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Address delivered by the Minister for Foreign Affairs
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at Georgetown University, Washington D.C.
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When I travel outside Ireland and discuss the problem of Northern Ireland with people in other countries I am always struck by the different perspective from which this tragic problem is viewed externally. Outside Ireland, it seems to me, the Northern Ireland crisis is, perhaps because of media treatment, seen primarily as one of violent conflict between organisations dedicated to destruction and murder. The political aspect of the situation is little reported and little understood. It is the IRA, its various splinter organisations, and protestant para-military bodies such as the UDA and UVF, which, as they kill and destroy, make the headlines, or at least find mention in the media of countries outside Ireland.

To many people in the world the conflict thus may seem to be one primarily between these bodies, which, in some way are seen by much of world public opinion as representing, or at any rate reflecting the moods and wishes and fears of the two different sections of the population of Northern Ireland with their different ethnic origins.

Of course, within Ireland as outside it, the activities of these organisations make many of the headlines. No one living in Ireland North or South could fail to feel overwhelmed by the torrent of meaningless violence which has continued, seemingly unendingly for so many years, and for which from time to time in various ways has overflowed from the North to the Republic and to Great Britain.

The scale of its impact may best be seen and may best be grasped by an American audience, perhaps, by multiplying the consequences of this violence in terms of the population difference between the United States and Northern Ireland. The United States has a population 150 times greater than that of Northern Ireland. Thus the death roll in Northern Ireland if it were to be reproduced on an American scale would have involved over 200,000 deaths and $2\ ^{1}/_{2}$ million injuries over a period of less than 8 years. Moreover the scale of damage to property, as a percentage of the the gross domestic product of Northern Ireland would be equivalent in American terms to something like 50 billion dollars a year.

At the same time the arbitrariness of the violence, which puts every member of the community at risk, is a particularly demoralising feature. We are not dealing here with a guerrilla campaign between revolutionary or para-military forces and the institutional forces of law and order - this type of conflict represents only a very small fraction indeed of the violence in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of the murders, especially in recent years, have been sectarian killings in which protestant are murdered by the IRA simply because they are protestants, and therefore presumed to support the union with Great Britain, while catholics are murdered by protestant para-military gangs simply because they are presumed to be opposed to this union. The shooting down of ordinary citizens in their homes and at their places of work, or their mass murder by the bombing of bars, restaurants, shops, etc. has created an atmosphere of total insecurity for the entire community. At certain times the IRA

campaign takes marginally different forms - thus at present the Provisional IRA are concentrating on murdering protestant business men in the hope that in this way they may disrupt the economy of Northern Ireland, as they have failed to do by blowing up property.

This violence has from time to time overflowed into the Republic also. Amongst the crimes committed by Provisional IRA activists in the Republic, have been the murder of one of my political colleagues, a protestant senator, who happened to visit the home of his fiancee at a time when a Provisional IRA gang were burning down the house, and throwing the family bible into the fire. The family happened to be protestants: the recent murder of a member of the police force of the Republic by setting a booby trap in a deserted house, then phoning the police anonymously to make sure they would come to the house, burning down of cinemas in the centre of Dublin, the kidnapping of the Dutch business man, Mr. Herrema, the murder of the British Ambassador and a girl member of the Northern Ireland office staff and hundreds of robberies of post offices, banks and shops.

These facts about the Provisional IRA and its campaign of indiscriminate and largely sectarian violence need to be bluntly stated and cannot be glossed over.

The acts of violence undertaken by these organisations do not however, to us in Ireland, represent the key to the Northern Ireland problem. Indeed by their campaign, which has disgusted the vast majority of the Irish people, North and South, they have made themselves irrelevant to the real problem. The political problem.

