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AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE  
17 Grosvenor Place  
London SW1X 7HR

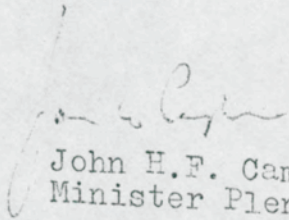
26 October 1978

~~Mr. Swift~~  
Mr. Swift, Maria  
9/23, 26/7

Dear ~~Hugh~~

The enclosed note prepared by Mr Corr summarises recent press and political debate here on the withdrawal issue. It is a useful note of record. You will have seen Hugh Munro's further contribution in yesterday's Times.

Yours sincerely

  
John H.F. Campbell  
Minister Plenipotentiary

Mr Hugh Swift  
Anglo-Irish Section  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin 2

# The British Media Debate on Withdrawal of Troops

From the North: June-October, 1978

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For the first time since the commitment of British troops to the North since 1969, there has over the past few months been extensive debate and analysis in the British media concerning the future of the North and, more specifically, on the role of the troops and whether they should now be withdrawn.

The origins of the debate can be dated to a Guardian editorial of 30 June entitled "Mr. Lynch has all the ideas". The editorial considered the attitude of Mrs. Thatcher to the North and stated that both Government and Opposition in Dublin now speak with one voice on the North and that they have chosen well the occasion to do so because nobody else is saying anything constructive. The editorial quoted Mr. Lynch's comment that unity does not have to happen immediately and stated that since a short-term answer has eluded every search, the suspicion may be growing that it does not exist and that power sharing and majority rule are irreconcilable. It concluded: "That leaves the long term. Mr. Lynch's prescription here is for a three-party enquiry - Britain, the North and the Republic - into what unity would eventually mean, if it came about at all. The sure thing about it is that it would be constitutionally loose and characteristically Anglo-Irish and the attractive thing is that it might work".

The single most important event which fuelled media debate

on the North was a Daily Mirror editorial of 14 August calling for withdrawal and additional impetus was given in the following month with the publication of a Gallup poll indicating that a majority of the British people now favour withdrawal. The debate widened to consider other aspects of the North's future development but media comment was largely in response and reaction to the Mirror editorial and the Gallup findings.

The Daily Mirror had toyed with the attractions of withdrawal on several occasions in the past, even if the paper did not explicitly call for full withdrawal. In June, 1974, for example, the paper stated that "Britain must now face the most sombre option of all - to pull out the troops and abandon sovereignty over the province .

Reluctantly, the Mirror fears that in the end withdrawal will be inescapable". The paper recently decided that this option's time had come and in its issue of 14 August called for the withdrawal of the troops within five years. The editorial argued that "only the Irish can hope to find a solution. The time has come to give them the Chance". It called for withdrawal not only of the troops but British finance and administration as well.

The editorial attracted considerable media and political attention in that it was the first time a major newspaper in Britain had openly called for withdrawal. In the weeks following its editorial the paper ensured its own central role in the argument and counter arguments by printing four more editorials criticising, inter alia, the opponents of withdrawal.

The Daily Express was the first paper to criticise the Mirror's call when it criticised the editorial on 15 August as "foolish and destructive". Mr Airey Neave was the first major politician to react and in a speech at Blaby on 19 August he stated that withdrawal would lead to a far worse situation than currently exists. Neave added that "those who advocate this policy do not seem to realise in what peril the whole community would be placed ... to withdraw our military presence (or declare an independent Ulster within five years) would provoke the very conflict between armed men of the two communities which the Army was sent in to stop ... the Catholic minority would suffer most if this shield were withdrawn".

John Whale and Chris Ryder in a lengthy Sunday Times article on 20 August provided some tacit support for the Mirror, even if from a rather unexpected source. The article stated that many R.U.C. men are increasingly wondering if the Army does more to excite trouble than to suppress it. It continued that there is no pressure from the Army to withdraw since "conditions may be uncomfortable but young men get action there (the North) and middle aged men get promotion". Whale and Ryder continued that R.U.C. members believe that they would do better than the Army since an element of racial misunderstanding would be removed and that many in the Force favour a compromise of withdrawing the troops to barracks. The article concluded rather hopefully that as British military presence in the North diminished, so would the *raison d'etre* of the Provisional IRA. On 23 August, the Mirror replied to its critics by stating that it had received massive support in favour of the editorial and it printed a page of letters from readers to this effect. In an editorial, it once again repeated the call for withdrawal and argued that without it the Irish would "talk about talks until the Blarney stone was worn down to a pebble".

On 31 August the Mirror carried extracts from a statement by Mr Mason to political correspondents the previous day in which he had rejected withdrawal as an option. Several other papers

also quoted Mr Mason's claim that the Mirror's views were not shared by the British Government or any major political parties in Britain or the North. He went on to add that "while I cannot speak for the Government of the Irish Republic, my understanding is that it does not accept the proposition either ... to advocate withdrawal by a particular date will give aid and comfort to no one but the terrorist". The Mirror in an editorial (31 August) in response to this stated that Mr Mason should consult his constituents in Barnsley and he will find that a great number of them do agree with the Mirror".

On the following day the Army made known its views. The Times, Guardian and Telegraph all quoted extensively from a briefing for Defence correspondents by Major-General Richard Trant, Commander of Land Forces in the North. Trant argued that while the Security situation has improved "we are still confronted by a very effective, ruthless, revolutionary, paramilitary organisation". He apparently gave examples of the "blood lust" pervading the Provisional IRA and deduced that to contend with such fanaticism requires a continued Army presence in the province.

