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Title: Memorandum titled 'Note on the Northern Ireland Situation by Minister for Foreign Affairs [Dr Garret FitzGerald, TD]' outlining policy of Government on Northern Ireland, referring in particular to opposition to Protestant domination through majority self-government, to re-partition or population transfer and expressing support for co-operation, devolved government and disarming of paramilitary organisations

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Note on Northern Ireland Situation by Minister for
Foreign Affairs

W.K.
9/9.

1. The policy of the Government hitherto has been to seek to ensure that Britain takes its responsibilities in Northern Ireland, protecting the minority against any Loyalist assault, and not conceding a declaration of intent or withdrawal.
2. While a time might come when this policy might seem likely to cease to be realistic, and a different approach might be called for, it does not seem that we have at present reached this point.
3. The discussions I have had informally with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the second of them in conjunction with the Tánaiste, seem to open up the possibility of pursuing this policy more actively. It is at least possible that a frank discussion in mid-September between the two Secretaries of State and myself, followed possibly by a discussion between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, might re-establish confidence between the two governments, and open up the possibility of pursuing a joint policy in the face of a crisis following a breakdown of the Convention at some point between mid-September and mid-November.
4. In undertaking such discussions a number of elements of the situation, some new, need to be taken into account. These include:
 - (i) The evident determination of Callaghan - an important member of the British Cabinet - to stand firm in the face of major Loyalist violence, at least in the first instance, which is encouraging, as far as it goes.
 - (ii) The possibility of a British request - or pre-condition? that we should support any security measures, including

the re-introduction of internment, that they might consider necessary if they were to fulfil their responsibilities in the face of an attempted Loyalist takeover or large-scale attempted pogrom.

(iii) On the other hand, Callaghan's willingness to contemplate intervention by the Irish Army in co-operation with the British Army, which, in conjunction with his query about the possibility of transferring the Catholic population from East Ulster with British financial aid, raises the spectre of re-partition.

(iv) The SDLP proposal that, if the Convention fails because of Loyalist refusal to accept the British terms of power-sharing and an Irish dimension, the British Government should withdraw the Westminster-guaranteed union between Northern Ireland and Britain and institute joint British/Irish control of Northern Ireland, for an interim period, to be opposed by British withdrawal.

(v) The SDLP concept, now put forward for the first time, of taking the lead in military action in a doomsday situation, which, though the SDLP do not seem conscious of this, would in practice also tend to lead to a re-partition situation - in so far as the SDLP would have any success in taking the lead in such operations, which is improbable and, in Belfast, quite impracticable.

(vi) The reduction in numbers of the British forces and greater use of the UDR, especially in Border areas, and the evidence that this organisation, and also the RUC Reserve, are closely linked to paramilitary organisations and represent a serious security risk.

5. Taking account of these elements in the situation it might be advantageous to have talks with the two Secretaries of State in which we would make it clear:
- (a) That, as we have both agreed, a return to Protestant domination through majority self-government is unacceptable.
 - (b) That we cannot accept any form of re-partition or population transfer.
 - (c) That we cannot accept that a vacuum, either military or political, be left in Northern Ireland, which would endanger the security of the whole island, and, we could add, of Britain itself.
 - (d) That within these constraints we are willing to discuss with them co-operation designed to maintain peace and order in the island of Ireland and to secure, as soon as may be possible in present difficult circumstances, the establishment of a form of devolved government in Northern Ireland in which both sections of the community participate.
 - (e) That in view of the current security danger posed (especially in border areas where we have a particular and vital interest), by the UDR at present - and in view of the threat posed to the whole political stability of Northern Ireland by this body and the RUC Reserve, which have close links with paramilitary organisations, action be taken now to disarm these bodies and bring all their weapons under secure control.
6. If such a meeting, to put forward these points, is agreed to be desirable then a response to Michael Canavan of the SDLP

could be made along the following lines:

- (i) In view of the sharp deterioration in the situation, and the doubts that exist about British intentions and British determination to make action necessary to protect the minority, we propose to hold early discussions with the British Government to clarify these issues and to seek adequate guarantees from that Government.
- (ii) Pending the outcome of these discussions we would prefer not to discuss action to be taken in other contingencies.
- (iii) However, we would wish to have discussions with the SDLP through the normal channels with a view to identifying clearly the nature of the problem that would arise in a doomsday situation, and in particular the geographical spread of this problem.
- (iv) We feel that a primary consideration in any contingency plans that we make must be a recognition of the danger of re-partition - a solution to which some elements in Britain seem attracted - and an avoidance of any action which might de facto produce this result.

29th August, 1975

*T. agreed that Mr. Canavan
may be spoken to on the
basis suggested in this
note.
I was informed Mr.
S. Durlan D/FA*

*D
3/9/75*