

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Meeting between Irish and British officials on
security co-operation, held in Iveagh House on
Monday, 14th April 1975 at 3.30 p.m.

The agenda and a list of participants are attached.

Mr. Donlon welcomed the British team and this opportunity to hear their proposals in regard to the proposed agenda for the meeting. Putting the matter in context, he made the general point that we are at all times available to listen to suggestions for improving the security situation in these islands. Our contribution would always be somewhat limited as the main source of violence - evidenced by the British statistics - was not from this part of the country.

Ambassador Galsworthy thanked Mr. Donlon for arranging the meeting and referred to the common interest in discovering the dimensions of the problem and exchanging information on the best methods of dealing with it. In order to establish its dimensions, he suggested a brief discussion on the statistics.

Mr. Bourn provided statistics on the security situation in Britain and in Northern Ireland. He mentioned that this was the first occasion on which figures on the situation in Britain were made available and that those for Northern Ireland were a summary of statistics already given. He said that statistics on unmarked and undyed explosives and detonators were less certain than subsequent figures. But rather than argue on statistics, he suggested that there were a number of "modest but useful measures" which both sides could agree on and which would be of mutual benefit. In reply to Mr. Donlon's query, he said he would be happy to supply similar statistics for the various security areas on a continuing basis.

On the conveyance, storage and use of explosive materials in Ireland, Mr. Bourn suggested three proposals on which the meeting

● might agree:-

1. technical discussions by both sides on rules, regulations and accounting procedures;
2. the use of a detonator marking machine here as well as in Northern Ireland. He pointed out that this was recommended by the joint Garda/RUC technical panel in a recent report; and
3. marking of explosives so as to indicate destination.

Mr. Donnelly saw a lot of sense in the first proposal but saw no point in duplicating or overlapping with existing channels.

With regard to the second proposal, Mr. Boyle said it would be necessary first to examine the machine, particularly for reasons of safety, but that the proposal seemed good in principle. He pointed out the differences between North and South as regards terrain and the distribution pattern. He also pointed out the need for a complete costing examination and for a suitable system of control.

Mr. Bourn said that they endorsed the joint report recommendation that uniformity of marking should be brought about as soon as possible.

Mr. Donnelly agreed in principle, subject to full examination of the practical application of the proposal.

Mr. Donlon emphasised the need to clarify channels and said that the Garda/RUC channel should continue in operation.

Mr. Whitbread said that it seemed to be agreed in principle to mark explosive materials and that safety and operational factors would need to be discussed at ground level, as a police matter.

Mr. Colwell said that, in addition to the feasibility and procedural aspects, there was a statutory obligation to ensure safety.

Mr. Bourn said it was helpful and encouraging that there was agreement in principle, subject to the safety and costings aspects.

He said that police in Northern Ireland and Mr. Whitbread and colleagues would be glad to assist in any way possible.

Mr. Donnelly said that our attitude was largely the same on the third proposal - in favour, in principle, subject to examination of its practical application.

Mr. Boyle again raised the matter of cost, to which Mr. Bourn replied that they did not envisage a very expensive affair.

Mr. Boyle saw the problem in a wider, even European context, including hi-jacking and other guerilla activities.

Mr. Bourn agreed in principle but suggested a domestic start as a first step.

When Mr. Donnelly questioned the efficacy of marking explosives wrappers, Mr. Whitbread said that the terrorist simply doesn't bother removing the wrapper.

Mr. Boyle raised the question of reciprocation and suggested that any arrangements should also include Britain. He instanced the 18 letter-bombs planted here at Christmas 1973, all of which were clearly marked "Glasgow".

Mr. McCarthy said that, up to a few months prior to that, ICI had been exporting here - this was no longer so.

Mr. Whitbread said that more convincing evidence would be required to show that Britain should be included in the suggested arrangements.

Mr. Boyle replied that the two islands were too proximate not to have a package deal applying to all explosives manufactured. This could be done either by statute or by state subvention. He added that tracer markings could be incorporated as an intrinsic part of the explosive.

Mr. McCarthy demurred and said the cheapest and simplest method was best - marking the wrapper. A statute and its attendant publicity would give advance warning to the terrorist.

Mr. Whitbread suggested that explosives might be distributed under police control. Police could monitor destination and deliver the explosives in batches to individual customers, thus freeing manufacturers of involvement. While the system wasn't perfect, it would at least give an indication as to the last legal owner.

Mr. Bourn said he sought an arrangement that would be relatively cheap, uncomplicated and worthwhile.

Mr. Donnelly agreed and asked what would be the attitude to including Britain in any arrangement.

Mr. Whitbread said they would mark where the technical situation demanded it.

Mr. Donlon said it was clear that the principle was not in dispute but the most effective means of implementation should be ascertained. The inter-police channels were there. He asked whether officials from Britain would be present at the technical meetings in question.

Mr. Bourn replied that Mr. Whitbread was responsible for both Northern Ireland and Britain. He suggested starting with the small-scale situation that exists and waiting to see what emerges. He added that the police channel was not an inhibition.

On the matter of other substances, Mr. Bourn pointed out that controls in Northern Ireland cover a wider range of substances (six) than this part of the country (three).

