Bulletin - Appendix B - which suggests that, subject to the statistical limitations of the Survey, that attitudes of Catholics and Protestants to the police were not significantly different.)



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3. Terrorist groups seek to denigrate the police, and to distort the truth however they can to achieve this. For example, a recent article in 'An Phoblacht' claimed that police response to sectarian murders in North Belfast was very slow. Investigation showed that the RUC were in fact prompt, in attending scenes of such incidents, where there was a real need for an immediate police presence. (See Appendix C.) That journal's recent account of injuries sustained by Mr D Fusco provide a further recently documented example of distortion of facts.

4. Nevertheless persistent complaints are received on various channels of slow responses to calls in areas such as West Belfast. Without seeking to justify dilatoriness or denying the possibility of improvement (on which see below), it is important to draw a distinction between cases where a police presence is needed, and cases where - although a policeman would be helpful and reassuring - there is no actual necessity for an immediate presence. In such cases action in slower time, and perhaps through different means, may be equally effective. In certain areas of Northern Ireland, it could be grossly inefficient use of resources for a policeman to attend the scene of every small burglary: in parts of North or West Belfast, this could require deploying considerable resources (some 16 soldiers, plus vehicles) in order to ensure the physical safety of the policeman concerned; divert those resources from other tasks, possibly of greater operational importance, including against terrorists; and be of doubtful effectiveness in catching the criminal. A request for the house holder to visit a RUC station, (to give details of the burglary, and allow insurance claims to be made), followed up, where sensible by detective work which may eventually identify the culprits, and amass sufficient evidence to secure conviction in the Courts, can be a better use of available resources - even if, at an emotional level, it can be less satisfactory to the injured party. He or she may well feel aggrieved if it is not explained to them why the police are operating in this way, and may instead conclude that the police are uninterested. They could even resent being asked to visit a police station.

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Tackling the Problem

5. This however is a failure in communication, rather than a faulty strategy for dealing with the underlying criminal problem. It is in the best interests of the police to ensure (with our help where necessary - or welcome) that communications with the public are such that the public understand the constraints within which the police operate, and the methods which are used. There is no doubt that the vast majority of the public would accept that the important issues are that loss of life and physical injury are minimised, and that criminals are caught, and brought to justice with sufficient evidence to ensure their conviction.

6. It is however rather easier said than done to get these messages across to the public, and perhaps more particularly to those sections of it which see advantage in expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of the police (especially as defensible grounds for objecting to its very existence have been progressively removed). There is scope for further study of how the public could be better educated.

7. There is also a link with the wider concept of police operations: to the extent that police manpower is absorbed in routine patrolling (which, at present levels, may be in some measure self-defeating), or the accompaniment of Army patrols, their ability to respond to requests for help will be inhibited. This is, however, an operational matter, and one requiring exceptional sensitivity in handling with the police and Army. Nevertheless there does seem, in principle, scope, for further study of how a change in patterns of police operations especially in hard Nationalist areas might free resources for other work (of a kind directly welcomed by the community) without removing a police presence from them.

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## PEACELINES - THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THEIR ERECTION AND DEMOLITION

### The Function of Peacelines

Peacelines are constructed as a response to, and a way of minimising, sectarian conflict between adjacent Loyalist and Nationalist areas. They are not, as some allege, barriers imposed by the Government and security forces to reinforce sectarian divisions or to maintain 'tribal' separation.

### Background

2. In the early 1970s, peacelines usually took the form of concrete blocks ("dragons' teeth") or high corrugated-iron fencing, installed by the Army. In recent years, however, much more environmentally-sensitive measures have been used. These include ornamental brick walls - such as those in Crumlin Road, Short Strand and Alliance Avenue (photographs attached) and using materials that are visually more attractive (palisade or plastasol fencing, as against corrugated-iron). In a number of cases, it has also been possible to use different types of measures, other than walls or fences, to create "buffers" at difficult interfaces. These include new road schemes - such as Westlink and the Albertbridge Road and, occasionally, housing developments allow old peacelines to be "designed out". In short, when considering whether new peacelines are needed or whether old peacelines should be retained, the NIO, Belfast Development Office, NIHE, and RUC consider whether there are alternative means of creating a stand-off between opposing sections of the community, rather than simply erecting walls or fences.

### The procedures for deciding whether peacelines should be erected

3. Few new peacelines have been erected in recent years. The main preoccupation of the NIO, DOE, NIHE and the RUC has been to maintain and upgrade peacelines installed in earlier years.



