

CSG

Prime Minister²

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
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PRIME MINISTER

DRUGS: CO-OPERATION BETWEEN POLICE AND CUSTOMS

I am content with the proposals made by the Home Secretary in his minute to you of ¹³ May. This is a matter where public wrangling between the two services reflects badly both on them and on the Government as a whole. Indeed, the only beneficiaries are the drug traffickers. If officials cannot settle it, I would propose that the Home Secretary and I should meet to resolve it.

You may find it helpful if I explain the Customs position in a little more detail. It is Customs policy to adopt a wholly positive attitude to co-operation with the police, both in terms of the provision of intelligence and of consultation and involvement in actual operations. It was on Customs initiative that terminals linked to their intelligence computer (CEDRIC) were placed in the National Drugs Intelligence Unit (NDIU) and they have now offered full "hands on" access by NDIU staff to CEDRIC. Customs management have made it clear that they will investigate any claims that their staff have failed to co-operate properly with the police and that, if these claims are proved, they will take appropriate action.

Customs are opposed to altering the existing division of responsibilities for a number of good reasons. They believe that if the police were also given responsibility for dealing with the importation of prohibited drugs, the resulting dual responsibility would reduce accountability, risk confusion and loss of effectiveness in actual operations and would be more likely to increase conflict rather than reduce it.

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Hitherto Customs have had sole responsibility for dealing with drug imports, a position which has been endorsed by Ministers in both previous editions of the Government's strategy document "Tackling Drug Misuse". Customs are uniquely well-placed to discharge this responsibility since they have both the means and experience to control importations as part of their long established role as a frontier force. Moreover, over the years their Investigation Division has developed considerable expertise in tackling drug importations and rounding up the organisers - more than 80 organised gangs were destroyed in 1986. They have also established excellent relationships with overseas enforcement agencies with whom there is a regular exchange of intelligence. Nine drug liaison officers have been established in major source or transit countries.

In recent years we have agreed to put very considerable resources - both of manpower and of money - into Customs to enable them to enhance their efforts against drug smuggling. Customs have engaged in a massive training programme to improve the performance of their staff on this work. The results - both in terms of numbers and quantity of drug seizures - have been impressive. I would be extremely reluctant to accept changes which put this at risk.

Customs consider that the concern of the police over their ultimate say in allowing controlled deliveries is based on apprehension rather than experience. I am satisfied that they approach all requests by the police for controlled delivery in a constructive manner. They feel that if the police were to accept that their approach in such cases was one of positive co-operation, the existing division of responsibilities would present no problems in practice.

I agree with the Home Secretary that it would be unwise to attempt to impose a solution. I hope that officials will be able to agree

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on something which is mutually acceptable. Customs assure me that they will approach these discussions in a constructive spirit. They will adopt the same approach to the proposed consideration of the constitutional and organisational arrangements of the NDIU and to the discussions about its new Head.

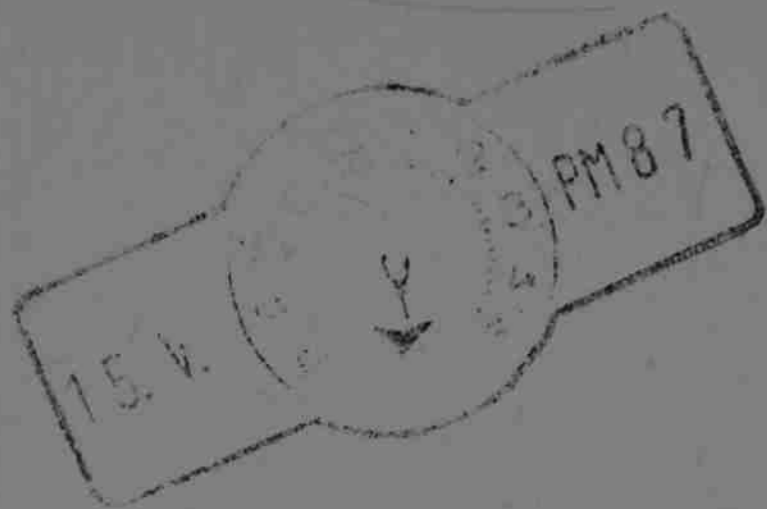
I do, however, consider that we should be extremely wary of altering existing arrangements which have proved to be increasingly effective in detecting drugs and taking out the traffickers. I am convinced that if a more positive spirit of co-operation existed, there would be no need for changing the current division of responsibilities. I entirely agree with the Home Secretary, therefore, that improving co-operation should be the focus of our efforts.

I am copying this to the Douglas Hurd and Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'N.L.' with a flourish.

N.L.

15 May 1987



HOME AFFAIRS: drug abuse

pt 3

referred to in

the following report: I believe that