

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Stormont Castle, Belfast

14 June 1976

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR MERLYN REES MP, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS TODAY DURING A DEBATE ON SECURITY:

"What I should like to do this afternoon is to share my thinking with the House on the current security situation and what can be done about it. The theme of Government planning is the rule of law. I would like to describe what working towards the rule of law means for the Security Forces. And I should like to say something about the work of the Ministerial Committee on Law and Order, which I have mentioned before to the House, and to talk about co-operation with the Republic.

"I shall be talking about this very shortly when we debate the Renewal Order for the emergency provisions. At the same time it is likely that we shall be debating the renewal of the Northern Ireland Act 1974. As this gives me two opportunities to talk about security, I shall be able to concentrate on political matters in the later debate. We must not forget, of course that the security and political considerations cannot be divorced, as I explained in the White Paper of July 1974 and again in my letter to the Chairman of the Constitutional Convention of 14 January this year. Our aim is to see a devolved government in Northern Ireland acceptable to both communities there. As I said in my letter to the Chairman in January this year:

"Experience in recent years has made it plain that no system of government within Northern Ireland will be stable or effective unless both parts of the community acquiesce in that system, and are willing to work to support it."



It is in these terms that we have to view the security situation.

"The problem in Ulster is not the classical colonial problem that has faced this country in recent years. The security problem is both urban and rural. It is a situation in which small groups of criminals wax and wane with the degree of support and assistance they get from the communities from which they come. When a community feels threatened, frightened and at risk, it will succour its violent men giving them a standing they would not otherwise have. But we cannot ignore also the strength of folklore and history combined in Ireland which is ever present and which we, on this side of the water, find difficult to comprehend.

"What we are dealing with in fact is not a single problem at all, but a skein of interconnected problems, compounded out of fear; the basic division of the community; malicious misinterpretation; remembrance of past injustices; intimidation; the criminal legacy of seven years of violence; the poisoning of community relations; vandalism; and the alienation of youth.

"Furthermore, we are dealing with a changing situation. The overall pattern has changed. There is less of a planned campaign; less civil rights' violence with mass confrontation on the streets. Much of the violence is still orchestrated and directed, but we see more examples of unco-ordinated operations and individual criminal activity.

"Some of the violence is the same kind as we have seen for the last seven years. The killing of those who make mixed marriages; the murder of those who live on sectarian interfaces and who are the accessible victims of retaliatory murder; the blowing up of pubs whose customers are usually members of one community or the other. And, of course, paramilitary killing.

"The House will recall that 1976 began with a wave of sectarian violence in County Armagh. Five Catholics were killed, and this was followed by the murder of 10 industrial workers, taken out of their bus and shot down when returning from work. It was a result of action by the Government and the security forces that the sectarian violence in the area was significantly reduced.



But, as Honourable Members have rightly emphasised, violence has since continued at a high level in other areas and under other guises.

"The Provisional IRA have engaged in a campaign of cold-blooded murder against members of the Security Forces, particularly against the RUC and the UDR. So far this year, 15 members of the RUC, five members of the Army, and seven members of the UDR have been killed. Why is this? They are shooting members of the Security Forces and particularly policemen because of the growing success of the RUC in securing convictions before the courts. We have also had, in recent months, attacks on members of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

"129 civilians have died in terrorist violence this year. This includes not only members of paramilitary organisations but ordinary civilian members of the population. Those who provide the community with essential services - especially those whose work recognises no sectarian boundaries - are among the most frequent targets for cowardly attack. Those who wish to get on with their work in peace or to provide in the face of mounting economic difficulties, employment to others, see their premises bombed or gutted by fire.

"The pattern of retaliatory killings was repeated over the weekend of 5/6 June when sectarian attacks took place resulting in 11 people being killed and a substantial number of injured in a series of shootings and bombings without warning on civilian targets, mainly in Belfast. Intensive activity by the Security Forces in all affected areas was taken to limit the outbreaks of violence and led to a number of arrests. Without this decisive action, the casualties could have been much higher. It is perhaps no coincidence that last weekend there were more mortar and other attacks on the Army in Belfast, fortunately ineffective.

