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For *Mayella O'Connor* *(initials)*

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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH 11 pages

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

15/4/92

9 April 1992

cc *J. Callahan*
S. Farrell
S. Hughes, D/I

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Assistant Secretary

Lieutenant General Sir John Wilsey, GOC, Northern Ireland, attended here for dinner last evening. He was accompanied by Brigadier John Sutherland, Commander of the 8th Brigade, (Derry) Brigadier Tom Longland, Commander of the 3rd Brigade, (Armagh) Colonel Fred Allen, Regimental Colonel/Project Officer (amalgamation of Royal Irish Rangers/UDR) and Colonel Roger Brunt, Military Assistant to GOC Wilsey. The British Side of the Secretariat was represented by Robert Alston and Marcus Dodds and the Irish Side by Messrs. O'Donovan (who hosted), Barry, O Riordain and myself.

This was not of course the first occasion on which senior British Army Officers (including a previous GOC) visited Maryfield but it was some time since we had a visit.

The atmosphere throughout the evening was both lively and friendly. As well as the general round table "forum" discussion, there were a number of one-to-one discussions which proceeded before, during and after what I've described as the "forum" discussion. Most of the exchanges are, I believe, captured in the attached note. It is difficult to summarise the essentials - together with the various nuances - but the following is an attempt:-

- (1) Our Army guests were intelligent, appeared to understand the complexities of the NI situation and very anxious to talk to us - their tendency to talk freely seemed to cause some unease to Messrs. Alston and Dodds. The present Dublin Government, they felt, is forward looking.
- (2) The UDR/RIR merger is being well received by members of both organisations - there were clear indications that the UDR were angry over the way in which certain politicians had represented their views.
- (3) The number of UDR part-timers will be maintained. General Wilsey believes that the new Regiment should

patrol all areas and that the Irish Government should not object to this. We disagreed.

- (4) The security situation has improved since 1974. Wilsey said that, with the benefits of "hot pursuit", the Army could sort out the NI situation "within a month". He qualified this view quite substantially in the course of discussion.
- (5) The Army's view of North/South security co-operation differs from that of the Chief Constable of the RUC (whom Wilsey "obeys"). People within the Southern security services are of course well intentioned but action (e.g. clearances) come too slowly.
- (6) The notion that there are areas immediately North of Border (e.g. South Armagh) which are not patrolled by the RUC is lacking in substance.
- (7) Harassment occurs but most complaints are unfounded. There is a keen appreciation of the importance of avoiding provocation and of dealing promptly with complaints. It is not true that the "Paras" and "Marines" are sent to areas on a planned basis to "sort out" problems.
- (8) A victory for Gerry Adams in the forthcoming election should be viewed in a positive light! (A surprising one from British Army Officers).
- (9) The planned (40,000) reductions in the British Army has produced a "delicate" situation within the Army.

Yours sincerely

T. Dalton

Tim Dalton
Secretariat

Dinner with GOC, Northern Ireland & Others

Note

General impressions

I think it fair to say, that our overall impression was one of some surprise - pleasant surprise. The (tiny) bundle of prejudiced notions which forms part of ones make-up had led me to expect that our guests would be a fairly stodgy, tight-lipped lot who would hold that the solution to the Northern Ireland problem was simply a matter of side-lining politicians so as to let the British Army get on with the job of "taking out" a hard core of well known, committed terroriste. Our guests, however, (and in particular the two Brigadiers and Colonel Allen) turned out to be a highly intelligent group of men who showed had not only that they had a well-balanced view of the situation but also a pleasant tendency to be anything but tight-lipped. Indeed, so anxious were they at times to express their views on everything that came up (or was thrown at them), that both Alston and Dodds became a little uneasy - whether this sense of unease transmitted itself to the Army people, I cannot say, but it was interesting that, at the end of the evening, some of them privately proposed further one - to - one meetings when, no doubt, they would be free to say more to us.

There were, of course, times during the evening also when the air of enlightenment lifted, momentarily, and was replaced by the kind of thinking one might more readily have expected. They all became quite defensive on occasion about the record of the British Government which had acted as an "honest broker", throughout, in attempting to deal with the Northern Ireland situation. The British Army certainly had "tried and tried and will continue to try" to discharge the onerous task placed upon it in a fair and impartial manner. We (Southerners), however, tend to "look back all the time rather than forward".

I put this "looking back" suggestion another way by saying that we tend to remember history while they apparently prefer to forget it. This did not mean that we look "back" for policy inspiration or that the legacies bestowed on us by our history had frozen our thinking - it simply meant that we realised that it was, to put it mildly, unwise to attempt to formulate any policies on Northern Ireland without taking account of the historical facts which produced it. They accepted this - Wilsey, in particular, (allowing the more enlightened approaches manifested at other times in the evening to re-emerge) said that the present Government in Dublin was forward-looking and open to ideas.

