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Assessment of British position and policy
in Northern Ireland

Background and Ambit of Paper

1. It is common ground among the parties participating in the Forum that before there can be fundamental progress in regard to Northern Ireland, a major reassessment by the British Government of its own position is necessary. This paper analyses the essence of the British position; sets out the main strands in British policy at present and as it might be expected to evolve in the absence of a British reassessment; and assesses the ^{al}principal elements of interest or motivation affecting the British position and the consequences of such elements.

Essence of British Position

2. The central element in the British position is as set out in Section 1 of the (British) Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973:

"It is hereby declared that Northern Ireland remains part of Her Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom, and it is hereby affirmed that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part of it cease to be part of Her Majesty's dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a poll held for the purposes of this section in accordance with Schedule 1 to this Act".

This is the current legislative expression of a formula which has been repeated, in one form or another, since the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Whatever views are taken in Ireland as to the legitimacy of partition, given the circumstances of duress under

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which the Treaty was accepted on the Irish side or the arbitrary and artificial delineation of the Northern Ireland entity, the British have taken the settlement of the sovereignty question embodied in the Treaty as given and as having given rise to an existing reality which has been, and remains for them, the central point of reference.

3. During the period 1920-25 when the constitutional settlement was being worked out, many in Britain saw the partition of Ireland - which previously had been regarded and ruled as a unit - as transitory. British policy was ambivalent on the question of whether the local unionist majority in Northern Ireland should be accorded a right of self-determination. However, with the passage of time, the British reached the view that the people of Northern Ireland have a right of self-determination. i.e. Northern Ireland, rather than Ireland as a whole, has become accepted by British Government as the appropriate unit in regard to exercise of this right. Up to recent years, the right was accorded in absolute terms. Not only was the right of the people of Ireland as a whole discounted: the identity of the nationalist people in Northern Ireland was disregarded and the unionists were left very largely to their own devices in the government of Northern Ireland. Since the Irish identity of the Northern nationalists was accorded express recognition, there has been a failure, with the brief exception of the period when the Sunningdale Agreement was in force, to translate that recognition into practical terms.

4. Thus, the guiding principle of British policy has been - and apparently remains - minimum, necessary movement.

5. Their position is characterised by immobilism. All the evidence is that their view has consistently been that any initiative along lines that could be expected to evoke a strong or even violent reaction from the unionist population is to be avoided. The British appear to see the present situation as being contained within what are, from their perspective, acceptable limits of cost - in violence, in economic terms, in terms of

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international relations and perceptions; and they may well consider, although perhaps with less confidence, that it can be contained in the foreseeable future.

6. The immobility in existing British policy - the fact that it does not seek to deal with the fundamental conflict of rights at issue - is steadily creating a dangerous situation. The effect of British policy is to drive the two communities in Northern Ireland further apart and to alienate them from each other and the British Government. The historical experience of loyalists is that a threat of violent reaction will force Britain to back down on any major step that seeks to deal with the fundamental conflict of rights at issue (e.g. British reaction to unionist resistance to Home Rule for all of Ireland in 1912, the partition settlement imposed in 1920/21, and the UWC strike in May, 1974). Nationalists have the same perception and this leads some of them to the view that constitutional politics do not work and cannot secure legitimate nationalist rights. These two complementary perceptions of existing British policy are a recipe for continuing conflict and growing violence by extremists on both sides.

Evolution of British Policy since 1912

7. Separate background papers (1) trace the evolution of British policy since 1912, with particular reference to the dimensions of consistency and inconsistency and to the anomalies and contradictions manifested in the application of policy and (2) examine the extent to which since 1969, different parties and interests in Britain have agreed or diverged on policy.

