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Reference Code:	2018/68/38
Creation Dates:	28 June 1988
Extent and medium:	10 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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MOST SECRET

European Council, Hanover

Meeting between the Taoiseach and British Prime Minister,

28 June, 1988

The meeting took place in the British Delegation Rooms at the Trade Centre, where the Council was held. It lasted approximately an hour and a quarter and was unusually intense. Apart from the principals, it was attended by Charles Powell and the undersigned. The communique issued after it is attached to this note which is not a verbatim record.

After some preliminary remarks - during which the Prime Minister remarked on the absence of women on the new committee of Central Bank Governors established at the Council, the Taoiseach spoke, at the direct invitation of the Prime Minister.

Taoiseach: There are a few basic things that I am glad to have this opportunity of clearing up.

First, I would like you totally to disabuse your mind about my commitment to defeat violence. In this area I act from the deepest personal conviction. But that alone is not my motive. I see violence as completely souring and disrupting and bedeviling Anglo-Irish relations. And I see those responsible for it as being a greater danger to the Irish State than to you.

You must accept our total and complete commitment in this respect. But we have to talk with you about how that commitment is implemented. We have to carry public opinion with us that is very deeply involved. Many of the measures your people suggest from time to time would in our considered judgement be counterproductive. Yet you keep coming back with them. There would be a political backlash which would make them ineffective or worse. Subject to that parameter we will do everything possible in the security area. You have my word for this.

I can cast my mind back to five or ten years ago when that sort of security commitment just was not there. It was a different world.

Things happen now - horrible things - which perhaps could or could not have been prevented. When they do, your people often blame us for lack of co-operation. I do not know if you are getting the best assessment of how things are on the ground. For example, the Lisburn tragedy had nothing whatsoever to do with us. You would naturally be very, very angry when such events occur. The simplest

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thing for those concerned is to say that cross-border security is not the best and to blame lack of co-operation. You could be told that these things would not happen if cross-border security were better. That simply is not true. Many of the explosives may have come from the South and we try to stop them. But many more are located in the North. We simply do not know the quantities involved in either area.

Look at what has been done. As soon as we heard of big shipments of arms we searched 50,000 houses in our State - the equivalent of 1 million in your country. We have got results. We have found many bunkers. There is a steady progression of arms finds. Your people think there are other consignments. We can't dispute that. We simply don't know.

Then, again, we have re-organised the Garda Siochana, with three young Assistant Commissioners. Gerry Collins gave a full account of what we are doing in this area at the last Conference.

I have probably said enough now for a start.

Prime
Minister:

Go on; go on, please.

Taoiseach:

You must consider my position. I was not a party to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We didn't altogether like it. But we accept that we are fully bound to implement it and we have done just that. We also take the view that we are not morally justified in failing to take any action we can to improve the lot of the people of Northern Ireland.

On extradition, I think, if you don't mind my saying so, that it was a mistake for you and Garret FitzGerald to do what you did. The 1965 Act was working. The Supreme Court judgements were getting rid of the "political" obstacle but now we have got ourselves into this tangle as a result of a stupid decision by a District Justice. We now find ourselves afflicted with the consequences and have stated a case to the High Court. We are considering moving of these cases from the District Court to the High Court so that they can be dealt with without intermediate steps and unnecessary appeals.

I must emphasise again that criticism of our efforts is counterproductive. We are doing our best. We have a public opinion to deal with. But to be constantly ballyragged does no good at all. The recent Chief

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Constable/Commissioner meeting was a good meeting. Then, shortly afterwards, something very different is said. Your people put up proposals time and again to us which we know won't work and will be totally counterproductive. There have been a whole series of incidents which did not emanate from our side but for which your people appear to blame us.

Prime
Minister:

Let's start on security co-operation. It's written into the Anglo-Irish Agreement. You talk of public opinion but I have to deal with guns, bombs, beating people to death with sticks and many other barbaric acts.

There are massive caches of arms somewhere. We would never ourselves have searched 50,000 houses. We know that the people concerned would have gone to ground. We would have used our intelligence service. That would be a better use of manpower. And so yes, I must send more young boys over to these deaths. I ask myself, am I entitled to do it? There is a borderline there but it is not an effective border. The IRA plan in five or six different places in the South. They use the border for this purpose. Most of the intelligence we get is our own. They plan in the South; if they go South we lose them at the border. We know there are arms and weapons and we know that they bring them across. Despite technological and other surveillance we lose them. We do not get intelligence from the Gardai. They are not the most highly professional force. We deal with the Amsterdam and the French police and the Brussels police. Each of them is highly professional. Israel is a small country: yet it has one of the best police forces in the world. We can give you equipment. It may be difficult for you to take our training but it could be arranged elsewhere if that is really so. We did have some agents who had suffered at the hands of the IRA. All that stopped some eight or nine weeks ago. In this you must have total singleness of purpose. You need total dedication.