"Those are the facts of the violence. Now to the response by the Security Forces. Against this background, I shall give the House the simple facts of the Security Forces' achievement. This year, up to the end of May, 497 people have been charged with serious terrorist-type offences, including 47 for murder, 38 for attempted murder, 142 for firearms offences and 93 for explosives offences. And up to the end



of May, 402 people have been convicted of serious offences, including 31 for murder. Some 1,300 persons convicted and serving prison sentences in Northern Ireland are serving more than four years; this represents two-thirds of the prison population. And 161 persons are serving life sentences.

"So far this year, 26,265 lbs of explosives have been recovered or neutralised, compared with 22,724 lbs for the whole of 1975.

"This is the nature of the violence in Northern Ireland. It is a variety of types; it has a variety of causes. There is no simple solution to this type of violence. There is no ingenious mechanism or sudden new initiative that will make the problem disappear overnight. If there had been a simple solution, successive Governments and their security advisers would have found it.

"As there is no simple answer, we must be prepared for a long haul. During this period there is one fundamental key to advance. And that is through the rule of law. In the long run, the rule of law means enforcing the recognised law of the land in the recognised courts. To work towards the rule of law is the only way to proceed which offers the prospect of a longterm solution to the security situation.

"We have already taken steps in this direction - no interim custody orders have been made since February 1975; the last detainee was released in December 1975; and special category status has been abolished for all crimes committed after 1 March 1976.

"I mentioned earlier the myths that lend support to paramilitary activities in Northern Ireland. But all those I speak to in the minority community tell me that the biggest step in reducing this support in the past year has been the ending of detention. At the same time, the Government's action in bringing to an end special category status has been recognised as a significant contribution in restoring the rule of law.



### The Role of the Army

"I turn first to the role of the Army in this context of the rule of law. They continue to do a vital job in Ulster under the leadership of the GOC, Sir David House. They will remain in Northern Ireland as long as they are required. Province-wide they still have a vital role in providing an essential framework of security within which the Police can operate; and they must be on hand to cope with situations which are beyond the capacity of the Police to control. Their presence is also necessary in those areas where the Police cannot operate alone. Given the existing level and pattern of violence, the continued presence of regular forces in substantial numbers in support of the police is clearly essential at the present time and in the foreseeable future in Northern Ireland.

"The Army are at present deployed in the Province in the same strength as throughout 1975. It has been alleged that over 1,000 have left the Province this year. This is simply not true. The Spearhead Reserve as the House was informed at the time, returned in May to its normal role of emergency reserve after four months in Northern Ireland; soldiers constituting that Reserve can be recalled if required. Meanwhile, the level of forces in and around the South Armagh area has remained unchanged from the level of January this year. The SAS remains deployed there. A high level of activity will continue to be maintained in all areas where the threat of violence and intimidation is acute.

"This means that the General Officer Commanding, who is overall Director of Operations, is responsible for the detailed deployment of all his Forces, including the UDR, and for the overall co-ordination of Security Force operations. And there will be normal troop changes as units go to and from the Province as part of the ordinary roulement arrangements. Some people misrepresent these changes. Every time a platoon of soldiers moves from one area to another, or gets on an aeroplane to return to Germany, we hear allegations of "pull out of troops" or "sinister military moves". This would be laughable anywhere else than in Northern Ireland, where the rumours are believed in inverse proportion to their foundation in fact.



It is sometimes argued that greater effectiveness could be achieved if all the Security Forces operated under the direct command of a supreme security director. Full co-ordination of operations is, as I have said, already assured by the responsibility of the GOC as Director of Operations; the level of co-operation between the Army and Police is of a very high order. The fact is that the roles of the Police and Army are complementary, but they are different.

### The Role of the Police

"Now I turn to the Police, and the crucial problem of securing the greater effectiveness of the Police in enforcing the law of the land. This is what the Rule of Law ultimately depends upon. And this is the longterm problem that has been the main concern of the Ministerial Committee that was set up at the beginning of the year.

