

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/148/709
Creation Date(s):	13-14 April 1978
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

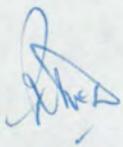
S. 18654

NOTE

The Ambassador in London telephoned me this morning. He said that Mr. Mallet, the Counsellor in the Foreign Office who deals with Northern Ireland affairs, had just telephoned him. Their conversation was brief.

Mr. Mallet expressed some indignation at the reaction in to-day's Dublin press to Mr. Mason's remarks in the House of Commons yesterday. He said it was clear that there had been briefing of the press on our part.

The Ambassador replied that he did not know of any briefing. We had been under the impression that Mr. Mason wanted a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs. If that was not the case, it was strange that they had not let us know.



Department of Foreign Affairs

14th April, 1978.

c.c. Mr. D. Nally,
Department of the Taoiseach.

MR JOHN WATKINSON (West Gloucestershire): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on his talks with the Ministers of the Irish Republic.

MR MASON: With permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer this Question and Question numbers 7, 8, 11 and 13 together.

I have no meeting with Ministers of the Republic planned but meetings at all levels between the two governments take place as necessary. My rt hon Friend the Prime Minister had a short discussion with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic on 7 April. They re-affirmed the views voiced in the communiqué issued after their meeting last September and reviewed progress since then.

MR SPEAKER: I shall call on Members in the order in which their Questions are being answered.

MR WATKINSON: Can my rt hon Friend indicate whether he takes the view that relationships between the North and the South have improved as a result of contacts between my rt hon Friend the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of the South? Can he reiterate that the guarantee of the British people to the Northern Irish people remains? Can he also say whether he is engaged in talks on matters of cross-border security? In his last speech in the House, he indicated that there could be a slight area of improvement there.

MR MASON: As far as I am concerned - and I am sure that this applies to my rt hon Friend the Prime Minister - there is a good working relationship between the North and the South. The meeting held by the two Prime Ministers was very short. It was informal and private. What is most important is that they jointly reaffirmed the communiqué from the 10 Downing Street conference of last September. There is a special Question on security and the use of the border later on the Order Paper.

MR LITTERICK: ^{has} In his talks with Irish politicians and the Irish Prime Minister/my ft hon Friend the Secretary of State yet been able to reach any judgement as to whether the current public debate in the Republic of Ireland about possible federalisation as a solution to the - shall we say? - total Irish problem, could form the basis for a new political initiative from Westminster?

MR MASON: No, Sir. I do not think that that is so. If utterances are made which tend to frighten the majority in the North - the Protestant population in particular - that makes it much more difficult to make political progress. I think that it is far better that that should be understood. Anybody who makes speeches about the unity of Ireland or national aspirations should bear in mind that that makes it much more politically difficult for me as Secretary of State. It is harder to talk to all the parties concerned if they are frightened, rather than our wooing them.

MR CRAIG: While one would welcome any improved relationship between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic, may I ask the Secretary of State to bear in mind that, in his own words, there is a gap in our security provisions that could be filled by more energetic efforts on the part of the Irish Republic? I am sorry that he was not a party to the talks. I hope that he will draw to the attention of the Government of the Irish Republic the need to close this area and, in particular, to consider the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, and more specifically the introduction of a satisfactory extradition agreement. All people in Northern Ireland are satisfied that the present so-called common jurisdiction in relation to terrorism is not a workable proposition.

MR MASON: As I have said in the House before, border security between the RUC and the Garda is good. We would like to be able to develop on that. Terrorism, whether in the North or the South, is the common enemy of us both.

As for the question of the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, the Irish Government are well aware of our view that all members of the Council of Europe should become party to this important agreement. We would wish to see the Republic sign and ratify the Convention without reservation and implement it in the same comprehensive way as the United Kingdom.

MR MOLYNEAUX: But will Her Majesty's Government seek to convince the Government of the Irish Republic that they are fast losing the respect of the other European countries which have taken effective action to suppress terrorism? Will he and the Government point out to the Government of the Irish Republic that it is in their own interests to join in combined efforts to suppress terrorism in all its forms throughout Europe?

