

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Billy Wright and the Mid-Ulster UVF
Background Note

1. The mid-Ulster brigade of the UVF is widely believed to have been responsible for over 40 murders in Armagh and Tyrone since 1990. The unit is led by Billy Wright ('King Rat'). Wright is believed to have joined forces with Alex Kerr, a former UDA South Belfast commander in recent months. The murder of Michael McGoldrick in Aghagallon, Co. Armagh on 8 July 1996 is believed to have been carried out by the Mid-Ulster brigade despite a denial by the UVF itself.

2. The UUP leader, David Trimble, has confirmed that he met with Billy Wright during the events at Drumcree in July. On 2 August the UVF issued a directive demanding that the Mid-Ulster brigade disband following a preliminary investigation into unspecified matters. The Brigade had been publicly critical of the Progressive Unionist Party's (PUP) policies and direction. On 21 August a clandestine press conference was held in Co. Down to announce the formation of a new loyalist paramilitary organisation and to express South Down UDA support for the mid-Ulster UVF. Three UDA members were arrested, on their return from the conference, in the company of four journalists. On 24 August the three were charged in connection with a staged show of force by loyalists for the members of the media which took place following the conference. There are now concerns that a breakaway faction is in existence containing both former UDA and UVF personnel.

3. On 28 August the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) issued a statement giving Billy Wright and Alex Kerr 72 hours to leave Northern Ireland or face "summary justice". Kerr is currently on remand in the Maze prison. Kerr's parents' home in South Belfast was attacked by a pipe bomb on 1 September although the source of this attack remains unclear. In response to the attack David Ervine of the PUP said he had been assured by the CLMC of its non-involvement. He described the attack as unjustifiable but refused to condemn it.

Security Section
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