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PRIME MINISTER

Northern Ireland: Cross-Border Security
(OD(79) 27)

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this paper is to seek agreement for the line which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should take when he sees the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. O'Kennedy, on 5th October: and I think you should keep the discussion strictly to that.

2. In particular there are two matters which are closely related but which would seem inappropriate to discuss in any detail on this occasion viz:-

(a) The Role of the Security Co-ordinator.

The appointment will have been announced before OD meets. The Ministers directly concerned all know the history to it: the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade will be missing: so it will come as a surprise only to the Lord President and the Chief Secretary. You could briefly say that the Ministers concerned all felt the need for someone to improve the co-ordination of the security forces: that the individual was chosen for his personal qualities and not his previous background: and that he is currently forming his own views on how he should operate. The main thing is to avoid any impression of intensified skullduggery.

(b) Improve Intelligence on Irish Terrorists Operating from the Republic.

A Working Party has just produced a Report on this which contains some new ideas. I hope to send to you and the Ministers directly concerned during the course of next week. However it contains some very sensitive information and proposals which would not be declared to the southern Irish and which ought not to go to the whole of OD. If, therefore, anyone raises the question of improved intelligence activities which would not be known to the Republic, I

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hope you can ride it off by saying that this is not relevant to Mr. Atkins' meeting with Mr. O'Kennedy which is what OD(79) 27 is about.

3. Since Ministers last discussed cross-border security a lot of work has been done both on considering the fullest possible range of cross-border security measures and methods of improving intelligence on Irish terrorists in co-operation with the Republic. A much greater degree of agreement has been reached between the Northern Ireland Office, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. The severely limiting factor has been the unwillingness of the Republic to contemplate some measures and their inability to implement others. Thus the Army in Northern Ireland would like to be able to pursue terrorists across the border and into the territory of the Republic. They would also like to be free to deal direct with the Irish Army on counter-terrorist matters and for the latter to have the same special powers as they enjoy themselves. The MOD including the CGS (but not HQ Northern Ireland) are persuaded that these proposals are not worth putting forward at the present time. However the fact that this attitude of mind exists in the army is an important background consideration to the proposals set out in OD(79) 27.

HANDLING

4. You will wish to invite the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to introduce his paper and then ask the Secretary of State for Defence to comment. The points to establish in subsequent discussion are:-

- (a) Is the Secretary of State for Defence content with the way in which the cross-border security issue is being handled? Paragraph 3 above refers to the greater extent of agreement between the Northern Ireland Office and the Ministry of Defence: but in view of the earlier Departmental differences which still persist to some extent at lower levels, it is desirable that the Secretary of State for Defence's endorsement for Mr. Atkins' proposals should be unqualified.

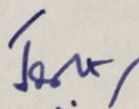
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- (b) In addition to the proposals already put to the Irish (listed in paragraph 2 of the paper), what additional proposals should be put forward if the moment seems opportune. The suggestion in paragraph 3 about enabling Army Technical Officers to cross the border to deal with explosive devices on or near the border seems eminently sensible but there may be other high priority proposals which the Secretary of State for Defence may wish to put forward.
- (c) If the Irish Government are prepared to do less than we hope, what should our public attitude be? The NIO are now more optimistic than they were. The questions put in Dublin to our officials last week suggests that the Irish are certainly preparing to offer some overflight concessions for British helicopters, and they may also be offering other kinds of assistance although they seem unlikely to be willing to accept RUC officers being permitted to interview terrorist suspects in Garda stations. This helicopter concession will be welcome as the Army attach particular importance to improving the existing level of surveillance south of the border. If however the talks are not productive we shall be faced with a difficult decision. There would be an obvious temptation to put the blame where it lies and pillory the Irish Government publicly. This would certainly satisfy some elements of public opinion and views in the services. But it would also tend to reduce the effectiveness of whatever co-operation we can achieve with the Irish Government. Mr. Atkins recommends the alternative approach of making the best of things while being prepared in the worst case to send a strong personal but private message from yourself to Mr. Lynch. This may be right but I do not think he should let the Irish off the hook by agreeing to a communique expressing satisfaction with what is being done unless we are satisfied.

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CONCLUSION

5. Subject to the points made in discussion, the Committee might be guided to the conclusion that they support Mr. Atkins' proposed approach when he meets Mr. O'Kennedy.



(John Hunt)

2nd October 1979