



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 August 1979

Northern Ireland

This letter records the main points which arose from a meeting called by the Prime Minister at 1800 today at No.10, which was attended by the Home Secretary, Defence Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chief of the General Staff and Mr. K.R. Stowe, to discuss the implications of Monday's tragic events in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic and the Government's next moves.

Decisions

- i It was agreed that the Defence Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would prepare a joint paper for Cabinet on 30 August (which is not to be circulated in advance) covering both the objectives which the Government should pursue in any future discussions with the Irish Government, in order to improve cross-border security and to stiffen the Irish Government's policies towards the terrorists; and possible ways of improving the British Government's own security effort in Northern Ireland, including the improvement of co-operation between the Army and the RUC in intelligence and operational matters.
- ii It was agreed that the FCO would pursue urgently the question of ensuring that the Taoiseach is invited to attend the ceremonial funeral of Lord Mountbatten in Westminster Abbey next week; and that the invitation, when extended, would be accompanied by a message from the Prime Minister inviting Mr. Lynch to meet her during his visit to London for talks on the Irish problem.

Discussion

i The events of 27 August

Mr. Atkins gave his colleagues a report on his visit to Warrenpoint earlier in the day and on his discussions with the security authorities in Northern Ireland. He said that although there were very strong indications that the bombs which ambushed the British convoy at Warrenpoint had been ^{detonated} from south of the border, there was as yet no firm evidence of this; and that, similarly, it had not yet been established that any small arms fire had come from south of the border. The Garda had already detained two suspects in connection with the

Warrenpoint explosions, and two more in connection with the murder of Lord Mountbatten and his companions in Irish waters.

ii Future relations with the Irish Republic

There was general agreement that the key to the situation in Northern Ireland lay in Dublin, and also to some extent with the Pope. The Prime Minister said that the Government had to take decisions on the future approach to the Irish Government and on what the UK required of the Republic. It was pointed out that, for so long as Ireland held the EEC Presidency, the Irish had cards which they could play against the UK. It was agreed that the British Government could, if necessary, take steps to make the rest of the world more aware of the shortcomings of the Irish Government's policies towards the terrorists and of their implications. This might help to change the Irish Government's attitude on the extradition issue. The UK might be able to exert some leverage against the Republic in the context of the UK Nationality Act, although any moves in this direction would be complicated by the fact that both countries were members of the EEC. It might also be possible to step up administrative action against Irish immigrants to the UK, on the lines of the steps already being taken at UK channel ports against Algerians and Turks. It was, however, agreed that before a more confrontational policy with regard to the Irish Republic was considered, a further attempt should be made - at a meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr. Lynch - to enlist the Irish Government's effective co-operation, particularly in the intelligence field. If no progress resulted, other measures would have to be considered.

iii Possible measures within Northern Ireland

Mr. Atkins informed his colleagues of possible new measures which could be adopted within the Province, all of which carried both advantages and disadvantages. These included: the re-introduction of executive detention; the high profile for security operations; increased use of UDR; more vigorous use of the SAS; changes in the law, e.g. making it possible to accept as evidence in court the testimony of police officers of the rank of superintendent or above concerning membership of proscribed organisations; the proscription of the Provisional Sinn Fein; the closing of border roads; the withdrawal of police from border areas, thus relieving the Army from the duty of protecting the police; and the dispatch of more troops to Northern Ireland (there was general agreement that this last option should not be pursued further).

There was also some discussion of how co-operation between the RUC and the Army, particularly in the intelligence field, could be improved, possibly by the appointment of one Director of Operations who could exercise overall day-to-day control of operations both by the police and by the Army. It was agreed that this and other possible measures should be considered in the joint paper which the

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Northern Ireland Office and Ministry of Defence are to prepare for Cabinet on 30 August.

Possible ways of improving our intelligence concerning terrorist activities south of the border were also discussed. It was agreed that an arrangement with the Irish Government whereby British helicopters could cross the border freely and conduct surveillance within an area of, say, five kilometres south into Irish territory, would be of very considerable assistance to border security operations.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), Roger Facer (Ministry of Defence), Michael Richardson (Office of the Lord Privy Seal), George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

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