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LC 1. Taoiseach
14/1/75 meeting - ^{on} which you have already seen a preliminary note
This is a full report / the
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Report of a Meeting between British and Irish Officials

Iveagh House, 9th January, 1975

2. Secretary

[The statement being made by Mr Lee is by no means as positive as Mr Dawson was on the question of referring to negotiate with the Provisionals]

A meeting took place at Iveagh House on 9th January between British and Irish officials. Present on the Irish side were Mr. A. Nally, Taoiseach's Department and Messrs. Donlon and McColgan from the Department of Foreign Affairs and on the British side, the British Ambassador, Mr. John Bourn, Under Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office and Messrs. Hickman and Daly from the British Embassy.

The British began by outlining what the Secretary of State proposed to say in his statement to the Commons early next week in which he would concentrate on the Government's response to the current cessation of violence. The first point he would make was that there could be no negotiations with the IRA, that the Government had received no proposals from that source and that they would not negotiate with a body of that kind. The second part of the Secretary of State's speech would deal with the kind of action that would be possible in the fields of security and detention if the cessation of violence continued.

The statement would stress particularly that the British were interested in a permanent cessation of violence. If this were to come about there could be considerably reduced military activity. There was no specific timetable for this reduction; it would depend entirely on the ongoing security situation and the performance of the terrorists in not reverting to violence. Already in response to the temporary cessation of violence there were fewer Army patrols on the ground and less screening and searching. Any further response would be gradual involving such things as troops patrolling with reversal arms, rather than arms at the ready, ordinary uniforms to replace battledress, spot searches at barriers

city centre areas rather than searching of all shoppers and their shopping bags and in general the introduction of a freer and more open life in city centres. Eventually and in the very long term a troop reduction could be envisaged to the stage where only a permanent garrison remained and the police again became the majority force for law and order. The statement would above all stress that the response to a continued ceasefire would be a measured one and that all changes in this direction would be gradual and calculated. These would be the broad lines of what the statement would contain on security matters.

On the question of detention the Secretary of State would refer to the releases made on 31st December and indicate that he had a programme for releases on a continuing scale though he would again stress that he had no timetable and no specific numbers in mind. He would also point out that no use had been made of the emergency powers to arrest or detain anyone since the ceasefire came into effect. However, normal arrests and the pressing of criminal charges will continue. He will announce the publication of the Gardiner Report the following week but he will make no major reference to this report in his statement to the Commons. The statement is expected on Tuesday or Wednesday.

The other points which the British side made in the discussions were:-

- (i) That they attributed the reasons for the ceasefire to the fact that the security forces had been successful in making life considerably more difficult and awkward for the terrorists. This was coupled with a critical realisation by the IRA of the real meaning of the UWC strike together with a feedback from public opinion both in Great Britain, the South and the North to the Birmingham bombings.

- (ii) While they were not making any prediction about the continuation of the ceasefire, Mr. Bourne in particular stressed that the situation was more hopeful than at any time since he came to Northern Ireland.
- (iii) The British Ambassador at one point said that he wished to inject a note of gloom into the discussions in saying that he personally had considerable doubts as to how the ceasefire could really be in the long-term interests of the Provisionals since the best they could hope for from pursuing a political path was, on practically everyone's assessment, a tiny minority representation in the Convention.
- (iv) The British officials also stressed the continued importance of co-operation in the security field. They indicated that they were extremely satisfied with the business-like footing on which RUC/Garda co-operation was currently being conducted. It had begun to produce results and to make it much more difficult for people to play cat and mouse on either side of the border. The only point of contention in this area, (and the British stressed that it was not a major problem but rather in their eyes a minor handicap) was the question of Garda reluctance to accept the presence of army staff officers in civilian clothes at security co-operation meetings. The Irish interlocutors indicated that there were strong historical and political objections on this point and it was extremely unlikely that any amelioration in the British sense could be hoped for. The British in reply stressed that they did not wish to stir up a hornet's nest if the long-term effect would be counter-productive. They reiterated their general satisfaction with the situation on security co-operation. The discussion on security

covered such areas as the closure of unapproved roads, the question of maps and map references, the Advance Planning and Communications Panels and the still outstanding British request for a reply to their document of 19th December on security co-operation in South Armagh. The Irish side indicated that this was still being examined by the Gardaí and the Department of Justice.