Main Strands in British Policy

8. The following appear to be the main strands in British policy, as currently applied and as it might be expected to have evolved in the absence of a British reassessment leading to significant political movement:

- (1) that there can be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland; and that the British will respect the wishes of a majority, whether favouring change or maintenance of the constitutional position;
- (2) that direct rule will be continued - whether with or without the Northern Ireland Assembly in its present form and composition can only be a matter for speculation;
- (3) that there may be periodic efforts to bring about devolved government within Northern Ireland but that there will be no devolution without cross-community support;
- (4) that present security approaches will be continued in order to contain terrorist violence;
- (5) that they recognise that peaceful expression by nationalists of their Irish identity within Northern Ireland and of the aspiration for Irish unity is legitimate but that they may place primary emphasis on the development of Anglo-Irish relations as the British response to these factors and may defer to unionist reactions in regard to concrete recognition of Irish identity within Northern Ireland;
- (6) that the Anglo-Irish process should be continued in a cautious way that will permit them to present it as the development of normal, bilateral friendly relations between the two States, the United Kingdom and the "Irish Republic", in a way that poses no threat to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland;
- (7) that the existing standards of civil rights and equity in administration will be maintained but that derogations from normal civil liberties seen as necessitated by the emergency situation will remain; and
- (8) that the well-established principles of British economic policy as applied to the North (parity, favourable industrial incentives regime, etc.) will be maintained and that substantial financial support for the administration of the area will continue to be provided subject, perhaps to a somewhat greater degree, to over-riding U.K. concerns on keeping public expenditure within limits that are tolerable in U.K. terms.

Elements of Interest and Motivation Affecting British
Position

9. The British Government published a formal statement of "the United Kingdom interest" in the Green Paper "The Future of Northern Ireland", October 1972 (paragraph 74): "The United Kingdom Government has three major concerns in Northern Ireland. First that it should be internally at peace - a divided and strife-ridden Province is bound to disturb and weaken the whole Kingdom. Second, that it should prosper, so as to contribute to and not detract from the prosperity of the whole. Third, that Northern Ireland should not offer a base for any external threat to the security of the United Kingdom."
10. The following are elements of interest and motivation - many of them cited by Forum members or oral presenters-which may affect the British position and for which supporting evidence can be found:

(a) political

- a concern not to make the situation worse than it is already
- the factor of inertia and the low priority of the problem among domestic British concerns
- an obligation to the majority of the people of Northern Ireland that must be discharged and be seen to be discharged
- a belief that nationalism in Northern Ireland can be contained within the context of the present political structures
- a belief that Irish nationalists are not serious about Irish unity
- a view that Northern Ireland is an internal UK matter
- a determination not to yield to violence
- interest in maintaining Britain's international prestige and reputation
- a residual unionism or imperialism; a lack of readiness to see the Irish as having a separate identity; a kith and kin attachment to unionists.

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- a failure to understand that the situation is fundamentally different from that in which British politics operates.
 - an interest in a friendly and stable relationship with the Republic
- (b) economic
- a wish to protect British economic interests and to minimise financial costs
- (c) strategic
- interest in retaining benefits to British defence of its presence in Northern Ireland.

A consideration that may have had some influence in the past, as late as 1977 or 1978 was the wish to avoid setting a precedent for the detachment of constituent elements of the U.K., particularly at a time when there were strong pressures for a substantial measure of devolution to Scotland and Wales. This factor is scarcely of any marked significance now but may have some slight lingering influence.

Relative Weight of Elements

11. The evidence is that among the factors set out above, concern that a change in their position would risk creating a much worse, possibly chaotic situation and the factor of inertia are the most important. These factors would be expected to be mutually reinforcing in British minds. The concern to discharge obligations to unionists also appears to have considerable significance. It is difficult to assess what weight is attached to the strategic factor in modern conditions: the matter is considered further below.

Consideration of Individual Elements Affecting British Position

(a) Political

Fear that new initiatives would make the situation worse than it is already.

12. Having tried a number of initiatives without success, the British Government seems to believe that initiatives entailing a change in the present constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom could give rise to a unionist reaction that would lead to greater instability, violence and bloodshed. Although the present situation gives rise to significant financial costs and is not satisfactory, from either a political or security point of view, the British Government appears to fear that the risks that could be involved in alternative proposals might be worse. This results in the unwillingness of the British Government to sustain reasonable proposals aimed at satisfying the rights of nationalists and unionists alike (e.g. Sunningdale, ideas floated in early 1982) because to do so risks incurring the opposition of those unionists who do not wish any accommodation of nationalist rights.

