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**Title:** Copy letter from Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees to Minister for Foreign Affairs Garret FitzGerald, relating to joint action to deal with terrorist activity, particularly in border areas.

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*Minister will  
hand copies to  
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22/3/74.*

20 March 1974

Dear Garret

When we met on 7 March I promised to send you a note of any points on which we thought joint action to deal with terrorism, particularly in the border areas, could be improved.

I think there are two aspects of this, which are of course inter-related - operational co-operation and technical co-operation. On the operational side, an excellent start was made with the meeting between the Commissioner and the Chief Constable on 3 January and there has been some further contact. Would it not be possible to follow this up with meetings at regular intervals, say monthly, between the two Chief Officers of Police and between the two Army Chiefs of Staff? The object of these meetings would be to direct studies, to consider the general trends, to establish common guidance for future anti-terrorist operations and to establish agreed procedures.

Further down the line, we think there would be great advantage if those elements of the security forces working in support of units operating on the border (notably intelligence and signals) also had regular meetings with their counterparts to exchange specialist information. Similarly, could there not be regular meetings of technical experts, such as those engaged in bomb disposal, forensic and ballistic investigations, and those responsible for the security of explosives, detonators etc? If necessary these regular meetings could be augmented by more frequent exchanges of data.

One of the problems which I know you are well aware of, is that the respective roles of the army and police are not the same north and south of the border. Could we reach agreement that the police and the army on each side of the border should be authorised to make contact and co-operate with whichever force (police or army) was most readily available on the other side whenever an incident occurred? This would of course involve a network of secure communications between all four



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organisations involved. We would need advice from our technical experts on what was necessary, what it would cost etc, but could you agree to an early meeting of communication experts to discuss how such a network might be established, with instructions to report jointly to the two governments? If we could extend the arrangement to include sea-borne operations against gun-runners so much the better.

If we could get something going on all these lines, we could see it leading pretty rapidly not only to the exchange and co-ordination of plans for future activity between the various specialists, but also to the automatic daily exchange of incident reports between the units concerned and their cross-border counterpart after every border incident. To get the full value from this, we think that these reports should be discussed at regular, say weekly, meetings for each sector between police and soldiers from both sides of the border to enable planning to be kept flexible and up-to-date.

One other practical point is the complex system we have at present for either side to obtain clearance for cross-border flights. We might be able to agree to simplify the procedure so that authority for such flights could be given at local level for specific urgent tactical purposes.

I know that you will want to consider all this with your colleagues; I would like to propose that a small group of the Ministers mainly concerned in our two governments, together with a few of their advisers including of course army and police chiefs, should meet confidentially to discuss the problem and our proposals for improving joint co-operation. I am asking Sir Arthur Galsworthy to discuss with you the type of points to which we think such a Conference could usefully address itself and to give you a list of border incidents since 1 March.

There is now considerable urgency about this. The tragic incidents over last week-end serve to stress how important it is that something more should be done on the border if the lives of innocent civilians and of the security forces are to be saved. And, in political terms, the need to take action, and to be seen to be taking action, is of vital importance in order to create the circumstances in which we can go forward, with the agreement of the Northern Ireland Executive, towards the ratification of the Sunningdale communique. I hope, therefore, that we can very soon proceed with the proposals in this letter.

*Tom Sweeney,*  
*M.S. 2.*