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Radio Ulster "Talk Back" Programme - 28/4/87

Interviewer: Now we had the meeting last night between the Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the GOC and there is talk of a reassessment of the security affair, their procedures. What more can be done to tighten up security to prevent the kind of things we've seen in the recent days?

Mr. Maginnis: Well first of all let me say I have very little hope for that meeting last night. We've had these emergency meetings before and it usually results in the military commander wanting to claw on to himself more responsibility for various areas within the province and the Chief Constable saying well, of course, we can't have that, the RUC must have primacy and I believe that there could be a compromise between the two. I feel that the army should in fact have responsibility for frontier security and in order to do that it may be that they need a mile, two miles in some places, three miles off a corridor where they do have primacy and where the RUC act in support, otherwise the RUC should have primacy internally in Northern Ireland but really at the end of the day, the Secretary of State, who has no real feel for the security situation, will ask the Secretary of State for Defence for another battalion, it will be brought over for a short while, we'll see a higher profile in the streets, the IRA don't need to compete with that because they will know that within another six weeks, that battalion will be withdrawn and it will be just more of the same.

Interviewer: Are you saying that the Secretary of State ought now to adopt what I might determine as a frontier philosophy so far as security is concerned?

Mr. Maginnis: Absolutely. He should have done this seventeen years ago, it's amazing the extent to which we find certain suggestions which we have made over the years, being adopted piecemeal rather than being adopted as a strategy and developed for the purpose of saving life and reducing terrorism within the province as a whole. If we could prevent the movement or stifle, to some extent, the movement of arms and explosives, across the frontier internally into Northern Ireland then we

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would be going some way to derive benefit from the numerous finds of arms and explosives which the RUC and other security forces have made over the years.

Interviewer: Isn't it implicit in that though that the security forces within Northern Ireland would be essentially going it alone, that there would be no need for co-operation with the Garda Siochana or the Irish Army.

Mr. Maginnis: Well, I don't agree. I think that two civilised states should have normal co-operation on a professional basis. What is stifling that sort of development along those lines is the pre-requisite by the Government of the Irish Republic that the two police forces have to act within some sort of political security committee and that politicians have got to have an oversight of operational matters and that really was the outcome of the decision that was made last Wednesday, at the meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference.

Interviewer: Would you say, and I would presume you would say, that the murder, the brutal murder of Lord Justice Gibson and his wife was ample evidence that cross-border security co-operation is not as good as it should be.

Mr. Maginnis: I don't have to look at the murder of Judge Gibson and Lady Gibson, what in fact one can look at is the reassurances that we've had over fifteen years while the Westminster Government has had sole responsibility for security, when they have assured us that the best of co-operation, both at Governmental and at security force level, is in place between the Irish Republic and the forces in Northern Ireland and yet, on the 15th November 1985 they told us they had to have an International Treaty in order to improve on what was supposed to be virtually perfect and then last Wednesday, Brian Lenihan can say but you know the co-operation really hasn't started. It's now going to start because you've got a Fianna Fail Government in power. It's such a nonsense. I wonder did Tom King and Nick Scott not recognise what obviously Brian Lenihan recognised,

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that security was a facade, it wasn't a reality, or security co-operation wasn't a reality.

Interviewer: Could I just put to you finally a point that was made in recent days by Sean Farren of the SDLP on the matter of security, and he didn't rule out the possibility that a devolved administration here could have responsibility for security, you, presumably, would say not only could but should.

Mr. Maginnis: Indeed. I would totally agree with Sean Farren and I think there is an increasing recognition across the board that we are not going to find English Ministers giving the sort of commitment that is required to the security difficulties which we face, that it really will depend in the final analysis on having security in our own hands.

Interviewer: O.K. Ken Maginnis, we'll leave it there because sitting beside you in London is, I hope, the Ulster Unionist party's Chief Executive, Frank Millar, the man behind the new publicity campaign which Unionists launched in London this morning to explain their opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to highlight the difficulties for people living in Northern Ireland. Today they have taken a full page advertisement in the Times newspaper which shows a picture of a terrorist with an armalite rifle and below it the caption "This is not Democracy". That advertisement, I understand, could have cost anything up to £15,000. It is said to be published by Belfast City Council on behalf of the ratepayers. This morning Unionists also had a working breakfast with the national newspaper leader writers in London and their campaign is set to continue for the next month. Frank Millar, it may seem odd to some people that you are carrying the message to Britain, but you are consistently refusing to have talks with the British Prime Minister.

Mr. Millar: No, I don't think so. Clearly we have an important message to get across and it isn't a message really just about a political crisis which has endured for 16 or 18

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months. I think most Ulster people have been expecting this kind of campaign in their name and on their behalf for the best part of 20 years.

Interviewer: Does the imminence of a British general election lend impulsion to the campaign?

Mr. Millar: I think it certainly is timely. We could not have known that there would be such a tragic escalation in the security crisis in the Province, for example. There is no doubt whatever, it's an ill wind, but there is no doubt whatever that this morning was a very appropriate moment to convey through the powerful medium of the London Times, the message that we did. I think the same will be judged to be true of the remainder of the advertising campaign in the course of the week and the campaign in terms of regional visits, for example, will take us through to the later part of May. It will see, amongst other things, a Unionist presence in Scotland to coincide with the Scottish Conservative Party Conference.