This unwillingness by Britain to take effective action to accommodate nationalist rights results in a nationalist perception of pro-unionist bias and alienation from Britain. Despite growing alienation of the Northern nationalist community, the decline in the trend of violent terrorist incidents compared with the peak in 1972-76 may have sustained a British view that the security problem can be kept under control and violence to a tolerable level. There is some evidence that the dangers in such a view are beginning to be understood by the British.

The British apparently take the view that the best they can do in present circumstances is to keep the problem within what they consider to be manageable proportions. They apparently see no pressing need to change the basic status quo. They may hope that in time a normal situation may return and North/South co-operation on technical/economic issues may grow into something more significant in the long term.

The British probably take the view that the present status of Northern Ireland arose as the only feasible arrangement out of the historical circumstances of 1920/21 and the boundary settlement of 1925. The underlying political problem of conflict between pro and anti-union forces which prompted London to implement partition as a solution may not, in British eyes, have changed.

The only radical proposal that is advanced from time to time in Britain is the suggestion of a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. This suggestion is represented as a "man-in-the street" view that British soldiers should not die in Northern Ireland, that "the Irish should fight it out amongst themselves". Although groupings in some of the British political parties may favour a British withdrawal, it is generally recognised by British politicians of all parties that a precipitate British withdrawal without agreed alternative political arrangements in Northern Ireland and adequate provision for law and order would be an abandonment of British responsibilities to nationalists and unionist alike. British policy-makers probably believe that such a precipitate withdrawal would lead to chaos - chaos which would threaten vulnerable nationalist and unionist sections of the community in Northern Ireland and which they may believe would also spread to the rest of Ireland and perhaps to Britain. Thus apart from fringe groups in the British political parties, those British politicians who may have seriously considered a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland see it in the context of an agreed solution to the Northern Ireland problem for which, they consider, unionist consent would have to be forthcoming.

The factor of inertia and the low priority of Northern Ireland among British concerns

13. For the British, the Irish question was solved in 1920/25: it appears that thereafter they preferred to disregard the problem as far as possible. The perspective from London was different from that from Belfast or even from Dublin. For the British factors of remoteness and scale could not but affect their perception of Northern Ireland after 1925.

In addition, British Governments are operating on the margin of indifference of their electorates which accord a low priority to Northern Ireland, as opinion polls have shown. As a result, Northern Ireland occupies a lowly place on the agenda of British Governments and political parties: on a number of occasions in recent years the question has been omitted from the main business of the annual Party Conferences. It remains the position to-day that

there are many other matters of more pressing domestic concern to Britain. In these circumstances, it is seen as easier and safer to continue with direct rule which is perceived, through British eyes, as working in a tolerable way and as representing the second best option for most parties to the conflict

Discharging responsibilities to the people of Northern Ireland

14. The British take the view that they should discharge and be seen to be discharging their responsibilities to ^{the} a million⁺ British citizens who regard themselves as such and, as the British perceive it, do not wish to be absorbed into a united Ireland against their wishes. The British have taken the view, over a long period that as long as a majority within Northern Ireland favours continuation of the union, this is the democratic exercise of self-determination which Britain has no alternative but to respect.
15. Although recognising to some extent that the Northern nationalists are alienated from, or at least frustrated with, the existing political structure which affords no political means of expression of their Irish identity, the present British Government may have hitherto felt that nationalist dissatisfaction can be contained and may have regarded the operation of direct rule as the least problematical way in present circumstances to safeguard Northern nationalists from unionist supremacy and discrimination: it does not however, provide an outlet for the nationalist aspiration and identity.
16. The British have failed to understand or have been prepared to overlook the element in the unionist ethos that is concerned with maintaining dominance and privilege, even contrary to their obligations to the wider British polity or to British interests. On the other hand, the British may not be satisfied that Irish nationalists are prepared to take into account the reality of the British-Irish identity or the fears and perceptions which condition loyalist unwillingness to enter into any political arrangements, involving structures, in Northern Ireland or in Ireland as a whole, in which Northern nationalists or the Irish Government, or both, would have a substantial role. The British position on the "guarantee" does not reflect the reality that given the nature

of the inter-communal conflict, unqualified support for the position adopted by a simple majority within Northern Ireland cannot provide an adequate basis for creating peace and stability and that any constitutional arrangements must obtain acceptance by both major Irish traditions.

