



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Reference Code:	2021/46/304
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Sec 1.1.3.6

Meeting with the SDLP

24 February 1992

Security Situation

1. The level of violence in Northern Ireland has escalated significantly since the beginning of the year, with a total of 31 deaths. There were during this time a number of major incidents involving multiple fatalities as follows:

- PIRA attack on construction workers at Teebane: 7 dead
- Sinn Fein Advice Centre (attack by deranged RUC officer): 3 dead
- UDA attack on betting shop in Ormeau Road: 5 dead
- PIRA killed by British Army following attack on Coalisland RUC Station: 4 dead

2. Two notable trends in the security situation over the past year are

- the upsurge in secretarian attacks by paramilitaries, most notable in the case of the UDA (Loyalist groups were responsible for 43% of fatalities in 1991, as against 27% in 1990)
- the fall in Army and RUC fatalities as a percentage of the total (from 43% in 1988 to 20% in 1991).

3. Against a background of mounting concern at the recent attacks the British Prime Minister convened a meeting in Downing Street of the four party leaders, including John Hume, on 11 February. Although billed as a discussion about the security situation the meeting was largely concerned with efforts to revive the political talks

process. The Prime Minister recalled that additional troops had been dispatched and that recruitment of a previously announced increase of 400 in the RUC was proceeding satisfactorily. There was no indication that major legislative changes or departures from the overall thrust of existing security policy were envisaged.

4. The upsurge in paramilitary violence has prompted renewed speculation about the reintroduction of internment. The SDLP position is similar to that taken by the Government: in his Irish News interview on 20 February the Minister for Foreign Affairs said:

"I believe strongly that governments must act within the framework of the rule of law. Experience has shown that internment does not work in Northern Ireland. Those who espouse internment are really offering a counsel of despair."

Coalisland Incident

5. The SDLP reaction to the shooting dead of 4 IRA members by the British Army in Coalisland on 16 February has been relatively muted. Party representatives, including the local SDLP Councillor Jim Kavanagh, have largely focussed on the theme of the futility of violence and the need for a political solution, while allowing that the particular circumstances of the shooting require further investigation. Seamus Mallon placed the responsibility on the instigators of the attack:

"surely the lesson from this is for those people who are encouraging violence to realise the harm they are doing to the entire community....."

The Government are continuing to monitor developments in this case through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

Proscription of UDA

6. Following the Ormeau road shooting there have been demands for the proscription of the UDA. The Government have taken the view that the UDA is overwhelmingly a terrorist rather than a political organisation and, as such, needs to be firmly confronted by the security forces. It is for the British authorities to judge whether proscription would be appropriate in that context. The SDLP have not in the recent past sought to make a major issue of this question, and are no doubt conscious of the complications likely to arise from Unionist demands for any such action to include the proscription of Provisional Sinn Fein.

Lethal Force

7. The issue of the unwarranted use of lethal force by the security forces has been the subject of continuing discussions in the framework of the Anglo-Irish Conference. Public interest is likely to remain active with the recent decision by the NI DPP to press murder charges against British soldiers involved in the death of Fergal Carragher, in December 1990.

A case which may be referred to by the SDLP representatives is that of Kevin McGovern, a totally innocent individual, who was shot dead by the RUC in Cookstown on 29 September last. The RUC expressed regret at the shooting and indicated that an investigation by the RUC of the killing, supervised by Fionnuala McGrady (Eddie McGrady's niece) of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, would take place. We voiced our concerns at the circumstances of the shooting at the Anglo-Irish Conference of October last and argued for a fully independent investigation. We also argued that the officer concerned should be removed from duties pending the outcome of the investigation. He was not removed. It was announced on 18 February that the investigation

had been completed and a file sent to the DPP. We have requested a full briefing on the latest developments through the Anglo-Irish Secretariat.

Brian Nelson Case

8. The Nelson issue will likely to figure prominently at the next meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference of 6 March. Central questions which will arise concern the foreknowledge and involvement of Nelson's British Army handlers in UDA murders, the degree of continuing collusion between the security forces and Loyalist paramilitaries, and the claims, made by Nelson, that he was encouraged by his British Army handler to plan UDA bombings in this jurisdiction.

Our concerns are shared by the SDLP. Seamus Mallon has drawn attention to implications for nationalist confidence in the administration of justice. Joe Hendron, who is the prospective SDLP candidate for West Belfast, has expressed concerns about the case, including media reports that Brian Nelson had been sent to South Africa several years ago on an arms procurement mission for the UDA.

9. Ulster Defence Regiment/Accompaniment

Statistics recently received from the British side on UDR accompaniment rates for the period April-September 1991 indicate that there has been a decrease in overall accompaniment rates, compared to the previous six-month period of October 1990 - March 1991. We have vigorously raised our concerns at the poor British performance on this issue at meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference and in official-level exchanges. We have in the past week conveyed our concerns at the appearance of unaccompanied UDR checkpoints and patrols in the Markets areas of Belfast (e.g. Cromac St.).

The Bill providing for the merger of the UDR with the Royal Irish Rangers passed its second stage in the House of Commons on 13 February. Seamus Mallon and others have generally welcomed the move, but remain keen to see the part-time element removed from the new Regiment. The British Armed Forces Minister acknowledged in the Commons that there was a decline and that it was likely to continue but denied, in response to Unionist MPs, that there was a hidden agenda to phase out the part-timers. The DUP, in particular, remain sceptical on this point. Paisley sees the Bill as the result of pressure by the Irish Government. The SDLP have prudently adopted a low profile in the House of Commons during the debate.

Anglo-Irish Division
February, 1992