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NORTHERN IRELAND

NOTE of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1., on
TUESDAY, 19th AUGUST, 1969
at 5.00 p. m.

PRESENT

The Rt. Hon. Harold Wilson, MP
Prime Minister

The Rt. Hon. Michael Stewart, MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

Major The Rt. Hon.
James Chichester-Clark, MP
Prime Minister of Northern Ireland

The Rt. Hon. James Callaghan, MP
Secretary of State for the Home
Department

The Rt. Hon. John Andrews, MP
Deputy Prime Minister and Leader
of the Senate

The Rt. Hon. Denis Healey, MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt. Hon. Brian Faulkner, MP
Minister of Development

Lord Stonham,
Minister of State, Home Office

The Rt. Hon. Robert Porter, MP
Minister of Home Affairs

General Sir Geoffrey Baker,
Chief of the General Staff
(for part of the discussion)

Mr. H. Black,
Secretary of the Cabinet of Northern
Ireland

Sir Philip Allen,
Permanent Under-Secretary of State,
Home Office

Mr. K. P. Bloomfield,
Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet of
Northern Ireland

Sir Burke Trend,
Secretary of the Cabinet

Mr. B. R. Cummings,
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robin Hooper
Mr. R. A. Lloyd Jones
Mr. N. F. Cairncross

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THE PRIME MINISTER welcomed the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and invited him to give his impressions of the present situation.

Internal security

MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that the Northern Ireland Government were grateful to the Home Secretary for his prompt approval of their request for the deployment of British troops in Londonderry and subsequently in Belfast. This action had led to an immediate and marked improvement in law and order in those cities; and, taken as a whole, the situation in Northern Ireland had been stabilised. However, there were fears in all quarters that if British troops were withdrawn from these areas violence might break out once more. It had to be admitted that the police forces in Northern Ireland had undergone a campaign of vilification and that they were now discredited among some sections of the community. It was necessary to consider how to restore civilian control over the areas in Belfast and Londonderry which had been affected by the rioting. Following discussions that morning with the Chief of Staff to the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland, he now proposed that as a first step General Freeland should take over control of all security operations in Northern Ireland, including control over the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). He understood that this proposal would be acceptable to General Freeland; and he had established that the Inspector-General of the RUC would fully support it. THE DEFENCE SECRETARY asked whether General Freeland's remit would extend to the command and administration of RUC and USC personnel, in so far as these matters affected the internal security operations for which he would be responsible; MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK replied that this would be the case.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that it was at present generally accepted throughout Northern Ireland that the British troops were impartial and were in no way involved in sectarian or other disputes. So long as this was the case, the troops would hold the confidence of all sections of the community; but he wondered whether the present proposal would not soon lead to public hostility being diverted from the police to the British troops. It would be essential for the General Officer Commanding (GOC) to retain this responsibility only as a short-term measure until the RUC could be re-organised in such a way that it could command the confidence of the whole community. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK agreed that his proposal was intended only as a short-term measure to hold the situation until normal police control could be restored. MR. FAULKNER added that the Northern Ireland Government were facing an exceptional situation, and exceptional measures were needed to defuse it.

THE HOME SECRETARY said that before a decision could be taken upon the Northern Ireland Government's latest proposal, it would be necessary to consider the position of the B Special force, which was the subject of grave concern throughout the remainder of the United Kingdom.

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MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK explained that the Northern Ireland Government's standing instructions provided for the B Specials to be used in normal circumstances for guarding police barracks, factories, roads, public services and other key points; and that it had always been their aim that the B Specials should not be used for crowd control or to put down riots. But on 13th August the Northern Ireland Government had been faced with a major riot in Londonderry, and disturbances in nine other provincial towns as well. At that time, no troops had been deployed, and it was therefore necessary to call out the B Specials. On 14th August, the rioting in Belfast had made it necessary to call out the B Specials in that city as well, since the RUC were unable to contain the situation. The Northern Ireland Government had thought it proper to use all their own resources before resorting to the use of troops. MR. PORTER added that 485 B Specials had been called out in Belfast, and 250 in Londonderry, for patrol duties only in Protestant areas. He pointed to the fact that for many years the B Specials had been used extensively for keeping the peace in Northern Ireland without complaint.

THE DEFENCE SECRETARY said that the GOC was of the opinion that immediate steps should be taken to restrict the deployment of B Specials and to exercise central control over their arms. He asked whether the Northern Ireland Government intended that General Freeland should be given authority to take such steps. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that the difficulties of disarming or disbanding the B Specials should not be under-estimated. To disarm them at this juncture would be highly inflammatory, and in view of the public threats from the Irish Republican Army, it would undoubtedly lead to some citizens taking the law into their own hands. THE PRIME MINISTER said that many responsible journalists in Great Britain had been highly critical of the activities of the B Specials in Belfast. MR. ANDREWS replied that whatever might be said about events in Belfast, it should also be taken into account that the B Specials had succeeded in maintaining law and order in provincial towns during the period when the RUC had been fully extended in Belfast and Londonderry. THE DEFENCE SECRETARY said that the GOC was of the opinion that the B Specials had used excessive force, including use of arms, and had thus aggravated the problems faced by the British forces in restoring law and order; the GOC considered that it would be necessary for him to exercise full control over their future use in internal security operations. THE HOME SECRETARY pointed out that the B Specials were not accustomed either to police or to military discipline, and were experienced only in the use of arms. While it might be possible to consider their deployment for guarding police barracks and other key points, he could not support their use for controlling crowds and riots. Moreover, tension in Northern Ireland would remain high so long as they were allowed to keep arms at home. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that at present there was no doubt that the B Specials themselves and people living in country areas would feel that their safety would be endangered if the B Specials were compelled to hand in their arms. At his meetings with community leaders in Northern Ireland the previous night, the view had been generally taken that to disarm the B Specials would invite a further breakdown of law and order and would undoubtedly lead to a resumption of violence.

