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cc PSS

PSM

Mr. Walsh

Mr. Campbell

Mr. O'Donnell

Mr. Neligan

I have been giving some thought to the points which the Minister may wish to get on the record in his meeting next week with Mr. Mason.

Crossmaglen

Con Murphy recently raised again with the Minister the question of the perimeter wall, damage to and dumping on the pitch and harassment by low-flying helicopters during games.

For the record, the Minister might reiterate the fundamental objections of the GAA locally and nationally to the enclosure of their property which has been requisitioned. As regards dumping and other damage to the pitch and, in particular, the approach area, the Minister might press Mr. Mason for a commitment to have this land restored to a suitable condition by a fixed date - say the end of the month or the middle of March. The British Embassy indicated informally that it was the intention of the British authorities to do this and guarantees to restore the ground to its original condition and not to limit to the club the enjoyment of the facilities have been given as far back as 1976. However, Lord Melchett recently mentioned to Ambassador Kennedy that it was open to the GAA to seek grants for the development of the pitch and clubhouse. While this question has not been discussed by us with the GAA, the Minister might make clear to Mr. Mason should he raise this possibility that the GAA expects the British authorities to rectify themselves the damage they have done, as indeed the authorities have undertaken to do.

The comments of the British authorities have been sought on the incidents of harassment of players by low-flying helicopters on 10 and 12 December last. Mr. Mason might be pressed for an early reply.

Cross-border Checkpoints

The position in respect of disruption of local traffic by British cross-border security checkpoints has improved in the last year or so and the volume of complaints we receive has been reduced almost to nothing. The permanent checkpoint at Aughnacloy, traditionally the principal source of complaint, has been removed. We have, however, recently received a complaint concerning checkpoints between Derry city and Donegal and it might be useful to get on record the Government's anxiety that delays to innocent travellers at such checkpoints should be kept to a minimum consistent with security requirements.

Road Closures

Many of the roads closed by the British in '73/'74 remain closed, frequently to the considerable inconvenience of local farmers who may have to make considerable detours to attend to their lands on either side of the border. Frequently it is the case that while the innocent are inconvenienced, terrorists have established alternative routes for their own purpose.

Road closures are a particular problem in Co. Leitrim, most especially in the area of Kiltyclogher where, because of the destruction by the British Army of a cross-border bridge, the detour necessary in order to go to Co. Fermanagh is considerable (20 miles?). The question of re-opening a bridge in this area has been raised with the British authorities on a number of occasions, most recently during the Minister's conversation with Mr. Mason in Dublin on 20 September 1978. The British subsequently indicated that, while they had re-examined the matter, they were unable to agree to the reopening of the road in question.

The Minister may wish to raise this question again with Mr. Mason.

*Deputy Blaney has put down a PA
about reopening a road in the
Pettigo area.*

Compensation

Arising from the activities (principally road closures) of the British security forces in Northern Ireland there are claims outstanding for damage to property in the State of the order of £800,000. A response by the British authorities to these claims is outstanding and will be pursued at a meeting at official level on 15 February. The Minister might wish to mention to Mr. Mason the interest of the Government in quickly finding a solution.

There are in addition a number of claims being pursued privately, principally by property owners in the Kiltyclogher area. Special mention might be made of the desirability of early and favourable decisions in their cases because here it is the private individuals who are out of pocket.

Points that the British May Raise

From time to time in recent months, the British have raised at official level the question of establishing a new group of officials concerned with security questions. At present, security questions are discussed by the Garda and the RUC at the "Baldonnell panels" and by officials in a group set up to coordinate cooperation on the subject of explosives. (The explosives cooperation group has, from time to time, gone outside its strict mandate in order to deal with other questions, such as the exchange of experiences on security legislation.) When asked what mandate they envisaged for the proposed group the British have indicated that they felt that general exchanges of views between officials concerned on security questions would be useful and that there was room for operational improvement on questions like Army-to-Army communications, which would remove the danger that has arisen in incidents in which the activities of the security forces on one side of the border imperilled their colleagues on the other side.

We have opposed the suggestion because we see the establishment of a further forum as unnecessary. The Department of Justice believe that such a forum would lead to a deterioration in the morale of the Garda and in the high level of cooperation that has been achieved in Garda/RUC cooperation. We have also hinted informally to the British that if there are particular questions which they wish to discuss, we would prefer to see these discussed on the margin of future meetings of the explosives cooperation group rather than in a new group such as they propose. The initiative for convening a new meeting of the explosives cooperation group lies with the British side.

Army-to-Army Communications

The British gave notice in January that they proposed to raise this question again. It has been raised by them from time to time over the years but has always been refused by us, on the following grounds:

- (1) The existing cross-border communications links between the Garda and the RUC work satisfactorily as do communications between the Garda and the Army on this side. (There is certainly a suspicion that such failures in communications as occur, occur in the link between the RUC and the British Army.)
- (2) It is preferable to have one single reliable channel of communication rather than invite confusion by multiplying the channels
- (3) As the Irish Army operate in general in support of the civil power, it would normally be necessary for them, on receipt of a communication from the British Army, to confer with the Garda before taking action. Accordingly, no improvement in communication would be achieved.

In addition, it is known that the Irish Army would strongly object to direct communication with the British and fear that their position vis-a-vis the local population in border areas would deteriorate if they were known to be cooperating directly with the British Army. It is presumed by our Army that the British monitor all their radio communications in the border area so that they are aware in virtually all cases of the location of Irish Army units.

General Security Evaluation

It is to be expected that Mr. Mason will review and reiterate the assessment of the general security situation given in their paper of 20 February 1978, which put forward the thesis that while the security situation in the "interior" of Northern Ireland improved significantly in recent years, there had been no comparable improvement along the border. There is an element of truth in this assessment but it is difficult to evaluate it fully because of the continued British refusal to supply us with the sort of detailed reports on border incidents that they had given us up til the end of 1976. However, it remains our view, based on the statistics available to us, that only a very small proportion of the violence in Northern Ireland has a cross-border connection and so it would be wrong to read too much into marginal shifts in a limited period.

U.S. Congressional Hearings on Northern Ireland

January

The British also indicated in ~~general~~ Mr. Mason's intention of raising this question. We have no information from Washington since the inaugural meetings of the new Congress which would enable us to assess any changes in the probability of such hearings now being convened. We therefore remain of the opinion that hearings in the coming months are unlikely, because of the continued opposition of Speaker O'Neill and Clement Zablocki, Chairman of the House Committee on International Relations. The British have indicated that they would not propose to be represented either officially or unofficially at such hearings which, of course, would contrast with our anxiety that, in the event of hearings being convened by the U.S. Congressional authorities, care should be taken that those called on to give evidence should be representative of legitimate interests in Northern Ireland, including in particular, elected political representatives.

There is a tradition of British interest in increasing cooperation between the two countries' representatives and public relations operations in the U.S. This is a path we have always refused to embark on, both because it would put us, in the U.S., in the position of defending British interests and attitudes and because overt cooperation with the British would reduce our acceptability to Irish-American opinion, which remains fundamentally anti-British.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

While the administration of the PTA in Britain is not a matter for Mr. Mason, the Minister might wish to put on record with a member of the British Government the continued anxiety of the Irish Government that the disruption and inconvenience caused to travellers between the two islands and to the Irish community in Britain should be kept to a minimum. We continue to receive complaints about detention and about the manner of the detaining officers towards Irish travellers. The Minister also recently received representations in the case of ^{Mr.} O'Malley Daly who was detained in Northern Ireland under the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act.

Uugh Swift

12 February 1979