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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE REVEREND IAN PAISLEY, M.P., AT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 25 JUNE 1981 AT 1700.

PRESENT

The Prime Minister
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Mr. Ian Gow, M.P.
Mr. M. O'D. B. Alexander

The Reverend Ian Paisley,
M.P.
Mr. P. Robinson, M.P.

Mr. Paisley said that the security situation in Northern Ireland was now very serious. Fifty-three people (27 civilians and 26 members of the security forces) had been murdered by the IRA since he had last met the Prime Minister. The people who lived in the worst affected areas were losing confidence in the will of the security forces to cope with the situation. Following the murder of a cousin of his, Constable Kyle, the murderers, according to Mr. Paisley, withdrew into the village of Carrickmore, a well-known "Republican ghetto". The inhabitants had set up road blocks and the police had been refused entry. The UDR were saying that Carrickmore was now out of bounds. The UDR believed that this was because it had been agreed at a meeting between the heads of the Catholic community and senior police officers a week before the death of Bobby Sands that the police would not enter a number of Catholic areas.

Mr. Paisley claimed that on election day in Carrickmore last month, five IRA men armed with armelites and hand guns had appeared at the polling booths. They had been spotted by the RUC and could have been shot but the local police officer in charge, Superintendent Hill, refused permission. Despite the fact that the area was surrounded by some 50 police, the five IRA men had been allowed to escape. It was widely believed that one of the five had been involved in the murder of Constable Kyle. It was easy to understand the demoralisation of the Protestant community in the face of such events. Unless something was done there would in due course be a vicious Protestant backlash which it would be impossible to contain. People were already saying in Enniskillen that they might as well die fighting the IRA as wait for the IRA to come and get them. Others were thinking of emigrating: two families had recently left for Canada, having had to be taken to Belfast under police guard.

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The Prime Minister asked what Mr. Paisley thought should be done. Mr. Paisley said that it should be made clear that the UDR was authorised to operate anywhere in Northern Ireland. Secondly, it should be agreed that when armed members of the IRA appeared in public, the police should be allowed to take them on. The Prime Minister said that the Army and the UDR were deployed in support of the police. It was not for her to tell the police how the job should be done. The Government had made it possible for the size of the RUC to be increased. She understood that recruiting to the UDR was on the increase. From all she had heard, the Army was carrying out its duties splendidly. Mr. Paisley said that he was not questioning the integrity of the armed forces. But he was questioning whether the officers were doing their job properly. The Secretary of State said that it was not for him to tell the Chief Constable or the GOC how to do their jobs. The Chief Constable deployed the UDR as he saw fit. There were certain areas where he preferred to use the regular Army. The UDR was the first line reserve in 50 per cent of all police districts. In other areas, e.g. West Belfast, there were understandable reasons why it might seem preferable to the Chief Constable to use the regular Army. That was a matter for his judgement. Mr. Paisley said he found it extraordinary that the UDR had been able to operate in Carrickmore, in the Short Strand area and elsewhere a week before the death of Sands but not since. The Secretary of State said that in the period after Sands' death the Army had been used more but the situation was now reverting to that which had obtained before the deaths of the hunger strikers.

Mr. Paisley said that all this was of little comfort to the victims and of little comfort to those in the UDR who were being banned from operating in the border areas and prevented from defending their own "homes and homesteads". Why should they be deployed to defend Lord Brookeborough's home rather than the place where they themselves lived. More and more members of the UDR were asking why they were being recruited if they were not being allowed to operate in the areas where their families were. It was widely assumed that this policy was the result of an agreement between the "security chiefs" and the leaders of the Catholic Church that certain areas would be 'no go' areas. It was not tolerable that the views of the Roman Catholics should be given such weight. It was not tolerable

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that in Carrickmore tricolours and black flags should be flown and the UDR and the Army should be unable to enter. When the police went in, as they had with him on a recent occasion, they came out again in a hurry.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State both repeated that it was not for them to give instructions to the GOC or the Chief Constable. The Government fully recognised the importance of security and provided the means to ensure it. But the officers in charge on the spot had to decide how those means should be deployed. The Prime Minister commented that they might well have considered that more members of the UDR would be killed if deployments of the kind advocated by Mr. Paisley had been made. Mr. Paisley retorted that this would be no comfort to Mrs. Kyle.

Responding to a comment by the Prime Minister that she much appreciated the role of the UDR, Mr. Robinson commented that members of the UDR were unaware of this. He wondered whether it would be possible to confer the Royal title on the UDR, which would be a great boost for their morale. The Prime Minister gave no undertaking but thanked Mr. Robinson for raising the issue.

Mr. Paisley said that he was concerned about the pressures being brought to bear by the Catholic Church on the Government in favour of a compromise with hunger strikers. He found it surprising that statements such as that made by the Catholic Bishops recently did not appear to be read in their entirety. Whatever they might say about violence, they always ended up with the routine charges about the injustices inflicted on the Catholic community. It would be a tragedy if the hunger strikes were brought to an end by concessions on any of the five demands. The Government should not be deceived by Cardinal O Fiaich: he spoke with a double tongue. The Prime Minister said that she thought the Bishops had been courageous and that their statement was a welcome one. Mr. Paisley said that any concessions to the hunger strikers would produce a terrible backlash in the Protestant community. The Prime Minister expressed her gratitude for the fact that so far the Protestant community had not reacted. Mr. Paisley said that the Protestant community had reacted in the way that their leaders had told them to do. He himself had played his part.

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The Prime Minister said that she recognised this. She thought that the memorial service he had organised to coincide with the Bobby Sands funeral had played an important part in ensuring that media reporting at the time was reasonably balanced. She thought that media coverage in recent weeks of events in Northern Ireland had improved. Mr. Paisley agreed. Mr. Robinson said that the propaganda battle was still being lost in the United States. Mr. Paisley commented that he kept in close touch with Senator Strom Thurmond, a personal friend of his.

Mr. Paisley said that the Prime Minister should take a close look at what was being said by delegates from the Republic of Ireland to the European Parliament. They took the line that the hunger strikers in the Maze were dying simply because of the inhumane treatment they received. Mr. Paisley said he had been "nauseated" by Mr. Haughey's claim in the recent election campaign that Northern Ireland was a "non-viable entity" and that HMG had admitted this. The Anglo-Irish studies were angering people in Northern Ireland increasingly. They were causing an upsurge of hostility towards HMG. The only man in Northern Ireland who supported the talks, John Hume, had received only 17 per cent of the vote in the recent election. Mr. Haughey asserted that the British Government's participation in the talks amounted to a tacit admission of the failure of Northern Ireland. The talks were profiting neither Northern Ireland nor HMG. It was being said that the Secretary of State would soon be seeking to talk to the parties in Northern Ireland about a new initiative. So long as HMG were talking to Dublin, the DUP would not talk to HMG. The Prime Minister said that she hoped Mr. Paisley would reconsider his position. Mr. Paisley said he would not. It was for the Prime Minister to reconsider her policy which was doing damage both to herself and Northern Ireland. The present Parliamentary situation in Dublin gave her the opportunity to change course.

The Prime Minister said that she remained very anxious to find a way to secure peace in Northern Ireland. Mr. Paisley said the only way was to adhere to the ballot box, whatever results it produced.

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The Prime Minister should take the initiative to return political responsibility to the people of Northern Ireland. There should be an elected convention or a referendum. If he were defeated, he would be willing to act as a constitutional opposition.

The meeting ended at 1740.

And

26 June 1981

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