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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

10 September 1981

Thank you for your letter of 28 August.

I am naturally concerned not only about the recent bomb attacks you mention but also at the continued attacks on members of the security forces. However I do not accept your view that the Government's policies and the efforts of the security forces to implement them are ineffective. There are no short cuts, and no substitutes for diligence, persistence, calmness and courage. The members of the RUC and the Army have these qualities. Humphrey Atkins and I believe that the Chief Constable and the GOC are deploying their men and their resources in a sensible, intelligent and productive way. We are ready, as I have frequently said, to give them extra help if they need it. Recruitment to the RUC is encouragingly high and the establishment ceiling of the force has not yet been reached. I can quite understand however that the Chief Constable must feel frustrated when his men are diverted from pursuing terrorists by other duties, such as maintaining public order in circumstances where it is being disturbed unnecessarily.

It is important to take a balanced view of the security scene. There have indeed been the terrorist attacks you mention; but the terrorist effort has been hurt too. You will have noticed the arrest by the police of three terrorists in a car in possession of two armalite rifles, following a shooting attack against an

/ Army foot patrol

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Army foot patrol in Andersonstown on 20 August. Among a number of good finds was the recovery from a flat in the Shantallow Estate in Londonderry of 500 kilogrammes of explosives on 16 August.

The police and Army rely on the help of ordinary citizens in all parts of Northern Ireland if they are to prevent violent attacks and arrest those who have committed them. There are still opportunities for local people to serve more actively by joining the UDR or the RUC Reserve. I cannot insist too strongly that the energy and willingness which you describe must be channelled into direct help for the police and the Army, whether by part-time service or other means. The creation of another force would be in stark conflict with that principle. For any group to arrogate to themselves the proper tasks of the security forces would be unhelpful, improper and (depending on the circumstances) possibly illegal.

The welfare and safety of the people of Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Government of the country of which it is a part. We are providing the RUC and the Army with the best means possible to carry out their duties. What the authorities need now is positive support in their efforts to fulfil that responsibility.

(SGD) MARGARET THATCHER

The Reverend Ian Paisley, M.P.