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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

STATEMENT ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION

by

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February 29, 1972

Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of Secretary Rogers and the Department I want to express our appreciation for this opportunity to comment on the several resolutions on the situation in Northern Ireland which have been introduced in the Congress, and to set out the Executive Branch position on the Irish crisis.

Secretary Rogers described that position in his press conference of February 3 following his meeting with Irish Foreign Minister Hillery. The Secretary told the Foreign Minister of President Nixon's deep personal concern about the tragic situation in the North, and of our distress at the damaging effect of the current crisis on relations between these two countries with which our own ties are so close. The Secretary said that if the Irish and British Governments agreed that the United States could play a useful role in the crisis, they could be sure that we would respond most sympathetically to their request that we do so; but that in the absence of a request from both parties, U.S. intervention would be both inappropriate and counter-productive.

Foreign Minister Hillery told Secretary Rogers that he understood our position, and that he was not requesting U.S. intervention in the Northern Ireland situation. The positions of Canada and of the European countries which Foreign Minister Hillery visited after his visit here are, so far as we know, very similar to our own position.

Mr. Chairman; I would like to turn now to the numerous resolutions which have been introduced in the Congress. Although the resolutions vary considerably from one another, it appears to us that, taken as a whole, they urge three major courses of action:

First, that we use our good offices toward a resolution of the problem;

Second, that we take an initiative to engage the efforts of the United Nations in the dispute;

Third, that we support the ending of internment the withdrawal of British forces from the North, and the reunification of Ireland.

With respect to the resolutions urging that we offer our good offices, we believe that the position we have already taken goes as far as we can go in that direction. We have said that if the Irish and British Governments agreed to ask us to play a role, we would consider that request most sympathetically. It is clear that a good offices role can only be performed if the parties concerned request it. We believe that a resolution urging us to offer our good offices would not, in practical terms, alter the U.S. position which Secretary Rogers has outlined.

Concerning the resolutions calling for a U.S. initiative to engage the United Nations in the Northern Ireland problem, I want to point out that a necessary precondition for an effective UN role would be that the Irish and British Governments want it. Secretary General Waldheim made this point with respect to Northern Ireland in a press conference on February 7. Therefore, UN good offices, like U.S. good offices, could only be useful in a situation in which both parties agree that they ought to be requested. This precondition applies a fortiori to proposals for UN fact-finding missions or peacekeeping forces, and we note that the Irish Government has not pressed for such UN actions.

As previous witnesses have noted

I would like to comment now on the resolutions which urge the unification of Ireland, the withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland, and the end of internment.

The unification of Ireland can be a solution to the Irish crisis if the people to be unified agree that it is the solution. At present, they do not agree. The leaders of Ireland fully recognize this, and they have been unreserved in their condemnation of those who would attempt to bomb Ireland into unity. Prime Minister Lynch, speaking at his party's conference on February 19, had this to say about the means to unification:

"There is no peace among the exploding bombs. There is no justice in the rule of the gun and there is no unity in setting Irishmen against Irishmen.

"On the contrary, violence simply frustrates the creation of the conditions in which serious political discussions can take place.

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"Britain cannot keep Ireland permanently divided but, as has been said before, we cannot have a United Ireland by coercing Unionists into it. Therefore, is it not also realistic that we should seek the cooperation of these, our fellow Irishmen, in working for that solution?"

Mr. Chairman, the cooperation of Irishmen with Irishmen which Prime Minister Lynch spoke of will come to pass only through a process of conciliation and compromise which operates over time to blur and soften bitter and age-old divisions. As Prime Minister Lynch has said, this process is retarded by every act of violence. In our judgment, it could also be retarded by sweeping declarations by outsiders as to how the peoples concerned should arrange their destinies, for sweeping declarations tend to sharpen old divisions instead of blurring them.

These same considerations apply to the other aspects of these resolutions which I have referred to. With respect to the proposal for the withdrawal of the British army from Northern Ireland, I ~~want to~~ ^{would like to} point out that the Irish Government itself has gone no farther than to urge that the army be pulled back from the densely populated Catholic areas. I cannot tell you that if the British army left Northern Ireland there would surely be a substantial increase in the bloodshed; I can only tell you that people who are closer to the situation than we are think there is a real risk of it. In our view this raises serious doubt about the advisability of resolutions which call for withdrawal of the army.

As for internment, I think it is clear that everyone concerned with that measure wants to see it ended at the earliest possible time. I fully understand the depth of your concern ^{and the concern of the Americans} about it. We Americans have resorted to internment on rare occasions in the past in extreme conditions of civil conflict, actual or conjectural, and the experience of it has always left us with feelings of profound disquiet. I think we can fairly assume that resort to internment is seen in an equally grave light by the British authorities, and has been so seen also by the authorities of the Republic of Ireland when, in the past, they have felt themselves obliged to resort to it in the South in order to preserve the institutions of the Republic. I intend to offer no defense of internment, either as principle or as a policy. But I do not believe that we should make declarations which in effect substitute our judgment for that of other democratic countries as to whether they do or do not face conditions of civil conflict which cannot be controlled by ordinary judicial processes. I know that we would accept no advice from them in similar circumstances.

Mr. Chairman, Ireland is now passing through times as critical as any it has faced since the end of the civil war. Emotions are understandably running

very high. But in that connection I want to quote another passage from Prime Minister Lynch's speech of February 19 to his party conference. Emotion, he said, is a dangerous counsellor. And he went on:

"It generates exaggerated expectations, and also strengthens fears and prejudices, in ways quite incompatible with the realities of life. We see this happening to some individuals and groups at the present time. They give the impression of being carried forward on the crest of an emotional wave. Unconsciously they are placing themselves in the control of unscrupulous manipulators whose policies and actions they abhor. It is vital -- in our ~~own~~ interest, if for no higher reason -- that we take hold of ourselves and re-examine how we can best advance in a calm and democratic way towards the aims we have set." End of quotation.

Mr. Chairman, the realities of life in Ireland which the Prime Minister spoke of are presently so difficult that they inevitably cause powerful feelings of frustration in all who are concerned with the problem. But the realities must be dealt with as they are, and they ~~must~~ be dealt with in a spirit of patience and moderation. If they cannot now be dealt with in that spirit, which unfortunately seems to be the case, this only enhances the importance of the appeal to reason and endurance which the Prime Minister has made.

In the present circumstances of Ireland I think that the Prime Minister's statement is impressive and courageous. It expresses an attitude which I believe Americans who have Ireland's best interests at heart could adopt as a model. In the spirit of that attitude I think we should refrain from making declarations which, to echo the Prime Minister's words, could generate exaggerated expectations which are beyond our power to fulfill, and which, therefore, would not advance the interests of Ireland, but could, in fact, set them back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.