

SECRET



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London S.W.1

R 29 October, 1968.

Law Roche, Prime Minister

In my letter of 25 October enclosing the brief for Mr. Lynch's call on the Prime Minister, I said that I would be writing separately about a sensitive matter on which we think the Prime Minister should be informed before he sees the Taoiseach.

This is the I.R.A. threat to assassinate Sir A. Gilchrist on which I now enclose a background note. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary proposes to mention this matter to Mr. Lynch when he sees him at 4.00 p.m. tomorrow, 30 October, on the lines of the enclosed speaking note. He would not suggest that the Prime Minister should raise it at this stage.

Yours sincerely

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S E C R E TI.R.A. Threat to AssassinateSir A. GilchristBackground Note

On his return from a visit to Germany at the end of June this year, Sir A. Gilchrist discovered that he was being provided with a strong security guard by the Irish authorities. The Secretary of the Irish Department of External Affairs, Mr. McCann, called on Sir Andrew shortly afterwards to explain that protection was being provided for him against the threat of assassination, and referred to a number of anonymous letters which had arrived at the Embassy containing threats to the Ambassador's life.

We subsequently learnt that the Special Branch of the Irish Police did not believe that the letters were connected with a threat, but clearly had some other strong evidence of its existence.

2. Sir Andrew was told that the danger to him was greatest at public functions. He is provided with a twenty-four hour guard, of some twenty men in all, and a motorised escort when he travels by car. Bodyguards stand close to Sir Andrew at all cocktail parties, sit next to him in the theatres, and during dinner parties guard the house in which he is dining. In the last ten days, the guard provided has been doubled.

3. The threat is clearly directed only at the Ambassador. It is not certain whether it comes from the IRA itself or from an extremist splinter group. The Irish Special Branch appear to believe that they should be able to identify and deal with the potential assassins, and our own Special Branch think that the security is adequate. The one complicating factor is the

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reluctance of the Irish Government to take firm measures against the IRA, partly for fear of making martyrs and giving them free publicity, and partly because a residue of militant anti-British sentiment is still to be found among many Irishmen. Although the Irish Special Branch has a good reputation in safeguarding people under threat of assassination, the situation is far from satisfactory.

4. The Irish Chargé d'Affaires, Dr. Brennan, was summoned to the Commonwealth Office last August to discuss the threat and what ought to be done about it. Dr. Brennan was told that, while we appreciated the precautions which the Irish authorities were taking, we hoped that everything possible was being done to deal with the source of the threat so that before long precautions would not be necessary. Dr. Brennan said that he had been informed that the Irish Department of Justice did not regard the present situation with undue apprehension, and considered that there was no reason to fear immediate violence. They were continuing the precautions in order to avoid taking any chances, and also in order to deter those responsible. Dr. Brennan was told that H.M.G. continued to take the matter very seriously, and would feel happier if some progress had been made in tracking down those responsible and thus removing the source of the danger. Dr. Brennan undertook to convey this to his Government.

5. During the last week in August, the police guarding Sir Andrew's residence disturbed but failed to catch a couple of intruders. The British Special Branch learnt from their own

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sources that the intruders were in fact IRA men on a reconnaissance of the premises, and so informed the Irish Police. The latest assessment of the threat from the British Special Branch is that while it must clearly still be regarded seriously, there are signs that the IRA may now be considering kidnapping rather than assassination.

6. The strain arising from these threats has been considerable, not only on Sir A. Gilchrist, but more particularly on Lady Gilchrist, and he was considering during the summer whether he should not ask to retire - he was Notionally 60 on 19 December 1965. He has now reconsidered this and believing that the threat is now less serious than it was has decided to continue. He is in any case due for retirement on 19 April, 1970.

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I.R.A. Threat to Assassinate

Sir A. Gilchrist

On taking my new responsibilities for relations with the Republic of Ireland, I was concerned to learn of the threat to assassinate H.M. Ambassador in Dublin. I am aware that the authorities in Dublin take this threat seriously, and I appreciate the extensive precautions which are being taken to protect Sir Andrew Gilchrist. I also understand the particular difficulties of the Irish Government in dealing with an organisation such as the I.R.A. But as I understand it, the precautions are on such a scale as to affect Sir Andrew Gilchrist's ability to lead a normal life, and it is difficult to think that a situation like this can be allowed to continue indefinitely. The need is to remove the source of the threat.

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