

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

**IRELAND**



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2008/79/3032
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	March 1978
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	12 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
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Comments by Mr. Mason and others on bilateral relations

1. In a statement issued on 9 January 1978 in reaction to the Taoiseach's RTE interview of 8 January Mr. Mason said:

"During the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in October of last year a clear understanding of each Government's position was established. I am therefore surprised and disappointed by the unhelpful comments on Northern Ireland made by Mr. Lynch"

and

"Talk of amnesty for those convicted on carefully gathered evidence presented before the courts can do nothing but give succour to law-breakers."

In a reiteration of British policy in respect of N.I., he said:

"The British Government's policy in respect of Northern Ireland which has the support of the major parties in Westminster is based on the following principles. Firstly, that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom for so long as the majority of people there so wish. Secondly, it is our aim to establish in Northern Ireland a fully devolved government and parliament. Thirdly, we want to see more of the government of Northern Ireland being conducted by locally elected representatives and the main parties at Westminster are agreed that any development of the present system must be one which both sides of the community can support and sustain. HMG are not committed to any particular arrangement as the only way of achieving this support and stability. Fourthly, I do not think that anyone in Northern Ireland has any doubt about HMG's commitment to the province."

2. On the 11th January at a luncheon at the American Chamber of Commerce in London, Mr. Mason said:

"In everything we have done, we have sought to establish confidence on the part of the people of Northern Ireland in our determination to do everything possible in the economic and security fields to ensure the earliest possible return to normality. It is not helpful if others, outside the UK, make comments which have the effect of damaging the confidence."

3. In the House of Commons on 12 January Mr. Mason, replying to a question concerning "irresponsible encouragement" being given to terrorists by the Taoiseach, said:

"Irrespective of what Mr. Lynch may or may not have said about this matter, the partnership between the Army and the RUC is well forged and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the RUC is taking the lead in most of the anti-terrorist activities within the Province."

4. In reply to a question concerning a failure to consult the British Government and the undesirable talk of an amnesty, Mr. Mason said:

"At the time of Mr. Lynch's initial statement, the hon. Gentleman, on behalf of his own party, and I, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, made our views quite clear. Secondly, I am pleased to say that in Mr. Lynch's second statement he removed most of the ambiguity about amnesty, and I think that there is no need, therefore, to make further representations on that matter."

5. Replying to a question concerning consultations with the parties in N.I. for a devolved system of government, and for the production of a working document, Mr. Mason said:

"I do not see any reason why I should take that sort of initiative at present, when I have already laid before the four major parties

of Northern Ireland the framework of a possible interim form of devolution and when talks are going on. The talks have not broken down. Some members of the Northern Ireland political scene have thought that the interjection by the Republican Prime Minister might have caused a setback, but the talks are continuing, and there is no reason why they should not continue. I do not wish to consider any other plan until the discussions are completed."

6. Replying to a question concerning the unhelpfulness of the Taoiseach's statement towards the achievement of a solution to the problem in N.I., Mr. Mason said:

"As regards his first question, my hon. Friend must have been aware that, when the Taoiseach made that long broadcast and it then appeared in cold print, there certainly would be a Unionist reaction, because Mr. Lynch indicated that there was the possibility of an amnesty for criminals and terrorists, and that was bound to cause a major reaction in the North and even in my own mind."

7. On 1 February the Conservative spokesman on N.I., Mr. Neave, in a speech at Surbiton, said the concept of power-sharing was "no longer practical politics".

8. The next day Prime Minister Callaghan said in the Commons:

"I have noticed recently that there are some issues in which the Opposition seem desirous of ending what should be a national approach to some of these matters. In the case of Northern Ireland, I hope that a national approach can be sustained and maintained as it has during the last seven years. What seems to me to be important is that in any arrangements for a future administration or Government of Northern Ireland all communities should have a feeling of fully sharing in that administration or government, otherwise we shall be back to the situation that existed before 1970."

9. In a speech to the Doncaster Constituency Labour Party on 3 February, Mr. Mason said that:

"the policy aim of successive UK Governments has been to see established a fully-fledged, locally elected, partnership administration in Northern Ireland. That remains our objective."

In expressing the hope that the talks about fleshing out a framework for a N.I. regional authority will be resumed before long, he said:

"Finding the basis for an interim arrangement is no easy task and outside utterances can knock us off course, by causing fragmentation and polarisation at a time when the parties should be pulling together for the common good."

10. Following the La Mon House Restaurant bombing of 17 February, Mr. Mason said in the Commons on 20 February, in reply to remarks about the security situation:

"I give an absolute assurance that as far as I am concerned there will be no amnesty whatever for those who are guilty of criminal acts. They will be treated as criminals and processed through the courts of law. They will serve their sentences, and there will be no amnesty."

and

"On cross-border co-operation, I assure the hon. Member that, from a practical point of view, since the return of Mr. Lynch to government in the South there has been no lessening of cross-border active co-operation."

