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Meeting with Mary Madden of the NIO on security-related matters

Belfast Secretariat, Wednesday 20 September 2000

Present at the meeting:

Irish Side

Mr. Val O'Donnell (Secretariat)

Mr. Niall Holohan (Secretariat)

Ms. Fiona Flood (DFA)

Mr. George Hegarty (Secretariat)

British Side

Ms. Mary Madden (NIO)

Mr. Chris Maccabe (Joint Secretary)

Mr. John Fisher (Secretariat)

Loyalist Feuding

1. Since our previous meeting with Madden on 30 August, there had been few further developments. The security presence in place then, involving both police and army units, had remained broadly similar, although police numbers had been increased since the bombing of the [UDA/UFF] Loyalist Prisoners' Aid centre on the Shankill Road in the early hours of 18 September. Army resources had remained the same (three companies operating in rotation) and they would remain in place for as long as the RUC deemed their support necessary. While Madden had indicated at our last meeting that the Army was operating essentially in interface areas with a view to preventing the situation from spilling over into inter-community - as opposed to intra-community - violence (and successfully so to date), this was no longer as clear-cut. The Army were supporting the police across the affected Shankill area. While there have been local

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political allegations that the police were not being active enough, they would refute these claims. They are policing the situation appropriately, without being heavy-handed, and are seeking to avoid provoking an escalation: in a situation where tensions remained high, they are not "standing idly by". Madden argued that it is extremely difficult to police a situation in which claim is met by counter-claim and allegation by counter-allegation.

2. As far as mediation, recognised by the authorities as the only way to bring the feuding to a definitive end, was concerned, there had been some signs of a tentative beginning to the process but - as yet - no results. There had been major displacements of people from the Shankill area and intimidation was continuing.

Arms Finds

3. On the positive side, the feuding had presented the authorities with an opportunity to carry out weapons searches on a scale which would not be possible normally and substantial finds had been made. Following the 18 September explosion at the UDA-linked Loyalist Prisoners' Aid offices, bomb parts had been found. Madden stressed that photographs released by the RUC were of basically a pipe bomb-type device with a tail-fin, rather than a mortar. She said that this equipment was not comparable in terms of sophistication with the type of mortar used in the attack on the Armagh RUC station on 13 September. O'Donnell noted the success of the police in making finds but asked whether these were resulting in arrests being made and charges being brought. Madden stated that there had been arrests and charges and that if any evidence is found during the course of investigations - which were continuing - into more recent finds, then there will be more arrests and charges.

4. O'Donnell asked whether the discovery of arms in offices used by the UDA would lead to a review of the cease-fires and prisoner releases. Madden gave the standard reply on this point, stating that SOSNI is continually reviewing the cease-fires and will take action as necessary. Licences will be revoked if he receives information indicating that

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this is appropriate, as was the case with Johnny Adair. The specification of organisations has not been ruled out either.

Johnny Adair Pipe Bomb Incident

5. O'Donnell referred to press reports suggesting that the pipe bomb explosion on 15 August, which Johnny Adair had claimed was a republican attempt on his life or on those of associates of his, had occurred prematurely during preparations for a UFF attack on republicans/nationalists/Catholics in the Ardoyne area. Madden replied that the police view was that it was not a republican attack as the device was not of a type used by republican paramilitaries. Maccabe added that three scenarios being considered were that it was: (a) caused deliberately by Adair to suggest an attack on him; (b) carried out by other loyalists actually trying to get Adair; or (c) the premature detonation of a device being prepared for use against other loyalists. These, according to Maccabe, were the three most likely explanations. Holohan also referred to suggestions that the UFF were attacking loyalist areas and making it appear that these were republican attacks, in order to justify sectarian attacks on Catholics. He pointed out that Davide Ervine of the PUP had made public statements to this effect. Madden said that she would have to revert to us later on this allegation.

Magilligan and Armagh Bombings

6. Madden pointed out that, while the explosion at the Magilligan Army training camp had taken place a day prior to the mortar attack on Armagh RUC station, the two incidents could not have been intended to coincide. The Magilligan device was a booby-trap attached to a hut door, so it could have exploded at any time. Armagh, on the other hand, was a pre-planned, timed attack, intended to cause maximum loss of life. There was evidence that RIRA was growing in capability and it was extremely fortunate that the Armagh device had not exploded as intended or fallen short of its target.

7. Madden expressed the view that RIRA - and, to a lesser extent, CIRA - were continuing to benefit from 'seepage' from PIRA. The experience acquired by dissident groups

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themselves was also a factor in increased efficiency. The most troubling element in the Armagh attack was that RIRA clearly had no qualms about risking civilian losses and attached little or no importance to public opinion. This was particularly worrying in the context of the ongoing Omagh inquest. O'Donnell asked whether the authorities saw these attacks as evidence of a concerted campaign of escalation by RIRA. Madden replied that this was clearly the case. They regard the attack as a serious escalation by the dissidents in that the possibility of civilian casualties arose directly from the timing of the attack. The Armagh bomb had probably been manufactured in South Armagh or Louth. RIRA had been able to transport the device without being intercepted. This was also an area in which they had acquired expertise.