They are of course relevant to the extent that their violence creates tensions within the Northern Ireland community which make political negotiations between representative groups of the two sections of the community more difficult. But they are relevant only in this negative sense, - thus very few people in Ireland, North or South, believe for a moment that the problem of Northern Ireland would be resolved by some kind of negotiation involving these violent groups, or negotiation between them. Even their negative impact on the possibility of finding a political solution is probably far from decisive. It is certainly arguable that a much more potent obstacle to agreement between political representatives of the two sections of the community has been the impact of extreme protestant politicians whose influence has been a powerful barrier to conciliation on the loyalist side.

To understand why the role of the men of violence is seen in Ireland as not being politically crucial it is necessary to understand how little support they have amongst the people in either section of the community in Northern Ireland or in the Republic. This is to a large degree measurable in political terms because during the period of the Northern Ireland crisis since 1968 many elections have taken place, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, which have not merely been completely free elections, but which in the Republic throughout this period and in Northern Ireland in the latter part of this period, have been carried out according to a proportional representation system which provides a very accurate reflection of the voting pattern in the strengths of the different political groups elected to office.

It is true that in a number of instances the extremists have not put forward candidates for election because of their consciousness of their political weakness. But all the extremist groups have been tested to some extent on some occasions, and all have failed to secure even the most minimal support.

Thus, Provisional Sinn Fein, the political party of the Provisional IRA, put forward candidates in half the constituencies in local Government elections in the Republic in 1974 and secured one percent of the votes. In Northern Ireland Provisional Sinn Fein have not put forward candidates at any election. On occasions candidates however, have gone forward who are known to reflect their viewpoint and in no proportional representation election have any of these been elected to a provincial body - Parliament, Assembly or Convention. In general the position of Provisional Sinn Fein with regard to elections in Northern Ireland has been one of advocating abstention from the polls and it is possible to measure approximately the amount of support implied by this policy by seeing the extent to which the voting strength of the Nationalist Catholic Section of the population is under-represented at the polls. Such an analysis does not suggest that their political support has run to more than about five or six percent at any period.

So far as the Official IRA represented by Official Sinn Fein are concerned, they have presented candidates both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. Like the Provisional Sinn Fein they secured 1/2 percent of the votes in the local elections in 1974 in the Republic. In Northern Ireland they also secured a somewhat similar small percentage in local elections but have failed on any

occasion to have one of their representatives elected to the regional parliament, assembly or convention.

On the protestant side some of the para-military organisations have in certain elections put forward candidates for election. It has been rare for any of these candidates even to secure as many as 1,000 votes in constituencies where the votes run into tens of thousands.

Against this background it is easy to see why in Ireland itself these bodies are regarded as having little political significance, however much death and destruction they can wreak. Therefore the political discussion in Ireland turns around the positions of the political parties in Northern Ireland which actually secure the support of the electorate in the frequent free elections that have taken place there during this period of crisis.

These political parties represent the two different sections of this community, which is divided basically on ethnic lines, between the descendants of the original Irish inhabitants of this part of the province of Ulster and the descendants of the 17th Century Colonists w-o came there from England and Scotland. Unlike all the earlier colonists - and Ireland has been colonised wholly or partially many times during the millennia - those who came in this wave of colonisation in the 17th Century failed to assimilate with the indigenous inhabitants because of the religious division that had arisen through the reformation in the previous century. It was the lack of intermarriage between the colonists

and the earlier inhabitants, caused by this religious division, which ensured that each of these two groups has retained its own sense of identity over a period of almost four centuries.

The more immediate roots of the present problem lie, however, in the reactions of British Governments immediately before and after the first World War to the problem posed by the insistent demand of the great majority of the Irish people for, as a minimum, self Government within the United Kingdom, or Home Rule. The descendants of the post-reformation colonists, protestant by religion, not merely in North East Ireland, where they represented a local majority, but also in the rest of the island where their numbers were much smaller, feared the consequences of finding themselves under the control of a Home Rule Government democratically elected by the majority of the Irish people, Roman Catholic in religion, and, it was feared, likely to feel resentful at the centuries-long domination by the minority of colonists. Throughout most of the country this unionist protestant minority was too small to influence the ultimate decision to grant Home Rule, but in the North East, in parts of which the protestant unionists outnumbered the catholic nationalists by over 2 to 1, the situation was different. The threat of violent resistance to Home Rule by this local protestant majority in the North East weakened the resolution of successive British Governments to give Home Rule to Ireland as a unit and led to the decision in 1920 to set up two Home Rule parliaments, one in the North East and one in the remainder of the country.