Belief that nationalism in Northern Ireland can be accommodated within present political context

17. An intermittent emphasis in the British approach is the belief that the situation in Northern Ireland can be handled within the present political context; and specifically that violent nationalism can be contained through vigorous security measures while gradual and limited reforms in Northern Ireland administration and the benefits of UK levels of financial support for the economy and of social transfers will satisfy the wishes of constitutional nationalists. This approach was best exemplified during the period when Mr. Roy Mason was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

18. This element in British thinking reflects a complacency in regard to Northern nationalists' aspiration and identity. It seriously underestimates the alienation of the Northern nationalist community, which is reflected in the decision of the SDLP not to enter the Northern Ireland Assembly, in disillusionment among certain sections of nationalist opinion with the capacity of constitutional politics to secure justice and in support for Provisional Sinn Fein. Measures to overcome the present Northern security problem cannot be efficacious while political structures exclude a meaningful role for the nationalist tradition in Ireland and thus lack the cross-community support that would enable constitutional nationalists, as well as unionists, to play an active role in support of security efforts; gradual reforms in the Northern administration leave untouched the failure to accommodate politically the aspirations

and the Irish identity of the Northern nationalists; and whatever economic benefits are available they do not dilute the legitimate claim by Northern nationalists to political expression of their identity, any more than unionists wish to forsake their identity in return for economic/financial inducements.

Perception that Irish nationalists are not serious about

Irish unity

19. There may be a belief in Britain that nationalists especially, in the Republic are not serious in seeking a change in the present situation. When expressed, this view suggests that Southern nationalists are not really interested in genuine Irish unity, and that Irish Governments, parties and institutions have not accorded, in practical terms, a sufficiently high degree of priority to the unity of Ireland. It is held that Southerners wish to maintain the ethos and political framework, within which the 26-county State functions, without its being upset by a large unionist minority. It is suggested that Southerners fear that their ethos and framework would be threatened by any realistic effort to absorb the unionists or accommodate their interests on a basis acceptable to them.

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View that Northern Ireland is an internal UK matter

20. Yet another intermittent British reaction to events has been that Northern Ireland is an internal UK matter and that the Republic has no business in interfering in the United Kingdom's internal affairs.
21. This assertion creates tensions within Northern Ireland and in the British-Irish relationship. It is in direct contradiction with the principle of the role of Dublin in relation to Northern Ireland, which has been accepted by the British Government on a number of occasions. For example, paragraph 78 of the 1972 British Government Paper for Discussion (Whitelaw Green Paper) states:-

"Whatever arrangements are made for the future administration of Northern Ireland must take account of the Province's relationship with the Republic of Ireland: and to the extent that this is done, there is an obligation upon the Republic to reciprocate. Both the economy and the security of the two areas are to some considerable extent inter-dependent and the same is true of both in their relationship with Britain. It is, therefore, desirable that any new arrangements for Northern Ireland should, whilst meeting the wishes of Northern Ireland and Great Britain, be so far as possible acceptable to and accepted by the Republic of Ireland, which from 1 January 1973 will share the rights and obligations of membership of the European Communities. It remains the view of the United Kingdom Government that it is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide what should be their relationship with the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland; and that it should not be impossible to devise measures which will meet the best interests of all three. Such measures would seek to secure the acceptance, in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic, of the present status of Northern Ireland and of the possibility - which would have to be compatible with the principle of consent - of subsequent change in that status; to make possible effective consultation and co-operation

in Ireland, for the benefit of North and South alike; and to provide a firm basis for concerted governmental and community action against those terrorist organisations which represent a threat to free democratic institutions in Ireland as a whole".

