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MR POWELL

c Mr Stark

Force Levels in Northern Ireland

The Defence Secretary has agreed, with certain provisos, to the proposal by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that an additional infantry battalion should shortly be deployed to the Province. I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's reaction will also be to acquiesce and to stress the importance of getting the public presentation right. This has become all the more important in view of the leaks before the weekend that reinforcements might be on the way, which the Northern Ireland Secretary has sought to damp down.

2. It is clear that the army in Northern Ireland is working at full stretch. There is a risk of Protestant violence beginning in the coming weeks. It is clearly best to deploy the additional battalion to Northern Ireland before its arrival can convincingly be misrepresented as an anti-unionist move.

3. I suggest that the Prime Minister should agree to the despatch of the additional battalion; endorse the suggestion in paragraph 4 of the Defence Secretary's minute; and suggest that the move be presented publicly as a response to the demands placed on the security forces in Northern Ireland at present. To suggest, in line with the last sentence of paragraph 5 of the Defence Secretary's minute, that the move was being made in case there was "any increase in the threat" would tend, I suggest, to exacerbate our problems with the unionists over the Agreement.

C L G Mallaby

24 February 1986

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