Taoiseach:

I am not quite sure what you are referring to.

Prime
Minister:

They were disbanded.

Powell:

I think there may be some confusion here, Prime Minister. There was particularly close liaison with a particular section in the Gardai.....

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Prime
Minister:

Those people we had contact with have gone, I have no means of knowing where. The IRA is not an amateur operation. It requires a professional approach to deal with it. I go berserk sometimes when I hear questions about whether the RUC have primacy. I am worried about bombs and maiming and killing.....

We do the best we can in Northern Ireland. We know there are godfathers of violence there. We know the sort of intimidation that goes on. It is going to go on unless I do something.

Will you not consider better training for your Gardai? I understand if you do not want to use our facilities. I spoke with Brian Mulrooney when I was in Toronto and discussed the matter with him. I am not concerned about where they get the training as long as they get it.

Taoiseach:

You mentioned agents. Your people are constantly pressing us to re-organise the Gardai. If we move people around it is to get a better organisation and after receiving these requests

I want to mention something now that bears out what I say. There were 147 punishment shootings in Northern Ireland in a recent period. You had Lisburn. You had Enniskillen. These are not failures of our making. These are things that happen within Northern Ireland where your security forces operate.

Prime
Minister:

They come North and from the West. I can't seal the border. You talk about communications but won't let the Gardai speak to the Army. They won't even take a telephone call in an emergency on the border.....

Taoiseach:

We have evidence that arms or explosives in the bunkers we have found were moved probably North. Your people, as well as ours, were unable to stop them.

Prime
Minister:

We get the odd lorryload. What we need is concerted, systematic intelligence. If we don't defeat the IRA, I don't know what I am going to do. We can't have the border open as it is now. We rely on intelligence. We rely on equipment. In Belfast, where the terrorists are, we are not getting the same violence now. Bombings and shootings in the North and on the mainland - these things are now being plotted in the South.

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Taoiseach: I don't know that.

Prime Minister: Questioning is no use. They stay silent.

Taoiseach: It is known as the spot on the wall technique.

Prime Minister: So you get nothing from catching them. You must get them by surveillance, highly effective, highly professional surveillance. You have to train people in these skills. I understand if you don't want our services but these can be got elsewhere.

In recent times my feelings have run far higher than ever before in my life. I am not a natural hater - they are using the border to carry on an effective campaign.

Taoiseach: We patrol right up to the border. The RUC don't come within ten miles of it. Our methods are different, for very good reasons. The Army operates there instead.

Prime Minister: There is no way we can patrol the 500 miles, with some of the people against you. What we need is a professional approach. Everywhere there is an open border. We need equipment to deal with that. You have limited people. Therefore training, real training is all the more necessary. They must know how to observe; they must have speed in passing on information; they must have dedication to their work.

Taoiseach: You are laying a lot of emphasis on pre-emptive intelligence and training.

Prime Minister: If you don't want us to do the training - I understand that. The quality of the contacts between us and say the Amsterdam police and the Gardai is completely different.

Taoiseach: We called in the help of the Dutch police in connection with an art robbery some time ago in which there was some Provo involvement. They made a complete mess of it.

On training and pre-emptive intelligence, let me assure you now that I will go into this personally. I will look very carefully at what you are saying.

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Prime Minister: There are persons in the South who have every reason to hate the IRA....

Taoiseach: In the Gardai?

Prime Minister: I don't know.

Taoiseach: Let me look at those two things.....

Prime Minister: These are two most important things. I do not know what to do about the border. I was speaking recently with a member of another police force. He said that you in Ireland have the biggest concentration of terrorists in the world - apart from the Lebanon.

Taoiseach: Was he talking about the North or the South?

We still have a lot of people in jail in the South.

Prime Minister: They go South to plan their next campaign. The single most important thing in the Anglo-Irish Agreement is security. I needn't have gone into that Agreement. Its purpose was to develop some confidence among the Nationalist community so that there would no longer be a safe haven, North or South, for the IRA. I had hoped that the SDLP and John Hume would have been more active. I don't want them just to say the right thing in the House. That is not enough. It is their duty to let the police know any information that would be of help. They will speak in general terms but do little else. They have the gift of the gab, but no, they won't talk to their people and tell them to join the RUC. So I have failed.....

When the troops went to Northern Ireland, they were welcome. It has all been so useless.....

And I have lost the Unionist community. The Agreement says that decisions North of the border are made by the United Kingdom Government and South of the border by the Irish Government. They know that. I knew it would all take time but it just isn't working.

I am caught both ways. I am not getting the co-operation I think I should get and I have lost the Unionists who only say "get rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement".

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We ought to be working against the terrorists and we are not. So I have to look at pre-emptive intelligence and training.

