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INTER-DEPARTMENTAL UNIT ON NORTHERN IRELAND

Draft Report of meeting on 11th September, 1975.

1. Members present were:-

Mr. D. Nally (Chairman)	-	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. S. Donlon	-	Department of Foreign Affairs
Mr. F. O'Donohue	-	Department of Finance
Mr. F. Corcoran	-	Department of Defence
Mr. P. Colwell (Alternate member)	-	Department of Justice

Also present were Mr. W. Kirwan, Department of the Taoiseach, Mr. G. O Broin, Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. L. Murphy, Department of Finance and Mr. S. Brosnan, Department of Defence. The agenda for the meeting is attached.

2. The meeting discussed the current and prospective situation in Northern Ireland, with a view to clarifying views on the latest developments. It was indicated that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had directed his Department to prepare a Memorandum for the Government for consideration at a meeting which was to consider Northern Ireland affairs on Friday, 19th September, 1975.
3. It was agreed that it would be desirable to draw the attention of the Government to the need to consider:
- (a) their attitude to the proposals which had been put to them by the SDLP, in relation to the approach to be adopted in the event of a failure to secure a political settlement through the Constitutional Convention: a related issue was the extent to which the Government wished to become involved in Northern Ireland affairs;
 - (b) certain preparations involving the Defence Forces and in particular building up the Forces to their establishment strength;
 - (c) decisions required on advance purchases of supplies to cater for any large influx of refugees from Northern Ireland;
 - (d) representations to the British authorities concerning control of the UDR, with particular

reference to the heavier weapons in its armament;

- (e) the cultivation of a civil war psychosis by the media in the Republic; and
- (f) the propaganda by certain British official quarters to connect the Republic with the violence in Northern Ireland and Britain.

It was suggested that the Government should have regard to the scope that might exist, in the light of recent upheavals on the Loyalist side for securing a settlement involving power sharing, through the intervention of the British Government directly.

4. On the likely time scale of possible developments in the North, it was considered that it would be the end of October or early November before the Convention's report would reach London. The British had indicated some time ago that they envisaged spending a few months considering the report of the Convention and the situation generally in its aftermath. Unless something occurred to upset this time scale, it was unlikely that any announcement of British intentions would come before the beginning of 1976.
5. In relation to (a) of paragraph 3 above, proposals which had been put to the Government by the SDLP on the approach to be adopted in the event of the failure of the Convention and a refusal on the part of the Loyalist to accept power sharing were outlined. It was noted that the SDLP expected a response to these proposals from the Government. The SDLP had not yet adopted their fall-back position and before doing so they wished to have discussions with the Government. It was noted that the SDLP apparently did not favour a continuation of direct rule in the wake of the Convention's failure and that there were considerable dangers in some of the other proposals that they had put to the Government.

Acceptance of these proposals might draw the Government
X irrevocably into Northern Ireland affairs.

6. On attitudes to direct rule, it was noted that it seemed to emerge from the meeting's considerations of various possible options that the one which would be least undesirable from the Irish Government's point of view was direct rule and that there was therefore scope for divergence between the Government and the SDLP on this point. Reference was made, however, to the consideration that whatever might be the least undesirable option from our point of view, the decisions lay with others and primarily with the British Government. Though precise co-ordination of policies might not always be necessary or wise there were obvious dangers in urging something ^{on an important issue which could be} opposed vociferously ^{ously} by the minority. It was suggested that there was much to be said for trying to secure an agreed joint position, as between the Government and the SDLP. It was suggested that the Government might wish to consider if it should try to influence the minority so as to reduce the divergence. It was noted that the Government should have considerable influence with the SDLP, as that party's strength lay in maintaining solidarity with the Government and people of the Republic.
7. The desirability of keeping the political process going implied that direct rule should have some democratic element, to provide a forum for Northern Ireland political parties and leaders. A study which was undertaken in the Department of Foreign Affairs of the nature and activity of local government in Northern Ireland since the reforms in that area had been implemented some time ago had concluded that reform had been ineffective and that a situation in which local government would have

significant powers would probably be unacceptable to the minority in the North. Discriminatory activities had persisted in many authorities and it seemed likely that the faults in local government in the North were attributable to the people elected to the local authorities: experience suggested that these people might well be elected again and again. Nonetheless there might well be possibilities through different areas and different systems.

