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Cross border projects

Ref. A03564

PRIME MINISTER

Northern Ireland

(OD(80) 67 and 68)

BACKGROUND

As a result of your meeting with him on 31st October to discuss the Government's future policy, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has produced a policy paper supported by four notes by officials, together with a separate paper on the security and prisons background.

2. OD last discussed general policy in regard to Northern Ireland at their meeting on 10th June, when they approved a draft document for publication setting out the Government's proposals for future discussions regarding the future Government of Northern Ireland. This document was subsequently endorsed by the Cabinet and published, and discussions took place. These have now run out of steam because Northern Ireland politicians have failed to respond to the proposals which have been put to them constructively or in a spirit of compromise.

3. Although the blame for this situation rests with the Northern Ireland political parties, the responsibility for making further progress in this difficult area still rests with the Government. The security situation in the Province has significantly improved. So have relations with the Republic. The two factors are related because a major contribution to the security situation has come from Mr. Haughey's more co-operative approach. We cannot count on these improvements being maintained unless some kind of positive progress can be seen to be taking place on the political front. On the other hand any clear-cut political initiative runs the risk of upsetting one or other of the Northern Irish communities and thereby destabilising the present situation. Thus the Government is condemned to walking along a tightrope. It is unlikely that this OD discussion will achieve a clear-cut definition of long-term Government aims and the means by which these are to be achieved. But in the short term the Secretary of State

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for Northern Ireland needs to have an agreed line on future policy in Northern Ireland which can be set out in the Debate on the Address and subsequently elaborated in reply to Parliamentary Questions. You will also need a clear line for your meeting with Mr. Haughey in December.

HANDLING

4. You will wish to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to introduce his papers. As there are a lot of these, you may care to suggest that discussion should be structured round the three main objectives for policy identified in paragraph 3 of the covering paper, namely:-

- (a) Security -
- (b) Mr. Haughey and the wider framework -
- (c) Political development within Northern Ireland -

A. Security

- (a) Is it agreed that a continuance of the improvement in the security situation should be the first aim of policy? You will wish to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has anything to add to the paper he has circulated on this subject. Is the Secretary of State for Defence in agreement with this assessment?
- (b) How is the security situation likely to be affected by the current hunger strike? If this does not have the impact which the organisers are hoping for, is there a chance that a still further improvement in the security situation may follow its failure? Is there any question of a need for immediate military reinforcement over the next few weeks?
- (c) To what extent is it likely to be possible for further security responsibilities to be handed over from the Army to the RUC over the next few months to reduce the number of Army units on emergency tours in the Province? Is the existing handover proceeding smoothly? Is it proving possible to get the troops off the streets and thereby reduce the extent to which they offer themselves as targets?

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- (d) Is the question of arms for the RUC a live issue still so far as the security forces are concerned? I am told that the new Chief Constable is less keen on Sturm Ruger pistols than his predecessor, and that a limited supply of these weapons has in any case been arriving in Ulster. Does the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary advise that this sleeping dog should be left asleep so far as the United States are concerned?
- (e) How well are intelligence arrangements now working in Northern Ireland as between the military and the RUC? In view of the sensitivity of this matter you may not wish to pursue it in detail in OD but you may seek a general assurance from the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that there is no particular problem.
- (f) To what extent has the improvement in the security situation depended on an improvement in the performance of the Garda Siochana and the attitude of the Republic?

B. Mr. Haughey and the wider framework

Annex D to OD(80) 67 sets out the NIO ideas on this subject. You may wish to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has anything to add. In discussions you may wish to cover the following points:-

- (g) Does Mr. Haughey have any clear long-term aims and ideas how he intends to achieve them? The answer to both these questions is probably "no" except in the most general terms. I suspect that the most plausible explanation of Mr. Haughey's position is that he would like to be the Taoiseach who unlocked the door to (if not arrived at) the solution to the Northern Ireland problem; that he is testing us - and specifically you - for your responses, your vulnerable points and your sticking points; and that the tactics to which he is working are to offer us a series of successive openings and concessions: each will appear attractive, the further we go along the more difficult it will be to draw back, and, if we do at some stage draw back, he will (as he hopes) be in a position with his own electorate to blame us for failure.