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THE PRIME MINISTER observed that the Northern Ireland Government, by proposing that the GOC should take control over internal security, were in effect inviting the United Kingdom Government to take responsibility for the actions of the B Specials, and their consequences. In the very serious situation which Major Chichester-Clark had described it was essential to be clear about the authority that General Freeland would be allowed to exercise over the use of B Specials, and over their arms. There would shortly be nearly 5,000 field troops deployed in Northern Ireland; public opinion would demand as a corollary that the B Specials should be disarmed and possibly disbanded. THE DEFENCE SECRETARY added that the GOC considered that the change in policy for the use of B Specials in the current situation - and especially the decision to make no further use of them for crowd control or in riots - should be announced at the same time as it was made known that he would be made responsible for internal security in Northern Ireland. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that while he could accept an announcement that the B Specials would not be used further for crowd and riot control, in the view of his Government any long-term measures to alter the normal role of the B Specials should not be announced immediately, but should be introduced gradually and with the minimum of publicity. THE HOME SECRETARY said that it was highly desirable that the Northern Ireland Government's intentions for standing down the B Specials should be announced soon.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the United Kingdom Government considered that the aim should be to withdraw British troops from internal security operations in Northern Ireland as soon as possible, and in any case within a few weeks; and that the role, organisation and structure of the RUC should be investigated by means of an independent enquiry. The British police advisers who had visited Northern Ireland during the past week had formed the impression that the standards and approach of the RUC were different from those of the police in the remainder of the United Kingdom; and that the present command structure of the police forces left much to be desired. He accepted that conditions in Northern Ireland were in many ways unique. The GOC would need the services of a senior police adviser. THE DEFENCE SECRETARY added that the GOC would also need more adequate intelligence advice and Special Branch support. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK agreed to consider how such an enquiry might be carried out while the GOC remained responsible for internal security; such an enquiry would however probably lead to some resignations among senior officers in the RUC, and this would lower morale not only in the RUC but also in Northern Ireland at large.

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He therefore wished to consider the proposal further, and he intended to discuss it with the Inspector-General of the RUC the following day. He agreed with the Home Secretary that it would be appropriate for such an enquiry to be carried out by a police officer with experience in dependent territories as well as in Great Britain. THE PRIME MINISTER said that the aim should be to carry out the review as quickly as possible in order to hasten the day when British troops could be withdrawn from internal security duties.

Appointments of senior officials

THE HOME SECRETARY proposed that two senior officials from Whitehall should be appointed in Belfast to advise both Governments on matters as they developed, and also to undertake responsibilities on the spot as appropriate. He envisaged that one of these officials, at Deputy Secretary level, might be attached to the Prime Minister's office; and the other to the Ministry of Home Affairs. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that he would like to discuss this proposal with his colleagues, but at first sight it appeared to have many advantages.

Composition of Northern Ireland Government

THE HOME SECRETARY enquired whether the Northern Ireland Prime Minister considered that there was any possibility of broadening the base of the Government in Northern Ireland. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK replied that he saw no prospect of forming a coalition government, since - with few exceptions - members of the Opposition would not be working towards the same ends as the present Northern Ireland Government.

THE HOME SECRETARY suggested that the Northern Ireland Government might widen its appeal to the electorate by appointing a Minister for Community Relations, possibly supported by a commission on which all sections of the community would be represented. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK replied that his Cabinet would be meeting the following day to discuss these and other suggestions. Within the next two weeks, he expected that a White Paper on the pace of reforms would be published. MR. FAULKNER explained that local authorities had been instructed to work to new systems for the allocation of housing; and 40 per cent of the authorities had already indicated their willingness to comply forthwith with the model scheme prepared by the Northern Ireland Government.

At this point (6.45 p. m.), THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that both sides should withdraw to consider what should be said in a Communique and a Declaration of principles which he proposed should be issued after the talks had concluded.

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The meeting resumed at 8.30 p.m. to consider a draft communique. THE PRIME MINISTER explained that the United Kingdom Government attached particular importance to announcing that with the assumption of operational control by the GOC the B Specials would be progressively and rapidly relieved of their present temporary duties in the cities, and that the GOC should have discretion over the custody of their arms, subject to separate consideration of the situation in the remote areas; and they also attached importance to the appointment of a Chief Constable from Great Britain as Inspector-General of the RUC. He also proposed that a Declaration should be issued concurrently with the Communique, which would indicate the principles which should guide the future actions of the two Governments.