RIR/UDR Merger

We were given some information on the RIR/UDR merger. It was interesting that information on the subject which was given quite freely in private (one-to-one) discussions was given much more sparingly and cautiously in open forum. Some of the more important points to emerge were as follows:

- (a) Contrary to what might have been suggested in a BBC "Panorama" programme, the idea of the merger was being very well received by the vast majority of those who now form part of the RIR and the UDR. There are of course some who are unhappy about various matters, but this is no more than one would expect when any major personnel reorganisation takes place. Wilsey said that he would "dearly love" to publish (but for obvious reasons could not publish) a letter which he received from one UDR Battalion which was to the general effect that they wished that the politicians who were suggesting that the proposed merger was a matter of deep dissatisfaction to rank and file members of the UDR, would "get off their backs" and allow the merger to proceed. We were promised a copy of this letter.
- (b) The new Regiment will be an "ordinary" Regiment of the British Army and Wilsey sincerely hopes that it will be

looked upon as such. Its members will have the possibility of service abroad - Colonel Allen confirmed that, earlier in the day, he had vetted and approved applications from 50 members of the UDR who had applied for service in Cyprus as members of the new Regiment.

(c) Wilsey said that it is not the policy to reduce the number of part-timers in the new Regiment. On this issue, one sensed (on the basis of some other general remarks which were made and certainly on the basis of private conversations), that Wilsey's views differ somewhat from those of the two Brigadiers and Allen. Allen had already said to me (and Longland said something similar to David Barry) that the strict application of regular Army rules and regulations would probably have the effect of disqualifying a number of part-timers. Allen felt that given their slightly higher age profile, many of them might not meet the fitness requirements. One had the impression that the two officers just mentioned (at least) were not very impressed by the UDR generally and would not regard it as disastrous if many of them (the part-timers, in particular), failed to make the cut.

(d) Wilsey urged very strongly that we should use our "influence" (he was addressing O'Donovan at the time) to persuade people with whom we come in contact that they should treat the new Regiment as an "ordinary" British Army Regiment so that it would "given a chance to succeed". The amalgamation initiative, he said, was his and he was convinced that if there was an insistence, for example, on accompaniment on all occasions it would "ruin" everything.

He confirmed that it followed logically from his ideas on the "ordinariness" of the new Regiment that they could be called on to patrol areas in the same way as other

Regiments. He hoped that "Dublin" would not create too much of a "fuss" about this. O'Donovan said that he would have to say to him, in all honesty, that the idea of UDR personnel patrolling these areas would simply not be acceptable to the Government - the UDR were seen as a threat to the Communities concerned (Alston thought this "a bit strong"). I mentioned to the General, subsequently, that it was not a matter of the Dublin Government wanting to create any "fuss". People in the minority community, who do not now have UDR patrols for very good reasons, would be unlikely to welcome them with open arms, simply because they had new uniforms. The Government - and indeed the British Government - would have to respond if the presence of the newly-dressed UDR men in certain nationalist areas became the subject of serious concern to the communities involved. [On this issue, again, one detected a difference of opinion between Wilsey and the three officers mentioned earlier. I had the impression, on the basis of the conversation generally, that the three in question would tend to see merit in "managing" the manpower resources at their disposal in a way which - whatever their theories about "Ordinary" Regiments - would not see former UDR men patrolling these areas].

Security Situation/Cooperation/Hot Pursuit

Much of the discussion on these issues took place between Wilsey, Allen and I. Overall, the situation in their view was much more "manageable" than in, say, 1974. Wilsey said that he was not aware of any situation, where an Army had managed to defeat a terrorist group like PIRA, where they (i.e. the subversives) had a "perception" that they could always escape to a "friendly adjoining territory".

The General, realising that his air of enlightenment had again temporarily lifted, hastened to add that he was not suggesting that escaping PIRA activists actually receive "friendly"

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treatment when they cross the border - what was important was that they had this "perception".

He went on to say (to me - not generally) that if the option of "hot pursuit" were open to the Army, (he was referring to overflights) it would put the terrorists out of business "within a month". I expressed doubt about this thesis, making the point that most of the activities of PIRA begin and end inside Northern Ireland where the Army have the opportunity of hotly pursuing whatever and whoever they wish - was the "hot pursuit" issue not something of an excuse for failure. Allen clearly recognised that there was a point here and nodded when I said that Wilsey seemed to be suggesting, in any event, that the problem of violence in Northern Ireland was capable of a military solution. Wilsey accepted that this was not the case and proceeded then to list elements which he considered essential to a solution i.e. political development, economic and social progress and, finally, a sound security policy (the four elements which, by coincidence, O'Donovan had mentioned to him before we dined). He accepted that one is no more likely to eliminate PIRA by "hot pursuit" than one is to eliminate crime by saturation policing.

