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CABINET

DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

NORTHERN IRELAND : POLITICS

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. Our political policy has two major facets: first, a recognition that any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom can be made only with the consent of a majority of its people; and secondly, the objective of replacing "direct rule" by a system of government involving elected representatives of the Northern Ireland people that would be broadly accepted on both sides of the communal divide and by Parliament. As the Queen's Speech put it, we will "seek an acceptable way of restoring to the people of Northern Ireland more control over their own affairs".

Present Attitudes

2. At present there is a massive gap between the basic positions of the two sides of the community and everyone is scared of making any move which weakens his basic position. The Catholics are afraid of being a minority discriminated against and excluded by a Protestant-based government of the Stormont type; their political leaders insist on participation in government and recognition of the Irish dimension, and (with the Irish Government) they hanker after getting as close as possible to the elements of the Sunningdale agreement. The Protestants are afraid of being a minority in United Ireland: they see both the SDLP's demands as a step in that direction and want ordinary, democratic majority rule - though perhaps with some safeguards for the minority. This "double minority" problem makes genuine negotiation very difficult.

3. The results of the European Election have almost certainly made it more difficult to get some political movement. Paisley scored an emphatic personal victory; it was the first election in which the whole province could vote for him. Much may depend on the lessons other Unionists draw from Paisley's "triumph" in the European election. He picked up a lot of support from anti-marketters, and his "success" may be as much a reflection of general concern about the security situation as a precursor of increased pressure for political movement on the lines of his intransigent views.

## CONFIDENTIAL

4. The European election also confirmed the position of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as the dominant representatives of the Catholic minority. The SDLP will see to use both Dublin and the Irish Americans to put pressure on us.

### The Government's Strategy

5. At present I can best make progress by patient and determined exploration of the issues with the political leaders, drawing on the authority of a Government with a full Parliamentary term ahead of it and on the good credentials of the Conservative Party in this area. I am consolidating my first contacts with the political leaders in Northern Ireland and building up a personal relationship with those who matter (including Paisley). I shall try to bring them privately to understand what I see as the political realities. They must each be enticed from their corners. My aim will be to get each side to recognise, and then to begin to accommodate, the other's concerns - in the interest of the whole community.

6. Some people call, simplistically, for a "British Government initiative". Usually they really mean "a solution to the Northern Ireland problem", and that cannot yet be discerned or provided. I can certainly envisage a stage when we should judge it right to put specific proposals before the parties, after very careful preparation of the ground. These proposals could take the form of models of new governmental arrangements for Northern Ireland, and this is the stage at which local government changes could come into the picture. Or they could be procedural proposals designed to encourage Northern Ireland politicians to break into new patterns of thought. One which I know that Airey Neave contemplated is the possibility of setting up some form of independent inquiry; and if we could give the inquiry an international component, that would have added advantages. At the end of the day we might need to take a chance and push through new arrangements, against some opposition, provided we thought that the result would be more stable than the present position.

7. If we make a major move which fails, it will take some time to recover - perhaps most of the lifetime of this Parliament. So very careful preparation is needed, and timing will be critical. An "initiative" now - in the sense of putting forward new proposals - would be counter-productive. The only new political arrangement which is even remotely feasible at the present time is one which would meet Paisley's demands; and this would contain the seeds of its own failure and leave us in the end worse off than we are now.

### The Irish Government

8. The Irish Government recognise that my steady, determined and patient efforts, in private discussions with local politicians, are the best form of "initiative" at the present time. They do not expect an immediate initiative of a more substantial kind, though they will certainly look for continuing evidence of our determination to break out of the present stalemate.



9. It is part of my strategy to keep in regular contact with Irish Ministers and to keep them with me as far as possible. Although in public the Irish Government too often appear as adversary and critic, they share almost all our short-term objectives for Northern Ireland and privately share our view of the political realities. They recognise that Northern Ireland is our responsibility. Equally we should recognise that history, culture and politics all give them a legitimate interest in what goes on there. The "Irish Dimension" goes even wider than the Northern Ireland problem, given the interlocking nature of our peoples and interests. There is advantage, vis a vis the Unionists, in not concentrating solely on the North/South linkages. We should also cultivate the London/Dublin axis on a Government to Government basis. The Prime Minister has agreed that we should continue with the group of officials from both countries looking at Anglo-Irish economic co-operation.

10. The EEC, including the new European Assembly, will be an additional dimension, but probably not separately significant in the short to middle term.

#### The United States

11. Keeping the Irish Government content is an invaluable help with United States opinion. The sympathisers with PIRA have made some headway with their propaganda. Tip O'Neill, Edward Kennedy and other Irish-American leaders have helped reduce the flow of funds from US to PIRA, but have become more critical of our human rights record and failure to bring about political progress. The Embassy's assessment (Washington telegram 1684 of 26 June) is that in order to avoid the risk of the Administration reappraising its public position on Northern Ireland we need to ensure that our policies continue to sustain a positive attitude in Dublin; and to persuade responsible opinion in the US that our human rights record is defensible and that we are making genuine efforts to promote political progress. With the help of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary I am giving a good deal of attention to increasing our efforts to make sure that influential Americans properly understand what we are trying to do in Northern Ireland.

#### Conclusion

12. I invite the Committee to agree that I should -

- (a) continue my talks with the main political leaders (paying particular attention in the next few months to Paisley and the SDLP) to impress upon them the Government's determination to see new political arrangements in Northern Ireland and to make it clear that this means that each must move from his present position (paragraph 5);
- (b) work up specific proposals (constitutional models, proposals for an independent inquiry etc) to be put to the parties when the right opportunity occurs (paragraph 6);

- (c) examine with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary ways of developing closer ties with the Irish and making sure that our policies are properly understood in the United States (paragraphs 8 - 11)
- (d) bring these matters before the Committee again in due course.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS : IRELAND : LAW AND ORDER

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

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Northern Ireland Office

5 July 1979

The main threat continues to come from republican terrorists, who have been increasing their activities since the end of 1978. Substantial resources had been made available for the purpose, but the IRA's continuing failure to give up its arms in return for long term arms, the increasing activity and expansion of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the IRA's inoperability to Security Force operations and operations have done much to offset these problems. They have succeeded in their operations and not operate in similar ways, generally with determination and with better internal security than before. They have developed their technical and operational expertise and are more professional than before. Their operations are more effective, and successful results on the Security Force have increased. Such factors are not unexpected, and the information I receive about the operations of the terrorists is disturbing. The main aim of the report is to discuss the main threat to the United Kingdom and the measures which the Government will take to meet this threat.

1. The main National Liberation Army (NLA) threat is a smaller but significant one. There is a close relationship between the two organisations, arising from their aims and a degree of local cooperation.

2. The aim of the report is to discuss the main threat to the United Kingdom and the measures which the Government will take to meet this threat. It is intended to provide a basis for discussion of the main threat to the United Kingdom and the measures which the Government will take to meet this threat. It is intended to provide a basis for discussion of the main threat to the United Kingdom and the measures which the Government will take to meet this threat.