Interviewer: There were voices at the debate in which there was minimal Unionist representation yesterday, or in fact it wasn't a debate, it was a response to a Government statement on the killings, voices saying "well look, if Unionists have a message, why not deliver that message where it should be delivered and that is at Westminster".

Mr. Millar: Well, the reality for Unionist Members of Parliament is that they have been almost marginalised out of existence, indeed the nature of the proceedings yesterday in the House of Commons, reinforced rather than diminished the argument that they should be extremely reluctant about participation there. The message needs to be got across to the British public and the message is that there is a violation of accepted democratic practice in a part of the United Kingdom, that the gun, contrary to the strong anti-terrorist stance of Mrs. Thatcher, that the gun has been seen increasingly to be a determining factor in the affairs of a Province of the United

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Kingdom, that there is a denial of fundamental British rights in what is still ostensibly a part of the United Kingdom. That message is long overdue and I think that we have come up with some pretty powerful means which will become apparent over the week to get that message across.

Interviewer: Could I put to you the point that I have put to Ken Maginnis and he appeared to welcome it, that comment from Sean Farren, a prominent member of the SDLP, that a devolved administration in Northern Ireland could have responsibility for security, and I understand that was in response to something he understood you to have said. Do you think that that kind of attitude by a senior member of the SDLP in some way, in some small way, opens the door for meaningful dialogue between the two sides in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Millar: Well, I suppose I'd better be careful Barry, because there are ever those sitting listening to your programme who suspect me of an overwhelming desire to portray my own interests in the interests of my Community, but you're right, I would interpret Mr. Farren's response as being geared indeed to comments that I made on your programme and subsequently, in the Belfast News Letter. It is, what I was attempting to open up on the security issue was what is devolvable. You see this theory has been that we could devolve away the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I have been attempting over a period of months to indicate that that isn't so. That the Agreement itself specifies that certain very important matters, namely matters of security and the administration of justice, would, in any event, remain within the purview of the Anglo-Irish Conference. Now, if we are moving, and I don't want to over-estimate it and I certainly don't want to damage whatever slight prospect there is, if we are moving to the point where powers which were, in any event, to remain with an Anglo-Irish Conference are to be placed on the agenda of what may be devolved in Northern Ireland, then I think that constitutes movement and it would be extremely imprudent of the Unionist, whose overwhelming concern is security, to close the door upon it.

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Interviewer: O.K. Frank Millar, we must leave it there. Thank you very much indeed, both yourself and Ken Maginnis, for joining us from London. Mr. Seamus Mallon joins me on the line now. Seamus Mallon, a point I put to Ken Maginnis, which I think I ought to put to you, to give you the opportunity of reply, isn't the murder of Lord Justice Gibson and his wife ample evidence that the security co-operation, which has been promised now for 18 months under the Anglo-Irish Accord, is just not materialising.

Mr. Mallon: Well, I think that's much too simplistic. There is evidence that in effect, there was a lapse and the evidence points to the fact that that lapse took place North of the border. I don't want to be one of the people who starts to castigate the RUC in relation to this. They had four members of the force blown up on that exact same spot and I can fully sympathise with their position that they do not want to be sitting for possibly an indefinite period at that exact place, sitting there is sitting ducks for this type of bombing activity. So whatever else you may say about this whole incident, and much has been said, I think that one must realise that whatever lapse took place, did take place North of the border. But could I widen out the whole consideration about this and look at it this way. I can see no good reason why, if the Garda Siochana are escorting someone from the Republic of Ireland, why they should not continue to escort them right to their destination wherever it may be in the North of Ireland.

Interviewer: And vice-versa.

Mr. Mallon: That way, it cuts out this type of stop situation. It cuts out a changeover and cuts out the possibility of this type of attack and of course, vice-versa should apply as well. That if someone is being escorted into the Republic of Ireland, I see no reason why that cannot be done by the RUC, because that seems to be the only way in which it prevents giving to the Provision IRA, and other people who blow people up, giving them this type of target.

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Interviewer: I can hear voices being raised in alarm in Dublin by that suggestion that armed RUC men, because after all if they are to provide adequate security they will have to be armed, that armed RUC men will be allowed as of right to enter and to violate, as it were, the sovereignty of the Republic.

Mr. Mallon: I can remember Margaret Thatcher coming to the Republic of Ireland. I wonder would anybody be convinced by the argument that her Special Branch advisers were not armed when they were escorting her into the Republic of Ireland and out of it. I remember President Reagan coming to the Republic of Ireland and it was well known that his security advisers actually took over the whole operation, they were the security forces of another country and I think in the present circumstances there is a big argument for extending cross-border co-operation in this way because by extending it in this way, it is in effect realising that the problem is not just a problem of the North of Ireland, it is not just a problem of the North of Ireland, it is a problem in the whole of the island and, I think, should be dealt with in that way.