8. Madden spoke of the need for both Governments to work together against dissident republican groups. This was clearly something she felt strongly about. [In this respect, her style is very different from Susan Scholefield's. Madden expresses opinions and wider political argument in a way that Scholefield avoided doing.] There was a need for a joint approach. We had to begin to understand the ideological and psychological forces driving the members of these groups. We also had to make a concerted effort to tackle their sources of funding, most notably cross-border smuggling and fraud. While dissident republicans were not necessarily behind all such cross-border crime, this type of crime was providing a disproportionate amount of their funding. It would be in the interest of neither Government to see RIRA taking up the position occupied by PIRA in the early 1970s and to find ourselves sitting around this table in thirty years' time discussing the same problems.

Bangor Bombing

9. Madden initially dealt with the issue of whether the Bangor explosion on 18 September was evidence of a spreading out of the Belfast loyalist feud. She pointed out that considerable numbers of ex-Shankill residents now live in Bangor. However, reiterating a point made at our previous meeting, she said that the Shankill violence had been sparked off spontaneously and unexpectedly and that there were no indications of a

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concerted plan to start trouble in Belfast and to spread it subsequently to other areas.

10. In this particular case, the bombing appears to have been a settling of old scores, involving drugs. O'Donnell referred to remarks by John White of the UDP claiming that the UFF were responsible. Madden replied that this could very well be little more than megaphone diplomacy, an attempt to 'appear tough'. Maccabe added that the explosion had occurred too soon after the attack on the Loyalist Prisoners' Aid premises to be retaliation. There would not have been time to organise the attack. He added that mutual hatreds within loyalism were often much more vehement than sectarian hatred.

11. O'Donnell also referred to comments by Gerry Adams suggesting that the device used in Bangor was the same as that used to kill Rosemary Nelson and asked whether there was any substance to this. Madden replied that the investigation was still in the early stages. As far as the most seriously injured victim, Mr. Sandy Rice, was concerned, there was intelligence suggesting low-level UVF involvement in the 1970s but nothing since then. Both Madden and Maccabe expressed some amusement at the image of Rice portrayed in media reports as a selfless community worker, helping deprived children in his boxing club. Maccabe pointed out that if all the 'altruistic community workers' in the place were really what they appeared to be, Northern Ireland would have the highest concentration of saints in the world.

Normalisation

12. O'Donnell enquired about the current state of the Chief Constable's promised review of security arrangement. We had been told at our last meeting that an announcement was expected in September. Madden said that the review, heralded in the Chief Constable's May statement, had been made more difficult following the Armagh and Magilligan incidents and, to a lesser extent, the events on the Shankill. The Chief Constable would have to balance these factors against the need to move forward on normalisation. Whether he will be able to make an announcement in the near future remains to be seen. Pressed by O'Donnell on the timing of an announcement, Madden

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replied that she hoped one would be made soon, even if only to say that a review had been undertaken and that significant changes were not possible in the immediate term. However, if the review slipped into another month, she would not be surprised.

Other Issues

13. Reincarceration of Johnny Adair: There was nothing new to add on this. His legal representatives had not as yet taken any action for his release and the case had not been considered by the Sentence Review Commissioners.

14. Magherafelt IEDs and 'South Londonderry Volunteers': These incidents, initially raised at our last meeting, were still under police investigation.

15. Fisher and Wright: Their cases were still with the Army Board. Madden was of the belief that Army Board findings were not normally made public but that the interested parties were informed of the outcome. In this case, that would probably include Mrs. McBride. Madden further suggested that, as this was an MOD matter, the NIO may not be informed officially of the result and that we may very well find out, via the McBride family, before her.

16. Arrest of Bertie Shaw in Larne: The case of Mr. Shaw, charged on two counts of attempted murder following riots in Larne in mid-August, was raised by O'Donnell. It had been reported that Mr. Shaw had previously been acquitted six times on various charges and that he appeared to be a 'usual suspect', rounded up after all violent incidents in the area where nationalists/republicans were involved. We wanted to know whether the charges were being pursued. Madden said that she would have to revert on this.

Log Cases

17. In general terms, there appear to be some hold-ups in the system on the British side, as Madden was under the impression that certain replies had been provided, which neither

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we nor Fisher had seen. We undertook to provide the British side with a list of all outstanding log cases.

18. Finaghy Road South: Holohan drew attention to reports we have received of continuing intimidation of Catholic residents in the Finaghy Road South area and asked whether it was true that police resources had been removed from this area (and others) for use in the Shankill. Madden said that she would revert.

19. Document Finds: We were provided with an oral reply (a written reply should have been received - see 17 above) to I/45 of 13 June 2000, relating to a wallet handed to Michelle Gildernew MLA. According to Madden, the matter has been fully investigated. Williamson, the RIR soldier involved, had recorded details of briefings, against Army regulations, as an aide-memoire to assist himself in his work. There had been no subversive intent and there are no indications of any links with loyalist paramilitaries. He will be facing disciplinary action. He had also lost his warrant card in the wallet, another serious breach of military regulations. If certain individuals named on the list had received police warnings that they were in danger, this was coincidental. The case was now closed.

20. Possible Harassment of Pádraigín Drinan (I/58 of 18 July 2000): This matter was raised again by Holohan, as Ms. Drinan believes that harassment is continuing.

21. Alison Gilchrist Case (I/61 of 1 August 2000): Ms. Gilchrist is due in court on Friday 22 September.

Next Meeting

22. The next meeting was set for Wednesday 4 October at 2.30 pm.

George Hegarty

21 September 2000

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