In discussion, it was agreed that it should be announced in the Communique that the General Officer Commanding would immediately assume responsibility for internal security operations on the conditions outlined by the Prime Minister. THE PRIME MINISTER said that it would be unwise to relate this decision to the possibility that certain forces might be attempting to subvert the Northern Ireland Government; the evidence available to the United Kingdom Government did not bear this out, and he thought it was significant that Opposition spokesmen had not taken the theme up. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY drew attention to the robust statement by the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic the previous day that the Irish Republican Army had no right to speak for the Irish Government. He considered it essential to retain the goodwill of Mr. Lynch's Government and not to make any statements in the Communique which they might regard as intemperate.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the United Kingdom Government regarded it as important to announce as soon as possible - and preferably in the Communique to be issued that evening - that the two Governments agreed that in order that British troops might be withdrawn from security duties at the earliest possible moment, an urgent enquiry should be held into the organisation and role of the civilian security services in Northern Ireland. MAJOR CHICHESTER-CLARK said that while he agreed that there should be an enquiry, he had undertaken to the Inspector-General of the RUC that he would discuss the whole matter with him the following day; and that no announcement would be made before then. THE PRIME MINISTER emphasised that it would be necessary to make an announcement on the lines he had proposed within the next two or three days, in order to make it quite clear to the public that steps were being taken which would result in the replacement of British troops by a soundly based and efficiently organised civilian security structure.

In further discussion, a draft Declaration of principles was agreed, subject to a number of minor amendments. It would be important to make it clear that the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic was not an issue; and that the aim should be to restore normality as soon as possible so that economic development could proceed.

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THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that officials should now prepare a revised draft Communique and Declaration which would take account of the decisions taken during their discussion; and that the meeting should resume when fresh texts were available. The proposals which had been agreed should materially assist in the maintenance of stability in the near future; and it would be desirable for the two Governments to meet again to review progress in about a fortnight's time. The arrangements for the appointment of two senior officials in Whitehall to Belfast would be made as soon as possible; and the Home Secretary would wish to visit Belfast in the near future to form his impressions of the way in which the new arrangements were working.

The meeting adjourned at 9.45 p.m., and resumed, under the chairmanship of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, at 10.30 p.m., in order to consider further drafts of the ~~Communique and Declaration~~. These drafts were approved in the form of the attached texts.

The meeting concluded at 10.45 p.m.

Cabinet Office, S.W.1.

21st August, 1969

CONFIDENTIALCOMMUNIQUE

A meeting was held at No. 10 Downing Street this evening between the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Wilson, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Mr. Michael Stewart, the Home Secretary, Mr. James Callaghan, the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr. Denis Healey, and the Minister of State at the Home Office, Lord Stonham, and the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Major Chichester-Clark, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. J. L. O. Andrews, the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. R. W. Porter, and the Minister of Development, Mr. Brian Faulkner.

In a six-hour discussion the whole situation in Northern Ireland was reviewed. It was agreed that the GOC Northern Ireland will with immediate effect assume overall responsibility for security operations. He will continue to be responsible directly to the Ministry of Defence but will work in the closest co-operation with the Northern Ireland Government and the Inspector-General of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. For all security operations the GOC will have full control of the deployment and tasks of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. For normal police duties outside the field of security the Royal Ulster Constabulary will remain answerable to the Inspector-General who will be responsible to the Northern Ireland Government.

The GOC will assume full command and control of the Ulster Special Constabulary for all purposes including their organisation, deployment, tasks and arms. Their employment by the Northern Ireland Government in riot and crowd control was always envisaged as a purely temporary measure. With the increased deployment of the Army and the assumption by the GOC of operational control of all the security forces, it will be possible for the Special Constabulary to be progressively and rapidly relieved of these temporary duties at his discretion, starting in the cities. The question of the custody of Special Constabulary arms will similarly be within his discretion. Consideration will be given to the problem of country areas and the defence of vital public service installations.

The Northern Ireland Ministers agreed that an appeal should be made to all members of the public to hand in unauthorised weapons under an amnesty.

In order that British troops can be withdrawn from the internal security role at the earliest possible moment the two Governments will discuss as a matter of urgency the future of the civilian security services of Northern Ireland which will take over when the troops withdraw.

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Major Chichester-Clark said that it was the intention of the Northern Ireland Government to set up forthwith an impartial investigation into the recent grave public disorders. Further details will be announced very shortly by the Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs.

The United Kingdom Ministers proposed and the Northern Ireland Ministers readily agreed that two senior civil servants from London should be temporarily stationed with the Northern Ireland Government in Belfast to represent the increased concern which the United Kingdom Government had necessarily acquired in Northern Ireland affairs through the commitment of the Armed Forces in the present conditions.

The question of detainees was discussed.

The two Governments agreed to a joint Declaration on the principles which should govern their future actions.

The Ministers agreed to meet again early in September.

10 Downing Street, S.W.1.

19th August, 1969