

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2008/148/740
Creation Date(s):	14 March 1978
Extent and medium:	10 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.

Note

Tansach
to see please
14/3

The British Ambassador called on me at 11.30 a.m. this morning. I had requested him to call and he had indicated that he also had something to communicate to me.

The Ambassador handed me a message (copy attached) from Mr. Mason to the Minister suggesting an early meeting between them, preferably a meeting before Easter. The message indicated that Mr. Mason would be happy to come to Dublin.

Having read the message I pointed out to the Ambassador that it laid heavy stress on the security theme. He rejoined that his authorities of course placed great importance on the security aspect. I reminded him then that such meetings traditionally dealt with three topics, namely, review of Northern Ireland Political situation, review of security cooperation and North-South economic cooperation. I said that it seemed strange therefore that the message should weigh so heavily on the security aspect alone and that there should be such heavy emphasis on the question of the border.

The Ambassador asked whether I could give any sort of indication of the probable reply to the message. I said that I could not do so. I would of course bring it to the Minister's attention on his return from Brussels. I pointed out however that the Minister for Justice would not have returned to Dublin before Easter. The Ambassador indicated that he was aware of this fact.

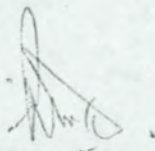
I then handed to the Ambassador the attached document "Violence in Northern Ireland". He said that he would not read it on the spot but would take it away for study and transmission to his authorities.

I then referred to the first sentence of paragraph five of the British note transmitted to us on the 6 March which stated that "the PIRA apparently feel that there is less pressure on their activities south of the border and thus use the perceived opportunities in order to store weapons.....".

I said that this sentence could be interpreted as indicating a lack of confidence on the part of the British in relation to our security measures.

If this was the meaning intended, it could not be conducive to good relations between the two sides. We had decided therefore to take the charitable interpretation that the sentence had not been fully considered. I added that we would not trust ourselves to reply in writing to alternative implications of the sentence in question.

The meeting ended with a short and vague discussion during which the Ambassador expressed his strong hope that present difficulties in relations between the two countries would be quickly ironed out.



14 March 1978

Department of Foreign Affairs

c.c. Mr. D. Nally, Department of the Taoiseach
Ambassador, London
PSM
Mr. H. Swift

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
TO MR MICHAEL O'KENNEDY

"As you know, I had hoped to have an early meeting with you on general matters and in particular on security: I am sure an informal talk would be more helpful than public exchanges on these issues and I very much wish to make sure that there are no misunderstandings between us.

I therefore believe that it would be very useful if we could meet quite soon, preferably before Easter. If it would be more convenient for you I would be happy to come to Dublin and to bring the Chief Constable of the RUC with me. I am sure it would be useful if Mr Collins was also present on your side.

I have always regarded it as of great importance that our two Governments should share a common assessment of the role which the border plays in the activities of the terrorists, so that the existing good level of practical cooperation between the RUC and the Garda is maintained and developed in the light of an agreed view of the significance of the border.

If you think, as I do, that a visit would be useful and helpful I would be glad to hear of dates which would be convenient."

British Embassy
Dublin

13 March 1978

Handed to British
Ambassador by
Secretary, Dept. of F.A.
14/3/78. Jm
141

1. Recurrent violence has been a predominant feature of Northern Ireland since the area was set up in 1920. Violence has erupted there in every decade since then, especially in Belfast, and a particularly bloody and persistent phase is at present being suffered. The Irish authorities firmly believe that any long-term solution of the problem in Northern Ireland depends on the recognition of the legitimacy of the aspiration of the majority of the people of the island to unity, achieved by consent and under agreed institutions. There is no evidence, however, that any significant proportion of the violence in Northern Ireland originates in or has a direct connection with the Republic.

2. The document entitled "The Use of the Border by the Provisional IRA", furnished to the Department of Foreign Affairs by the British Ambassador on 6 March 1978, makes a number of sweeping assertions alleging large-scale use of the border by those involved in the violence in Northern Ireland. These assertions are based for the most part on isolated incidents which are known or alleged to have occurred. The Irish authorities reject the allegation that the violence in the North is sustained by support from the Republic. Indeed, the successes that the Garda Síochána have achieved in combatting Provisional IRA activities in the Republic are underlined by the examples cited throughout the document of successful Garda operations. It is a matter of regret that Garda successes should be cited in support of unsubstantiated and potentially damaging allegations of the kind made. As regards the reference to statements issued in the name of the "Irish Republic Publicity Bureau, Dublin", it is also the case that similar statements are issued in Belfast.