Mr. Colwell said we would certainly take steps if evidence pointed to substances other than those we listed being used. A register of substances was not really useful and would interfere with manufacturing processes. In theory the list could be extended indefinitely to no useful purpose.

Mr. Donnelly said that the three substances we listed were the relevant ones.

Mr. Bourn accepted this and said his enquiry was for information: it was a valuable principle that, where there is no need to take action, one does not have to.

● Mr. Donlon stressed that, if the other side have any information, the sooner we get it, through police channels, the better.

Mr. Bourn noted that the joint police report drew attention to the addition of substances such as polysaccharides to ammonium nitrate-based fertilisers. He said it would only be worth doing if we did it together in both Northern Ireland and here. The amount involved in Northern Ireland was 63,000 tons and the cost would be £6 (10%) per ton to add polysaccharides. Of the total amount about 53,000 came from Britain, 3,000 tons from Europe and 6,000 tons from here.

Mr. Donlon asked whether the proposed arrangements would in principle apply to manufacturers in Britain.

Mr. Bourn replied "not by ourselves", but that they would be much more inclined to do so if it were being done here. The cost in Britain would be £400,000-£450,000.

Mr. Donnelly said that our consumption was double that of Northern Ireland last year - 130,000 tons. The cost for this would be the main factor.

Mr. Boyle referred to technical questions such as waterproofing qualities and method of incorporating the additives and asked to have details of the findings on the British side. He had reservations about it, however, particularly as regards the British source of untreated supplies remaining open.

Mr. McCarthy suggested that if this were found to be a problem in the future, it could then be examined.

Mr. Whitbread said that the confidential findings of their side could be made available to our side at the behest of the British Government.

Mr. Boyle said that he was clearly in agreement with the marking of detonators - even if it proved to be expensive. He had reservations about the efficacy of marking packages and greater reservations

about adding polysaccharides. All this was subject to further examination of the various aspects of these proposals.

Mr. Donlon said the matters would be best considered at technical level and that as soon as experts had discussed them they could be looked at again. Any current doubts did not derive from lack of will, but a decision could only be made on the basis of complete information which had been fully discussed at technical level.

Mr. Donnelly concurred and said we were anxious to follow up the matters raised but that all aspects would have to be examined.

Mr. Bourn said that fitted their ideas entirely. He suggested that the technical colleagues should report within a month or six weeks on procedures and accounting generally and in particular on the use of a detonator marking machine and the addition of polysaccharides.

Mr. Donlon suggested that it might be better to separate the proposals, for reporting purposes. Quick progress on a scheme for detonator marking, for example, might allow implementation of that proposal pending further examination of the others.

In response to Ambassador Galsworthy, who asked whether a press communique should be considered, Mr. Donlon said that meetings at official level do not normally receive press coverage. If the question arose specifically, the meeting could be referred to as part of "the continuing and close liaison" on security matters, or a similar phrase - with, indeed, an indication of satisfaction with existing arrangements, if appropriate. Mr. Donlon requested prior notice of this, so as to reach mutual agreement on any proposed statement.

A G E N D A

1. (A) STATISTICS

The new feature will be the provision of statistics relating to Great Britain. The object of presenting the statistics will be to give an idea of the size of the problem and its nature.

(B) PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The kind of subjects we should like to discuss are as follows:

- (i) Arrangements for safeguarding and overseeing the manufacture of explosives and detonators including procedures and records.
- (ii) Arrangements for the storage and conveyance of explosives and detonators. We would like to discuss physical arrangements for custody and conveyance, i.e. kinds of buildings, security devices and vehicles etc.
- (iii) Arrangements for safeguarding and overseeing the use of explosives and detonators. We would like to discuss procedures for purchasing explosives, arranging for their delivery and use, physical custody at the place of use, etc; and contribution of the police to these procedures.
- (iv) The marking of explosives and detonators. We recognise the difficulty of marking explosives, except by dyeing them. We should like to consider the scope for marking and accounting for their packages and containers.

(C) OTHER SUBSTANCES

We should like to discuss arrangements for the control of the manufacture, purchase, possession and use of substances such as ammonium nitrate and other chemicals which might be used for explosives, e.g. nitric acid. We should in particular like to consider the scope for additives to fertilisers to make the extraction of ammonium nitrate more difficult.

2. It is hoped that this expansion to the agenda will be helpful to the Irish authorities. The main aim of the discussions would be to determine whether there are any practical steps of benefit, both to the Irish Republic and United Kingdom, which could be taken quickly on the basis of expert advice and consideration.

Irish Team

Mr. S. Donlon, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs
Mr. M.J. Donnelly, Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice
Mr. P.J. Colwell, Principal Officer, Department of Justice
Mr. W. Kirwan, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach
Mr. G. Ó Broin, Counsellor, Department of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Boyle, Department of Defence
Mr. D. Hamill, First Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs

British Team

Ambassador Galsworthy, British Embassy
Mr. J.B. Bourn, Under Secretary, Northern Ireland Office
Mr. J. Hartland-Swann, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Mr. Bampton
Mr. Whitbread, Chief Inspector of Explosives, Home Office
Mr. McCarthy, Inspector of Explosives, Home Office
Mr. McQueen
Mr. B. Major, First Secretary, British Embassy