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- (h) Given the security situation and the political deadlock in Northern Ireland, does the balance of advantage lie in at least listening attentively and receptively to whatever Mr. Haughey has to say, rather than rejecting any possibility of developing "the wider framework"?
- (i) What are the merits of a formal Anglo-Irish conference of the kind which may be favoured by Mr. Haughey? The Committee seem likely to take the view that the disadvantage of such a conference is that it would have a formal agenda and conclusions. In any case the idea has already been unfortunately ventilated by Mr. Hume with the result that the Unionists regard such a proposal with extreme suspicion. You may wish to conclude that you should ride Mr. Haughey off such an idea at least for the time being.
- (j) Would a workable, and less objectionable, alternative be a commitment to twice-yearly consultations between British and Irish Ministers, led by you and the Taoiseach, on the model of our consultations with the French and the Germans (and theirs with each other)?
- (k) Is there any merit in setting up a consultative body of Anglo-Irish Parliamentarians from Westminster and Dublin, to which members of a Northern Ireland Assembly could be added if such an assembly were set up? The thought that access to such a body would be available to Assembly members might encourage Northern Ireland politicians to agree to the setting up of an Assembly.
- (l) Does the Committee agree that the other areas which might be worth further exploration in Anglo-Irish discussions are correctly identified in paragraph 8 of Annex D?
- (m) Does the Committee agree that the ingredients of a formula which you could accept are correctly identified in paragraph 10 of Annex D?
- (n) How can the maximum advantage be wrung from your meeting with Mr. Haughey to undermine the effects of the hunger strike? A report of a fruitful meeting would obviously be useful in the propaganda war.

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(o) What view is Mr. Haughey likely to take of the progressive approach to devolution set out in Annex C? Will this offer him sufficient promise of progress to make him accept the improvements to direct rule proposed in Annex B which will only be tolerable to him if they are represented as a stepping stone towards a more devolved long-term solution?

C. Future political development within Northern Ireland

- Discussing with
① Dublin
② Direct rule
③ Progressive Assembly

- (p) Does the Committee agree that some political progress has to be made in Northern Ireland? You may care to put this question particularly to the Secretary of State for Defence, as he may well take the view that it would be preferable from a security point of view to do as little as possible on the political side. Against this the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is likely to argue that some political progress must be seen to be made in order to keep both Mr. Haughey and the Northern Ireland politicians happy.
- (q) Is the choice of political options set out in Annex A agreed? You may wish to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has anything to say in amplification of this Annex.
- (r) Is it agreed that the improvements to direct rule identified in Annex B should be pursued as an essential prerequisite to any long-term political progress?
- (s) Does the progressive approach identified in Annex C hold out sufficient hope for it to be worth pursuing? Of the major Northern Irish political parties only Alliance might be willing to entertain it. Does this suggest that it might be wise not to push it too hard as the Government's chosen option but merely to advance it as a possible option for longer-term progress?
- (t) If the idea of a Consultative Assembly is dropped are there any alternative proposals which ought to be considered?

Other general points

(u) You may wish to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary how the outcome of the United States Presidential election is likely to change the American attitude to Northern Ireland. What is

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Mr. Reagan's position likely to be? Is Senator Kennedy likely to emerge as a more significant figure on this issue now?

- (v) You may care to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has fully considered the Scottish implications of his proposals.
- (w) You may care to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent there are underlying economic or public expenditure considerations to the present situation and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland's proposals which ought to be taken into account.

CONCLUSION

5. You may care to wind up the discussion by concentrating on Appendix 1 to OD(80) 67 which sets out some suggested points to be made in the Debate on the Address. You will wish to consider how far these should be modified in the light of points made in discussion. You will also wish to consider to what extent a clear position has been agreed for your forthcoming discussions with Mr. Haughey. If the Committee agrees that we should pursue "the wider framework", you may wish to ask either the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or a group of officials under Cabinet Office chairmanship to develop more detailed ideas in this field. You may wish to invite the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to do further work on his proposals for improvements in direct rule. But you may care to propose that further consideration of "a progressive approach to devolution" should await the outcome of your meeting with Mr. Haughey to see if he has any different ideas on this subject.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

14th November, 1980

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