On devolved government, the world's harshest battles are not between black and white but between people who are like each other and who live beside each other, like the Greeks and the Turks, the Seikhs and the Hindus, the Arabs and the Israelis - they are both semitic people. They keep their hatreds alive. Those two corporals were among the worst things in my life. The savagery was unbelievable. And don't think the people who did it were contrite - not the least bit!

Taoiseach: We expressed our horror.....

Prime Minister: I will never be prepared to walk out and let the terrorists win. You talk of unity and I ask would that be better. I say no, there would be the worst civil war in history. And it would spread to the mainland.

Your people come over to us. I wish they wouldn't. They come looking for housing and services. It's the same in Northern Ireland. If there was a vote tomorrow they would vote to stay with us. They have better conditions in Northern Ireland and in England.

I have one objective: that is to beat the IRA. For that we need the latest intelligence and in some places we don't get the full co-operation.

Taoiseach: I am sorry that you are so disappointed. We get no credit for what we are doing. If you keep on belittling what we are doing, we lose heart. We are putting immense resources into this. Do you not appreciate that?

Prime Minister: With the same amount of resources you could get far better results if they were used in the way I am suggesting.

On the Unionists, Humphrey Atkins tried to get a settlement. There was a convention. They talked and so long as it is all sweet nothings it was o.k. I am a bit sceptical about it all again. Tom King has wonderful patience. He is moving on Fair Employment and a mass of other things. He has problems with the Unionists. They say "You are doing too much for the Nationalists".

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I have for you now what you may regard as bad news. The Police Authority have considered if action should be taken against persons in the RUC. They have recommended that no disciplinary action be taken against the top three. The Kelly Report, which is due out on Friday, will recommend disciplinary action against a number of persons. I would ask you to keep all this to yourself until it is announced.

I would ask you to do as much as you can. Plenty of others will help. I was quite thrilled when Brian Mulrooney raised this question with me in Toronto. He said he had he had been talking with Ronald Reagan about it. I think of the young men who are being murdered and their families.....

What puzzles us is how you didn't know the amount of arms and explosives being moved about when there is a trained Special Branch.

Taoiseach: There is no proof of what you say but probably we have to accept a great deal of it. We have found a large number of bunkers. There is evidence that the arms and explosives in them have passed on, probably to Northern Ireland. We cannot but accept responsibility for that. But neither of us, either North or South, knows the full facts. We have always prided ourselves that we knew every winkle in Ireland - from our police sources. But this proves how wrong we were.

Prime Minister: You got O'Hare alright when you wanted him. You went after him in no uncertain manner.

Taoiseach: He rampaged about the country for a week before he was caught.

Prime Minister: But you went after him - we have that sort of thing all the time.

Taoiseach: I am sorry that you are so despondent about things.

Prime Minister: I would not be despondent if I got pre-emptive intelligence.

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Taoiseach: You want two things - pre-emptive intelligence and better training. And I am going personally to look into these questions and will send a message to you as soon as I can by a trusted messenger. Meanwhile, I would beg of you not to take an unbalanced view. Things are happening in Northern Ireland and you have had your failures - without any involvement from the South. Please acknowledge what we are doing. If the Gardai are not 100% effective then neither are the RUC 100% successful.

Prime Minister: Recently I saw four or five widows of persons who were murdered in this campaign. They said that they were living near the border. They were saying that their neighbours could tell them who would next be murdered by the IRA. One of them said that she had been told her husband was next. Some months later he was murdered. I do not know how people live in these conditions.

Taoiseach: You remember Churchill's phrase about the ancient hatreds of Fermanagh.

Prime Minister: Whatever we have done so far just is not enough. There are the greatest concentration of terrorists anywhere in the world in this area. We are not winning the battle: they have become much more professional.

Taoiseach: Let me tell you of an incident recently. We found 27 detonators near the border. That is 27 bombs that did not go off: that is pre-emptive intelligence.

Prime Minister: I am glad of what you say. That is something different. With identical resources we can get better results.

Taoiseach: They are better armed now.

Prime Minister: You speak of public opinion. Do you mean sympathy with the IRA?

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Taoiseach: Not really. There is great fickleness in this matter. There is a whole question of principle involved. Let me and my colleagues be the best judges of how we can deal with it. It is part of the failure of the security forces in Northern Ireland that they must operate among a hostile population. We cannot alienate our population in the same way. And we are not helped by some types of criticism. Some House of Commons speeches are not at all helpful. I am not referring to you, Prime Minister, but to others.

There then followed some further discussion about how Unionists might be brought into dialogue or the review process. There was discussion on the drafting of the communique and, finally, a reference to the hostages in the Lebanon, on which the Prime Minister said they had no definite information as to whether Brian Keenan - or Terry Waites - was dead or alive.

The meeting then concluded, reasonably amicably.

Dermot Nally

Dermot Nally

29 June 1988