"This Committee has been working for four to five months. I make no apologies for this. Indeed, the Committee would not be much use if it had produced a quick report in a couple of months. Irish history is full of examples of quick responses, and superficial proposals that have set off policy in disastrously wrong directions. So my Ministerial colleagues and I have been determined to avoid this kind of mistake, and to take a long, hard look at what is involved in achieving the rule of law in the longterm.

"However, the work of the Committee, and the studies that have been carried out by our advisers, have already begun to inform practical thinking and change action on the ground.

"The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has already set in hand a significant reorganisation both in RUC Headquarters and in the field. The immediate purpose of this reorganisation is to enable all the available resources of the Force to be focused towards the paramount objective of the detection of criminals, particularly terrorists, and the obtaining of evidence which can be used in the courts to bring those responsible to justice. The first feature of the new organisation is the creation of three regional crime squads, which are already being formed. There will be close co-ordination with the Army. These regional crime squads are based on relevant experience in Great Britain. They will use the latest and best equipped vehicles



and communications equipment; they will add technical strength and muscle to the human resources - the men and women of the RUC. They will cover the whole Province, corresponding to the North, South and Belfast areas, equating broadly with the existing Army Brigade organisation. Secondly, special emphasis will be laid on units, both centrally, at Headquarters and in support of each of the three regional crime squads, to collate resources and intelligence to gain convictions. Thirdly, there is the extension, and more purposive use, of specialist units dealing with forensic and similar technical work.

"The reorganisation of policing, led by the Chief Constable, is being vigorously pursued and its end product will be evidence that can be used in the courts. This means getting information of high quality that will stand up in court.

"With regard to changes in the law, I wish to make only one observation today. There is no point in making changes in the law unless the Police can obtain evidence to substantiate charges under the new law. Changes in the law may look good, but if they are unenforceable, they are not worth a row of beans.

"I must make it once more clear that no kind of paramilitary role is envisaged for the Police in this reorganisation. There can be no question of putting the clock back. We look to the future.

"The RUC in the years following 1969 received a good deal of criticism. The RUC today is a different force. Approximately two-thirds of its members have joined in the past five years. I want to pay tribute today to the courage and professional competence of the men and women of the RUC; they are not a paramilitary force; they are a civilian police force in the finest tradition.

"RUC morale is today, in spite of the risks of the work, as high as it has ever been. The Force is increasingly being recognised for what it is, and must be - a truly impartial force. Yet we all know that its acceptance is not yet complete. There are areas in Northern Ireland today where a full Police service cannot be provided. Nevertheless, it is only by the increasing acceptance and effectiveness of the RUC that the rule of the law can become a reality in Northern Ireland.



"I very much agree with Mr Enoch Powell when he pointed out in this House on 7 June that any action, however well intended and however understandable, by private persons or groups of persons, can contribute nothing to security and can only endanger it. As he said, it is only the Security Forces of the Crown which in the long run can prove to all concerned that there will be no practical result from vigilante groups and other misplaced private security initiatives.

"I should also like to commend the views of Mr Fitt who said in a recent radio programme that numbers of troops were less important than the question of people's attitudes. It is by recognising these true facts of the situation and in supporting the Security Forces that hope for the future resides.

"I take this opportunity to pay personal tribute to the contribution made towards achieving these aims by the retiring Chief Constable. Sir Jamie Flanagan was justly proud of the progress made by the RUC in recent years. He laid the foundations on which I am confident that his successor, Mr Newman, will continue to develop the impartial and professional Force the Province already has and deserves to have.

#### The Ministerial Committee

"I have already mentioned the Ministerial Committee and the way in which its work is already informing action on the ground. The Committee has almost completed its work, and I hope to say more about its conclusion shortly in the debate I referred to earlier. I had in mind at one stage the publication of a White Paper about the Committee's work. But I have decided against this, since I am anxious not to reveal operational and other details which could be advantageous to those who wish to destroy peace. However, what I can say now is that the Committee has been concerned:-

- to analyse the nature of the foreseeable threat to law and order;
- to specify the measures and forces that will be required now, in the medium and in the long term, to deal with the threat and to achieve the rule of law;

- to show how successful action will depend upon interdependence and co-operation between the Police, Army and locally recruited Forces.