The debate appeared to be waning but in the middle of September it was given powerful impetus. On 11 September, Mr William Van Straubensee informed Unionists in Belfast that if they thought they could get back Stormont by supporting the Conservatives with votes, they were very much mistaken. This caused considerable interest in the media in view of the Parliamentary situation and there was considerable speculation as to whether Van Straubensee had Shadow Cabinet backing for the speech. On 17 September, John Pardoe stated in an RTE interview that he favoured withdrawal and that he believed a third of Liberals nationwide and in the Commons agreed with him. The Sun in an editorial

the following day criticised Pardoe for arrogance and ignorance but added that it was really quite irrelevant what he thought. ✓ What was considerably more relevant was the publication of a Gallup poll a day later indicating that 55% of people in Britain favour withdrawal. ✓ In an editorial, the Times commented that a Study by Professor Richard Rose of Strathclyde University published earlier in the month had shown that since 1974 seven surveys had indicated that a majority in Britain favoured withdrawal so that it could not be said there was any great change in the latest poll. The editorial examined the options facing the North and concluded "If a province which has been fully part of the United Kingdom for 178 years and which contains a consistent majority in favour of remaining so has the civil and military authority of the State withdrawn from it, how is that to be described other than as expulsion from the Kingdom? By what principle is expulsion of a province from the Kingdom justified?".

On 22 September, both Mason and Neave criticised the attention being given to withdrawal. Speaking in Barnsley, Mason stated: "Suppose the troops pulled out what would be left behind? There would be a surge of violence from the IRA who would scent victory. There would be rapid retaliation by other paramilitary organisations leading to Sectarian violence on an unprecedented scale". Neave in a statement condemned the "armchair critics ... who stay away from the front line or wish to stimulate newspaper sales". In an editorial on 26 September, the Guardian considered the options facing in the North and concluded that of all options, direct rule has probably most common support from Catholics and Protestants alike. It stated, however, that "if the debate is about the long term then Dublin will have to be brought in" and considered possible models of unification while admitting that hostility to the idea would prevent any talks whatever on the theme. It concluded,

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however, that "it is still worth Mr Mason's while ... to inject the occasional longer thought into conversations with Ulster leaders".

On the following day, Professor Richard Rose in an article in the Telegraph examined the Gallup poll which had revealed that a majority in Britain favour withdrawal and he concluded that the better educated in Britain are in favour of staying in the North while those with lesser education feel the troops should be pulled out. ✓ An editorial in the paper found this a rather alarming discovery. It found even more alarming the Poll's discovery that the better educated favour staying in the North not from any belief that the North is part of Britain but from the belief that Britain has a humanitarian duty to prevent excessive bloodshed there. It concluded that both educated and uneducated seem to have abandoned instinctive feelings to their fellow citizens in the North and stated this was "little wonder ... when British and some Ulster politicians have so assiduously combined with media reporters to misrepresent Ulster men as an alien race devoted to the pursuit of antique forms of religious fanaticism". The Mirror, however, was outraged by Rose's conclusion and itself concluded of him: "His silly outburst demonstrates an old truth - an academic is a fool with degrees to prove it".

The "Economist" entered the debate at this stage. In a leader, the magazine stated that Direct Rule is killing political activity in the North and the people of the area do not really want it. It argued that Mr Mason should at this stage go "for the Jackpot of an elected Assembly for Ulster with some legislative powers". It considered the pressures for withdrawal and added that Mr Lynch is "biding his time ... he has not withdrawn his pledge to ask the British to state their intention to withdraw in the future". It concluded that the Irish hope they may gain political backing from the U.S. "for their long term view of a united Ireland" and that "at home and abroad the number who think that Mr Mason has not gone far enough grows daily. If Ulster is

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to blow up, it would be better for a bellwether than for this baa lamb (The five point plan).

In the Daily Express of 17 October, George Gale considered Direct Rule and concluded that "as long as direct rule and the Army are there there will always be the IRA". Gale went on to ask whether a united Ireland must be Catholic and answered his own question by stating that a secular and federal Ireland could bring both peace and prosperity to Ireland. He concluded: "The British people have no desire to remain in Ireland, nor indefinitely to station troops there. If the Dail and the Dublin Constitution were also to be dissolved, and a federal secular Ireland be established, then peace and prosperity could come to all Ireland, and Britain be relieved of a burden it is no good at carrying".

#### Conclusion

The Mirror's call for withdrawal met with overt hostility from most of the media and reasoned opposition from the Times and Guardian. Likewise, Mr Pardoe's call was attacked with considerable savagery in the more right wing papers. The Guardian was rather philisophical in its analysis of withdrawal describing it as "superficially attractive but ... not ... so much a solution as an abandonment". On the other hand, the opposition of the Times was based more on rather casuistical constitutional grounds.

The conjunction of the Mirror editorial, the Pardoe interview and the publication of the Gallup poll findings can be said to have had three main results. Firstly, for the first time in several years the media devoted extensive coverage to analysis of the situation in the North, even if in rather simplistic terms, as opposed to mere reporting of events. Secondly, the issue of withdrawal has now been brought fully into the open and has been widely debated, even if it has met with almost uniform hostility by both the media and the political establishment. Thirdly, both Mr Mason and Mr Neave felt the whole debate sufficiently serious to speak out on several occasions against the withdrawal lobby. It remains to be seen as to whether the whole episode will inject some urgency in the approach of both parties to the North's problems.

10-24/10/75