

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code: 2005/151/698

Title: Notes prepared 12 August 1975 as basis for discussion with James Callaghan, MP, United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and amended in light of comments by Conor Cruise O'Brien, TD, Minister for Posts and Telegraphs in his memorandum of 18 August 1975

Creation Date(s): [18] August 1975

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 4 pages

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Access Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Notes prepared (12/8/75) as basis for discussions with Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and amended in the light of comments by Minister for Posts and Telegraphs as per his memo of 18/8.

1. The Irish Government has one primary concern - the preservation of peace and order in Ireland, and the security in particular of groups in Northern Ireland who are isolated in areas predominantly inhabited by members of the other section of the community.
2. The maintenance of peace, order and security is actively threatened by the IRA - most immediately the Provisional IRA, but also the Official IRA and IRSP militants - and by the Protestant para-military organisations. Its preservation depends upon the presence in Northern Ireland of a sufficiently large military force, under the control of and loyal to a political authority external to Northern Ireland.
3. The policy of the Irish Government has thus been to achieve within its own jurisdiction control of IRA activities, and recognising how much more difficult the problem is to seek similar effective action against the IRA and Protestant para-militaries in Northern Ireland, of a character that will not by alienating the two sections of the community from support for authority and encouraging them to sympathise with or support those engaged in violence be counter-productive. The Irish Government has also been concerned that the military force in Northern Ireland should be sufficiently large to carry out its necessary role, and that the continuing presence of such a force until violence ends should be seen by both sections of the community to be certain.
4. The only political solution that can erode the basis of violence in Northern Ireland and produce a firm long-term basis for a peaceful political evolution there, is one that involves both sections of the community in the process of

internal self-government, on a basis of equal opportunity. Pending the development of political groupings cutting across sectarian lines, this can be achieved only by a system of power-sharing in government which ensures for the minority section of the community an end to their fifty-five-year-long exclusion from power, removes the resultant stigma of second-class citizenship, and gives the full backing of the great majority of both sections of the community for the maintenance of law and order.

5. Agreement on such a system is unlikely to emerge in present circumstances, because the elected representatives of the majority section of the community believe that they can secure complete control of internal self-government by rejecting all alternatives; they count on a presumed lack of firm commitment by the British Government and/or Opposition to the existing policy of permitting internal self-government only on a power-sharing basis. The necessary pre-condition for acceptance of power-sharing in government by the elected representatives of the majority section of the community is thus likely to be the emergence of compelling evidence that the commitment of the British Government to this policy, and to the maintenance of law and order in Northern Ireland, is firm, and will be maintained for so long as may be necessary.

6. The past five years have seen a radical deterioration in the balance of armed force within the island of Ireland. During this period the strength of the Protestant para-military organisations has multiplied, - perhaps four fold since 1970 - as has the availability to ~~them~~^{them} of arms and explosives. New legal armed forces have been created whose numbers equal those of the Irish Army, and whose loyalty to the UK Government is gravely suspect. The UDR, and also the RUC Reserve are likely in the event of a Protestant coup to side with and substantially

strengthen the rebellion rather than to assist in its suppression. Nor can the loyalty of the RUC be wholly relied on in such circumstances. At best it might remain more or less neutral until the outcome became clear.

7. As against this emergence of some 30 - 40,000 armed Protestants, the British Army in Northern Ireland has been reduced to little more than half its peak strength. And in the Republic, where the Government has felt inhibited from undertaking more than normal voluntary recruitment, the total strength of the Army has risen only from 8,500 to 12,500 men in this period. A large part of this figure consists of headquarters garrison and support forces.

8. This shift in the balance of military forces in the island of Ireland constitutes a serious threat to peace in Ireland, with international implications. In this situation any failure by the British Government to commit all necessary forces to the restoration of order in Northern Ireland in the event of major military action by Protestant para-militaries, possibly supported by the UDR and RUC Reserve, would be likely:
 - (a) To lead to the massacre of thousands - probably tens of thousands of the minority section of the community in "exposed" areas in Northern Ireland, and the expulsion of many - possibly all - of the remainder of the 200,000 members of the minority in East Ulster, as well as the killing of many Protestants in exposed situations.

 - (b) To involve large-scale bombing attacks in the Republic and in Great Britain, by Protestant para-militaries and IRA respectively.

 - (c) To create enormous popular pressure for military intervention in Northern Ireland by the Irish Army, which,

even if it were desirable, could not be effective in view of the balance of military force.

- (d) To threaten the stability of democratic government in the Republic which, for the reason already stated, has been unable to build up the military forces under its control to the level necessary to ensure against major disorders in the Republic.

- (e) Thus to create the strong possibility of chaos throughout Ireland, which, apart from its consequences for the Irish people, would represent a major threat to British security, and indeed because of the possibilities that would thus be provided for intervention by interests outside Western Europe - for Western Europe as a whole.