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Secretary of State

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NBPT
CDD
2/1/85

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2HB

19 April 1985

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter of 21 ^{see A 19} March about the Security Policy Review. I was pleased to note your general approval of the conclusions of the Review, and in particular your endorsement of the need to use our resources in the most efficient and cost effective manner in dealing with the continuing threat of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

I also noted with satisfaction your assurances that the Chief Constable will continue to receive the support and assistance which he requires in undertaking this task. Of course we are all working towards, and looking forward to, the day when normality returns to the Province and troop levels can once again return to pre-1969 levels. The NARC concept (areas in which there will be No Army Routine Commitment) is a useful step in this direction and I shall be watching progress in this area with some interest. But, like you, I fear that we are still a long way from our ultimate objective and that it would be foolish as well as dangerous to relax our efforts at this time.

For that reason, although I sympathise with the GOC's desire to rid himself of static guard tasks, such as providing the Prison Guard Forces, these are issues which require the most careful consideration. We must, of course, start by examining the threat of armed attack upon the prisons from outside and, in the light of the 1983 escape, from within. This exercise must proceed urgently and I have no wish to delay it. However, until we can decide that it is safe to withdraw the PGF, I am concerned that they should continue to fulfil a useful role. In particular I

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would not wish their Rules of Engagement to inhibit this. Our officials have been in touch with yours on this subject, and I am not yet convinced that we have struck the right balance between protecting the soldiers of the PGF from prosecution on the one hand and protecting the public by being able to prevent the escape of dangerous, convicted terrorists on the other hand. I will be writing to you separately on this point.

As regards the recruitment and training of the UDR, I have already discussed these issues fully with the GOC. I believe that we must keep a close watch on both recruitment and training if we are to ensure that the UDR retain - or in some areas regain - the respect and trust of the whole community. I was pleased to note that HQNI are looking into ways of improving, or at least making more visible and comprehensible, the procedures for investigating complaints against soldiers. Any improvements which we can make - in parallel with my own plans for improving the RUC's complaints procedures - should go a long way towards reassuring the community that the security forces are fully accountable for their actions. We will continue to take every possible opportunity to re-emphasise this message, and to underline the value of the work done by the armed forces, and particularly the UDR, throughout the Province.

As for home-made explosives, I wholeheartedly share your concern that we should continue, in co-operation with the Irish authorities, to seek ways of preventing its manufacture. As you know, I set action in hand some time ago. My officials met officials of the Republic of Ireland's Department of Justice on 17 April with a view to agreeing the terms of a joint submission to Ministers here and in the Republic covering an agreed analysis of the problem and the implications from the operational, industrial and agricultural standpoints of possible options for dealing with it. At this stage we are also engaged in further scientific research into new ways of preventing or inhibiting the abuse of ammonium nitrate in fertilisers. This was prompted in part by research work undertaken in the Republic of which we were not aware until recently; scientists in the Republic now are themselves engaged with us in this research. We shall have to see whether or not it offers a further way forward before we press Ministers in the Republic for decisions on the options already identified. If any action in this field is to succeed it must be taken simultaneously in both jurisdictions. This may face the Irish and ourselves with awkward and probably expensive choices, but it is not an issue which can be shirked.

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We have been most grateful for the valuable scientific advice and access to facilities which have been afforded to us by HQNI and MOD, and we will not hesitate to make further calls on your resources when the need arises.

Finally, I repeat my sincere thanks for all the help and co-operation which we have received and continue to receive from the armed forces in Northern Ireland. We have a long way to go before we eventually defeat terrorism and restore normality. But we have made considerable progress in recent years. I am certain that we are on the right track, and the Security Review points the way ahead.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours ever
Douglas*

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