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IRELAND



Reference Code: 2005/7/662

Title: Report on British Army activities in Northern Ireland, included in the Taoiseach's [Liam Cosgrave] brief for talks in London on 11 and 12 September, 1974.

Creation Date(s): [September, 1974]

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 3 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

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British Army activities in Northern Ireland

In mid-August the Ambassador in London was instructed to convey to Mr. Wilson the Government's concern at the activities of the British Army in Northern Ireland which has given rise to considerable disquiet and resentment on the part of the minority there.

There have been many complaints from responsible people regarding the behaviour of the Army in general. Bishop Daly of Derry, for instance, spoke of their "intimidation and terror tactics" on 4 August 1974. In addition complaints have been made regarding the behaviour of certain specific regiments such as the Black Watch in West Belfast, the Grenadier Guards in the Creggan Estate and the Royal Marine Commandos in Newry. The behaviour of the latter meant that there was a wide measure of support for the IRA in Newry when they confronted the Army on the issue of the control of street lighting in Newry.

There have been many individual allegations of harassment which include threats to kill if information is not provided, intimidation through surveillance (as in the case of two witnesses at the Strasbourg hearings), ill-treatment and torture during interrogation and searches and wanton destruction of property.

In addition there has been a series of incidents involving the Army and the RUC on the border, including incursions into the State, interference with the Gardaí in the course of their duty (in one case including firing on a Garda patrol car) and incidents arising out of road-cratering activities. A list of some of the more important of such recent incidents is attached.

These incidents taken in conjunction with the activities of the Army in Northern Ireland could prove detrimental to cooperation in security matters on the border. The British reply to the Ambassador's representations gave explanations in the case of each individual

incident raised. Our purpose, however, had not been to seek such explanations but to point out the deleterious cumulative effect which a series of incidents on the border may have. Taken in conjunction with the question of Army behaviour in the North, they are unhelpful in the general context of improving security since it becomes politically difficult for us to be seen to co-operate with the British on cross-border security. The border incidents with their frequently documented instances of arrogance on the part of individual members of the British security forces do not contribute to the formation and strengthening of a will to co-operate wholeheartedly with the British forces in Northern Ireland on the part of the Gardaí and Army in the implementation of any measures which might be agreed upon at a security conference. Many of them, particularly those associated with road-cratering activities have displayed a great insensitivity to local feelings and may be said to contribute to increased sympathy for the activities of the IRA. Thus British Army activities in border areas is such as to cause a degree of resentment amongst local people, the Gardaí and the Army, which can only benefit those intent on illegal cross-border activity.

The standard British response to allegations of misbehaviour coming from the minority in Northern Ireland is to say that it operates against terrorism from whatever quarter it may come. This appears to say that it is in order to harass the minority since most of the violence comes from that direction. There is, however, the consequence that such harassment leads to a heightened hatred of the Army and a willingness to tolerate indefinitely acts of violence against it. Indeed many other acts of violence by the IRA may be tacitly condoned when it is remembered that they also act against the Army.

The Army also claims that its saturation of Catholic areas has led directly to a reduction in acts of violence. Much of the decrease

is, however, due to the cessation of the Loyalist assassination campaign. The saturation strengthens the feelings among the minority community that they are receiving unequal treatment since the Army does not devote equal attention to the Loyalists from whom greater quantities of arms are regularly recovered with less effort than from searches in minority areas. The Army deny that there is any prejudice on their part against the minority. The fact remains that the minority have the impression that they are being harassed in a way that the majority is not. The existence of this impression is hardly conducive to an early solution of the overall problem.

Our purpose in raising these matters with the British is not to engage in a sterile exchange of recriminations and allegations. The common aim of both sides is to see agreed institutions in Northern Ireland and the cessation of violence. We would see the achievement of these two aims as inseparable and current British Army behaviour as unhelpful in achieving them.