11. Replying to a request for representations for the return of criminals who escape to the South, Mr. Mason said:

"I will bear in mind the point regarding representations to my right hon. Friend. The House is fully aware that we have rightly complained because the Republic has not yet ratified the suppression of terrorism convention. We wish to bring all

pressure to bear on those concerned to recognise that when criminals escape to the South, it is incumbent on the Republic that they should be returned to the North, and to realise that the whole situation in respect of terrorism should be tightened up."

12. In reply to a call for a rebuttal of the assertion by the Taoiseach that only 2 per cent of the violence in N.I. emanates from the Republic, Mr. Mason said:

"I can certainly tell the hon. Member that I disagree absolutely and fundamentally with the statement that only 2 per cent of incidents affect the border. The border is much more important now than it was some time ago. That becomes apparent when one recognises that in 1977 we charged 1,308 people with terrorist offences and that we also brought down the death level from 296 in 1976 to 112 in 1977. The level of violence had been reduced. The attrition rate had been high, and now, of course, people are using the border both to operate from Northern Ireland and to escape to it. There is no doubt that there is increasing use of the border and that 2 per cent is a paltry figure."

13. On 22 February, Mr. Frank Judd, Minister of State at the FCO said in reply to a question that the matter of Northern Ireland and its status had not been raised in any meeting of the EEC Council of Ministers. He also said that membership of the Community was a recognition of the territorial boundaries of the member states.

14. In reply to a question concerning signature by Ireland of the European Convention on Terrorism, Mr. Judd said:

"The view of the British Government on this matter is well understood by the Government in Dublin."

15. In the discussions which have been taking place in the British House of Lords on the Suppression of Terrorism Bill, which is the legislative provision to enable Britain to ratify the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, Government

spokesmen on a number of occasions have repeated the British Government's desire that Ireland should accede to the European Convention. For example, Lord Harris, Minister of State at the Home Office, said on 21 February:

"We certainly hope ... that the Republic of Ireland will become a party to the Convention. Even if it does not ... we hope that some other arrangements can be made with the Republic, possibly within the framework of the European Community."

Lord Harris again failed to acknowledge that arrangements of the kind under discussion between Community member states already exist as between Ireland and the UK under the provisions of the Criminal Law(Jurisdiction) Act.

16. Apart from statements by Government Ministers, it would appear that during the same period the British authorities have been briefing heavily on the subject of the importance of the Border for violence in Northern Ireland. Reflections of such briefings have been carried principally by the "Belfast Newsletter" and the "Daily Telegraph".

On 23 January 1978, the Belfast Newsletter carried a story about the acquisition by the Provisional IRA, of M60 machine guns and said:

"Usually reliable sources say that the guns were smuggled into the North via Éire ..."

An AFP report of the same day attributed this information to "a British military source". No information on the allegation was passed through RUC-Garda channels.

17. The Belfast Newsletter of 11 February carried a front page article on the belief of "security chiefs" that "the Provisional IRA has up to 100 trained killers standing by, ready to cross the border in a new murder offensive in Ulster". The story is attributed to the views of "security chiefs", "intelligence reports" and "the police" and alleges that IRA gangs are trained with powerful modern weapons in the Republic and that "as many as 300 IRA activists from Northern Ireland are taking refuge across the border." A senior RUC man is quoted as saying: "The key to Ulster's security problem is in the Irish Republic". No allegations along these lines have been made through Garda-RUC channels.

18. The "Daily Telegraph" of 24 February in an article based at least in part on official briefing includes the following:

"The South Londonderry gang believed to be eight to ten strong is based in Co. Donegal, and smaller provisional active service units operate from hideouts in Irish Republic towns like Dundalk, Castleblayney and Monaghan".

19. On 6 March, a debate took place in the House of Commons concerning security in Northern Ireland. In the course of the debate Mr. Mason made a number of allegations that the violence in Northern Ireland originated in the South.

20. The first of these concerned the perpetrators of the La Mon House bombing of 17 February. Mr. Mason, in reply to a query of Mr. Clement Freud (Liberal, Isle of Ely) alleged:

"It is doubtful whether the persons concerned remain within the Province. Because of the pressure that was brought to bear they could easily have escaped across the border".



21. Mr. Mason also alleged that "...there are groups who spend most of their time South of the border and make frequent rapid forays into the North to attack the security forces and escape back again". He added that "the border is more than a base line for local incidents, for there are other groups who spend more protracted periods, generally deeper into the heart of Northern Ireland, attacking where they can and often living rough, eventually withdrawing for recuperation and resupply to the other side of the border".

22. In regard to the explosives supply routes used by the Provisional IRA Mr. Mason alleged that "much of the home-made explosive which the Provisionals have been forced to use comes from sources in the Republic". He also alleged that "many of their weapons come through the Republic".

23. Following these allegations, Mr. Mason was asked, in the course of the debate, by Mr. John Watkinson (Labour, Gloucestershire West) whether he would enlarge upon the Taoiseach's Ard Fheis statement of 18 February that "...the border is not a major security problem now. About 2% of violence in the North has any direct connection with it". In reply Mr. Mason stated "the authorities in the Republic have been fully informed that the 2% figure to which Mr. Lynch referred is wrong". He added that "On a very narrow definition of an incident of shots across the border or of a terrorist being captured or injured on the border, it would be a small percentage, but the use of the border for terrorist activities in the North shows a very much higher percentage".

