

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2009/135/704
Creation Date(s):	5 October 1979
Extent and medium:	6 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.

SECRET

Summary of Discussions at Ministerial Meeting in
London on 5th October, 1979.

In addition to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Garda Commissioner, the R.U.C. Chief Constable and civil servants from both sides participated in the meeting.

The discussions are summarised hereunder under the various headings outlined in the British Embassy's Aide Memoire of 7th September, 1979 which formed the agenda for the meeting.

Steps to improve anti-terrorist capability of the Gardai
in the border area.

The Minister for Justice outlined the increases in the Garda Special Task Force and the Investigation Unit in the Garda Technical Bureau that had been decided on and he also indicated that some increases in the Garda strength in selected border areas would be made as more Garda recruits became available for service.

The Secretary of State welcomed this response which he considered very positive and encouraging.

The Minister for Justice raised the matter of the policing of South Armagh, in particular the lack of a permanent presence on the Northern side and the slow response of the Northern Forces to information supplied to the R.U.C. by the Gardai. He indicated that if the British increased the density of patrolling on their side, back-up cover would be provided on our side.

The British suggested that Gardai on border duty should be deployed solely in combatting terrorism but the Commissioner pointed out that in fact Gardai on border duty/^{already} devote 95% of their time to dealing with subversive activities.

SECRET

The Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable undertook to examine the operation of the police panels to see how they might be made more effective.

The British asked how the increased Special Task Force and the additional investigation units in the Bureau would be deployed - would they be deployed wholetime on border duty. The Commissioner indicated that they would be deployed on border duty as required - he pointed out that dealing with such matters as major bank robberies was just as important from the point of view of combatting terrorism as, for example, mounting vehicle checkpoints along the border.

Surveillance of suspects was discussed by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable. The Commissioner pointed out that the Gardai were not convinced of the value of the type of intensive surveillance carried out by the R.U.C. and the British Army having regard particularly to the heavy drain on manpower involved in such operations. The Minister for Justice pointed out that detailed information on surveillance was not as forthcoming from the R.U.C. as it might be but that if such information was supplied to the Gardai they would examine the situation - at present they are not convinced of the value of such surveillance but if and when they are convinced they will be prepared to consider the matter afresh.

The Commissioner undertook that, where an intelligence brief was furnished by the R.U.C. as a basis for the detailed investigation of a particular case on our side, it would be followed up by the Gardai provided they were satisfied that an in-depth investigation was warranted.

Helicopter Overflights

The Secretary of State stated that such overflights would be valuable in incident-related situations where terrorists on the move across the border could be observed until they were apprehended by the Gardai. As well as that there were occasions where surveillance patrols across the border would be helpful.

The Minister for Justice outlined what the Government was prepared to offer in relation to overflights and indicated that, additionally, the Irish Army would do more aerial surveillance on our side.

The Secretary of State welcomed the Minister's statement and expressed his appreciation for the Government's response. The conditions outlined by the Minister were quite reasonable except for one point - 5 kilometres was a bit on the short side and would only allow 3 to 4 minutes pursuit of a fleeing vehicle and it would be a pity if the concession were to fail on that account.

The Minister for Justice suggested that the concession be tried on the basis of 5 kilometres to see how it works. It could be looked at in the first monthly review of the overflights.

The Minister for Justice outlined what we understood by the term serious incidents and pointed out that if the concession were abused it would lead to problems and could give rise to a re-think on the issue.

Direct Army to Army Communications

The Minister for Justice outlined our position in this regard - Army to Garda communication in limited emergency situations.

The Secretary of State was satisfied that this would solve the problem from their point of view. He said that the concession would be rarely used and only in cases of emergency but that it was important to them to have the facility available.

It was agreed that the technical details for the communication could be worked out in the police panels.

R.U.C. Questioning of suspects

The Minister outlined the Irish position in this regard as decided by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Security.

The Secretary of State agreed that the difficulties were formidable. He said that they attached a lot of importance to such questioning and that he regretted that we did not find it impossible to accede to the request.

A discussion followed on the matter of the attitude of the Courts following the 1976 legislation and it was pointed out that if questioning by the R.U.C. were tried and failed our position would be much worse than it is at present.

The Secretary of State again recorded that he was bound to express disappointment and it was agreed that the Commissioner and the Chief Constable would examine means of improving the present arrangement that exists between the two Forces in relation to the questioning of suspects.

Assistance in training

The Minister for Justice pointed out that the Gardai have been glad to avail of assistance in the past.

The Secretary of State said that they were only too ready to help at any time.

The Minister availed himself of the opportunity to thank the R.U.C. for the invaluable help they had given to the Gardai in relation to the Papal visit.

Liaison Officers

The Secretary of State said that a favourable decision on this request would be a demonstration of a joint effort on the part of both Governments and would be evidence of their willingness to work together. He asked the Minister to consider the request in that light.

The Minister outlined the Irish position - the doubtful value of such an arrangement and the risk posed for the officers who would be nominated. He pointed out that the fact that the Gardai and R.U.C. meet regularly is well known but if what was required was further evidence of

co-operation, the question of giving more prominence to meetings between the Commissioner and the Chief Constable could be considered.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out that it was important to highlight co-operation in a common cause but that confidentiality was extremely important.

The Minister for Justice said that any publicity in this area would require careful consideration and should be done only by agreement.

The British were agreeable to the nomination of specific officers in each Headquarters as suggested by us. It was agreed that the names of the officers nominated would not be publicised.

What the British are doing

The Minister for Justice asked what the R.U.C. and British Army intended doing to effect improvements on their side.

The Secretary of State said that they were seeking to improve their effort to get on top of the problem by legal means - that no change of policy (e.g. executive detention) was being considered.

He said that the strength of the R.U.C. was being increased and, as the operations of the security forces were not as effective as they might be, Sir Maurice Oldfield had been appointed to co-ordinate operations.

Additionally several working parties had been set up to find ways and means of improving the overall performance on security.

One working party chaired by the Secretary of State would decide means of getting the British Army and the R.U.C. to work more effectively together.

Another working party was examining cross border co-operation and had come up with some of the ideas being discussed at this meeting.

A third working party had made an object study of the South Armagh area - which the British recognised as a problem area - and the views of the working party were being presented to the Secretary of State. It was pointed out that the object study would have to be looked at afresh in the light of developments at the meeting today.

The Secretary of State agreed that they were not as effective in South Armagh as they ought to be. He stated that a further study on the gathering of intelligence was being carried out but that he was not in a position to supply details regarding the study.

Miscellaneous Items

The Minister for Foreign Affairs raised the matter of H-Blocks and the campaign for special status for prisoners. It was agreed that the campaign was now for all practical purposes 'dead' but the Minister asked that the possibility of it being whipped up again be borne in mind.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs raised the question of the Crossmaglen G.A.A. pitch. He pointed out that things on that front were now quiet but that care should be taken that the G.A.A. are not abused.

He also raised the question of compensation for damage caused on this side of the border by British Army activities and the question of the recruitment of more Catholics to the R.U.C. and the U.D.R.

Communique

It was agreed that the communique and any subsequent private briefing should be balanced and that the involvement of both sides should be stressed. Copy of the communique is attached.

It was agreed that meetings should take place from time to time to review progress.

The general tone of the meeting was warm and friendly and the British side appeared to be very satisfied with the outcome.