



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/47/271

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

29 July, 1993

Confidential

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2.

Dear Assistant Secretary

Loyalist Attacks on the SDLP and Sinn Fein

We have had further discussions with the British side this week on this issue. You will have seen the responses given in respect of our representations on behalf of specific members of the SDLP. I am informed by the British side that reviews have taken place/are taking place in respect of all the persons concerned.

General Assessment

In response to our request for a general assessment of the attacks on SDLP members, the British side have said that the RUC's view has not changed since the Chief Constable's contribution to the Restricted Session at the Conference of 8 July. The RUC judge that

- the attacks are intended to intimidate rather than kill (unlike the attacks on Sinn Fein);
- the threat remains high; it could change, meaning it could escalate; it is affected by the political temperature and by remarks that may be made by spokespersons for the party or by members speaking as individuals;
- the situation is worrying and the RUC are keeping an extremely careful eye on it; steps have been taken to warn those at risk and, where appropriate, protective measures have been put in place; should the police receive information that the threat to individuals or particular groups has increased, appropriate action will be taken; patrols and vcps have been deployed in certain areas to deter and disrupt terrorist operations; these will continue, as will specific operations arising from information received.

Recent successes against what are thought to be loyalist paramilitary operations have included the interception on 5 separate occasions since mid-February of vehicles carrying terrorists en route to attacks, the recovery of 9 weapons and 13 arrests at the scenes, other arrests in follow-up operations, a number of persons charged including one individual for 5 murders, the army's intervention in a gun attack on Sinn Fein offices in Belfast (one paramilitary was shot and there were arrests).

The British side also point out, however, that since the end of May, Republicans have been responsible for 6 out of 7 killings, the exception being McCallum who died by his own grenade, as well as 9 vehicle bomb attacks on commercial targets, mostly unsuccessful, and four Mark 15 mortar attacks. I have written separately about an assessment of loyalist bomb-making capability.

Attacks on Sinn Fein

I also expressed concern about the latest attack on the house of a Sinn Fein Councillor, Mrs Annie Armstrong of Twinbrook. That attack was indiscriminate and the intention was undoubtedly to kill; it almost succeeded. Unlike the attacks on the SDLP which are a very recent development, attacks on Sinn Fein have been frequent over the past few years; several party members have been murdered.

These attacks are in a different category to those on SDLP members. Although the views of individual members of Sinn Fein can and do vary on the IRA's campaign of violence, the organisation supports it, is seen as the political voice of the IRA, is undoubtedly intimately linked with it and has members who are actively engaged in violence. All paramilitary attacks must be condemned nonetheless and I asked what steps have been taken to protect Sinn Fein members under threat. I am informed that the RUC seek to prevent attacks, warn individuals whom they may have reason to think are targeted and offer the services of their crime prevention officers.

They do not however extend their assistance to inclusion in the key persons protection scheme under which a number of SDLP people are given help. Sinn Fein members tend not to apply, as you might imagine, but I am told there have been two applications from Sinn Fein members and they have been turned down. One of these two, Gerard McGuigan, has also been refused permission to hold a personal protection weapon and is taking the RUC to court; I understand the RUC are concerned that the weapon could be used for other purposes. The NIO have anticipated that the policy in respect of the protection scheme could be challenged by way of judicial review, a tactic Sinn Fein has used adeptly on a range of issues in recent years. Their legal advice is, however, that the challenge would not be sustained.

The position in relation to Sinn Fein requires some reflection. I would be grateful for your views and to know what attitude the Garda authorities adopt in the South.

"Understanding" Loyalist paramilitaries

I took the opportunity of these discussions to draw attention to the encouragement of the Loyalist paramilitaries which we see not only in statements by Unionists such as Peter Robinson and John Taylor who echo the UDA's talk of a pan-nationalist front but also in the excusing, understanding or soft responses of so-called moderate Unionists. I drew attention, for example, to Chris McGimpsey's article in Monday's Irish Times in which he says

The other day a resident of this portion of Belfast (Shankill) asked whether a recourse to violence by the Protestant working class would help focus the minds of the political masters in Maryfield upon conditions within "forgotten West Belfast". I counselled strongly against a recourse to violence. When he asked me why it would not work for "us" when it had worked so well for "them", I had greater difficulty answering him.

This is the theory that any progress made by Nationalists since 1968 is down to IRA violence and that SDLP and Irish Government have simply batted on the IRA campaign. The Loyalist in question could only suppose that McGimpsey accepted that theory and would at least "understand" Loyalist violence. I noted that McGimpsey had given character references to two Loyalists charged with serious offences earlier this year and had attended the paramilitary funeral of McCallum who had died by his own grenade in the mini-Twelfth parade in West Belfast.

Contrast with constitutional Nationalists

I pointed out the contrast between Unionists, some of whom had openly associated with loyalist paramilitaries in the past and retained links with them, and constitutional Nationalists who had lived in their "forgotten" communities for the last twenty five years, fought hard for everything they had managed to achieve, endured attacks and intimidation from the IRA, but had never ceased to express their absolute condemnation of violence as a means to an end.

Action by the British

I asked that British Ministers and officials take opportunities in their contacts with Unionists to remonstrate about any implicit encouragement of loyalist violence; and I

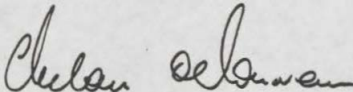
thought that a public comment from time to time would not go amiss.

I recalled our prediction to Ministers last week that the IRA would make propaganda out of the Tebbit affair and the British Government's failure to respond, and noted the lead story in the latest An Phoblacht "Tories cheer for bombs in Dublin". I did not suppose that Lord Tebbit had had it in mind to encourage the paramilitaries to attack SDLP politicians, but anything that could be viewed as encouraging loyalist violence coming from a perceived representative of the British system could well have that effect. I underlined again that the British Government had not rushed to condemn Tebbit's views or disassociate themselves from them in any effective way. We had found their inaction very disturbing.

Chris McGimpsey

Lastly, I view with serious concern the fact that the Irish Times feels able to print McGimpsey's comment above without criticism and I would urge the Department to point out to the Editor the implicit "understanding" that it conveys to loyalist paramilitaries. The point might also be made to McGimpsey himself when he is next in contact with the Department.

Yours sincerely,



Declan O'Donovan
Joint Secretary