The motivation for this decision is something which historians will eventually have to judge. In part at least it certainly reflected an unwillingness on the part of British politicians to take on such a powerful and determined group as the protestant unionists majority in the North East corner of the island. There may also, however, have been a further consideration - the apparent desirability from Britain's point of view of ensuring that, in part of Ireland at last, there would be a Government acted by a local majority strongly loyal to the British connection and securing for Britain a reliable strategic base in the island, the greater part of which might be expected to move on in due course from Home Rule to Independence.

Historians will also have to judge as to the wisdom of this decision to divide Ireland in this way. It seems to me unlikely that they will conclude that the decision was one that was wise in the long-term interests of Ireland or perhaps, indeed, even of Britain.

First, so far as Northern Ireland is concerned the effect of the decision was to give a dominant and controlling position in that area to a local majority which still psychologically felt itself to be a minority in the island as a whole, fearful of the new Irish State evolving to the South of it, and fearful of the Nationalist Catholic minority within its own frontiers. This fear-ridden group, determined to hang on to the privileges which the protestant minority had had in Ireland throughout the period of British rule, reacted to the creation of the new Northern Ireland Home Rule area

by taking discriminatory measures against the artificially-created catholic nationalist minority within this area - measures designed to ensure that wherever possible this minority would not fail control even of local administrations where they had a local majority and to discourage them from finding employment within Northern Ireland, thus minimising the anger of a deeply feared term demographic shift in their favour, based on the higher catholic birth rate.

Thus, so far as the social psychological, and political situation of Northern Ireland was concerned, the solution, a partition, produced the worst possible result especially as Britain's satisfaction at having, as most British political leaders short-sightedly though, found a solution to the Irish problem led successive British Governments to abdicate completely their responsibility for controlling the discriminatory actions of the provincial Governments formed exclusively by representatives of the protestant unionists.

In the Republic, too, the division of the island in 1920 had bad effects. When the Home Rule status of this larger part of the island was transformed into dominion status within the British commonwealth in 1922, (which became full soverign independence in 1931). This new state found itself with an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic population - the protestant minority within this area was only 6 percent at that time. This had the effect of encouraging successive Governments in the Republic to modify some of the laws of the State inherited from the previous period of British rule along lines compatible with the teaching of the Roman

Catholic Church on certain moral issues, and led to the introduction of a new constitution in 1937 which also bore the marks of Roman Catholic influence. At the same time the new State sought to repay the debt it owed to the Language Revival Movement of the early years of the century by making the use of the Irish language essential for school examination purposes and for entry to the Public Service. Thus the new Irish State developed along Catholic, gaelic lines which tended to deepen the divisions that already existed before independence between North and South.

Another consequence of the division of the island so far as the Republic was concerned was that the initial incredulity and non-acceptance of the idea that the island of Ireland could be divided, turned gradually into a form of irrendentism on the part of the new State, best summed up in the phrase "give us back our lost six counties" as if these six counties were the property of the other twenty six. Even though this view was not in most cases held with much passion or strong conviction nevertheless it exacerbated relations between North and South and intensified the already pre-existing fears of the Northern Protestant Unionists.