8. It was noted that one important influence on the time-table of developments and on British intentions would be a full-scale resumption of the Provisional IRA's bombing campaign in Britain. It was noted that different assessments were possible on the possibility of sustaining such a campaign and of the effects ^{on} of British public opinion. One assessment was that the bombing campaigns to date had been expensive for the IRA in terms of personnel killed and apprehended and thus that any further campaign could not be long sustained. On this assessment, the reaction to the Birmingham bombings had been adverse for the IRA and they would also be influenced by this consideration. The alternative assessment was that, having regard to experience in Northern Ireland, the indications were that the IRA were not unduly influenced by the rate of attrition of personnel and that the Birmingham bombing had been a powerful factor in persuading the British Government to enter into the contacts with the IRA in relation to the ceasefire. On this interpretation, the fairly late initiation of bombing in Britain as a tactic could be attributed to the fact that the IRA campaign was subject to direction by persons concerned with political as well as military strategy. On this assessment, a full scale resumption of the bombing campaign would have considerable impact on British opinion.

9. The Unit considered other possible developments, in the event of a failure of the Convention, in addition to direct rule. It was considered that full integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom was a most unlikely development, for a number of reasons but primarily because it would be unacceptable to the British Labour Government. Opinion in this country could react in a very adverse way to any attempt to move towards such a solution and ~~that~~ the Government could not support any solution on these lines. IRA violence would also be a factor. ~~A~~ general re-organisation of government in the U.K. under the Kilbrandon proposals would provide a different base for consideration⁷.
10. It was considered that, in the event that the British fulfilled their responsibilities and remained in control, Protestant rule was not a likely outcome in view of repeated governmental and Prime ministerial assurances. It was felt, however, that it should not be completely overlooked and reference was made to an inspired editorial in the Times of London earlier in the week. If the Government here were to accept^a development of this sort, it would need to be accompanied by watertight guarantees (which seemed impossible) and continued financial support from the U.K. (which seemed unlikely). Security would obviously be a major concern.
11. The tentative conclusions emerging from further discussion were that, among the various possible developments, two seemed most likely:-
- (1) the British stayed in the North and continued direct rule, perhaps with the introduction of some democratic forum for local politicians;

- (2) the British withdraw not necessarily very soon and perhaps after a phase of weakened commitment, but without declaring their intentions to withdraw in advance and, in the end, withdrawing very speedily.

It was also suggested that an alternative way of expressing the alternative possibilities was:

- the British stand firm and fully discharge their responsibilities;
- the British weaken their commitment, to a greater or lesser degree.

It was pointed out that the British could, at least for some time, retain political sovereignty over the North but maintain inadequate forces to maintain effective security and, perhaps, give inadequate financial support to maintain the economy. The possibility of a civil war in the North, with the British remaining but standing aside and not intervening effectively could not be overlooked.

12. In relation to (b) of paragraph 3 above, it was noted that the Government already have papers before them on this matter. On (c) it was noted that the Department of the Taoiseach had circulated and proposed to submit shortly to the Government, a further Memorandum on preparations for the reception of refugees from Northern Ireland. On (d), it was pointed out that the UDR had certain heavy elements in its armament and that in view of the doubts recently expressed on the impartiality and reliability of the force, especially in a "doomsday" situation, it would be necessary to press the British to ensure there were adequate arrangements for the control by the British themselves of the heavier armament of the UDR.
13. On (e) of paragraph 3 above, reference was made to the relatively frequent recent references to the possibility

of civil war in the North and especially to questions on this subject raised by interviewers and other commentators on RTE television and radio. It was agreed that it was most desirable to ensure that such references should stop. On (f) of paragraph 3 above, it was noted that certain British official quarters seemed to be endeavouring to shift some of the blame for security failures by the British authorities on to the authorities in this country. It was noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs, in the normal course, do all they can to counter such activities and make representations to the British authorities, whenever this seems necessary.

14. The Chairman indicated that the conclusions reached and the ^{al} principle points made at the meeting would be useful to the Government in their forthcoming meeting to consider Northern Ireland matters. The meeting then concluded.