- (v) In reply to a suggestion from the Irish side that in the long term it was essential to get the minority identified with Government and police, the British indicated that they were conscious of this need and saw it as the key to the problem in the long term. While the picture was not totally clear they were hopeful that what they had done with the expansion of the police reserve, (the emphasis they had placed on the need for local affiliations in the reserve, the proposed establishment of police link centres, the greater number of women who would be in the new reserve and the new recruiting procedures) would lead to modest progress in this field. These small things they hoped would gradually build up to a more acceptable police force. The key to the issue is that the policing of areas should arise out of local natural demands rather than imposed solutions.
- (vi) The Protestant reaction to the ceasefire had been on the whole reassuring. Thinking people on the Protestant side had accepted the Secretary of State's assurance that there had been no basic alteration in policy and that there would be no direct negotiations with terrorists. Paisley had been the only one of the prominent politicians to blow his top but their reading of Paisley was that he was a man with diminishing support. There is a general feeling on the majority side that he is misleading people and has

nothing constructive to contribute. His stock would appear to be waning at present though it is always possible that given the wrong circumstances it might wax again. The Protestant para-militaries, particularly the UDA, had lost a lot of face through the ill-contrived, unproductive and rather foolish visit to Libya. The indications were that they were trying to adapt to a more conventional form of politics though one can never really be certain when they would resort to violence again.

- (vii) The British said that they ^{had} pursued our representations on the border check-point at Aughnacloy. They proposed to construct a three-lane road there covered by a hanger with two North-bound and one South-bound lane. Six cars could be processed through the hanger at a time and it was hoped that the new scheme would be operational in six weeks.
- (viii) Finally they mentioned that they had received a number of approaches from Dr. John O'Connell, T.D., which they were not taking very seriously, on the question of negotiators to represent respectively the Catholic and Protestant para-military groups. Secondly they gave a breakdown in relation to the recent premature releases of convicted prisoners. Of the 139 recently released 47 had been special category prisoners. The breakdown of this 47 was as follows: 20 Provisionals, 5 Officials and 22 Loyalists. The New Year parole offer had not been widely accepted. Nine Loyalists and only two Provisionals had availed of the three-day parole. Because of hostility from their fellow prisoners the two Provisionals had not been able immediately to return to their compounds but had had to be kept in the more comparative comfort of the prison hospital.

The Irish side made the following points:-

- (i) Our main fear must always be that the British will get into direct negotiations with the IRA.
- (ii) For this reason the moves to associate the political parties with the ongoing peaceful situation is a good one.
- (iii) We would warn the British that the propaganda wing of the Provisional IRA is an extremely effective one. Seamus Loughlin sits in Belfast at present with the world press at his feet. The British should be aware that it is not just what they do or don't do in relation to a specific situation that is important but they must always be wary of what use the Provisional propaganda machine will make of whatever they are doing. Whatever the reality of the situation the Provos are currently giving the impression that they are much more at the centre of things in minority areas than they really are in fact. We would ask the British to be aware of this and not to feed it. They might try and give more credit to elected representatives for the increased release of detainees and e.g. in the Derry area point out that the high number of releases from that area was in response to the fact that the city had been comparatively quiet for the last four or five months.
- (iv) In the long term we saw it as utterly essential to get minority identification with Government and police.
- (v) That the British should be careful of using the good offices of Roman Catholic clergymen to facilitate the return of the RUC into Catholic ghetto areas. This is happening even though it might not be part of official policy. While it might produce a short-term benefit in the longer term mischief-makers (e.g. amongst Official

Sinn Féin who are violently anti-church) would like it built up and then use it for their own purposes.

- (vi) The Irish side also stressed that we still harboured considerable doubts of the genuineness of the Provo ceasefire. We had little doubt that they had not changed their objective but merely changed their route to that objective. One had to be suspicious of the fact that the Provos, who had never before ~~shown~~ any degree of perceptiveness to minority opinion, were suddenly appearing in the position of being susceptible to pressure and public opinion.
- (vii) The Irish side also stressed that their assessment of the capacity of the Provos to get back into action if they so wished was considerable. A few men in this situation could do enormous harm. The campaign, if it restarted, would probably concentrate in the first instance on Britain.

The British indicated that they were very happy to get our point of view and particularly the suggestions on the Provisional propaganda machine and the sensitive issue of the RUC and the Catholic clergy. They stressed that the reticence of the Irish Government in not making a public statement had in their view been absolutely the right stance at present. They emphasised that the general plan for the publication of the power-sharing discussion paper and the holding of the Convention elections had not changed.

JWC
10/1/75