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Discussion Paper No. 6

Possibilities of Military Intervention in Northern Ireland, likely flashpoint areas and possibility of IRA takeover of certain areas.

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INTER-DEPARTMENTAL UNIT ON NORTHERN IRELAND

POLICY ON NORTHERN IRELAND

DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 6

POSSIBILITIES OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND, LIKELY FLASHPOINT AREAS AND POSSIBILITY OF IRA TAKEOVERS OF CERTAIN AREAS.

ORIGIN OF PAPER.

1. The Government decided on 18 July, 1974 (S.19137) that the Inter-Departmental Unit on Northern Ireland should undertake a number of studies in relation to the North including an investigation of -
 - (1) what military and other assistance, if any, can be made available to the minority in a situation where they are under constant attack or threat of attack from or siege by the majority;
 - (2) what, if any, are the possibilities of the Irish Army setting up and maintaining buffer zones or offering protection to the minority in flashpoint areas both in the present Northern Ireland situation and in any repartition that might develop following withdrawal.

The investigation was to be on the following basis:-

- (a) that there was no prospect of UN intervention;
- (b) that the British would not militarily oppose intervention by the Defence Forces; and
- (c) that it would be possible to increase the size of the Irish Army over a period of two to three years to a figure of about 15,000, taking into account the accommodation available for soldiers and that it takes a minimum of about six months from the time of entry to train recruits.

2. The Government also decided that the Unit should try to identify likely flashpoint areas and that it should elaborate on Discussion Paper No. 2 to take account of possible IRA takeovers of certain areas in the event of British withdrawal.

POSSIBILITIES OF MILITARY INTERVENTION
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Report of Military Study Group

3. The Unit requested that a military study be made of the questions at (1) and (2) of paragraph 1 above, on the basis set out at (a)-(c) of that paragraph. The report submitted in response to this request is attached as Appendix 6. The report, which consists of a main paper and fifteen annexes, examines

- (1) the various circumstances in which intervention in the North for the purpose of assisting the minority might have to be actively considered, including the possible approach to and aftermath of an abrupt British withdrawal, the possible timetable for this and the situation then likely to prevail if widespread and large scale inter-communal violence ensued;
- (2) the present capability of the Defence Forces to render assistance;
- (3) the range of military and other assistance which might be rendered if certain requirements were fulfilled; and
- (4) the requirements mentioned at (3).

Assumptions underlying military study:

4. On the proposition that military studies could not be carried out in isolation, the military report makes certain assumptions as to the political repercussions here of the situation postulated for the study. Some members of the Unit, although not necessarily agreeing with these assumptions, do not consider it any part of their function to comment on them, as being matters for domestic political assessment and, therefore, outside the terms of reference of the Unit. Other members feel that some comment is called for, if only in the interests of balance and to demonstrate the existence of opposing views on these matters. The following are some of the assumptions in question, with these members' comments:-

Assumptions

Comments

if widespread civil war broke out in the North and the Catholic population came under widespread attack, the emotions of the population in the Republic would be deeply stirred in their favour;

Reference: para. 19 and Annex H, para. 8 of military study.

there would probably be pressure from virtually the full spectrum of society in the South for intervention on humanitarian grounds;

the only basis on which a bipartisan policy towards the North could survive would be on a policy of active assistance to the minority, using every means at the State's disposal, consistent with its own security;

failure to intervene would pass the initiative to the IRA in the Republic and Northern Ireland, and would have more disastrous results than becoming embroiled officially in Northern Ireland.

Annex G, para. 6

It is necessary to take into account the sense of disenchantment with Northern troubles. A basic tenet of IRA strategy has been to involve the South. There may well be a wider degree of recognition now, after the years of violence, killings and assassinations and in particular, the bombings in Dublin, Monaghan and elsewhere, of what military intervention could mean for the whole island. This recognition can only increase the reluctance to intervene.

non-intervention would swell the ranks of the IRA and in these circumstances the future of democracy as we know it in the South would be in doubt.

This is not accepted.

Present capability of the Defence Forces to render assistance

5. The military assessment as subsequently clarified was that, in the event of a British withdrawal and civil war in the North, the Defence Forces would have a capability to intervene to assist the minority even now. They say that it would be dangerous, however, to have to meet the resultant crisis with the lack of sufficient trained units and the limited intelligence and planning available in relation to possible contingencies in Northern Ireland and likely developments here. The extent of the present capability is not defined but clearly it must be considerably less than that outlined in paragraph 8 which deals with the capability that would exist after certain requirements had been fulfilled over a period of about six months.
6. In regard to buffer zones the military concept is that such zones comprise areas manned by a neutral force interposed between two belligerent forces. The Unit, on the other hand, when it referred to such zones, had in mind zones into which the Defence Forces might be inserted to protect minority communities from attack by the majority. In the sense of intervention to protect the minority the position would be as indicated in paragraph 5.

