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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS:
SECURITY COOPERATION WITH THE REPUBLIC

The Prime Minister has noted without comment your minute of 4 March on this subject and the accompanying assessment.

I am copying this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

(CHARLES POWELL)

5 March 1985

SECRET AND PERSONAL

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'SP', located in the bottom right corner of the page.

Prime Minister

ED? 30
4/8.

Ref. A085/659

MR BUTLER

Anglo-Irish Relations: Security Co-operation with the Republic

At recent Ministerial meetings on Northern Ireland there has been some discussion of the effectiveness of the co-operation which the United Kingdom receives from the Irish Republic in the fight against terrorism. This question clearly has an important bearing both on the sincerity of the Irish Government's claims to be doing all in its power to counter terrorism and on the extent to which it is realistic for us to press the Irish Government for improvements. As background to the current Ministerial consideration of Northern Ireland, therefore, I asked the Intelligence Co-ordinator to prepare an interdepartmental assessment of the present state of co-operation between the Irish and British authorities against terrorism. I now submit a copy of his report, which has been prepared in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Home Office, Northern Ireland Office, Security Service, SIS and MPSB.

2. As you will see, the picture which emerges is less than clear-cut. The Irish Government devotes significant resources to security (more than the United Kingdom on a per capita basis). Cross-border co-operation (ie between the Garda and the RUC) is inhibited by political considerations on the Irish side, personal mistrust between senior police officers in Belfast and Dublin, the uneven quality of the Garda and the other demands on the Garda's limited capability. Between Dublin and London (as distinct from across the border), co-operation is close and effective: and the flow of intelligence between the Intelligence and Security Branch of the Garda on the one hand and the Security Service and the MPSB on the other is of crucial importance in the fight against terrorism in mainland Britain. Up to now, this co-operation has been relatively unaffected by the ups and downs in political relations between the two Governments. It would not be to our

advantage if pressure on the Irish for improved cross-border co-operation were to lead to any diminution of the co-operation which has been developed between the two capitals.

3. Paragraph 2 of the report ends with the judgment that "the only likely circumstances in which they [the Irish Government] would feel able to take significantly firmer action [ie in the shape of allocating additional resources] would be if the terrorists changed tactics and mounted a campaign of violence in the Republic". It is however clear from our exploratory discussions with the Irish on the Armstrong/Nally channel that, in the context of an intergovernmental agreement on Northern Ireland of the kind now under discussion, the Irish Government would be prepared to take significant steps to improve cross-border security co-operation in such areas as the exchange of intelligence and threat assessments; the establishment of more effective liaison structures; technical co-operation; training and exchange of personnel; and ordination of operational resources on both sides of the border. They have also indicated that they would be prepared to consider redeploying to the border areas elements of the Special Task Force which were withdrawn to Dublin in 1983 (paragraph 4 of Sir Antony Duff's report). These measures, if implemented, would over time significantly enhance the effectiveness of the anti-terrorist campaign on both sides of the border.

4. If the current intergovernmental contacts end without an agreement, there is no reason to believe that the Irish Government's efforts to contain terrorism will slacken markedly as long as they judge the IRA presence a threat to their own state. But in a climate of disappointed expectations and recrimination against the British Government, which would be the likely consequences in the Republic of failure to reach an agreement, it would be unrealistic to look for any improvement in the present level of security co-operation between the two Governments and, at least on cross-border co-operation, there could well be some deterioration.



5. The conclusions I draw from this are that an intergovernmental agreement on Northern Ireland on the lines currently being explored would be likely to bring genuine advantages on the security front; that failure to reach an agreement could well be prejudicial to cross-border security co-operation, at least for a time; and that the right moment to exert maximum pressure on the Irish Government for tangible improvements in their co-operation with us on security will be if and when the main elements of an agreement are finalised and we can require the Irish to honour the undertakings into which they will then be entering.

6. I am sending copies of this minute and the report to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

4 March 1985

SECURITY CO-OPERATION WITH THE IRISH REPUBLIC

1. This paper assesses the present Irish attitude to co-operation and the practical difficulties involved.

Government Attitudes

2. The Irish Government sees the Provisional IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army and their respective political organisations as threats to the long-term security and political stability of the Republic. Both groups have carried out terrorist operations from time to time in the Republic. Both the Provisional IRA and Irish National Liberation Army are proscribed organisations. But because Republican terrorists are generally careful not directly to threaten Irish Government interests, and because of the political importance to the Irish Government of upholding nationalist aspirations in Northern Ireland, and not appearing subservient to British Government interests, the Irish Government perceives significant political constraints on the extent to which it can act further against Republican terrorism. Its activity is kept under close and critical review by the opposition and press and any suggestion that the Irish Government was yielding to British pressure to change its policy and thus helping to shore up British institutions in Northern Ireland would potentially be politically highly damaging. In addition Irish Ministers argue (we think correctly) that Irish spending on security is already higher than the United Kingdom's on a per capita basis. In a difficult economic situation, they would find it difficult to defend increased public expenditure in this area. We believe that the only likely circumstances in which they would feel able to take significantly firmer action would be if the terrorists changed tactics and mounted a campaign of violence in the Republic.

