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Statement issued by the Government Information Bureau on behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach, 28th October, 1971.

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At about 12 noon today a party of British troops, numbering in all about 50, prepared to blow up a bridge at Munnilly. This bridge straddles the border and is jointly maintained and serviced by the Monaghan and Fermanagh County Councils. It was previously blown up by the British Army on 20th October and was since then repaired by local people.

A Garda Sergeant informed the British officer-in-charge that the bridge straddled the border. He was assisted by an officer of the Defence Forces and the British Army party eventually agreed to withdraw. Two cases of PE8 explosives, which had been placed under the bridge on the 26-County side of the border, were taken in charge by the Defence Forces and are in their possession at Cootehill, Co. Cavan.

At no time was there a confrontation in a military sense. An Irish Army 27-man platoon remained not less than 800 yards away from the bridge, with the exception of the officer-in-charge and his orderly, who joined the Garda Sergeant on the bridge.

The Government are concerned at repeated incidents of this kind. It is obvious that blowing up any trans-border bridge, even if the damage is confined to the Six County side and no damage is caused on this side, destroys the use and value of the bridge. Consequently, in our opinion, it is a breach of normal good relations for the British authorities to engage in this kind of activity. Furthermore, the whole matter of cratering border roads has shown itself to be futile and dangerous and may yet result in bodily injury in addition to the affront it causes to people on both sides of the border.

It is time for the British Government to show genuine concern and statesmanship in their dealing with the present appalling situation in the North. Everyone with the desire in his heart to see the end of strife in the North is awaiting political initiatives from the British Government which will be meaningful and appropriate to the future administration of the North. The present attempt at coercion of the minority in the North, coupled with proposals which would leave them without real power and influence indefinitely, is not an acceptable basis of policy.