Range of possible military and other assistance if certain requirements were fulfilled

7. The military study examined the forms of assistance involving the use of the Defence Forces that might be possible if certain requirements were fulfilled. The forms of assistance examined are set out below with the Unit's comments on them:-

Military study

Unit's Comments

- (1) Deterrence involving the stated intention of the Government not to permit loyalist militants to impose their solution by force within Northern Ireland. It would require strong Defence Forces with 10,000 men in three operational Brigades, free for

This would be counter-productive as by putting the loyalists under threat, it would escalate an already explosive situation. Any increase in the strength of the Defence Forces could be let speak for itself. With our present military strength and preparedness, deterrence is not an option now, if it is

intervention, in addition to 12,000 men to secure the State here and provide administrative back-up to the operational units. In the long run, it might be the most acceptable and least expensive form of military response.

expressed as such. Fear of what the Army could do exists in loyalists' minds but it is not backed by any quantified assessment. For as long as the situation remains like this, deterrence exists in practice. Any declaration of a positive policy of deterrence would aggravate the situation.

(2) Evacuation of refugees involving use of armed force - from areas without easy access to the border.

It would not be possible to limit intervention to "humanitarian" grounds. Intervention would provoke retaliation, leading to reaction and increased involvement including, in all probability, targets in this part of the country and attacks on minority areas away from the border, including parts of the Belfast area (with 150,000 Catholics approximately) and North Antrim.

(3) Delivery of food, medical and other supplies, in the event of loyalist blockades of minority communities, involving fairly considerable military operations.

(4) Delivery of arms and ammunition to besieged minority communities. This would have special problems in relation to the likely IRA role and, for this reason, is not recommended on its own.

Same comment as at (2) and (3). In addition, it seems unrealistic to expect that small groups could ensure that arms supplied would not become available to the IRA who in a "doomsday situation" might become indistinguishable from the minority population, generally. It should be recognised that, unless intervention were in strength, control over the distribution and use of arms could not be retained and some would fall into the hands of the IRA.

(5) Delivery of arms, military advisers and communication teams to the minority under attack, to advise it on use of arms, to ensure arms supplied would not become available to subversives and to report back by radio on the situation.

(6) Limited intervention on humanitarian grounds with formed military units to assist in defence of accessible areas under attack, the units varying from a section of 10 men to a battalion of 600.

Same comments as at (2) and (3) above.

(7) Deeper ground penetration on mercy missions, to relieve isolated minority groups in East Ulster. It would be beyond our military capabilities (with the forces assumed) to break through to or hold open corridors from the Catholic enclaves in Belfast but a number of smaller operations of this type could be undertaken simultaneously.

Same comments as at (2) and (3) above.

(8) Large scale operations to defeat loyalist forces militarily and to establish a 32-County State - the ultimate in aggressive military action and patently beyond the capabilities of the Defence Forces.

It would also be beyond our capabilities to administer a hostile population.

Paragraph 22 (b)-(j), also Annex J

Requirements to provide capability for the Defence Forces to render assistance.

The military assessment is that the minimum forces required to render military and other assistance, in the event of a British withdrawal and civil war in the North, would be about 5,000 trained men initially, with reserve for intervention of 3,000 and 12,000 additional men to secure the South. In practical terms, the only way in which the necessary strength could be achieved now or in the near future would be by calling up reservists if and when the "doomsday" situation arrived. When the 5,000 men required initially had received about six months training and the other requirements set out in paragraph 9 below had been fulfilled, it would be possible, according to the military assessment, to sustain and defend the Catholics in the areas in the south and west of Northern Ireland and prevent the loyalists taking control of much of these areas; specifically, it would be possible to conduct some, all of, or a combination of the following forms of assistance:

Paras. 24-25 and Annex J

- (1) evacuation of refugees;
- (2) delivery of food, medical and other supplies;
- (3) delivery of arms, military advisers and communication teams to the minority under attack;
- (4) limited intervention on humanitarian grounds with formed military units to assist in the defence of accessible areas under attack;
- (5) deeper ground penetration on mercy missions to relieve isolated minority groups in East Ulster.

