

SI1917

Military Assistance to the Police Service of Northern Ireland

SI Identification Number SI1917

Policy Ownership Operational Support Branch

Initial Publication 12 April 2017

Review Cycle 2 Years

Reviewed 19 December 2025

Last Amended 19 December 2025

Governing Service Policy Counter Terrorism

Cancellation of SP1/2014 Military Assistance to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

Classification **OFFICIAL PUBLIC**

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Military Contact Details.....	3
3. Imminently Life Threatening Incidents (Accidents and Natural Disasters) MACA.....	4
4. Imminently Life Threatening Incidents (Explosive Threats) Operation Helvetic.....	4
5. Urgent Requests – MACA and Operation Helvetic.....	5
6. Routine Requests – MACA and Operation Helvetic.....	5

Table of Appendices

Appendix A: Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA).....	7
Appendix B: Operation Helvetic.....	9
Appendix C: Contact Us.....	10

1. Introduction

A range of military assistance can be requested under Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA). In addition, Operation Helvetic provides for military assistance to those countering the threat of terrorism in Northern Ireland. Both MACA and Operation Helvetic cater for military assistance where the incident is imminently life threatening however the tasking processes are different and these are outlined at [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#).

Urgent or routine requests for military assistance through either MACA or Operation Helvetic are made under the process outlined at [Chapter 5](#) and [Chapter 6](#).

There is no charge to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) for all military assistance provided under Operation Helvetic. The criteria used by the military for charging for MACA is outlined at [Appendix A](#).

See also [Civil emergencies | College of Policing](#) – Civil Emergencies.

2. Military Contact Details

Joint Regional Liaison Officer (JRLO) – MACA

JRLO has a Duty Officer on call for advice in relation to any request under MACA.

This will provide a dual function of providing Police with advice in relation to any request and alerting the military at an early stage of the pending request.

Contact with JRLO should be authorised by an Inspector – Contact for search related advice should be directed through a Police Search Advisor (PoISA).

Operations Centre Northern Ireland – OPERATION HELVETIC

Have a Duty Officer on call for advice in relation to urgent or routine requests under Operation Helvetic. This will provide a dual function of providing the PSNI with advice in relation to any request and alerting the military at an early stage of the pending request.

- Contact with Operations Centre Northern Ireland should be authorised by an Inspector.

- Contact for search related advice should be directed through a Police Search Advisor (PoISA).

3. Imminently Life Threatening Incidents (Accidents and Natural Disasters) MACA

Where there is an imminent threat to life contact JRLO. In such incidents, the Local Military Commander (LMC) has the authority to offer immediate military support should it be considered necessary for the purposes of the alleviation of distress and the preservation and safeguarding of lives and property in time of disaster.

On termination of the incident an e-mail must be sent by the requesting District / Department; this will alert Operations Branch to the tasking of military resources. The e-mail will contain details of the Authorising Officer, Date, Time, Place, Nature of Request/Incident and Control Works Reference Number. No additional paperwork is required for these requests.

4. Imminently Life Threatening Incidents (Explosive Threats) Operation Helvetic

Where there is a specific, suspected or imminent explosive threat to life relating to a terrorist incident contact the Operations Centre Northern Ireland directly. This Centre is the 24/7 single point of contact for all Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and search tasking in Northern Ireland.

Operations Centre Northern Ireland will provide advice as well as calling out EOD teams.

On termination of the incident an e-mail must be sent by the requesting District / Department; this will alert Operations Branch to the tasking of military resources. The e-mail will contain details of the Authorising Officer, Date, Time, Place, Nature of Request/Incident and Control Works Reference Number. No additional paperwork is required for these requests.

5. Urgent Requests – MACA and Operation Helvetic

Urgent Requests

Where the test for imminent threat to life above is not met but there is still an urgent need for military assistance the application can proceed on the authority of the relevant Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) or Acting ACC.

Advice and guidance should be sought at the earliest opportunity from the JRLO (MACA) or the Operations Centre Northern Ireland (Operation Helvetic).

Office Hours

A Superintendent will approve the completion of a Request for Military Assistance before forwarding it electronically to their respective ACC for authorisation.