22. A consequence of this acceptance of Dublin's role was that the Irish Government participated in the discussions at Sunningdale from 6-9 December 1973 and was a party to the Agreed Communique issued jointly by the Irish and British Governments and the parties involved in the Northern Ireland Executive (designate).

23. In July 1980 the British Government Paper on Proposals for Further Discussion (Atkins Green Paper) stated:-

"It is in the interests of both communities to recognise and to develop the links that exist between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland". (paragraph 20).

24. The agreed communiques of the meetings between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister on 8 December 1980 and 6 November 1981 stated:-

"The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed that the economic, social and political interests of the peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic are inextricably linked, but that the full development of these links has been put under strain by division and dissent in Northern Ireland. In that context, they accepted the need to bring forward policies and proposals to achieve peace, reconciliation and stability; and to improve relations between the peoples of the two countries-

They considered that the best prospect of attaining these objectives was the further development of the unique relationship between the two countries.

They accordingly decided to devote their next meeting in London during the coming year to special consideration of the totality of relationships within these islands".

(8 December 1980)

"The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister agreed on the need for efforts to diminish the divisions between the two sections of the community in Northern Ireland and to reconcile the two major traditions that exist in the two parts of Ireland".

(6 November 1981)

25. The British Government White Paper of April 1982 stated:-

"Relations between both sides of the Northern Ireland

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community inevitably influence, and are affected by, relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland".

26. This element appears to have given way to a realisation that to suggest that the problem of Northern Ireland is no business of the Irish Government would be to ignore the fundamental nature of the conflict and to fail to accept the practical consequences of the fact that each part of the island of Ireland is vitally affected by what happens in the other part.

Determination not to give in to Violence

27. The campaigns of violence waged since 1970 have clouded the basic issues by introducing an element which, as among constitutional nationalists in Ireland, has given rise to feelings of abhorrence in Britain. This has led, to a determination not to give in to terrorism. There may also have been some alienation of sympathy or acceptance for the objective of Irish unity which constitutional nationalists wish to achieve by peaceful means and by agreement. Opinion polls have demonstrated that in their resolution not to take steps that could be seen as yielding to violence or to those who support it, British Governments and Ministers reflect a strongly-held view among the British public.

28. This element has at time led the British Government at times to view the problem primarily in security terms. But even in the narrow focus of security, it is inescapable that security policy cannot succeed unless wholehearted cross-community support for the institutions of law and order is forthcoming. The British now seem to accept that constitutional nationalists are unequivocally opposed to violence and that successive Governments in the South have taken and are taking all possible steps to prevent it and to bring those responsible to justice.

*See this and
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system later.*

Interest in amintaining Britain's international prestige and reputation.

29. There is some evidence that British interest in maintaining a good international reputation and in promoting an international perception that they are dealing with the problem in a reasonable and equitable manner has played a part in prompting some British policy initiatives. [However, in one major instance - the hunger strikes in 1981 and 1982 - this factor took second place to other elements influencing British poilicy.]

add. ?

30. In general, the troubles in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years and the continuing instability and violence do nothing to promote the image of good government which the British would wish to see accepted internationally. In addition, Britain's reputation has suffered on various occasions, related to specific incidents or revelations e.g. the discrimination established by official British enquiries at the beginning of the '70's, the abuses that led to the European Court of Human Rights finding that prisoners had been subject to inhuman and degrading

treatment, the later abuses highlighted by Amnesty International and confirmed by the Bennett Report, the international perception of the shootings in Derry on 30 January, 1972.

31. British sensitivity has been particularly acute about attitudes and adverse publicity in the United States where Presidents and leading members of Congress have expressed their concern.

The British have also shown themselves to be sensitive to efforts within the European Community to understand the conflict, as exemplified by resolutions and reports in and for the European Parliament, perhaps most notably resolutions on the hunger-strikes and the resolution that led to the current preparation of a report by the Danish Liberal, Mr. Niels Haagerup. The Northern situation has also provided the Soviet Union and its allies with material with which to counter and deflect British and Western accusations, in international fora, of breaches of human right in the Eastern bloc.

Residual unionism; lack of recognition of separate Irish identity; a kith and kin attachment.

