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ANGLO-IRISH INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE

Note of a Special Meeting held in
Iveagh House, Dublin, on 16 November 1987

Present: Mr King Mr Lenihan
 Mr Stanley Mr Collins
 Sir John Hermon Mr Eamon Doherty
 Mr Stephens Mr Matthews
 Mr Ryan

Mr King explained that, as he had indicated in Parliament, the British Government had asked for a Special Meeting of the Conference for three reasons:

- (a) the Remembrance Day bomb outrage at Enniskillen on 8 November, which placed a duty on both Governments to see that the perpetrators were brought to justice;
- (b) the O'Grady kidnapping: regarding which, Mr King remarked that he was conscious that the leader of the gang, Dessie O'Hare, had his origin in Northern Ireland;
- (c) the Eksund arms shipment, which was a matter for great concern not only because of the size of that cargo but especially because of the indications that there had been earlier shipments with loads which in total, it seemed clear, equalled that aboard the Eksund. The only certain recovery of any significant quantity of those earlier arms had been the find in Sligo and Roscommon and the balance, which appeared to be all or nearly all in the Republic still, constituted a daunting level of armament for the terrorists.

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These three elements added up to a situation of extreme gravity. The Provisional IRA could be expected to be in a defiant mood after the widespread condemnation which had followed Enniskillen and would be all the more dangerous. The British side was anxious to offer every possible help in dealing with the arms threat. The Taoiseach's very welcome message to the Prime Minister after Enniskillen set the scene for all-out cooperation.

2. Mr Lenihan said that the Irish Government agreed generally with Mr King's description of the threat. He could confirm that the information which they had about the arms shipments accorded with Mr King's. They were preparing counter-measures and would certainly indicate what help they would like to have. But it would be crucial to maintain secrecy if the measures were not to be compromised.

3. Mr Collins agreed that the prospect posed by the reported arms shipments was a frightening one. Since the first reports, the Garda Siochana had been making plans and had already commenced their searching - for which the O'Grady operation provided useful cover. The exact forms of cooperation required could best be pursued through police channels. The Irish would be looking for help from other quarters too; the problem was too large for any one government. The arrival of large quantities of the Semtex explosive was very worrying, though he added that maximum effort also needed to be put into dealing with the problem of home-made explosive. He believed that there was no lack of public awareness and public concern about the situation and that there would be widespread approval for firm action by the authorities.

4. Referring again to Enniskillen, Mr King described it as a shock to the system from every point of view. Some of those present at the Remembrance parade would have been from the Republic. He did not see the outrage as a last desperate throw by the IRA, but rather as a natural outcome of their increased delegation of operational decisions to autonomous cells. He agreed with Mr Collins that it was important to bring home to the public how

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similarly dreadful the results would have been if the other bomb that had been placed at Tullyhammon on the border near Pettigoe, for detonation on the same day, had also exploded.

5. Referring to the O'Grady kidnapping, Mr Collins explained that the police operation had had to be conducted with caution because of the known propensity of O'Hare's gang for viciousness and the consequent danger to Mr O'Grady. The operation had nevertheless achieved its purpose; Mr O'Grady had been freed and no ransom had been paid (nor, Mr Collins stressed, had a ransom ever been contemplated by his government). Five people had been charged, including the three who together with O'Hare formed the hard core of the gang, and two more people were in custody.

6. Sir J Hermon commented that the police on the two sides of the border were working very closely together. The two forces were also pressing ahead with the development of structures and procedures for cooperation in accordance with Article 9A of the Agreement. Mr Collins confirmed that he and Mr Lenihan had received their copies of the joint threat assessment of PIRA which had been tabled at the previous meeting on 21 October; he would like to allow the new Commissioner some time to study it.

7. Reverting to the arms shipments, Sir J Hermon said that there were some indications of hides being prepared in the North, but no evidence yet of arms being moved into them. He shared Mr Collins' concern about Semtex, the main significance of which was its suitability for small but very dangerous anti-personnel and anti-armour grenades. The RUC were already assessing the implications of the new weaponry, with the help of the Ministry of Defence. Mr Stanley commented that it was unsafe to assume that the Libyans would desist from making arms available to PIRA and it was therefore vital to develop good intelligence. He repeated the British offer of help with the search for arms in the Republic.

8. Summing up, Mr Lenihan described it as a time for cracking down on terrorism. Mr King added that his primary purpose in asking for

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the Special Meeting had been to ensure that there was a common understanding of the nature and the gravity of the threat and of the need to respond vigorously. He was most grateful for the opportunity to compare notes and for the very frank way in which the discussion had been conducted, which boded well for the future. He was reassured that there was a close identity of view and he was happy to take on trust that the Irish authorities meant business. He would leave it to them to take the lead, and would give whatever help he could.

9. In conclusion the Conference approved the issue of a short communique as attached.

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