The ACC's office will send authorised requests to Operations Branch via e-mail.

Out of Hours

The District Duty Officer or Head of Branch (HoB) will approve the completion of a request for military assistance. The approving Officer will then contact the

Service Duty Officer (ACC) for authorisation to request military assistance.

Contact with the Service Duty Officer can be facilitated if necessary through Urban Contact Management Centre (UCMC) Call out Desk.

Once authorised to do so the requesting officer will then contact the Incident Manager at Incident Co-Ordination Centre (ICC), Castlereagh.

The request for military assistance is forwarded to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and a decision whether to authorise military support is made by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) at Ministerial Level. It is therefore important that the MoD is made aware of any plan to request military support at the earliest opportunity in order to commence the authorisation process.

6. Routine Requests – MACA and Operation Helvetic

Advice and guidance should be sought at the earliest opportunity from the JRLO (MACA) or the Operations Centre Northern Ireland (Operation Helvetic).

Requests for military assistance at planned events should be submitted as soon as the requirement becomes known and at least 14 days in advance. Any unnecessary delay in submitting such a request may negatively impact on the availability of the military resource.

A Superintendent will approve the completion of a request for military assistance before forwarding it electronically to their respective ACC (or Acting ACC) for authorisation. The ACC's office will send authorised requests to Operations Branch via e-mail.

Operations Branch, who will provide a central point of contact for liaison with the NIO and MoD, will then forward the request to the NIO for approval. If approved, NIO will then pass the request to MoD for a decision to authorise the tasking of military resources. MoD will respond formally to the NIO. NIO will advise Operations Branch of the decision.

Request for Military Assistance not Approved

Should the NIO not approve an application this will be addressed by Operations

Branch staff in liaison with the authorising ACC and the Senior NIO Duty Officer.

An explanation of MACA and Operation Helvetic are set out in [Appendix A](#) and [Appendix B](#).

Appendix A: Military Aid to the Civil Authority (MACA)

Advice on MACA is available from the JRLO.

The arrangements for MACA are in force across the UK and are guided by three principles:

- There is a definite need to act and the tasks our Armed Forces are being asked to perform are clear;
- Other options, including mutual aid and commercial alternatives, have been discounted; and
- The civil authority lacks the necessary capability to fulfil the task and it is unreasonable or prohibitively expensive to expect it to develop one, or the civil authority has all or some capability, but it may not be available immediately, or to the required scale, and the urgency of the task requires rapid external support from the MoD.

Charging

MACA activity is normally conducted on a repayment basis. There are 3 main levels of charging which are determined by the MoD:

- Full costs – All direct and indirect costs will be recovered including pay and allowances. Now limited to pre-planned operations;
- Marginal costs – This is the recovery of costs that would not otherwise have been incurred. The new default setting for charging; and
- Zero costs – All liaison, advice, joint training and assessment is free. The decision to waive costs for an operation would normally be taken centrally, often by Defence Ministers.

For PSNI purposes there should be no charge in situations where military support is required and:

- The request meets the criteria for Op Helvetic; or
- There is an imminent threat to life. (MACA).

Use of Military Facilities for Training

The PSNI routinely use military ranges, training areas and camp facilities in Northern Ireland. For advice on the range of support and availability, contact the JRLO. Requests for assistance should be sent to the JRLO and it must be noted that all such use is normally treated the same as other third party requests to use Defence assets and is likely to result in a charge to the PSNI at full cost.

Appendix B: Operation Helvetic

Advice on Operation Helvetic is available from the Operations Centre Northern Ireland.

Operation Helvetic replaced operation Banner on 31st July 2007 as the means by which military assistance is provided, under transitional arrangements, to those countering the threat of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

In principle, search support will be provided at no cost where there is a specific threat of an explosive device.

Therefore should military assistance be required which does not meet the criteria above, e.g. a search request relating to the investigation of non-terrorist crime, it will incur costs for the PSNI. It is therefore essential in all such cases that the budget holder authorises the military costs in advance.

Appendix C: Contact Us

Branch e-mail

OTDU@psni.police.uk