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31

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CONFIDENTIAL

Possible UN Role in solution to Northern Ireland Problem

1. The question of a possible role for the UN in Northern Ireland must be seen against the background not only of the problems of Northern Ireland but also of the structures of the UN, the political realities which govern its decisions and the limits to its resources.
2. Under Article 24 of the UN Charter, the UN Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council is composed of five permanent members (USA, USSR, China, France and UK) and ten other members who are elected periodically. Except on procedural questions, the Security Council can take action only with the agreement of all the permanent members and therefore could not take any action in relation to Northern Ireland if Britain (or indeed any other permanent member) were opposed. Any role for the UN in Northern Ireland would mean a dilution of British responsibilities there, and has always been opposed by Britain. There is no reason to anticipate any change in this British attitude in the foreseeable future, or indeed unless and until Northern Ireland became ungovernable within present structures, or Britain decided to withdraw. Even on the unlikely hypothesis of British support for UN intervention, active lobbying by Britain and Ireland in favour of a proposal for such intervention would probably be necessary to ensure its success. However, any such proposal might still meet with the opposition of one or more permanent members of the Security Council for any of a number of reasons (e.g. financial, a desire to embarrass Britain or a possible insistence on the part of the USSR or China on an unacceptable form of intervention).
3. ^{On a few occasions} ~~It is formally possible~~ for the UN General Assembly ^{has} ~~to take action~~ in situations where the Security Council failed to agree but the limited precedents for such a course, ^{more of them recent,} ~~and the structural difficulties which would result,~~ virtually rule out the possibility of UN intervention in Northern Ireland developing in such a manner.
4. Abstracting from the difficulties within the UN which would have to be overcome in order to permit a UN role in Northern Ireland, there are a number of possible forms which that role could take on the basis of the precedents of the principal forms which UN intervention has taken in other

trouble spots. The possible forms of UN intervention might be listed as follows:- mediation and conciliation commissions; small scale armed intervention; a system of guarantees through a subcommittee or other organs of the General Assembly, possibly with observers stationed in Northern Ireland; full UN Trusteeship; or UN peace-keeping force In present circumstances, it is not clear what contribution UN intervention in any of these forms would make towards solving the problems of Northern Ireland. Such intervention seem more appropriate to a state of widespread fighting between paramilitary bodies amounting to civil war and with clear-cut territorial divisions. There is no evidence to suggest that UN intervention would contribute to a solution to the underlying political problems of Northern Ireland, the failure of the majority and minority there to come to understand and accommodate each other and live together in peace and harmony. Indeed, on the basis of UN involvement elsewhere, there is reason to believe that UN intervention in the North would tend to freeze the situation there rather than effectively resolve the basic causes of conflict.

5. There have been no recent policy statements by the Government on the question of a possible UN role. Accordingly, it is suggested that while it is not considered that an approach now to the United Nations would be helpful in achieving peace and stability in Northern Ireland, it will be necessary to keep the question of a possible future role there for the organisation under review. It would seem undesirable to say explicitly that the factor most liable to give rise to a change in this evaluation would be a sudden British withdrawal, associated with a widespread breakdown of law and order.

1 March, 1978