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4. Peacelines arise from pressure in sections of the local community: local people living on interfaces become disenchanted with having their properties damaged or their lives put at risk by attacks from "the other side", and demand that the RUC and 'Government' take action to protect them. Sometimes, though not always, the Churches or political parties make representations on their behalf. Examples of the types of representations which the NIO receive are attached:

- (a) correspondence from the Church of Ireland and the Rev Martin Smyth MP about Dunboyne Park, the Protestant area which suffered so badly from sectarian attacks before the Springhill Avenue wall was built (Appendix A);
- (b) a petition from 1,100 residents in the Alliance area seeking a security wall in Alliance Avenue (Appendix B); and
- (c) extracts from minutes of meetings of the Belfast City Council Police Liaison Committee at which councillors supported the case for a security wall in Alliance Avenue (Appendix C).

Similar cases involving representations from the Nationalist community are also on file (eg a petition from 1500 residents in the Springfield Road who, earlier this year, were seeking the closure of Lanark Way to protect them from further murders by Loyalist gunmen from the Shankill - a request, the validity of which was reinforced by the sectarian murder last night of a Roman Catholic in the Springfield Road.

5. Local politicians are themselves involved in calls for new peacelines. This happens more frequently on the Protestant/Loyalist side, but there are instances of similar interventions on the Catholic/ Nationalist side as well. Attached at Appendix D is a letter from Councillor Feeney, SDLP. At Appendix E are Press cuttings showing that, when we closed Lepper Street and Adam Street in North Belfast in June, this received support from politicians on both sides of the divide.

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6. Local politicians are, in such cases, sometimes representing the genuine concerns of their constituents, either for or against a particular measure; on others they simply play at party politics, criticising what has been done for "the other side", primarily, it would often seem, for the sake of taking the opposite argument. When taking decisions on peacelines, the NIO, RUC, DOE and NIHE, will not, usually, be able to satisfy both sides of the community, or even everyone within the same community. Nevertheless, major efforts are made to ensure that the political implications are weighed-up before decisions are taken. In this, SPOB rely on the Civil Representatives, PAB and the RUC. All have their own contacts in the local communities including with key opinion formers. It is normal practice for SPOB to seek advice on all three channels before making recommendations to Ministers. In this way, we obtain three different perspectives on the problem, and officials can obtain a wide range of raw data stretching from the opinions of MPs or local councillors, parish priests and other Church representatives, down to the individual residents who are likely to be affected. The Civil Representatives in particular have contacts in all parts of the community and make no bones about speaking to whomsoever is necessary to obtain the information they need. (This includes Sinn Fein.) SPOB also takes pains to ensure that so far as possible, recommendations now take account of all the political as well as eg the environmental arguments for and against the erection of a wall or barrier in a particular area. It is also noteworthy how barriers are becoming increasingly attractive; and a casual passerby might well fail to realise their function. This can only be beneficial in political as well as environmental terms - even though one may still regret the necessity of their existence at all.

Summary

7. In summary, a major effort is made to ensure that the Department has all the relevant information that it needs to take sensible decisions. It is, however, unrealistic to expect that these measures will always receive universal approval. But they seem to be accepted as a regrettable necessity in the communities, and are regarded as much better than having no protection at all. Where measures are likely to cause controversy in one section of the

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community or the other the Department or the RUC will do everything they reasonably can to explain why the measures are considered necessary; and why no other, more suitable alternatives are available; and to assure people that disruption, etc, will be kept to a minimum during and after their construction.

8. At Governmental level, the continuing existence of peacelines allows the outside observer to make critical comparisons with Eastern Europe, etc. Such comparisons require a careful response. However, we have never had any difficulty in explaining to people that the two situations are very different, and the issue, generally, has rarely achieved a high political profile. This is probably because, in the final analysis, these measures are there, in essence, at the request of the local people in Northern Ireland, and, as the years have gone by the barriers are not simply less and less an eyesore but even a visual enhancement in some areas.

Process for reviewing the continuing need for peacelines

9. There is no formal mechanism as such for reviewing the continuing need for each peaceline at set intervals. And, so far as NIO is aware, no barrier has been demolished altogether because it is no longer needed to protect hostile communities, as opposed to being replaced or resited in developmental schemes. However, in practice, virtually all our peacelines are under continuous review. This is because fencing, etc, requires constant care and maintenance and clearly we would not wish to continue expending public money on measures if they were no longer necessary. Also, as the DoE come forward with new development plans, housing schemes, road schemes, environmental proposals, etc, we again have an opportunity to review, with the Planners and the RUC, whether measures are still necessary. If they are, as is indicated above, attempts will be made to merge them into the development proposals generally.

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