Picking up on the reference to crime, Allen said that one of the major problems, now, as he sees it, is that a sizeable number of people involved in PIRA and in extreme Loyalist organisations are straightforward criminals "doing very nicely" on crime. Unlike ordinary criminals, however, they carry about them the "freedom fighter mantle" which fortifies their position within certain communities and makes it extremely difficult to deal with them.

The conversation at that stage drifted for a time into crime generally, with Allen saying that he felt much safer in Northern Ireland than in parts of London. One of the products of increased criminal activity is that the Army now has to be constantly on its guard about the problem of drug-taking

amongst its younger members in particular. The Army are, Allen said, quite vigilant on this issue because the combination of expert training, guns and drug taking could obviously be lethal.

With regard to security cooperation, Wilsey was keen to emphasise that his relations with the Chief Constable (whom he "obeys") are excellent. However, RUC views as to the effectiveness of North/South security cooperation, tend to differ somewhat from the Army view. It is not that they question the "goodwill of the security forces in the South", nor in any way question their sincerity but, from an Army point of view, the procedures sometimes are simply too slow. I asked if they could give examples and was assured that they could give many. The only example they gave, there and then, were the delays sometimes experienced when they try to get "clearance" for an ATO to cross the border. I asked where they thought the delays arose and they said they did not know - sometimes people were not at their desks, sometimes requirements arose at nights and at weekends, some individuals were more eager to help than others and so on. I gathered that the RUC were amongst the agencies which might, at times, be "slow".

Police Patrols on the Border

O'Donovan raised the question of police patrols in certain areas north of the border, such as South Armagh - the fact that the Army has to police these areas without an RUC presence must present problems for the Army? This produced a lively discussion which began with absolute denials, on Wilsey's the part (and all of his Juniors) that the RUC did not patrol areas north of the border. There was a problem of "availability" of RUC officers, at times, but if an RUC officer needed, for example, to serve a summons on somebody residing right up to the border, then he could certainly do so - the "Queens Writ" ran to the border. It was of course extremely unsafe for members of the RUC to operate in certain

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areas. However, they could do so and frequently did so with Army protection. The question is (said Wilsey) - what are we doing to ensure that the RUC can patrol freely in these areas?

O'Donovan, pointing to the lessons of our history, said it was essential to the restoration of normality that the RUC should patrol this area as they do any other.

The Army people came across quite strongly on this subject, generally, and absolutely rejected that there was a basis for the perception on our side that there are areas north of the border which are not patrolled by the RUC.

Harassment

There was a long discussion on this subject, the main points being as follows:-

- (a) Most complaints of harassment are unfounded. A proportion however certainly have substance.
- (b) The Royal placed particular emphasis on measures to deal with this subject in the Derry area some years ago, with some very positive results. All of those present indicated that they were deeply conscious of the need to avoid provocation and to deal fairly and quickly with complaints. All officers receive specific instruction on these issues six months in advance of posting to Northern Ireland - again we were promised a copy of these instructions.
- (c) The assignment of particular Regiments to particular areas was simply a matter of that Regiment's "turn" coming up on the "rota". They strongly denied the suggestion that the Paratroop-regiment or the Marines are consciously sent to particular areas at particular times to "sort out" problems that emerge. There is no mystery figure in the Ministry of Defence who make conscious

decisions of this kind. It is simply a matter of rota fall-out. [I did not find it easy to understand their exact position on this subject. If it is true that the operation of the rota has the unfortunate effect of sending particular Regiments to areas where their presence is strongly resented, would it not make sense for somebody to make a policy decision that the rota be changed? The only logical reason for leaving the rota as it stands is that it produces results. In other words, while the level of resentment within the community is raised so also is the level of British Army effectiveness].

Vote for Gerry Adams

There were of course, some references to the forthcoming election, but none more interesting (I thought) than the argument by five senior British Army Officers that the re-election of Gerry Adams should be seen as a positive thing. There was some division of opinion on this subject around the table generally but it was clear that not only the Army Officers, but also Messrs. Alston and Dodds felt that it was better that the people whom Mr. Adams represented had a political "voice". O'Donovan asked whether this might enable the British Government to do "deals" with certain elements (as they had done in the past) when the time was right. [It was fairly evident that this is not ruled out but is a longer-term option].

Army strength generally

British Army strength is to be reduced by 40,000 in all, over a three year period (ending in 1994). This is an inevitable part of the outfall from the changes which have taken place in Eastern Europe. The planned reduction in strength had produced a "delicate" situation within the Army with many (naturally) feeling quite concerned for their jobs and their futures. The reduction will be achieved by means of a combination of reduced intake, natural wastage and a

redundancy "package". While I would need to confirm the figures, my understanding was that in each of the three years about 1,000 people will be expected to opt for (or be given) the "package". This year the majority of those receiving the package had opted for it but some (including officers working closely with those present) had simply got notice to the effect that the "package" was being applied.

Some of the officers (including Wilsey) expressed the view that, in the longer term, there may be a review of the cutback policy - the reemergence of fascism, for example, in Europe may cause Governments to pause.