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INTER-DEPARTMENTAL UNIT ON NORTHERN IRELAND

REPORT OF MEETING.

1. A meeting of the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland was held in the Department of the Taoiseach, Government Buildings, on Monday, 10th February, 1975. The following were present:-

Mr. D. Nally, Department of the Taoiseach (Chairman),

Mr. S. Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs,

Mr. S. Brosnan,  
(alternate member), Department of Defence,

Mr. P. Colwell  
(alternate member), Department of Justice,

Mr. E. O'Donoghue, Department of Finance.

Also present were Mr. W. Kirwan, Department of the Taoiseach, Mr. J. McColgan, Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. L. Murphy, Department of Finance, Mr. D. Whelan, Department of Health and Mr. M. Healy, Department of Defence.

2. The Unit considered the various studies it had on hands. The discussion on the various items is recorded below.
3. The Unit considered the question of plans to deal with casualties from Northern Ireland in the event of a conflict situation there. A paper on this subject, prepared by the Department of Health, had been circulated. The discussion mainly centred on whether the planning should be frozen at the stage which had been reached or whether further, more detailed planning should be undertaken in conjunction with the various health staffs that would be involved. On the one hand, it was recognised that the Government could be subject to criticism if in the event of a large influx of casualties from Northern Ireland, it was found to be without detailed plans. On the other hand, it was recognised that the involvement of a larger number of people in planning, as would be required to go beyond the present stage, could give rise to leaks about what was being done, with a possible

adverse consequences in Northern Ireland, in the political sphere and in relation to sectarian violence. It was suggested that the contingency being considered would only arise following <sup>a series</sup> ~~periods~~ of events which would unfold over time so that there would be reasonable notice of its onset. It emerged that those who would be concerned with detailed planning could probably produce a "de luxe edition" of a contingency plan within a period of one month but that even two weeks notice would enable them to provide a reasonable service. On the other hand, it was suggested that one's reluctance to take a decision to set in train detailed planning might be even more <sup>pronounced</sup> ~~reluctant~~ at the time when it seemed most likely to be necessary. A number of suggestions were put forward as to how the fact that the plans in question were related to a conflict situation in Northern Ireland might be concealed.

4. It was agreed that the Unit would present the Department of Health paper to the Government as a preliminary plan; that it would indicate that it was not fully satisfied that this plan went far enough; that it would recommend that a selected Chief Executive Officer of a Health Board should be asked to <sup>in the strictest confidence</sup> prepare/a model paper plan for his area, on the basis that he would not put any questions to any other person but would largely identify the various tasks that would have to be undertaken, with particular reference to administrative aspects; and that the Government should be advised of the implications of any leak of information in relation to such a course of action. Mr. Whelan pointed out that while the preparation of a model plan, as suggested, would be valuable, it would be still quite some distance short of the detailed planning that would be required to deal effectively with a situation of the kind contemplated.
5. In relation to arrangements for reception of refugees from Northern Ireland, Mr. Healy referred to the paper prepared in

the Department of Defence which had been circulated earlier. He expressed some concern that his Department's preparations were not further advanced, pending the receipt of authority to make advance purchases of necessary supplies. He said that they had been advised by the Chief Stores Purchaser of the Post Office that delays in the delivery of blankets could run up to six months. He mentioned that since the previous paper had been circulated, it had emerged that there would be a need for substantial storage space in which to store blankets and other supplies, if purchased. It had been calculated that the space required to store the blankets would be 250,000 cubic feet. The advisability of making advance purchases of blankets and other equipment was discussed. On the one hand, it was recognised that, in this case also, the placing of large orders for supplies could give rise to some undesirable speculation <sup>about</sup> ~~for what~~ the purpose for which they were being ordered. On the other hand, it was strongly argued that the Government would be subjected to considerable criticism if a deterioration of the Northern Ireland situation found it unprepared for the reception of the large numbers of refugees which could enter the State in such a situation. There was a general consensus that the problem of possible adverse consequences from any publicity was much less important in this case than in the case of preparations for the reception of casualties. It was also generally recognised that the <sup>prospect</sup> ~~existence~~ of substantial delays in the fulfillment of orders for supplies reduced the room for manoeuvre. It was also pointed out that supplies ordered now would not become available for up to six months and that delivery could be in small lots to various local depots throughout the country and that both of these factors should reduce the problem of publicity which might arise. It was felt, moreover, that even if some publicity did eventually arise, that it would be possible to indicate, in replies to enquiries, that the purchases were being made for the normal requirements of the Department of Defence.

