

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2015/51/1371
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	20 January 1985
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	6 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
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Since the Anglo-Irish Summit last November it seems that relations with Britain have been under strain on several fronts. Over the Christmas break there was extensive criticism of Britains use of the prevention of terrorism act which many Irish people living in Britain say is racist. While this week the Government has informed Mrs. Thatcher's Government of its grave concern at the UDRs opening fire on a car at a check-point in West Belfast, an incident at which a 17 year old youth was killed. This week-end our Northern correspondent Jim Dougal has been discussing both these issues with the Northern Secretary Douglas Hurd. But first the Norths political future. He asked Mr. Hurd what his junior Minister Chris Patton meant when he said that if the Norths politicians don't come to some conclusion in the near future the British Government would have to do so themselves.

Mr. Hurd: What that means is that we are entering this period when the parties I hope will be discussing these things all over again and maybe they will reach agreement, obviously that is very much the best answer. Maybe they won't reach agreement but out of those discussions will emerge ideas which we the British Government, and the British Parliament could take up and carry through even if they weren't the result of full agreement that is to say we are the sovereign Government we do have a responsibility and it may be, we aren't at this point yet, but it may be that proposals may emerge which we think will get wide spread acceptance even if the immediate response of some of the party leaders is not to accept.

Mr. Dougal: Secretary of State on this programme a short time ago Cardinal O'Fiach said that he despaired of there every being a solution to the Northern Ireland problem while Mrs. Thatcher is Prime Minister because the Northern Ireland problem was so low down on her list of priorities. How low down on the Prime Ministers list of priorities is the problem?

Mr. Hurd: I was surprised that His Eminence said that because in fact the Prime Minister spends a lot of time thinking, talking, listening about Northern Ireland because she certainly accepts that this is one of the really grave problems which confront the Government of which she is the head and we have certainly seen that this week, it just happens that I have walked across the gravel to No. 10 really quite often this last week to discuss with her this aspect or another and thats quite normal.

Mr. Dougal: When the ~~next~~ Anglo-Irish Summit takes place it's been suggested as well that the British Government will have concrete proposals to make, will you?

Mr. Hurd: We are certainly not simply going to sit back and expect the Irish side to do all the thinking for us, I don't think that would be fair. There has been a pause since the Summit at Checkers and the events which followed that but I hope that very soon now the channel will re-open in a sense that serious work will be done in that UK/Irish channel leading up to the next Summit on which the two Government leaders agreed and we certainly mean to put ideas into that channel and I expect the Irish side will too.

Mr. Dougal: Some of the things that have been suggested for example is that the British would like to see the setting up of the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Council, Parliamentary tier should I say and perhaps some kind of joint security group. Is it possible that you would be putting forward those ideas?

Mr. Hurd: I'm a little hesitant about the parliamentary tier not because its a bad idea but because I think it really need enthusiasm from the parliaments. It's not sometime that Government can decide on and I think the members of both Parliaments UK and the Dail need really to think among themselves. Is this just going to be another place where we meet pleasantly or is this parliamentary tier is this something which could really help things forward? Are we parliamentarians really prepared to invest time and effort in it and if the answer to that question is yes then I think it could be a good thing but they have to, the parliamentarian, have to do a little more work on this than they have. The joint security commission its a familiar idea it has been in several pamphlets and so on obviously security cooperation is something that both Governments need it's important to the Government both for the South of the Republic and of the North, quite how you do it is something which ought always to be discussed. I quite understand the feeling which has been expressed in the past from the Irish side in public that they are not interested in

some new arrangement which was wholly confined to security. They have explained that in public and we are clear about that and obviously any ideas which we put forward have to take account of that view, while obviously we don't give up our thought that it's in the interest of people living both sides of the border that there should be effective security cooperation.

Mr. Dougal: Well during the week Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Peter Barry was highly critical of the UDR after the shooting of the young boy at the UDR check-point. Indeed he expressed some disbelief that the UDR were on duty on the fringes of Catholic nationalist areas in West Belfast, how did you react to that?