32. These strands of opinion exist in Britain and in the British establishment but appear to be of relatively limited significance. The British imperialist feeling that was strong in the second half of the last century and remained a potent factor up to the 1920's in regard to Ireland has declined to such an extent as to near insignificance in normal times. Traditional Unionist sentiment has declined since World War II with the ending of Northern Ireland's imperial contribution, the diminished links to senior echelons of the British armed forces, the break in formal links between the Conservative and Official Unionist parties, changing political values within Britain and alienation in Britain at violence in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, residual Unionism continues to have some strength. The feeling that the unionists of Northern Ireland were kith and kin may have had a somewhat broader base than political Unionism in the past although perhaps never very widespread. Such feeling appears to have dissipated considerably in the light of the factors to which reference has been made and particularly as violence leads many British people to lump all Irish people together with the view that "one lot is as bad as the other".

33. There is also an element in British attitudes, stemming from history and from the common language and intermingling of population that the Irish identity is no more distinctive than that of the Scots or Welsh. This may contribute to some lack of appreciation of the wish of Irish nationalists, North and South, to foster a separate political and cultural identity, while also sharing many cultural and other links with people in the neighbouring island.
34. The concentration of debate in recent years on the situation within the Northern Ireland entity has probably contributed to a failure in Britain to appreciate how the problem is seen by Irish nationalists in the perspective of Irish history in which Ireland was, over the centuries, regarded and treated as a cultural and, later, political and administrative unit; and a corresponding lack of understanding of how a partitioned Ireland appears as an aberration and Northern Ireland as an artificial entity. *creation*
35. Another manifestation of this is a failure to understand the conflict of identity in Northern Ireland or to acknowledge British responsibility for what has been happening there. Without an understanding of the dual identity aspect, politically motivated violence and the terms in which political debate is conducted in Northern Ireland become incomprehensible. From this incomprehension, it is but a short step to the perception of the people in Northern Ireland as warring tribes. At the level of the establishment this is seen as giving rise to a duty to play a U.N.-type role to prevent the Irish from massacring each other. This leads to a concentration on security dimensions of the problem, at the expense of efforts to tackle the underlying problem of conflict of rights and identities.

Lack of understanding of fundamental differences between politics in Britain and in Northern Ireland.

36. There is evidence that some British politicians tend to apply to the Northern Ireland problem their own experience of a normal political context where there is basic consensus about the legitimacy of the State and where political differences between parties are primarily concerned with economic issues, across a classical left-right divide. In the Conservative Party, this attitude translates into a view that the democratic norm of majority rule, as operated under the Westminster political system, must operate in Northern Ireland. References to the enduring minority position of the Conservatives in Co. Durham betray a failure to appreciate that the political parties representing Northern Ireland nationalists lack opportunities for exercise of

meaningful power or the normal alternation of parties, at any level of government. This reality and the corresponding isolation of up to 40% of the population of the North from the administration of the area were referred to in the British Green Paper of October, 1972 as "a fundamental defect at the heart of the system". Yet there has been a failure to appreciate and act on the full implications of that recognition.

37. In the British Labour Party, the assumption that British experience and political categories must also apply in Northern Ireland has most frequently been reflected in the view that priority in policy must be given to the economic development of the North which is seen as a panacea for the area's ills. The proponents of this view were unsuccessful in imposing it as the principal determinant of the Party's present policy on the North but it remains a strong factor in all sections of the party.

Interest in a friendly and stable relationship with the Republic

38. Britain's interest in friendly and stable relations with the Republic is a factor that weighs in British thinking. The Republic is a fellow member state of the European Community; the size of its economy has grown in recent years and it remains a very important market for Britain; there are close human links between the Republic and Britain reflected in family ties, voting rights, a common travel area, significant interchange of residence; cultural links are also close e.g. media, publishing, sports etc. Because of such interdependence Britain has an interest in ensuring that perennial Irish dissatisfaction with the present situation is eliminated as a consequence of a just and lasting settlement acceptable to public opinion in both Ireland and Britain.

(b) Economic

Wish to protect British economic interests and to minimise financial costs.