MR MASON: Yes, Sir. I think that the Irish Republic well understands that. I think that because of the exchanges of recent times they are fully apprised of it. I am hopeful, therefore, that we can develop along the lines I have suggested. But, border security being good, let us develop that further.

MR NEAVE: Is the rt hon ^{Govt} Government aware that we on the Conservative Benches share the resolve to put aside our differences with Dublin at present, but want to reach an agreed determination to defeat terrorism? Is it also aware, in regard to questions raised by other hon Members, that there is very strong criticism of the Irish Government in Europe for ^{not} signing the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, in view of the number of people who are now hiding in Dublin from the police in the North?

In view of the number of people who are skulking in the Republic, who may or who may not have committed acts of terrorism but are wanted by the RUC, will the rt hon Government ask this very relevant question: what action would the Republic take if a member of the Red Brigade or the Baader-Meinhof gang were to take refuge in the Republic at present?

MR MASON: I would not want to widen the question into such dimensions, I think that the Irish Government understand the growing pressure throughout the Western European countries on the acceptance of the convention. We have a second best - the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1976, agreed by both the South and the North. I would hope that we could get some results from that.

MR TOWNSEND: Is the Secretary of State aware that he has told this House for years that there is good co-operation across the border when there is much evidence on the ground that that is not so? Why should there not be more liaison visits between the respective forces? Why should there not be joint patrols? Why cannot we reach better agreement with regard to overflying rights?

MR MASON: The hon ^{Gentlemen} Government, of course, will be impulsive and fly in the face of history. We have made good progress between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda of the South, but the hon Government knows well - and so does the House - that it is not so easy to make that sort of co-operative progress between the British Army and the Irish Army. Nevertheless, in spite of all their historical difficulties, we have been getting even the

MR FITT: Mr rt hon Friend has laid particular stress on the fact that a short meeting of the two Prime Ministers seems to have resolved all the difficulties, which would seem to belie the fact of the crisis which existed prior to the meeting. Was there a crisis, or was it an artificial crisis? Is there now no further reason for a meeting between my rt hon Friend and the Irish Foreign Secretary?

With regard to frightening statements which may upset the Northern Ireland majority, is my rt hon Friend aware that ... [unclear text] ...

particularly by the hon Member for Abingdon (Mr Neave), who only recently made a very bellicose statement in Northern Ireland which put him fairly and squarely on the side of an intransigent Unionist majority, to the total exclusion of any consideration of the minority in Northern Ireland?

Will my rt hon Friend insist that the situation in Northern Ireland is not, as the hon Member for Abingdon would put it to the House, purely/military/^{one}but that it is a political question at all times?

MR SPEAKER: Order. Questions are getting longer and longer. This can only result in some hon Members not being called.

MR MASON: First of all, there has been no crisis between the North and the South.

MR FITT: You could have fooled me.

MR MASON: If the hon ^{Government} wants to heed Press speculation - it, of course, wants to encourage conflict - so be it. There was no crisis between the North and the South. Secondly, even before the La Mon House incident five or six weeks ago, I had indicated that there might be reason for a meeting. I had also indicated to the South that I was prepared to go on the Thursday before Easter, but because of the death of the former President that meeting was cancelled. In fact, things were progressing along that path. But shortly after the proposed meeting, the planned meeting between the Prime Ministers was imminent, and, therefore, there was no reason why they should not have discussed it. It was only a short, polite, private meeting.

MR NEAVE: In view of the ritual inaccuracy of the hon Member for Belfast West (Mr Fitt) on these occasions, will the rt hon Government please take note of what I actually said? Will he tell the Ministers in Dublin to have no illusions? We on the Conservative side stand four-square for the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is what I actually said.

MR MASON: Yes, I appreciate that; and it is right that the Opposition should stand four-square with Her Majesty's Government on that sort of bipartisan policy.

In answer to an earlier question, I must reiterate - it was said during the course of the Prime Ministers' meetings that, as long as the majority of the people of Northern Ireland by decree, and, indeed, by referendum, wish to remain a part of the United Kingdom, so it shall be, unless they decree otherwise.

Y