24. The allegations were strongly denied by a Government spokesman who was quoted in "The Irish Times" of Tuesday, 7 March as saying that:

"Not a shred of evidence to support Mr. Mason's allegations .... has been conveyed by the RUC or by anyone else in Northern Ireland, or Britain to any authority in Dublin".

25. In an interview, on 8 March, on the RTE radio programme "News at 1.30" the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Michael O'Kennedy, when asked if Mr. Mason's allegations could, in fact, be justified, replied that:

"we have never got any evidence whatsoever or any complaints whatsoever from the Northern authorities, from the RUC to suggest that there is any basis for what the Secretary of State is reported to have said ..."

26. When asked does he deny Mr. Mason's allegations, the Minister replied:

"We do indeed and of what I am particularly concerned that its very hard as you know and impossible indeed to disprove a negative to suggest that these things might be happening when no evidence is given to us as to what precisely this is based on".

27. In regard to the allegation that those who perpetrated the La Mon bombing were now in the Republic, the Minister said "I think that's particularly regrettable". The Minister described this allegation as "speculation" which, he said, "can of course give rise to fears and prejudice and all kinds of criticism which just don't stand up".

28. In the RTE interview, the Minister said that in relation to security co-operation "we are determined to have an effective security co-operation policy, we do not want to engage in any public recriminations or arguments and I think that our attitude over the last months clearly show that". He also commented that he did not want "to see our success being turned against us, we don't want to see tragedies of the North being used against us to cause reactions. I think this is terribly dangerous ground ....."

29. During Question Time in the House of Commons on 9 March, Mr. Mason in reply to a question from Mr. Martin Flannery (Labour, Hillsborough, Sheffield) whether he would raise the matter of the change of policy from the previous Irish Government to the present in regard to the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland, said:

"Certainly the next time I meet the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary of the Republic I shall discuss such matters with him".

He added, however, that he had:

"not yet detected a major change of policy by the South on that issue".

30. On the theme of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, Mr. Neave asked "Will he tell the Irish Government that raising the spectre of withdrawal at the present time simply encourages subversion and terrorism in Northern Ireland?" to which Mr. Mason made the following reply:

"..... Raising the spectre of military withdrawal is bound to cause some turbulence in the North. That has been accepted, and the Taoiseach has been fully aware of that".

31. In reply to a query of Mr. Fitt (SDLP, West Belfast) whether a Diplomatic Note concerning cross-border activity had been handed "to the Dublin Government" and that they had "completely rejected the terms of that note" Mr. Mason said:

"....., the information regarding the wide use of the Republic was conveyed to the Dublin authorities three months ago and before I made my speech on Monday. I hope that that sort of matter will now be pursued through the official channels".

This statement was similar to <sup>reported statements</sup> ~~one~~ made by the Northern Ireland Office, on 8 March, and ~~was~~ denied by a Government spokesman in Dublin.

which had been

the previous day,

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The Government spokesman is reported in "The Irish Times" of 10 March as saying that no information was submitted to the Department of Foreign Affairs or any other Department three months ago.

In regard to the document handed in to the Department of Foreign Affairs on 6 March the Government spokesman is quoted as having said that it was:

"a generalised one containing speculation, vague assumptions and unfounded deductions without a shred of evidence to support any of it".

32. On the question of development of co-operation between the RUC and the Garda, Mr. Mason told Mr. Watkinson (Labour, Gloucestershire West) that:

"The co-operation on the border between the RUC and the Garda is good, and I hope that we can build on that in the wider operations of attacking the Provisional IRA or, indeed, any other terrorist activity both in the North and in the South".

Mr. Mason also replied in similar vein to Mr. Goodhart (Conservative Bromley, Beckenham division) when questioned on the quality of that co-operation. He said:

"I have no evidence to prove that there is a slackening of co-operation between the RUC and the Garda on any part of the border".

33. On the question of whether the British security forces in Northern Ireland were "getting full and genuine co-operation" from the Irish Army, Mr. Mason told Mr. Marten (Conservative, Oxfordshire, Banbury Division) that:

"During the time that I have been Secretary of State for Northern Ireland the Army of the South has been giving greater co-operation than previously".

34. Mr. Mason, in reply to a question from Mr. McCusker (Official Unionist, Armagh) concerning allegations of 6 March and whether he will try "to convince the authorities in Dublin of what is happening along the border?" said:

"It is quite clear that 2% of border incidents are consistently mentioned. That represents only those incidents which are indisputably cross-border because commanding officers or eye witnesses have seen attacks being carried out from over the border in the Republic. That is the definition of the 2%".

35. In reply to a question by Mr. McNamara (Labour, Kingston-upon-Hull Central Division) concerning the arranging of Ministerial talks after Easter so that "some problems of definition that have arisen over the past few days", could be "sorted out sensibly". Mr. Mason said:

"I heed my hon. friend's wise words".

Department of Foreign Affairs  
March, 1978