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ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRÁCHA
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2
DUBLIN 2

4 April, 1978

Mr. D. Nally
Assistant Secretary
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Dublin 2.

Confidential

Dear Dermot

I enclose two copies of a brief on the Northern Ireland situation prepared for the Copenhagen meeting. A copy has gone separately to Frank Dunlop.

Yours sincerely

Seán Donlon

Seán Donlon
Assistant Secretary

Extract from Brief of Taoiseach's
meeting with the British P.M. is
superficial or the occasion of the European Council
meeting of April 1978
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Anti-Irish Government References by the Northern
Ireland Secretary of State, Mr. Mason*

1. Statement issued on 9 January in reaction to the Taoiseach's RTE interview of 8 January:-

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

2. Luncheon at the American Chamber of Commerce in London on 11 January:-

"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. Question Time in the House of Commons on 12 January:-

- "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".
- "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".

*Evidence of hostile media briefing by the British authorities is contained in an Annex to this paper

4. Speech to Doncaster Constituency Labour Party on 3 February:-

"Finding the basis for an interim arrangement [in Northern Ireland] 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".

5. Statement in House of Commons on 20 February following the La Mon House Restaurant bombing of 17 February:-

- "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".

- "I can certainly tell the hon. Member that I disagree absolutely and fundamentally with the statement that only 2% 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% is a paltry figure".

6. House of Commons debate of 6 March concerning security in Northern Ireland:-

- "It is doubtful whether the persons concerned [in the La Mon House bombing] remain within the Province. Because of the pressure that was brought to bear they could easily have escaped across the border

-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 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

- we also know of cases where terrorists wounded in the North - and not necessarily close to the border - have gone South for medical treatment
- much of the home-made explosive which the Provisionals have been forced to use comes from sources in the Republic
- many of their [the Provisionals] weapons come through the Republic
- authorities in the Republic have been fully informed that the 2 per cent figure to which Mr. Lynch referred is wrong ... 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".

7. Question Time in the House of Commons on 9 March:-

- "Certainly the next time I meet the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary of the Republic I shall discuss such matters [change of policy from the previous Irish Government in regard to the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland] with him.....but I have not yet detected a major change of policy by the South on that issue..... 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
-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
- 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
- My right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Her Majesty's Government have let the Republic know how worried they are that the Republic is not prepared to move forward on the convention on the suppression of terrorism".

Media Briefing by British Authorities

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" (see examples attached):-

- (i) 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". The RUC have informed the Gardai that they have no evidence or intelligence to suggest that the guns were brought into Northern Ireland through the Republic.

- (ii) 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.

(iii) 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".

(iv) On 11 March, the Belfast Newsletter carried a front-page report headed "Dundalk 'is Murder HQ'". The report, attributed to "British intelligence experts" and "security chiefs", states:

"The current wave of Provisional IRA murder attacks on soldiers and police on patrol in Belfast is being master-minded from Dundalk..... Neighbouring towns like Castleblayney and Monaghan are also known to house wanted Provisionals - men whom the RUC are anxious to interview in connection with murders and explosions in the North".