3. A further implication contained in the document in question is that more could be done by the Irish authorities to deal with those involved in terrorist-type activities. The Irish authorities totally reject this implication and find it wholly unacceptable in the light of the degree of security co-operation under present arrangements and, indeed, the recent and repeated expression of satisfaction at this co-operation by, among others, the British Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary of State.

Short-range cross-border penetration

Under the procedure bilaterally agreed in 1975, the British authorities furnish on a weekly basis a list of incidents which are alleged to have their origin within or a connection with the Republic. In the course of 1977, 28 incidents were alleged to have had such a connection with the Republic. This is 1.06% of the total number of terrorist-type incidents in Northern Ireland, as published by the Northern Ireland Office. The British authorities have furnished no evidence that would justify putting any other construction on these statistics than that less than 2% of the violence in Northern Ireland has a direct connection with the border. It is significant that, even on the basis of these statistics, the number of alleged border incidents has shown a continuing decrease over the past three years and has, moreover, constituted a decreasing percentage of the total number of terrorist type incidents in Northern Ireland as a whole.

5. While it is not contended that the border does not play a limited part in the campaign of the Provisional IRA in the North, very substantial security is operated by the Gardaí and the Army in border areas. Approximately one eighth of the total strength of the Garda Síochána is assigned to duties in border areas. The problems to which the border gives rise are accentuated by its totally artificial nature. However, while the Irish authorities would welcome the disappearance of the border as a political and administrative division they are prepared, so long as it remains, to co-operate fully in surmounting whatever security problems may arise. The commitment of men and resources to the border areas is primarily aimed at denying the IRA and other paramilitary groups the freedom to use the border for their unlawful activities. The Gardaí have had a good success rate in apprehending persons engaged in subversive operations along the border and the majority of those apprehended have been from the North. However, while there is a constant Garda/Army presence in and intensive patrolling of the border areas, this is unfortunately not matched by a corresponding presence on the Northern side. The border has two sides: if the RUC wish to interview certain suspect persons it is at least as easy to apprehend them on one side of the border as on the other. If anything one would expect apprehension to be easier in the more contained communities existing in Northern Ireland.

6. No evidence to substantiate the allegations of IRA active service units being in the locations mentioned has been furnished by the RUC to the Gardaí. Without evidence, court charges cannot be sustained.

Long-range cross-border penetration

7. No evidence has been supplied to support the assertion that Provisional IRA active service units use the Republic as a safe haven as alleged. In the absence of such evidence, it would seem at least as logical, from an objective point of view, to assume that IRA activities - whether in South Armagh, South Derry or elsewhere in Northern Ireland - are carried out by persons from and resident in the North.

Safe haven

8. The allegation that the Republic is a safe haven for subversives from Northern Ireland is totally and categorically rejected. In each and every case where there is evidence that an individual was involved in illegal and subversive activities, appropriate action is taken by the Gardaí. A case in point is the arrest on 12 December last of [REDACTED] who had for a considerable time been resident in Northern Ireland. With regard to [REDACTED] the Gardaí have received no request from the RUC to institute proceedings of any kind and no evidence has been received which would connect this person with crimes in the North. If evidence exists, the machinery is there to deal with such situations. This applies equally to the case of [REDACTED] who, moreover, was the victim of an assassination attempt and would therefore be acutely aware of the risks inherent in seeking hospital treatment within Northern Ireland. Unsubstantiated allegations of this kind give rise to a direct risk of raids on Dublin and other centres in the South by Loyalist extremists. The security measures necessary to counter such risks in turn tend to divert the southern security forces away from border areas.

9. Of the 1,257 persons ~~convicted by~~ ^{brought before} the Special Criminal Court in the period since its establishment in May 1972 to 30 November 1989 were convicted solely for membership of the Provisional IRA. The fact that more than 50% of the total number currently imprisoned in Portlaoise Prison are from outside the Republic is conclusive evidence that the Irish authorities, far from providing a safe haven for subversives, have taken and continue to take notably efficient and effective action against those involved in illegal and subversive activity, North or South, where the necessary evidence exists. If the British authorities have evidence of individuals using the Republic as a safe haven, such evidence has certainly not been passed to any authority in the Republic. If the British authorities have such evidence, why has it not been passed over in order to allow proceedings to be instituted? The British Prime Minister's comment in the House of Commons on 24 November last, in an apparent reference to the Nairac murder trial, is here relevant: "...it is the case that the Government of the Republic have taken action in certain very serious cases - including one in particular that is in everyone's mind - and I have no doubt that they will continue to do so".