39. There has been a total change in the position that obtained up to the late 1960's, when Northern Ireland was relatively successful in economic terms and the financial burden on Britain was much less than it is now as a result of the mounting costs since the onset of the trouble in 1969. (See Forum report on "The Cost of Violence arising from the Northern Ireland Situation since 1969", Dublin, November 1983). Apart from the heavy costs of security and measures to offset the effects of violence, there are other elements in the heavy British financial burden in the North. The British subvention now amounts to

over IR£1,600 million annually. Significant amounts are spent on industrial development efforts. High dependency ratios and an average unemployment rate in the North of 21 per cent entail a costly demand for social services and a significant flow of social transfer payments. Against these a number of possible positive economic interests could be mentioned e.g. a market of 1.5m. people closely integrated with the UK economy.

40. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that during recent years, when British tax receipts were strongly boosted by North Sea oil revenues, concern to minimise financial costs has not been a compelling element in conditioning the British position.

(c) Strategic

Interest in retaining benefits to British defence of its presence in Northern Ireland.

41. Direct authoritative evidence as to the importance the British themselves now attach to the strategic, defence argument for staying in Northern Ireland is not available. It is difficult to make a fully informed judgement on the matter. There is ample evidence as to the importance Britain attached to Ireland in the past in connection with her defence, up to and after the Second World War. It is not clear how much significance the British attach in modern conditions to having a presence and facilities in Northern Ireland. Inferences can be drawn from information about British and NATO strategic approaches but it is difficult to be sure how valid are such inferences. When a question on this matter was put to Sir John Biggs-Davison at the Forum, he said, inter alia, that "the strategic factors may well have changed since (1949) but the fact remains that the only territory in the island of Ireland which is available to NATO powers is Northern Ireland. That is a fact. Whether there would be any change in thinking if the Republic became an allied power, I do not know".

42. Reference has previously been made to the summary of the "United Kingdom interest" in Northern Ireland in paragraphs 74-75 of the 1972 British Green Paper, The Future of Northern Ireland. The third of three considerations mentioned was that Northern Ireland should not offer a base for any external threat to the security of the United Kingdom.
43. It has been a historical concern of Britain to ensure that an assault on her defences through Ireland was denied so that the main effort could be directed against any threat from mainland Europe. That consideration doubtless still applies but may be more relevant to the element in the British position which fears destabilisation of the North. In this century, a second major concern of the British has been to have access to particular facilities of benefit for specific types of warfare and for protection against specific types of threat to security, mainly submarines, in the two World Wars. This concern was reflected in the negotiations on the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 and again in Anglo-Irish negotiations in 1938 and 1940.
44. When NATO was founded, after World War II and Ireland did not join, it is on record that NATO considered that Ireland's membership was not essential because of the availability of Northern Ireland. A British Admiralty paper prepared in 1947/48 in the course of this assessment, stated that British withdrawal from the North was strategically inconceivable. Following the declaration of the Republic of Ireland in 1949, the same view was recorded by the British Cabinet Secretary and by the Commonwealth Office.
45. To-day, the possible British strategic interest in retaining a presence in Northern Ireland can be considered under two headings:-
- (i) they might consider that they could ensure that neither Northern Ireland nor Ireland as a whole could be used as a base or route in an external attack on Britain or leave a gap in its warning and defence systems; and
 - (ii) they may believe that there would be strategic or military value to Britain and NATO in having the use of facilities and territory in Northern Ireland.
- in a New Ireland
- In regard to (i) they may believe that a policy of neutrality and/or the defence/warning capability of the Republic or of a new Ireland would prove inadequate to ensure denial of the use of Ireland or the seas and skies well to the west of it as a source/route for an attack on Britain.

In regard to (ii) it might be thought that with so much emphasis on nuclear warfare, the strategic relevance of the North would by now have completely disappeared. This would be going too far as there are new features of the strategic situation which may mean that the area retains strategic relevance. However, the question arises, from the limited deployment of British defence facilities in the North and their geographical location, whether the areas possesses any unique significance, over and above the north and west coasts of Britain itself.