

SECRET

1reland
Copy No ① of 56

NIO(79)8

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE ON FRIDAY
7 DECEMBER 1979 AT 12.00PM

Present:

Mr Marshall	Chairman
Mr Hannigan)	
Mr Buxton)	
Mr Corbett)	NIO
Mr Jones)	
Mr Benger)	
Mr Stephen)	
Mr Cousins)	
Mr Rotheram)	
Col Jones)	MOD
Col Wilson)	
Maj Pheysey)	
Mr Newington)	
Mr Parramore)	FCO
Mr Phillips	Home Office

The Political Situation

The Chairman said that, since the last NIOM, the Working Paper on the Government of Northern Ireland had been published and initial reaction had been moderately favourable. Both the Alliance and DUP had accepted invitations to attend a Conference and it was probable that the SDLP would feel able to come. Mr Hume had seen the Secretary of State on 3 December and would see him again in the following week to discuss the matter further. The Conference had been postponed and, if the SDLP agreed to attend, it would open either shortly before Christmas or early in January. The Conference was unlikely to run on for a long while; the aim was to identify the highest level of agreement possible so that the Government could decide on future policy.

Security

The Chairman said that the debate on the renewal of the Emergency Provisions Act would take place on Tuesday, 11 December. The Government intended to seek the renewal of all the provisions of the Act despite representations from SACHR; some members of the Commission might possibly resign.

The Republic

During the meeting it was learnt that Mr Haughey was to succeed Mr Lynch as Taoiseach. The Chairman said that the Government would not comment on political events in the Republic; in any event our policies were formulated with regard to Northern Ireland's needs. It was possible, however, that Mr Haughey would place more immediate emphasis on Irish unity than Mr Lynch had done.

SECRET

Cross-Border Security

In response to a question from Col Jones the Chairman said that it should be assumed, until the contrary was shown, that arrangements on cross-border security would remain as they were at present. Mr Hannigan thought that the Irish would not break the agreement reached between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, but the will on the ground was crucial to its success or failure. Mr Newington said that the attitude of the Garda was vital, and in this context the change in the senior Garda posts, notably the appointment of a new head of the Special Branch, should be closely watched. Mr Phillips said that the Home Office was also interested in the new Garda appointments and it was likely that representatives of the Security Services and Metropolitan Police Special Branch would shortly be visiting Dublin to establish contacts.

Helicopter overflight

Col Jones said that the issue of air-safety was still outstanding. Mr Hannigan said that, provided the text of the arrangements did not require agreement, it might be possible simply to announce our intentions and go ahead. The Chairman thought it wisest to delay for a short period while Mr Haughey settled in, while Mr Newington said that a lot would depend on whether there were ministerial changes at the DFA and the Department of Justice.

Force Reductions

Mr Stephen said that for operational reasons the unit concerned would need to be informed by 18 December. The Chairman said that the position at present was that the Secretary of State was not going to make any announcement about force reductions during the renewal debate and that, in the light of the political changes in the Republic and Mr Paisley's request for assurances on security as a condition for DUP attendance at the Conference, the proposed force reduction might have to be reconsidered. He understood that the Secretary of State would be writing to the Secretary of State for Defence on the matter. He asked whether 18 December was the latest possible date on which a decision could be taken. Mr Stephen said that it was not, and confirmed that no irrevocable action had yet been taken, to render reconsideration of the withdrawal impossible. But he drew attention to the fact that the Secretary of State would be unavailable until Thursday 13 December. Furthermore the Army's reasons for desiring the reduction were very urgent, and strong arguments would be needed to reverse the decision. Mr Rotheram said that the dispositions of other units would make the proposed reduction clear to the unit concerned if they were to make a reconnaissance on the ground. Mr Cousins said that the chances of a leak would increase as time went by.

Direction and Co-Ordination of Security Activities

Mr Hannigan said that Brigadier Pascoe had produced a paper on the higher direction of security policy which had been circulated to HQNI, RUCHQ and NIO for comment. It developed the proposition agreed with the GOC and Chief Constable that Sir Maurice Oldfield would chair the Security Co-ordinating Committee, which was not to assume an executive rôle. The paper also examined the functions of the Operations Policy Committee, the revival of which had been agreed by both the Chief Constable and the GOC. The paper was to be discussed at the

SECRET

Security Policy Meeting on 14 December. On lower-level security policy Mr Hannigan reported that the Working Party's Report on the Direction and Coordination of security operations had in effect been passed to the Planning Staff for practical implementation as the need arose; already recommendations in three instances had been made, and consideration would proceed case by case in view of the local situation as the Working Party had recommended.

Irish Named Unit

Mr Stephen said that MOD would be grateful for an early response on this question in order to relieve the current pressure on certain units in the Army. The Chairman said that NIO had not yet been able to consider the matter but would reply as soon as possible.

The 'H' Block Protest

Mr Hannigan said that the recent meeting of the "Smash the H-Block Committee" had not been very successful; attempts to whip up support were not going well. There was a risk that if the campaign flagged a hunger strike would be called, but this did not seem to be an immediate threat.

12/12/79

SECRET

1979