Weapons

10. The controls on firearms and ammunition in the Republic are significantly more stringent than those operated in the U.K. There is no evidence to support the view that the Claudia and Antwerp cases were other than isolated attempts to import such material in the Republic. On the contrary, the several Garda successes cited would surely dispel any impression there may have been that there is less security pressure south of the border. As regards the M60 the RUC have informed the Gardaí that they have no evidence or intelligence to suggest either that these guns were brought into Northern Ireland through the Republic or that they are being used for training here. Equally, the Gardaí have no information that they were smuggled into the north in this way.

Training

11. A number of training camps have been discovered in the Republic, some of which had not been used for a considerable time. The Gardai have informed the RUC of these finds. Otherwise, there is no evidence to support the allegations in this section.

Explosives

12. The Irish authorities acknowledge the tribute paid to the considerable Garda success in this area and agree that all major illegal sources of commercial explosive from the Republic into the North have been effectively closed. It is, however, regrettable that Garda successes in this field should be assumed to indicate that home-made explosive is largely manufactured in the Republic. There is no evidence that this is the case. Again, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is surely more reasonable to assume that home-made explosive is largely manufactured within Northern Ireland, where fertiliser containing Ammonium Nitrate is as freely available as in the Republic and where, moreover, both the bombers and their targets largely lie.

13. On 21 February, [REDACTED] was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment at Preston Crown Court on charges of ferrying explosive through England to a Northern paramilitary organisation (believed to be the UVF). The 263 sticks of commercial explosive found in his possession, weighing 45 lbs., is equivalent to 8.7% of the total Northern Ireland finds in 1977. [REDACTED] also had in his possession electric detonators and 275 lbs. of explosive component. It is disturbing to note the substantial amount of explosive involved in this single find. Is there any evidence that similarly substantial quantities of explosive are not regularly getting through to Protestant paramilitary groups in the North? Have the British authorities taken adequate steps to prevent this?

14. A vital element in dealing with the problem of explosives, of course, the control and custody of detonators. It is noted that some 60% of all illegally held detonators found in Northern Ireland during 1977 were of British manufacture and unmarked. This was nearly twice the number found there marked for use in the Republic.

15. In recent times there has been a spate of incidents in Northern Ireland involving the use of small cassette-type explosive devices. The Provisional IRA have claimed responsibility for many of these incidents. Cassette incendiary devices have been seized by the Gardaí from Northern Loyalists who came from the North to carry out reprisal operations in Dublin. If Loyalist extremists can produce them in Northern Ireland, it is not reasonable to assume that the Provisional IRA do likewise?

Finance

16. The Irish authorities accept that the Republic is not immune from robberies carried out by the Provisional IRA. Neither is Northern Ireland. Indeed many crimes of this kind committed in the South are committed by persons coming from Northern Ireland against whom increased vigilance would appear to be called for.

Security Co-operation

17. Garda/RUC co-operation is at a high and satisfactory level. The Gardaí cannot take action against persons in the Republic who are alleged to have committed crimes in Northern Ireland unless they have evidence on which to ground criminal charges. The action they take in operating check-points, patrols and searches is designed to deny use of the border to paramilitary organisations. The actions on this side of the border are coordinated with the RUC who, however, for understandable reasons have had to maintain a low profile and a largely inactive role in their side. The Irish authorities are fully committed to pursuing to the fullest possible extent those who are engaged in violence or other activities for illegal and subversive purposes and have achieved considerable success in pursuing this commitment, in co-operation as necessary with the

northern authorities. This commitment still stands and can fairly be judged on the excellent results that have been achieved to date.

18. The Irish authorities are satisfied that the structures through which cross-border security co-operation is being pursued are adequate. While therefore they are not aware of any need for change in present arrangements, they remain ready to review these structures on the basis of any reasonable proposals which might be made in order to better to achieve mutually agreed objectives in the area of security co-operation.

Department of Foreign Affairs

14 March, 1978