The situation created by the division of the country and the establishment of a Home Rule system in Northern Ireland was one which clearly carried in it ultimately the seeds of its own destruction. The Catholic Nationalist minority artificially created within Northern Ireland would not be expected indefinitely to accept total exclusion from power at the level of the

Provincial Government and in the late 1960s the resentment of this minority was transformed from a sterile anti-partitionism to a constructive demand for civil rights and the ending of discrimination. This switch in the whole emphasis of the policies pursued by the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland owed much to the example of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Because this new Movement involved on the part of the Catholic Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland an implied acceptance of the existence of Northern Ireland, for the time being at least, and a willingness to participate in its institutions, it carried with it the possibility and prospect of at least an interim solution to the Irish problem had the protestant unionist majority had the imagination to grasp the opportunity thus offered. Unfortunately this did not happen. The shock effect of seeing the system of safeguards for their domination through discrimination, built up so carefully over so many decades, destroyed overnight by the reforms imposed by the British Government in 1969, following the demands of the Civil Rights Movement, had indeed the opposite effect on the Protestant Unionists. To them the Civil Rights Movement appeared not as a belated acceptance by the Catholic Nationalists of the Northern Ireland Statelet and a willingness to work within the system there but rather as a threat to what they had come to accept as their natural right to control exclusively and indefinitely the fortunes of this area, without interference from the soverign British power, and without effective resistance from the Catholic Nationalist minority.

Throughout the whole of the period since the Northern crisis started it is this psychological attitude of the protestant unionist majority which has posed an insuperable obstacle to a solution to the problem of governing Northern Ireland. In other respects, however, the political situation has evolved favourably, and several other major obstacles to a solution have removed themselves.

Thus quite apart from the highly significant change in the attitude of the Catholic Nationalist minority within Northern Ireland, a change also occurred during the early 1970s in the attitude of politicians and public opinion in the Republic. The unthinking irredentism of many decades in this part of Ireland has been displaced by a new, more realistic and more generous approach, involving a recognition of the impossibility of securing a reunification of Ireland by any other means than the free consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

This change in attitudes in the Republic is important because it has effectively removed one of the major pschological problems of the Northern protestant majority - the fear that the larger and more heavily populated Southern Irish State would in some way and at some point seek to impose and succeed in imposing, reunification, against the wishes of the protestant majority in Northern Ireland.

Yet another obstacle to a solution disappeared around the same time, as British politicians and British public opinion, faced with the intractable character of the political problems of Northern Ireland, woke up to the fact that retaining control of this area brought more problems in its wake than it did advantages. In a nuclear age

the presumed strategic advantage of bases in the area was in any event greatly reduced and the burden imposed on Britain, both financially and strategically in terms of the need to transfer troops from Germany to Northern Ireland, thus weakening the United Kingdom's participation in NATO, has created a completely different situation, in which the great majority of British politicians and British public opinion have lost all interest in remaining in Northern Ireland save to the extent and for the period necessary to find an honourable solution and one that will not leave behind chaos and Civil War in an island within a dozen miles of their shores.

While there remain those in Ireland who do not yet recognise this fundamental change in British attitudes, and who still see the Northern Ireland problem in simplistic terms as being merely a question of getting Britain out of the part of Ireland over which it still exercises sovereignity, this view no longer commands general support, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic the great majority of people recognise that the real problem is rather the relationship between the two sections of the community in Northern Ireland, whose mutual fears of each other are such that, given the existence of para-military bodies on both sides, the premature withdrawal of the British presence could precipitate a real Civil War.

At the same time it has to be said that there is a school of thought that despairs of a solution being found by political means in the foreseeable future and that is prepared, if not to risk the consequences of an actual British withdrawal, at least to take a

chance on a declaration by Britain of an intent to withdraw at some time in the future. However, given the danger that even such a long-term declaration of intent could precipitate a major crisis by tempting extremists on both sides to move in rapidly to fill the potential vacuum that would be created by such a British declaration this idea is firmly rejected by the Irish Government, whose first and compelling concern must be the avoidance of the danger of a drastic intensification of violence in the North, where the very survival of the isolated catholic nationalist minority who live in so-called 'Ghetto areas' in the Eastern part of the province would be in danger.

I have spoken of the changes that have taken place in the attitude of the catholic nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, of the new perception of the problem in the Republic, and of the - somewhat belated - British recognition that they no longer have an interest in maintaining a presence on Irish soil.

