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MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN IRELAND

## THE PRESENT SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. The foreboding and anger in Northern Ireland since the IRA bombs at Thiepval Barracks are unmistakable. Neither is confined to the Unionist community; neither - as we heard in the Taoiseach's vigorous attack on Sinn Fein in the Dail last week - is confined to Northern Ireland. Our response has matched resolution in the face of the terrorist threat with our commitment to the Talks and determination to make progress with those parties who, unlike Sinn Fein, have committed themselves to the political process.

SecurityThiepval Bombing

2. The two car bombs used in the Thiepval Barracks attack on 7 October each contained about 800 lbs of home-made explosive and were clearly intended to kill or maim as many as possible. Thirty-eight people were injured - 30 military, 1 RUC and 7 civilians; 14, including all the civilians, were female. One soldier, WO Bradwell, died of his injuries on 11 October. The IRA claimed responsibility for the bombings on 8 October.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

3. The police investigation into the attack, including how security at the base was breached, is underway with full Army assistance; 40 detectives and 150 uniformed RUC personnel are deployed on the case. Forensic examination of the scene has been completed; the suspected getaway vehicle was recovered burnt out in Belfast the day after the attack; one of the vehicles used in the attack was purchased on 4 June and the other a month later, which confirms that the atrocity was in preparation for a considerable time.

#### Security Response

4. Security was increased across Northern Ireland immediately after the attack. This included heightened security at all bases, and increased patrolling in Belfast, Londonderry, Armagh, East Tyrone and Fermanagh, to deter terrorist operations, prevent sectarian clashes and provide reassurance. A detailed list of measures is at Annex A. These steps come on top of the general tightening of security following Canary Wharf, when two battalions were returned to the Province. The security response has been deliberately measured; patrolling levels have not returned to pre-ceasefire levels, nor have additional troops been requested.

5. The Irish have responded too by stepping up patrolling along the border and in Dublin: these measures, while aimed primarily at deterring loyalist attacks, will also inhibit IRA and RSF operations. Recent Garda successes include the recovery of 21 mortars and other material near Dundalk on 2 October, and the find of an arms factory in Co Laois on 20 June.

#### Outlook



should be counterproductive and would mark a fundamental departure between the situation in Northern Ireland and that administered in England and Wales. Nevertheless, the internal issue has been raised by Lord Lloyd in his report on the future of UK counter-terrorist legislation, and will need to be reconsidered in that context.

13. I will chair a Security Policy Meeting early next week to review the security situation. In addition, Sir John Chilcott is to visit his opposite number in the Irish Department of Justice on 15 October to review cross border security co-operation.

7. If violence intensifies the various security options set out in the paper considered by NI Committee in July (NI(96)6) remain available. The Rural Reinforcement Battalion, based at Colchester, is at seven days notice to return to the Province. Full-scale framework operations at pre-August 1994 levels can quickly be restored. The re-introduction of physical security measures, including town centre barriers, control zones and road furniture at security force bases, is being kept under review, while the civilian search regime in Belfast can be reinstated within 48 hours. The security force hardening programme continues, with work at the Cookstown base underway.

8. Other possible operational measures, none of which the security forces have yet requested, include increasing Army force levels (though six resident and six roulement units were considered the optimum level of support before the ceasefire); reclosing border roads, an option which would be politically difficult; and the reimposition of exclusion orders, which again would have presentational drawback. The anti-terrorist legislation remains in place, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 having come into effect in August.

9. Mr Trimble has recently raised the possible use of authorised investigators in all terrorist cases, and of making intercept material admissible in criminal cases. These and other options were first proposed by the RUC Chief Constable some years ago: after detailed consideration it was concluded that their implementation

## C O N F I D E N T I A L

would be counterproductive and would mark a fundamental departure between the criminal law in Northern Ireland and that administered in England and Wales. Nevertheless, the intercept issue has been raised by Lord Lloyd in his report on the future of UK counter-terrorist legislation, and will need to be reconsidered in that context.

10. I will chair a Security Policy Meeting early next week to review the security situation. In addition, Sir John Chilcot is to meet his opposite number in the Irish Department of Justice on 16 October to review cross-border security co-operation.

### Loyalists

11. It is encouraging that the Loyalist ceasefire has been maintained. The efforts in public and in private of the PUP and UDP have been valuable, as have been the public statements by the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Mr Trimble and others praising their responsibility under severe provocation and urging them not to abandon their relative moral high ground. However, the CLMC ceasefire cannot be taken for granted and there is pressure from the PUP and UDP for both progress in the talks and some prisoner-friendly moves. It is difficult, however, to see what could be done for Loyalist prisoners alone, and in the absence of a credible IRA ceasefire we could not contemplate any more general moves.

### Political talks

12. The parties reached agreement on an agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary in the small hours of Tuesday morning (attached at Annex B). This has been reported widely as a "breakthrough". While it may be a useful antidote to the deep pessimism in the media last week it would be wrong to over-emphasise the significance of the agreement. It does show that the UUP and the SDLP (whose bilateral deal was the basis for the agreement) can do business

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RN/ESL/27665

C O N F I D E N T I A L



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within the talks. But the fundamental impasse on decommissioning remains with no sign that the gulf between the participants can be closed. The UUP do not show any inclination to compromise on a position which has been clearly, and publicly, set out (indeed their conference this weekend is likely to see a vigorous re-affirmation of their position as an answer to DUP and UUP criticisms).

13. If the UUP's stance blocks the prospects for an inclusive process (continuing to hold out the prospect of Sinn Fein's involvement after an IRA ceasefire is reinstated) that might suggest explicitly ruling out Sinn Fein's involvement, perhaps after a final challenge to them to abandon violence, and pursuing a multi - rather than all-party process.

14. Unionists would favour this exclusive approach, but it would not be supported by either the SDLP or the Irish Government - particularly for so long as either of them believe that the Hume/Adams initiative has a real chance of success in bringing about another ceasefire. (My separate memorandum deals with our options for Hume/Adams.)

#### Information Strategy

15. The post-Thiepval condemnation of Sinn Fein from all sides showed clearly how in the right circumstances Republican hypocrisy can be exposed and their public position undermined. Indeed, the attacks on Sinn Fein from the Irish Government and from others not always wholly sympathetic to our position are more telling on Republicans themselves than anything we might say.

16. Against this background Sir John Wheeler is to chair a first meeting of the Northern Ireland Strategic Information Committee, established after an earlier discussion in NI, on 16 October. He will report the outcome of the NISIC discussions to NI at its meeting on 17 October.

15 OCTOBER

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