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Statement on Tyrone killings and Brooke resignation  
20 January 1992

1. The text of Brooke's statement as issued to the media and circulated in the House did not contain any reference to his resignation which came as a surprise to the opposition benches and to Conservative backbenchers. According to MPs to whom we spoke he had tendered his resignation this am to the PM prior to his departure for Belfast, after a weekend of reflection on his political future. Our sources say that the PM refused it but on Brooke's insistence agreed to defer a final decision until his return later today. The Whips and the Leader of the House did not expect the matter to become public and we gather had little forewarning of his decision to tag the matter onto the end of this afternoon's statement on the killings.
2. Explaining what happened in Dublin, Brooke told the House he had accepted a long standing invitation to appear on the Late Late Show and that he had hoped to use it as an opportunity to speak to the people of the Republic about terrorism. He said that when he yielded to an unsignalled request to sing, he did so innocently but that this was patently an error and he wished to apologise unreservedly to the families of those concerned and their representatives for the wholly justified offence he had caused.
3. Word had leaked out earlier this afternoon to some backbenchers that he would be making a personal statement. The widespread expectation was that he would go no further than a personal apology. There was a large attendance in the House, especially on the Tory benches. Brooke was flanked on the front bench by the Home Secretary, the Attorney General, the Solicitor General (remaining on from Attorney General's questions directly beforehand) the Leader of the House and several junior Ministers including Nick Scott, Archie Hamilton, the Armed Forces Minister, the Chief Whip and almost all of the senior Whips. On the Opposition benches, Kinnock made a point of sitting through the entire debate from the outset. McNamara was accompanied by Marshall and Stott. Hume and McGrady represented the SDLP. The OUP were represented by Ross, Forsythe and Walker and the only DUP representative was Robinson.

4. Brooke's offer of resignation was greeted with a spontaneous outburst of dismay on all sides. McNamara, as the first to respond, caught the mood when he said "what happened on Friday night, happened, but in my humble opinion is not a resigning matter". Brooke's offer of resignation he described as "characteristically honest and courageous". Privately, McNamara and others feel that resignation was an unnecessary, excessive and politically unwise response. He, Stott and Marshall, were asked in various media interviews over the weekend whether Brooke should resign. They all, in different ways, dismissed this suggestion and this afternoon expressed some measure of resentment of being obliged to join the Tories in urging the Prime Minister to refuse his resignation.
5. The contributions of Ross and Forsythe were predictably at odds with the overall mood of the debate. Ross spoke about "mutilated bodies on the floor of this House" being necessary to alter Government attitudes to security. He made no reference to Brooke's resignation. Forsythe, following a pre-prepared script, referred to Brooke's "song and dance act" making an understated passing reference to the fact that Brooke had shown he was "an honourable gentleman who deserved great credit".
6. Explaining that McCrea and Paisley were at the funerals, Robinson referred to Paisley's meeting last week with Mawhinney and called for a root and branch pro-active security policy which would "go after the IRA".
7. Hume made a strong, well-regarded, intervention speaking of the divided loyalties of those who were killed and those who did the killing but adding that the answer to divided loyalty was not murder but respect. He called on the two Governments to ensure that there was no political vacuum and concluded by hoping that the Prime Minister would ensure that Brooke remained in office to continue his efforts.
8. Others to contribute to the debate included Jim Kilfedder who raised again, to groans from both sides, the question of excommunication for the IRA. Alex Carlile spoke for the Liberal Democrats (he was flanked by Paddy Ashdown and Lord Holme of Cheltenham - the Liberal Democrat NI spokesman - was in the Gallery). Carlile urged Brooke not to resign and to hold to his twin-track policy of "political progress and tight security" adding that no party should be allowed "to bomb their way into the General Election campaign". John Biffen (Cons) agreed that it was correct for Brooke to offer his resignation but hoped the Prime Minister would recognise, as did the whole House, his "formidable qualities". He called for tightened military security, in particular more effective supervision of the border.

9. Merlyn Rees noted the unusual strong united view of the House that Brooke should not resign which should send a message to the IRA that terrorism will not dictate to the House. Julian Amery (Cons) expressed his admiration for Brooke's "frank and manly offer of resignation". He called on the Government to consider very seriously "the alternative of administrative devolution/integration" (a suggestion which drew vigorous expressions of agreement from Kate Hoey, the Labour integrationist). Peter Temple-Morris claimed that in all parts of this House there was "no wish or thought" that Brooke should resign. The talks, he said, had marginalised the IRA (a statement which drew strong negative responses from Hume on the benches opposite). The best security for the people of Northern Ireland lay in talks and the sooner they were resumed, the better. Sir Giles Shaw (Cons), in an uncharacteristically negative intervention, asked if the commitment to the rule of law should "not be observed on both sides of the border" remarking on the origins of IRA weaponry and the sighting of training camps and asked "what intensification of security was planned by the Irish Gardai and Army?" He, too, hoped that Brooke would keep his position. Ivor Stanbrook asked if the claim to Articles 2 and 3 gave encouragement to the IRA. He also raised the old chestnut of Labour party opposition to the PTA, claiming that this undermined the efforts of the security forces.
8. the view in the House when the Ambassador and I left it and now confirmed was that the Prime Minister would not accept Brooke's resignation. The Chief Whip and Leader of the House were expected to report back to him the universally supportive views on all sides. There was some acknowledgement that the Prime Minister might return from his visit to Northern Ireland with a heightened sense of Unionist outrage. To act, however, on this would, it was felt, confirm yet again the power of the Unionist veto. Hume was strongly of the view that Brooke will be reconfirmed in office. McNamara was marginally less certain but persuaded to the view that so soon before an election, the Prime Minister was unlikely to dump a Secretary of State, universally perceived here to be a decent man, victimised by circumstances. Brooke's low key, downcast performance showed clearly, however, the strain that this affair has put on him and there was a sense, among those to whom the Ambassador and I spoke, that whatever the outcome of this affair it has taken a considerable toll on him politically and personally.