Thus the last seven years have seen major changes take place in a number of the elements of the Northern Ireland problem so that the previously numerous and in conbination apparently insoluble political difficulties have now been reduced to one single issue - the willingness of the protestant unionist majority to share power with elected representatives of the catholic nationalist minority, who are willing to join in the Government and administration of the province, and to work with representatives of the protestant unionist majority to put down violence emanating from both extremes - and who are also willing to agree that the question of the reunification of Ireland be left to be determined in the future by a majority decision of the people of Northern Irl.

Given that in any such power-sharing Government or administration the elected representatives of the protestant unionists would be entitled on a proportional basis to 65-70% of the seats in Government, it may not be easy to understand why this issue should be, or have become, the final stumbling block in the way of a political solution to the Northern Ireland problem. To a certain extent at least this difficulty has arisen because of the fact that in the difficult process of mental readjustment to the ending of the period of protestant unionist domination, which has led to the break up of the unionist party monolith into half a dozen political parties, a number of these new parties have fought to retain the support of the protestant unionist electorate by making this issue of power-sharing a crucial question - in other words by getting on a political hook on this issue.

But the fact that this has happened is itself a reflection of the depth of the fears and misunderstandings that exist between the two sections of the community in Northern Ireland. A large proportion of the protestant unionist electorate, in its fear for the survival of the identity of this section of the community, makes few or no distinctions between the tiny minority of IRA supporters on the one hand, and the vast majority of the catholic nationalist community who support the constitutional SDLP party which is opposed to violence, and is willing to work within the existing system on a power-sharing basis until such time as a majority in Northern Ireland agree to political reunification of the island.

These fears are easily played upon by the more extremist of Protestant Unionist politicians - and the less extreme political leaders on the Protestant Unionist side clearly fear that any compromise on what has been elevated into the crucial issue - viz. power-sharing in Government will play into the hands of Paisley, and will lead to their being discredited with the electorate as other Unionist politicians have been discredited in the recent past when they have agreed to compromise on the power-sharing issue.

Another reason why the question of power-sharing has not yet been faced by the leaders of the Protestant Unionist majority is that while it has been the policy of the British Government and opposition since 1972 that devolved Provincial Government will be restored only on a power-sharing basis, during a significant part of this period - in particular between 1974 and 1976 - this policy was not always clearly enunciated by British political leaders. Fearful of alienating Unionist opinion by too aggressive a statement of this policy, both the British Government and opposition at various periods during these two year period have weakened their impact upon Unionist opinion by seeming to water it down or to play it down.

However, since last Autumn there has been a clear recognition in British political circles of the counter-productive character of this trend towards a watering down or playing down of the power-sharing issue and a very positive re-statement of British policy, both by the Government and by the opposition, has in recent

months reconcentrated attention on this power-sharing more clearly than for several years past and has faced the Protestant Unionist majority, who are increasingly dissatisfied with direct rule from London in the absence of devolved Government, with the need to redefine in some way their policy on this issue, if they are to secure as the vast majority of them clearly wish to secure, a restoration of devolved Provincial self-Government. In this situation there exists some possibility of political movement, although past disappointments in this respect have been so numerous that most people continue to regard the possibility of an early political solution with considerable scepticism.

In the meantime the problem facing politicians in Northern Ireland is that of maintaining their role in society over a prolonged period during which they have no formal functions to perform. These politicians were elected less than two years ago to a Convention, designed to seek a political solution, but they failed to agree, this Convention was dissolved by the British Government. The facilities available to the politicians in the form of the Parliament building at Stormont, near Belfast, were then withdrawn from them, and even the function of representing local constituency interests ceased to be recognised by the British Government.

These British tactics which many regard as seriously mistaken, have created severe problems for the politicians in Northern Ireland, who need above all to have a positive role to play during the period while opinion evolves towards agreement on some kind of solution to the power-sharing problem. There is a real danger that the political system in Northern Ireland

could disintegrate if left too long in this state of limbo, and there is therefore - quite apart from the urgency imposed by the continuing campaign of violence - a very real need for early progress along this road