3. Successive Irish Governments have encouraged practical co-operation in general terms, and genuinely wish for it within the limits of what they regard as politically possible. But their sensitivity to charges of collaboration particularly in relation to Northern Ireland has made them reluctant to acknowledge this publicly and we believe that even those Irish Ministers who are aware of it in general terms may be unaware of its extent. This sensitivity means that co-operation is out at risk by unfavourable publicity or adverse political

developments. Against this background, the helpful attitude of the former Irish Attorney General and his and Dr Fitzgerald's willingness to face criticism for their co-operation in the field of extradition (eg over the McGlinchey case) and extraterritorial jurisdiction struck a positive note, but we do not yet know the attitude of the new Attorney General. There has also been a constructive meeting between officials from the NIO and the Irish Ministry of Justice on ways of limiting the scope for fertiliser to be used in home-made explosives.

The Garda

4. The Garda is an unarmed national police force, whose strength is some 10,500. Apart from some specialist branches (see below), it is a largely unsophisticated force with limited training and resources. In recent years it has been faced with a significant rise in urban crime in Dublin, and with problems of drug trafficking, which have necessarily been given a high priority. Within its political constraints and the competing priorities, the Garda does maintain some co-operation with the RUC in border areas. But its extent and efficiency is affected by the quality of personal relations in each police area, and by the Garda's limited resources and relatively unsophisticated equipment. Attempts to improve the existing formal structure of consultation have faltered. Liaison officers in police headquarters have been appointed, but otherwise liaison on operations at levels above Superintendent is extremely rare. Following the alleged involvement of RUC officers in 1982 in preventing a witness attending a court case in the Republic with direct political overtones (the Nangle Affair) there has been mutual suspicion in the senior ranks between the Garda and the RUC which still needs to be dispelled.

Garda/RUC Special Branch Co-operation

5. The Garda Intelligence and Security Branch (D Branch) has a total strength of 350 and is responsible for countering threats of espionage, political violence and subversion, including terrorism. Much of its manpower is consumed on protection duties. It is principally based in the Dublin area. For country-wide operations, including the border area, it can call on the 150 strong and armed Special Task Force (which comes within the D branch complement) units of which were until 1983 based in the border area but can now only be deployed from Dublin in consultation with local Chief Superintendents. The Garda can also call

upon the Army to assist the civil power. Neither the Garda nor the Irish Army liaise with the British Army: this goes through the RUC. The Intelligence and Security Branch and task force does not have the manpower and equipment to maintain an effective presence in the strongly Republican border areas: only 50 branch officers are posted outside the Dublin area. Links between the headquarters of Intelligence and Security Branch and the RUC are maintained on a personal basis. Some hard intelligence is exchanged beneficially on the cross-border activities of Republican terrorists, but this personal exchange can be influenced by the political climate established by the Irish Government and the Garda Commissioner. The RUC Special Branch at regional level also maintain personal contact with the Garda in the border areas, where there is some exchange of low-level intelligence.

Mainland Liaison with Security Branch

6. The Intelligence and Security Branch devote a great deal of effort to monitoring those responsible for mounting attacks on the mainland. They provide helpful intelligence, despite the practical difficulties of having to work in a number of essentially hostile areas, which make continual surveillance operations virtually impossible, and security constraints precluding telephone interception outside the Greater Dublin area.

7. Both the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and the Security Service maintain excellent relations with Garda Intelligence and Security Branch and benefit from a degree of co-operation and from a flow of intelligence which we believe to be at a greater level than is suspected by at least some Irish ministers. This is achieved by working with a small number of Garda officers who, although sensitive to the political constraints, and to the potential hostility of some of their colleagues, are nevertheless prepared to be extremely helpful and whose attitude gives no indication that they are anything other than whole-heartedly dedicated to the defeat of terrorism from whatever source. MPSB believe that this co-operation makes a major contribution to combating the present terrorist campaign on the mainland: as an example the discovery of arms and explosives dumps on the mainland in 1984 and subsequent arrests of three PIRA terrorists were due largely to Garda intelligence. The Security Service provides appreciable assistance to the Garda in areas where Garda

coverage is minimal, such as subversion, Arab terrorism and counter-espionage. It used to provide training courses in the United Kingdom but political difficulties have recently led the Irish side to abandon the practice. Nevertheless the Security Service continues to receive very valuable information about PIRA and INLA activities abroad. This intelligence has played an important part in frustrating several major arms shipments and the Garda has made it plain that it relies on the Security Service to investigate such matters on its behalf with foreign services.

Conclusions

8. Security co-operation with the United Kingdom is a highly political issue, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland. Irish Governments feel extremely vulnerable to domestic criticism that they are collaborating too closely with the United Kingdom on Northern Ireland security. They consider that closer co-operation can be the more easily pursued and presented in the context of their involvement in wider political developments relating to Northern Ireland. There is also a limit to what can be expected within the expertise and resources currently available to the Garda, and the requirements placed on it. Despite being essentially an unarmed and relatively unsophisticated police force regionally organised, it is able to operate reasonably effectively against the current limited threat from terrorism facing the Republic itself, but it has deficiencies in counter terrorist operations, and is less of a constraint on cross-border operations than we would wish. It does, however, co-operate well with MPSB and the Security Service on the terrorist threat to the mainland and on PIRA and INLA arms procurement abroad.