These forms of assistance could be given in predominantly nationalist areas close to the border, roughly the Newry-Crossmaglen Keady area, the South Fermanagh area, the Castlederg-Clady-Strabane area and the West Derry area, in areas further into the North with large Catholic minorities, including the Dungannon-Armagh area, areas in South Down such as Warrenpoint, Kilkeel, Annalong, and Newcastle and possibly Downpatrick, and possibly some isolated areas which could be reached by air or by sea. There would be no possibility of giving effective assistance to minority groups in other areas well away from the border e.g. the 150,000 or so living in the Belfast area and groups living inland in North Antrim. (The near certainty that intervention would lead to attacks on persons and property, in this part of the country has been mentioned above).

The report, as clarified in the course of discussion, specifies the main requirements to bring the Defence Forces to a level of preparedness adequate for the rendering of the forms of assistance set out above, within a timescale of six months. These are:

- (1) implementation of certain proposals for reorganisation of the Army, including the formation of three regular army brigades, the reorganisation of the F.C.A. and the allocation to it of a major role in internal security and the creation of an adequate First Line Reserve;
- (2) rationalisation of security arrangements so that more intensive training can be undertaken by the Permanent Defence Force; this would involve releasing the Regular Army from many routine internal security duties, these tasks to be undertaken by the F.C.A. and the Gardai;
- (3) preparation of legislation to facilitate the Defence Forces in undertaking whatever tasks were allotted to them;
- (4) a special intelligence effort, including the appointment of a special staff to produce the required intelligence and a transition from passive to active pursuit of intelligence including the recruitment and training of personnel for specific tasks in a "doomsday" situation;
- (5) the preparation of plans for each of the tasks which the Government might give the Defence Forces; this would involve the appointment of a Commander and appropriate Headquarters to supervise; and earmarking and planning the training of selected army units for nominated tasks in Northern Ireland;
- (6) the tailoring of the procurement programme to the requirements posed by the Northern Ireland situation, including the acceleration of procurement of various items of equipment which could not be obtained within six months with present policies and procedures;
- (7) the arrangement of accommodation for an intake of about 8,000 reservists and the acquisition of accommodation in the border area for mounting and supporting operations within Northern Ireland;
- (8) intensification of the recruiting campaign for the regular army, First Line Reserve and F.C.A.;
- (9) the carrying out of the studies set out in Annex P to Appendix A.;
- (10) the preparation of broad national plans for such matters as
 - law and order in areas in which we would have intervened
 - reception of refugees from these areas
 - dealing with the wide effects of intervention on the socio-economic life of the South.

Paras. 30-31 and Annex M.

10. The military report envisages that, in the event of military intervention to assist the minority in Northern Ireland, 12,000 men of the Defence Forces would be retained for security within the State and administrative support of forces operating in the North. The report also states that irrespective of whether the State were to intervene or not, it is imperative that its military capabilities be improved as a matter of urgency; and that a decision not to intervene would probably need comparable levels of troops, equipment and combat efficiency in order to secure the State in the face of a national groundswell in favour of intervention.

Para. 27 (d)

POSSIBILITY OF IRA TAKEOVERS

11. The Garda Síochána view is that in the type of situation considered in the previous section of this report there would inevitably be a reaction by the IRA and the minority population, probably involving the attempted take-over by the IRA of certain predominantly Catholic areas in the North, for example, areas close to the Border around Derry, Clady, Crossmaglen and Newry, other areas west of the Bann that are further away from the Border and also areas of Belfast.
12. While the problem of containing a spill-over of violence into the State from the North would be great, the Garda Síochána do not think that subversive elements would be able to seize or hold, for any appreciable period, specific areas of organised and systematic resistance in the State, particularly if the resources of the security forces were not diverted across the Border.
13. However, the establishment of such areas would not have any real attraction for the IRA and the aim of that organisation would be to create a situation in which they could seize control of events. The Gardaí say that, in the turmoil and tensions that would follow from a British withdrawal in the

North, the prospect of a coup d'état by the IRA in Dublin in which they would seek to get control of the State institutions and the news services must be held to be more attractive to the IRA than the establishment and maintenance at high cost to their resources of areas of resistance elsewhere in the State. It is of crucial importance, therefore, that the security of the State institutions in Dublin should be a first consideration and that there should be no dispersal of the forces of the Gardaí and the Army that would expose the seat of Government to IRA take-over. The Garda Síochána say that the presence in the Dublin area, especially in the vicinity of the seat of Government and in the vicinity of vital installations such as the news transmission services, of forces adequate to safeguard the continuity of central Government will prove the most effective insurance against subversion.