- It was agreed that the Unit would present the Department of Defence paper to the Government, with a recommendation that orders should be placed immediately for sufficient blankets and mattresses to bring existing stocks of bedding to the level necessary to cater for 20,000 refugees, in the ratio of two children to every adult, at an estimated cost of about £250,000. The blankets would not be waste - they can be used in due course as ordinary army /or health authority/equipment.
7. There was a discussion on the prospects of obtaining relief supplies from the United Nations and its associated agencies. Mr. Donlon indicated that his Department was awaiting a suitable opportunity to pursue enquiries with persons whose discretion could be relied on. He considered it likely that if a situation of serious hardship developed, the United Nations would have the capacity to provide substantial quantities of necessary supplies within a fortnight of a decision to make such supplies available. However, this decision and the level <sup>at</sup> with which aid would be given would be political decisions. The United Nations would expect us to have our own infra-structure <sup>to</sup> ~~body~~ care <sup>for</sup> ~~of~~ refugees. This, of course, would present no problem.
8. In relation to the question of furnishing supplies to distressed Catholic communities in Northern Ireland in a breakdown situation, reference was made to the note on this matter, prepared by Mr. Colwell, which had been circulated previously. Mr. Colwell again advanced <sup>the</sup> a view and was supported by a number of other members, that any supplies transferred across the border by the authorities here, whether or not involving the direct intervention within Northern Ireland of ~~the~~ Estate Agencies would fall into <sup>the</sup> hands and come under the control of the Provisional IRA ~~or~~ of opposition para-military groups. It was suggested

that the provision of such supplies was inseparable from the question of military intervention from the Republic. On the other hand, it was suggested that if the Unit were to report back to the Government to this effect, it might be regarded as rather unhelpful in saying simply that nothing could be done. It was also suggested that in a situation of the kind contemplated the IRA might be sufficiently occupied with other matters that they would be prepared to leave the distribution of relief supplies to other bodies unassociated with them, on the basis of a specialisation of labour. However, in reply to this view, Mr. Donlon indicated that experience during the UWC strike seemed to confirm the view that in a situation of the kind contemplated the IRA would, in fact, take over everything in the areas that were likely to be beleaguered<sup>ed</sup> - and the opposition groups in other areas. It was accepted that the Unit would report to the Government that the implications of providing supplies would be<sup>as</sup> suggested by Mr. Colwell and that the provision of such supplies was inseparable from the question of military intervention. It was accepted that there were some areas which were adjacent to the Republic and would be accessible from it in a conflict situation but in these areas the inhabitants could generally obtain supplies from the Republic themselves.

9. In relation to the studies being undertaken by the military authorities of the possibilities of military intervention by the Republic in Northern Ireland in situations and<sup>on</sup> assumptions set out in the Unit's Discussion Paper No. 2, Mr. Brosnan reported that the study should be available within a week. He had been given to understand some time ago that it would not greatly differ in its conclusions from those which had previously been reached by an Inter-Departmental Committee which had examined the implications of substantially increasing the Defence Forces. However, he had not seen any draft of the study.
10. Reference was made to further studies in relation to the possibility of United Nations involvement in a peace-keeping role which were being undertaken by the Department of Foreign Affairs

in response to questions raised by the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs. It was recalled that the material on this matter which had previously been circulated by the Department of Foreign Affairs had not been presented to the Government and it was suggested that all aspects of the question of United Nations involvement in the Northern Ireland situation might appropriately be the subject of a separate submission to the Government. This was accepted.

11. In relation to the draft paper on negotiated independence and negotiated repartition which had been circulated, Mr. Nally suggested that it might be presented to the Government under cover of a separate submission which would relate its content to the current situation. He outlined the way in which the options which had been studied might come to the foreground following a breakdown of the Convention discussions and a British decision to withdraw which he suggested would be implemented very speedily. Mr. Donlon briefly reviewed the present situation, with particular reference to the renewed cessation of violence on the part of the Provisional IRA. He was at a loss to understand their motivation for this decision. In the discussions which had taken place between British officials and representatives of Provisional Sinn Fein the only specific agreement of which we are aware was of a means of ensuring that minor incidents did not lead to a breakdown of the ceasefire. Our understanding was that no papers had been passed between the two sides except for those in the exchange of which the Feakle clergymen had been involved. In these papers the IRA had given no evidence of a readiness to depart from the full extent of their demands. The British had not conceded any part of their position either. It therefore seemed likely that the present cessation of violence was a tactical decision on the part of the IRA. Mr. Donlon referred to a conversation with a British official about the thoroughness of the British advance planning for the imposition of direct rule in 1972 and suggested that it was certain that

- the British had already made detailed contingency plans for various possible courses of development, including a British withdrawal.
12. In relation to the relevance of the study, Mr. McColgan mentioned that, in the estimation of Mr. John Taylor, the support among the Official Unionist Party for independence as a solution to be favoured if they could not obtain a Stormont-type administration had risen from about 10% some time ago to perhaps 50% now. It was agreed that members of the Unit might provide comments on the draft paper within a week and that subject to these, and perhaps to some of the first parts of the paper going into the covering memorandum, it might be presented to the Government. It was agreed that any reference to the highly unlikely establishment of a West Berlin-type situation in West Belfast should be deleted. It was emphasised that great care was taken to preserve the secrecy of the Unit's papers on such sensitive matters as negotiated independence, possibilities of military intervention etc.
13. In relation to the location of flashpoint areas in Northern Ireland, it was noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs had prepared a map on which such areas were charted, on the basis of information provided by the Catholic Church authorities in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that it would be appropriate to report on this matter on conjunction with the study on possibilities of military intervention.
14. The meeting then concluded.