Mr. Hurd: I think it might have been a little wiser to wait a little longer but it's an expression of view which is understandable, which was reflected in a certain comment here and I was interested in it and as I said just now I don't think it's sensible for me to fly off the handle and say that Mr. Barry has no right to say these things. I noticed on an earlier occasion talking about the prevention of terrorism act in the way that is operated the other side of the water in England that Mr. Barry was under very strong pressure to attack the British Government for the way it was handling it and he resisted that and measured his words very carefully, so I think I would always pay attention to what the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic regardless of individuals said on these matters and I hope that they would pay attention to what members of the British Government said.

Mr. Dougal: Could I just make the point that he made and he said "that many nationalists see the UDR as an armed instrument of domination of their community by the majority community, that that is in fact the way a large number of nationalists see that particular regiment". Do you accept that?

Mr. Hurd: No. Of course I don't accept that. Otherwise if I accepted that the UDR day's would be clearly numbered and I think the UDR does a job which is indispensable. This is an example of the

circular argument. The UDR, <sup>and</sup> as Secretary of State, I, would very much welcome a return to the position where there were many more Catholics inside the UDR and it will be admirable if Catholics could be encouraged to join the UDR it is partly because the proportion is now really rather low, that people are able to say "oh but it is simply sectarian". It isn't sectarian. It is a highly disciplined force which like all forces may occasionally make mistakes and when that happens then those mistakes have to be very carefully and thoroughly investigated but I wouldn't accept the generalised accusation against the UDR and nor I think would anyone who had experience of actually seeing how the UDR is commanded and the spirit of the overwhelming majority of those who serve in it.

Mr. Dougal: But most nationalists see the UDR on duty, they see them on the streets, they see them as an almost exclusively Protestant force and they distrust and fear them, do you not accept that?

Mr. Hurd: I accept that this is a feeling of which I am frequently told and the statement you mentioned from Peter Barry is just the latest example but if that actually is a misapprehension then the answer is not to abolish the UDR and open a great gap in the means by which Governments in this province can assure the liberties of the citizens to be free of terrorism. The answer is not to abolish it but to find ways of increasing understanding about it and to make sure that the UDR itself operates in a fully disciplined manner, in a way which shows people that it is serving the whole community.

Mr. Dougal: What role do you see therefore in this restructuring, if you like, and in the future development of politics here for the Irish Government?

Mr. Hurd: I see the Irish Government free to articulate views which I hope will be expressed in the interests of the whole of Northern Ireland and not just on behalf of part of the people and I see that it will always be sensible for the people running the province here to listen carefully to those views.

Now that happens to some extent now, rather sporadically. We discussed some of the ways in which it happens, if they could be made rather more methodically, rather more methodical, then I think those views might carry a greater weight and I think this is an area where serious work needs to be done within the constraints which have emerged from recent discussions.

Mr. Dougal: Could there be a machinery for that?

Mr. Hurd: Well of course there could be machinery for that but exactly what it is and what you call it and how it works and what its limits are, that is where I think the work needs to be done.

Mr. Dougal: Could I ask you one very final question and I know it's not exactly your area but the Prevention of Terrorism Act has come in for severe criticism and you mentioned it during the interview, severe criticism over the past few weeks particularly, how would you answer people who say that it is used indiscriminately against the Irish, that it's racist and that it's used for trawling?

Mr. Hurd: It can't be used for trawling under the law and it would be very dangerous if the police did that they would find themselves in difficulty very quickly, but we are dealing with a ruthless and sophisticated terrorist enemy and parliament in Britain and in many other countries have given Government exceptional powers to deal with that. I think this is overwhelmingly accepted that such powers are necessary and when I was questioned about this in the House of Commons the other day by a Labour member I tried to say "look for heaven's sake, hold your horses, you are talking about allegations and incidents about which you simply don't know the facts, you don't know what has been going on, you don't know what the police have been trying to prevent in the way of atrocity" and so I think that this is an area where frothy and immediate comment is particularly wide of the mark. It's an area in which I don't think my colleagues in Government or I need to be defensive because I think most people most Irishmen, most people across the world, most Americans for example are very conscious now of terrorism, and there is an Irish aspect to it, there is an Arab aspect to it

there is a Basque aspect to it and it is not confined of course to the problems of this island. Its a world phenomen which is a fearful one and I don't think we need be at all defensive about exceptional powers which many Governments have taken to deal with it.

cc,

PSM

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Mr Lullin

Mr Whelan

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