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AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2  
DUBLIN 2

*M. Keenan (on leave)*  
*M. M. Lally*  
2-15

7

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

21<sup>st</sup> May, 1992.

*Tairneach*  
*Jan may with*

*to me,*

The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew, Q.C., M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

*22/5*

*Dear Sir,*

You wrote to me on 20 May indicating some concerns which you had about the manner in which the public debate on the events in Coalisland had developed over recent days, particularly as regards comments which I had made in Dáil Éireann and elsewhere. Being convinced, as I know you are, of the importance of exchanging views openly and arriving at a clear understanding of each other's positions, I welcome the opportunity which this correspondence provides to convey our perception of the chain of events which culminated in the deplorable incidents involving the Parachute Regiment which occurred last week. I too will treat our exchange on a personal and confidential basis.

You will recall that at the Conference on 27 April I drew attention to serious problems developing in the Tyrone area, based on the many reports we were receiving from very responsible sources, about harassment and conspicuously aggressive behaviour by the Parachute Regiment. I hoped by raising the matter in this fashion, and at a relatively early stage, that action could be taken to deal with the situation. In my subsequent remarks to the press I deliberately dealt with the matter in a low-key and very general manner.

The behaviour of the Parachute Regiment in the period since the Conference is now a matter of record. The attacks carried out by members of the Regiment on customers in two public houses in Coalisland on 12 May, followed by the events of 17 May during which live ammunition was fired, with consequences which could have been even more tragic than they were, generated, as you no doubt observed, a response which was remarkable, not alone for its strength, but for the spread of political opinion on both sides of the border which it encompassed. You will have noted that in the Dáil the issue was pressed in the strongest terms and at very senior level by all of the Opposition parties.

Faced with a situation we hoped might have been averted by our earlier private representations we had, as you yourself agree, little choice but to address publicly and directly the concerns which were being voiced on all sides. I did so on the basis that the simple and sure way to allay these justified concerns is to remove the prime cause of the problem.

I believe it is reasonable to suggest that a regiment whose record and behaviour are a manifest liability in terms of relations with the nationalist community, and who have unquestionably engendered confrontation and tension, should be removed from an environment and a role for which they are so clearly unsuited. It is unfortunate you should perceive that as "trenchant criticism" and "unhelpful".

The objective of "calming the situation" would, I believe, have been best served by a clear signal that the British Government were prepared to adopt the straightforward remedy which the situation demanded. Instead there were Ministerial comments stressing the primacy of military decisions in the deployment of the regiment, dismissing the notion of its withdrawal and seeming to justify, in advance of proper enquiry, the discharge of live ammunition in what were, to say the least, very controversial and potentially tragic circumstances.

You take exception to my reference in the Dáil to the importance of accountability in relation to the security forces. Against a background where, as a recent official survey showed, two out of every three Catholics in Northern Ireland believe the security forces are not made accountable, you will appreciate that some of the official comments made in response to the problems caused by the regiment gave rise to misgivings. My reference to this aspect in the Dáil would not be regarded as gratuitous or superfluous by public opinion here, nor, I suspect, by community leaders in the Coalisland area.

I have, as befits friends and colleagues in the Conference, set down frankly our concerns. If there is any lesson to be drawn it is that perhaps that we need to intensify even further our discussion of sensitive issues within the Conference and through the Secretariat, so as to ensure that there is ample time to prevent points of concern evolving into major incidents. I will do everything I can to assist in this process.

*Yours sincerely,  
David*

David Andrews, T. D.,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs.

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SECURE FAX

URGENT

Fax No. 609  
Date: 2/15/92  
Pages: 4

To: HQ  
For: P. HENNESSY

From: BELFAST  
From: S. GIBLIN

Ref. Your/My \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments

Please see the attached

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~

cc PS/7

PSS

Manally d/i

M. J. [unclear]  
22/5

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Northern Ireland Office  
Stormont Castle  
Belfast BT4 3ST

Mr David Andrews TD  
Minister of Foreign Affairs

20 May 199

*Dear David:*

I am writing to you on a "personal and confidential" basis, as befits colleagues who know one another and who participate in the working of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Save that I must tell the House of Commons at Question Time on Thursday that I have been in touch with you, I shall observe confidentiality about it myself.

I greatly regret that you should have spoken publicly as you did on Monday 18 May about recent events in Coalisland. The Agreement permits us, and its spirit requires us, to notify each other of any anxieties or grievances through the private channels it provides.

It was in this spirit of mutual trust that Michael Mates had spoken on Thursday 14 May to Pdraig Flynn, at my request, by telephone about the incident which had involved a platoon of 3rd Battalion The Parachute Regiment in Coalisland. He further briefed him at their meeting in Dublin on Friday. He stressed throughout how seriously the incident was being taken and made clear our awareness of the very proper sensitivities that were involved.

This had been evidenced by the immediate suspension of the platoon officer by his C.O., by the unusual step of publishing this, and by the RUC inquiry into the incident that was at once put in train. He stated that conduct of the kind alleged was completely unacceptable

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to the Army's commanders and to Ministers. Padraig Flynn had welcomed that call.

You were aware of my own insistence that our security forces keep within the law, and of my awareness of the advantages to PIRA that flow from any misconduct, for you refer in your formal note Log No 1448 dated 13 May to my having spoken of this at the IGC. Yet at a time when we and the community leaders were doing all we practicably could to calm the situation you went public with trenchant criticism in a way which I must tell you was very unhelpful, and also surprising to me in the light of the circumstances I have mentioned.

I appreciate your need to refer publicly to the fact of having made representations to me on this serious matter and to your obligation thereafter to answer questions in Dail Eireann. In the light, however, of our exchanges at the Intergovernmental Conference on 27 April, to which I have referred, I was disappointed that you found it appropriate to say: "We will moreover continue to insist that all members of the security forces are accountable under the law and that any violations of the law must be vigorously pursued by the authorities."

The tone of your remarks on each occasion really does not seem to me appropriate as between colleagues, which I hope you consider us to be, whose attitude is already known to one another and who trust on another in the pursuance of a common objective in very difficult circumstances.

I have also to say that each of your notes, dated 13 and 15 May respectively, unfortunately leaves me with the same impression.

For my part I shall use the privacy afforded by the Agreement to raise with you matters that from time to time cause me concern:

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this has always been understood to be part of its purpose. The RUC, the Army and my Ministerial colleagues and I will in any event continue to do our duty. I do hope, however, that in future when setbacks occur, in spite of our best endeavours, we shall correspond and comment in a fashion that is far more congenial to the spirit and intent of the Agreement.

A separate reply will be sent to your notes.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Patrick*  
\_\_\_\_\_

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