Interviewer: And I think, Seamus Mallon, your memory is also long enough to remember the rows that there were when there were accidental cross-border incursions by British Army and RUC. Those rows went as far as Dail Eireann. Surely this similar attitude will prevail.

Mr. Mallon: No, I think you are talking about two different things. You're not comparing like with like at all. And I mean there were very few accidental incursions into the Republic of Ireland, those were fairly well planned and I think everyone knows that. We are talking about something which would be formalised between the two Governments, between the two police services and something which to me makes sense and it if makes sense and it if saves lives, then it's worth doing.

Interviewer: Am I right in interpreting what you said in your speech in the House of Commons yesterday that you do not want to see some kind of knee jerk reaction on the security front in Northern Ireland as a result of the Gibson killing.

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Mr. Mallon: That is quite right. I think one thing the Provisional IRA want at the present moment of time is an increase in punitive, a punitive approach from the British Government here in Northern Ireland. They have been seeking that actually since the Brighton bombing. What they are terribly keen to get is an increase in the security situation, more punitive approach so that they then can use it for propaganda reasons. And I made my remarks against this background. We already have got the Emergency Provisions Bill, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, we have got non-jury courts, we have got a very heavy army presence, we have got armed police in its strength, we have got the operations of MI5 and MI6 in the North of Ireland and we've had all of those things for this past 16 years. Now if that proves anything, it proves this, that no matter how much you have in absolute security terms that it is not going to provide a solution because if it was capable of doing that it would have done so long ago. I maintain the position that there is no such thing as absolute security, there is no such thing as a security solution and that we must be looking at ways in which we are able to win the battle for the hearts and minds of people, rather than looking for what is quite ephemeral and that is this notion that by some new security measures, you can, somehow or another, change the situation.

Interviewer: O.K. well let's look at hearts and minds. And could I ask you to draw together for me some of the disparate straws in the wind that there have been in recent days, we have had Harry West on this programme urging the Unionists to talk to Mrs. Thatcher, we have had Sean Farren of your own party suggesting that a devolved administration here could have responsibility for security, we have had John McMichael of the UDA saying that the time has come to get around the table and start talking about some form of administration here. How do you interpret all those straws. I mean, is, as I've suggested, to Ken Maginnis and to Frank Millar, is the door being gradually pushed open to allow talks to begin?

Mr. Mallon: I would hope so. I think one of the things that

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may come out of these terrible tragedies is that people are at long last realising that unless there is positive dialogue and that we get all sections of the Community in the North of Ireland at least thinking in the same direction then that the way is left open for the people who want to bomb and shoot their way to a solution.

Interviewer: What do you see as the potential, I know we're speculating here, but what do you see as the potential timescale within which profitable talks could take place between yourself and the Unionist party.

Mr. Mallon: It is never too late to talk, and on the other hand it is never too early to talk. My view is that dialogue, proper dialogue, and I mean dialogue which is geared to go somewhere and to produce results, should take place as soon as humanly possible. I realise now that that will not happen until after the next election, but I think immediately after the next election there should be the structure set up for that type of constructive dialogue. I don't mean the waffly type of sanctimonious stuff that we've had in the past, I don't mean that type of unthinking reference to dialogue as if dialogue of itself is going to stop the violence, it won't and could I just divert for a moment and make this point, it doesn't matter who has responsibility for security in the North of Ireland, whether it is the British Government, whether it may be the British and Irish Governments jointly, whether it may be a devolved administration, it doesn't really matter who's in charge of it. You don't stop the type of thing that we have seen in Newcastle, in Portrush, in Pomeroy, at Kileen and in various places throughout the North of Ireland unless you get to the root of the problem and the root of that problem is not essentially a security problem because the security measures simply cannot cure it, the root of that problem is a political problem and we must get to the root of that political problem, if we're going to cure this terrible, and stop this terrible spiral of violence which, I suppose, is revolting everybody in the North of Ireland and South of it as well.

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Interviewer: And do you think there is a danger that as a result of last night's meeting between the Secretary of State, the GOC and the Chief Constable that any moves that will come from that will be moves that will be directed more towards the symptoms of the malaise, as you would put it, than the malaise itself.

Mr. Mallon: Yes, I'm afraid of a knee jerk reaction. I listened with great sadness, I think, to Roy Mason in the House of Commons yesterday encouraging the Secretary of State to involve himself in more punitive measures. Roy Mason was the man who should know that it failed, he was the person who tried it and left us a terrible legacy. I have seen the way in which, and I can understand Unionist politicians feeling very, very annoyed about things, and I can understand them taking the easy way out and calling for more security measures. I would hope the Secretary of State has enough strength and enough wisdom to stand out firmly against that and realise that if he is going to solve this problem, along with the rest of us, because he can't do it on his own, then he must get to grips with the problem itself, rather than go through the motions of trying to please people by placing in, as I do possible may happen, more troops, putting up more of a show along the border areas, making more presence on the streets to try and convince people that something is happening, I think we want the substance now and not shadow, and the substance in my view is getting into the roots of the Community and letting, and trying to get the Community to act in concert with the political administration whatever it may be, to end this awful spiral of violence.

Interviewer: O.K. Seamus Mallon, let's leave it there.