"What I have said so far about the Army and Police therefore represents the initial stages in the application of the Ministerial Committee's ideas which, of their nature, must be longterm in their application. As far as locally recruited Forces are concerned, I can say that we have decided against the introduction of a regular battalion of the UDR.

"The UDR, like the Police, is sometimes misunderstood and unappreciated in parts of Ulster. It too is not yet fully accepted everywhere in Northern Ireland. But I should like to pay tribute to the bravery and self-sacrifice of its members and to make clear that it has a vital and developing role now and in the future. It will remain a regiment of the British Army. It was set up in 1969 to support the regular forces in Northern Ireland in protecting the border and the state against armed attack and sabotage. And this is its continuing role. It offers scope for men and women who have a good knowledge of their local areas to make a positive contribution, based on that knowledge, to the achievement of the rule of law. In short, it will continue to provide an essential service to the people of Northern Ireland.

"Indeed, the interdependence and co-operation of the Security Forces on which I have laid stress is the key to the future. It is misleading to abstract and misdescribe particular elements of the developing programme, to coin such slogans as "Army Withdrawal", the "Employment of Soldiers by Police", or the "Ulsterisation of security". The value of the Government's approach lies in the combination and interdependence of the various elements of the Security Forces.

"However interdependence does not mean integration or mergers. It would be wrong to establish the Police as a paramilitary force; for the police to conduct military style operations; or for the police and army to merge in whole or in part.

"I turn to the proposal which has been made by Mr Airey Neave for a joint Regular Army/UDR/RUC Force with special training and responsibility for combined anti-terrorist operations in border areas. On the advice of my security advisers, I do not share this view. Full co-operation and co-ordination of operations is fully assured by existing arrangements.



### Co-operation with the Republic

"I have spoken so far of the measures we are taking and propose to take in the Province itself. But those measures cannot be viewed in isolation from those of the Government of the Republic of Ireland. We continue to attach the highest importance to achieving active co-operation across the border in a wide variety of security matters with the authorities in the Republic of Ireland. There has been steady advance since the discussions I had with Ministers of the Republic at Baldonnell in 1974. My latest talks were on 28 and 29 May when I visited Dublin and reviewed with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice of the Republic a number of areas in which this co-operation has been developing. Co-operation between the RUC and the Garda is developing steadily. This co-operation is important in two ways: first, to ensure that the efforts of our respective Security Forces complement and reinforce each other; and second, to ensure that incidents involving the legitimate activities of the Security Forces on either side against terrorism do not cause friction between us.

"My exchanges with Ministers in Dublin, were, of course, confidential and I cannot give details. But I can say that the programme of co-operation covers all the vital practical issues such as communications, control of explosives, exchange of information and joint planning.

"Finally, I should like to refer to the arrangements which came into force on 1 June 1976 under the Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1975 and provide for co-operation between the two Governments to ensure that terrorists cannot escape the consequences of the law by removing themselves into the neighbouring jurisdiction. Terrorists can now be tried in the courts of the one jurisdiction for certain crimes in the other. The RUC and Garda, and the legal authorities concerned, are in regular contact to ensure that all the practical arrangements are ready to enable these procedures to work effectively. In all these areas, it remains the Government's intention to work for the most effective understanding and practical co-operation between ourselves and the Republic. We share the same aims. If the terrorists were ever to achieve their aims in the North, the outlook for the South would be bleak.



### Conclusions

"The achievement of peace through the rule of law will take time. Violence will not disappear overnight.

"Indeed, the acceptance and effectiveness of the Police in the way that I have described will be the progressive result of the policy and not its initial manifestation. The final result will be the operation of the Police in the same basic role as in Great Britain.

"The terrorist therefore faces a bleak future. He cannot win. The Government will never surrender its obligations and responsibilities."