

ANNEX

SECURITY FORCE RESPONSE TO THE CEASEFIRE

The SDLP delegation may raise two security-related issues in particular: continuing security force patrolling levels in nationalist areas; and the retention of security force installations, especially the observation posts in south Armagh (a particular concern of Mr Mallon's).

Patrolling Levels

The security forces have responded positively to the ceasefires. Military support to the police has been scaled back in all areas. The RUC now patrol without military support in Belfast and Londonderry City centres, while military activity is down, compared with pre-ceasefire levels, by 75% in Londonderry, by 65% in west Belfast, and by 25% in north Belfast and south Armagh. One battalion has been relocated from Belfast to the Maze. Various other measures, such as the removal of barriers and reopening of roads closed for security reasons, have also been taken, and the style of patrolling is much more relaxed than previously.

Nevertheless, the threat from terrorist groups remains, illustrated by the attempted CAC bombing of a Government office in Londonderry on 30 October and the bomb attack on Markethill RUC station on 16 September. There are indications that the CAC, INLA and the LVF all wish to carry out further attacks. The signs of instability in PIRA's ranks are also a cause of concern. For this reason a certain level of security force activity remains inescapable.

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South Armagh Towers

The South Armagh towers were built in 1985/6, originally to provide protection for the two RUC stations at Forkhill and Crossmaglen. Since then the surveillance capability of the towers has been developed significantly and now provides critical intelligence, both strategic and tactical.

Since the start of the present troubles a quarter of military deaths and a third of all RUC deaths have occurred in the South Armagh area (including Newry). Despite the recent PIRA ceasefire, the threat in the area remains high; South Armagh PIRA continue to target and are prepared for a return to violence, the threat from the CAC is increasing and there is a real risk of disaffected PIRA members defecting to them, and much of the population remains strongly Republican. The RUC still requires military support in the area.

The GOC considers the towers to be a vital enabling capability and paramount to the safety of the troops based in the area. He would not be prepared to maintain a presence in the area were they to be removed which would seriously affect the RUC's ability to uphold the rule of law in the region.

The recently formed South Armagh Farmers and Residents Committee have been arranging protests against the Observation Posts and organising meetings (at which Mr Andrews spoke). NIO Ministers are considering how to deal with various representatives from this group.

Handling

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Pressure to halt security force operations in nationalist areas and to remove security installations, have been a theme of Sinn Fein's for some time: this is now increasingly being picked up by the SDLP and (unhelpfully) the Irish Government. Tomorrow's meeting provides an opportunity to explain again that, while levels of activity in particular areas are kept under review, the need for continuing security force action to counter terrorism (several individuals with weapons have been intercepted in recent weeks), and the requirement to maintain essential infrastructure, has not yet ended. The following lines make these points.

Security Force Activity

- I am determined that Northern Ireland will return to normality as soon as possible. Since the IRA ceasefire there has been a very considerable reduction in the level of security force patrolling. Security requirements are kept under close review.
- Military support to the RUC has been scaled back by at least 35% across Northern Ireland. In some areas (including Londonderry, east Belfast, Newry) the police now patrol without Army support. In west Belfast military activity has fallen by 65%, and in Londonderry by 75%. A parachute battalion has been relocated from Belfast.
- This comes on top of other steps. Barriers and roads in many places have been reopened. The internment powers are going. Exclusion orders have been lifted. A review of counter-terrorist legislation is being launched. This process will continue, if the security situation allows.
- Obviously we cannot do all we would like to while the threat from the CAC, INLA, the LVF remains. Nor can we be certain of

PIRA's long-term intentions. Equally, it is possible to move more quickly in some areas rather than others. Some criticise us for moving too rapidly.

- I want to see a Northern Ireland where the paraphernalia of security is no longer necessary. We will continue to move in that direction as quickly as we safely can.

Towers in South Armagh/Other Security Installations

- Towers in South Armagh play a vital role in the fight against terrorism, providing protection to the RUC and Army to uphold the rule of law.

- Unfortunately the potential threat in the area remains high, particularly from the CAC. Still not possible for RUC to patrol without military support in South Armagh. Look forward to the day when they can. But not prepared to put lives of public and security forces at risk. Towers provide essential protection in the area.

- More generally, the need for all security force installations is kept under review. Several bases were removed during the first ceasefire: other steps are under consideration now. But some of the infrastructure will need to be retained while the terrorist threat remains.