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Extract from report of 7 October 1974  
from Permanent Representative regarding  
conversations between Minister for  
Foreign Affairs and UN Secretary General

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5.           Leading into the situation in Northern Ireland, the Minister said that we were also most anxious to avoid a further partition there on communal lines. The Government very much regretted having to withdraw its troops from UNEF but they were urgently needed to maintain our security along the border. We were doing our best to cooperate with the British army on manning the frontier but relations were not improved by their frequent hostile behaviour, including shooting across the border into the Republic and a recent incident involving an actual attack on a hotel in our territory. A cause of difficulty was the fact that the role of the British army in the North in relation to security was quite different from ours. In the Republic the police are primarily responsible though they are backed by the army. In the North the army carries the main responsibility and its faulty liaison with its own police often cause difficulties.

6.           The Minister then said he would like to refer to an important issue which he had mentioned last year, namely, the possibility that in the event of a British withdrawal in the North



we might need a military presence from the United Nations. He described the Sunningdale background to the collapse of the power-sharing executive caused by the strike in June and referred to our hopes that the promised Convention would lead on to a new attempt to create a political solution. But we have to face the fact that the majority in the Convention might reject power-sharing and that British direct rule would have to be continued, together with the presence of the British army. The danger might then present itself that British public opinion, faced with the cost in life and money of the continued British presence there, would eventually insist on a British withdrawal, at a time when the United Kingdom itself may be undergoing severe economic difficulties. Both the British Government and Opposition Parties deny the possibility of a withdrawal, but we would be prudent not to exclude it.

7. The Minister then said that it was possible to envisage two scenarios, the first more peaceful (though, perhaps, less probable) than the second.

In the first hypothesis, the British Government, faced with an uncompromising refusal by a majority in the Convention to work a power-sharing system within the United Kingdom, would be prepared to negotiate an independent North, but on suitable conditions: One such necessary condition would be a system of power-sharing in an independent North, and the British Government would most likely insist that, if the power-sharing system were overturned



by a coup of Protestant extremists, the essential financial backing, which Britain would have to continue well after independence, would not be maintained. It could well be, that as another kind of passive guarantee against a coup by extremists on the right, it would be necessary to envisage a United Nations Force which would act as a kind of barracks-based garrison, but immediately available in the event of a coup. It is obvious, of course, that the British Government might declare at the outset that their army would provide such a guarantee, but in the face of a severe economic crisis and a British revulsion against further involvement in the North, it is only prudent to foresee the need for a United Nations garrison guaranteeing the continuation of a power-sharing system.

8. The Secretary-General commented on this first scenario that obviously it would need the agreement of the United Kingdom, Ireland and the North itself for a United Nations presence to be acceptable. He brought out the parallel between Greece, Turkey and Cyprus in this connection - the difficulty in Cyprus at the moment being precisely that Turkey wishes to remove the United Nations presence. But given that London, Dublin and Belfast were in agreement with the presence of a United Nations garrison, the United Nations, from its side, would be prepared to contribute to a solution. The Minister said, in this connection, that Mr. Taylor, one of the Protestants leaders in the North, had



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already spoken positively in relation to a United Nations garrison.

9. The second hypothesis, the Minister explained, was the more probable of the two and the more dangerous. It could arise if the Convention failed and if there were a complete collapse in the negotiations about the future of the North. In this scenario the United Kingdom, caught in a severe economic crisis and led, possibly, by a weakened (possibly minority) government, might bow to public opinion and simply pull out of the North without negotiating appropriate prior conditions. It is true, of course, that such a vacuum-creating withdrawal would not be in the tradition of Britain's long-term strategic interests and therefore of its policy on Northern Ireland. Yet it might have to be faced. It would be followed by a virtual civil war in the North in which the Catholic minority, especially those east of the Bann, would be in danger of expulsion to the west or even of massacre on the spot. The Irish army could help the minority along the border towns, for instance in Newry and Derry. But it would be hard for it to get to Belfast in order to aid the Catholic minority in that area. It would be in these circumstances that instant United Nations action might be needed to prevent large-scale bloodshed in the absence of United Kingdom forces in areas which the Irish army could not hope to reach. Hours rather than days might be the



only time available. The Minister conceded that not only would an instant United Nations presence become necessary, but that it would be extremely difficult for foreign troops to distinguish Protestants from Catholics and to identify their respective areas. He added that we do not, of course, envisage such a situation developing overnight. Nevertheless, it was necessary to alert the Secretary-General that it might take shape, especially in the period from March-July 1975 which could be crucial for the Convention and therefore for the whole system of power-sharing.

10. The Secretary-General said that it would, of course, be necessary to be very careful about the selection of contingents in such a scenario. He would ask the undersigned to keep in touch with him when we are nearer the coming Spring in order to keep him au courant with the developing situation. It would be borne in mind that by next Spring the United Nations may be very much engaged in the Middle East should conditions deteriorate. But the Secretary-General intimated that he would do his best to help if the United Nations were needed in either scenario.

11. The Minister also had conversations later, inter alia, with the Foreign Ministers of Canada and Norway. He mentioned to both, en passant, that should a United Nations force be needed in the North, he would hope that both governments might be in a



position to contribute. Although no commitments were, of course, made, both Ministers agreed to look into the possibility in a positive manner.

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Ambassador

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