14. The military report envisages the retention of 12,000 men of the Defence Forces for security within the State and administrative support of forces operating in the North. This number would include a substantial number of FCA men whose present state of training is not comparable with that of the Permanent Defence Force. The Gardaí would also be available for this task. It would be essential before any decision were taken to intervene militarily in the North that the Government would be fully satisfied of the adequacy of these forces to ensure the security of Government here.

FLASHPOINT AREAS

15. In the course of its continuing contacts with the Catholic Church authorities in Northern Ireland the Department of Foreign Affairs has elicited the following information on the location of possible flashpoint areas which the Unit considers to be sound:-

Armagh and Down

16. The main Protestant strongholds in the southern section of these dioceses are: Portadown, Tanderagee, Bessbrook, Banbridge, Rathfriland and Newcastle. It is conceivable that in a situation of major sectarian violence these strongholds could operate together in order to push the Catholic population in a south-westerly direction towards the Monaghan border.
17. In the northern section of the Armagh diocese, along the western side of Lough Neagh (centred on towns like Stewartstown, Moy, Coagh and Moneymore), the Catholic population could be forced to move out. They would probably head for the border on either side of Aughnacloy. Aughnacloy would itself be a likely flashpoint.

Clogher

18. In Clogher trouble could emanate from Irvinestown, Enniskillen, Tempo, Fivemiletown and Brookborough in the centre of the diocese. Again the Catholic population if attacked would most likely head for the Leitrim-Cavan border.

Derry

19. The rural part of the Derry diocese has a fairly even balance of population. There is unlikely to be much trouble from the Protestant community except in the Cappagh district north of Omagh and Limavady on the eastern side of Lough Foyle.
20. Derry city can be divided into the western and eastern halves with the river Foyle between. The western half has a large Catholic majority whereas the eastern half or Waterside has 10,000 Catholics and approximately 19,000 of other denominations. If there was a sectarian outbreak the Catholics on this side would have two escape routes, one into the strong Catholic areas in rural Derry or across the Foyle into safe territory.

Down and Connor

21. The rural section of this diocese has the following main flash-points: the Coleraine, Portstewart and Portrush section; Larne, Carrickfergus and the area which surrounds Strangford Lough.
22. The following are the main flashpoints and danger areas for Catholics in the Belfast area: West Belfast, generally; Ardara

Ligoniel, Newtownabbey, Whiteabbey, in North Belfast; Willowfield, Markets (St. Malachy's Church) and Ballymacarret (St. Matthews) in south and east Belfast.

CONCLUSIONS

23. The Unit considers, subject to what is said in paragraph 4, that -

- (1) a policy of deterrence as such should not be adopted or enunciated;
- (2) military intervention should be considered if a situation of widespread violence arose, only if
 - (a) action on the political and diplomatic planes alone were unavailing;
 - (b) matters had become so bad in the North that intervention could not make them worse; and
 - (c) the Government were fully satisfied that the forces not committed to intervention were adequate to ensure the security of the State and especially of Government here;
- (3) the Government should consider whether, in relation to possible developments in Northern Ireland, the existing capability of the Defence Forces should be improved.* (In this connection, it would be most important to avoid an overt escalation of preparations which would imply an intention to intervene militarily in the North; that Army intelligence officers should not extend their operations to the North; and that in any training of units, procurement of military equipment or identification of accommodation no reference whatsoever should be made to Northern Ireland);
- (4) with a view to improving information on the North
 - (a) steps should be taken to ensure that relevant information of a political character available to the Department of Foreign Affairs is communicated to the Department of Defence, the Department of Justice, the Army and the Gardaí;
 - (b) these authorities should consider whether arrangements for correlation and assessment of available intelligence can be improved.

In relation to (3) above the Government would no doubt wish to be furnished with estimates of the expenditure that would be involved. The Unit would point out that a decision even in principle to incur any extra costs would fall to be taken in the light of the Government's assessment of the likely course of developments in Northern Ireland.

*The report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Implications of Substantially Increasing the Defence Forces - Discussion Paper No. 3, dated July, 1974, in the series "Policy on Northern Ireland" is relevant here, although the military report attached to this paper envisages achieving a strength of 20,000 solely by calling up reservists if and when a "doomsday" situation arrived whereas Discussion Paper No. 3 was largely concerned with the implications of achieving this or a greater strength by other means.

Emergency legislation

24.

Existing legislation and draft legislation which is ready for immediate introduction to the Dáil or Seanad would appear to provide for all the powers likely to be necessary in the situation that would arise if the State were to intervene militarily in the North. Arrangements have, however, been made to have a further study of this matter undertaken and the Unit understands that this is being done.

10th JUNE, 1975.

Signed:

J. Mallon

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