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Border Incursions

The Taoiseach has instructed that the Government's growing concern about border infringements by British Army personnel be conveyed to the British authorities.

In the two-year period up to August, 1971 about 30 incursions into the 26-Counties had been made by British troops. These were brought to the attention of the British authorities as they occurred and repeated assurances were received that stringent instructions had been issued to British troops to avoid such infringements.

On 29th August, 1971 a border incursion resulted in a fatal shooting within the Six Counties after a British Army patrol had recrossed the border into the North. A strong complaint was conveyed to the British authorities on that occasion about their failure to control movements of their troops in border areas which could be prejudicial to the peace.

On 20th October the Taoiseach informed Dáil Éireann that on the previous day British forces were observed in a firing position inside the 26-Counties near Castleblaney and that a protest had been made to the British. That infringement appeared to be connected with a road-cratering operation on the Northern side of the border. Several other incursions have also occurred in recent weeks and their frequency appears to be growing rather than receding. The Taoiseach informed the Dáil on 27th October that the number of confirmed incursions had then reached forty and that although many seemed to be accidental others appeared to be deliberate.

The apparent correlation between road-cratering operations and current border incursions draws attention once again to the dangers involved in this kind of operation and in the blowing up of cross-border bridges which are jointly maintained and serviced by contiguous county councils. On 28th October a statement issued on behalf of the Taoiseach's Department dealt with the very serious situation that arose when the British Army was preparing to

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re-demolish one such bridge - at Munnilly near Clones. It was pointed out in that statement that it was a breach of normal good relations for the British authorities to engage in that kind of activity; that the whole matter of cratering border roads had shown itself to be futile and dangerous and might yet result in bodily injury in addition to the affront it causes to people on both sides of the border.

Infringements like those at Munnilly and at Dooard also on 28th October, could easily escalate into serious incidents; they could also be sparked off by a third party. It is essential, therefore, that immediate action be taken to prevent any further incursions and to avoid activities which increase the possibility of such incursions.

The Taoiseach said in Dáil Éireann on 20th October that if there were further and more serious border incursions by the British Army it might become necessary to seize the United Nations of the issue as a threat to international peace.

Department of Foreign Affairs

29th October, 1971