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Meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs
and U.S. Secretary of State Vance at State Department
Washington, 17 March 1977

Northern Ireland

Following the opening courtesies Dr. FitzGerald referred to the statement issued yesterday by the four Irish/American political leaders (Senators Kennedy, Moynihan, Governor Carey and house speaker O'Neill). He said this was very helpful and satisfactory indeed. He said he had also just been informed that the Secretary of State had agreed to the issue of a draft statement after their present meeting. The text had been agreed between the Embassy and the State Department and he had just been told that the State Department propose to issue it at their noon press briefing.

Mr. Vance agreed.

Dr. FitzGerald said that he was very pleased at this. He appreciated the help of the State Department in general on the problem. In some ways it was rather more difficult to get the proper message across in the United States than in Ireland.

Mr. Vance said they would always be happy to do anything they could to help.

Dr. FitzGerald said he believed that as much as 60% of the guns and ammunition getting into Northern Ireland came from the United States. This was probably a function of the fact that guns are easily obtainable in this country. We welcome the vigilance of the US authorities but there is still unfortunately according to our information a significant flow and fund raising activities continue. It is of course as difficult as he well appreciated, to stop fund raising activities by such groups in the United States. We for our part are trying to see if there is anything that we can do at our end.

Mr. Vance said that if there was any way they could work with us on the matter they would want to do so. They fully appreciated the problem from our view point.

Dr. FitzGerald said that there is now close cooperation between the British and Irish Governments but of course there are some problems at times. There was for example the current Strasbourg case. We felt that we could not just let go an issue affecting human rights in this way. The case is now with the Court. He could say off the record to the Secretary of State that we had hoped that some solution may possibly be found on this issue. Of course one of the difficulties in the past had been that the UK had not in fact made any proposals for a peaceful settlement. Another problem was that there are people in the Police Force still who were involved in the act which the charges relate to. However, for the most part the Police Force in Northern Ireland is now quite a good body; their overall record is good. There is constant communication indeed between our Police Force and the Police in the North. At 26 points along the Border there is direct telephone communication by our Police with the Police in the North.

Of course there are bound to be difficulties at times and there have been some slight problems in regard to border-crossings by British troops. It appears that their map reading can be faulty at times. Nevertheless behind these occasional difficulties there is a common determination and indeed a common policy by both Governments at present and for some time past. Both Governments are working to get politicians in Northern Ireland to join in working together while Northern Ireland still remains under British jurisdiction. On this point of course we have made clear that we do not want to press for any change so long as the majority in Northern Ireland does not accept this. The problem at present is that of intransigence on the Unionist side by politicians who are not prepared to share power.

There has, however, been some progress recently. In the 1974-76 period we were worried that the United Kingdom Government did not seem always to press with sufficient vigour this policy on which in principle we were both agreed—that is that there should be no question of devolution of power to a local administration unless that local administration were organised on a power-sharing basis. This policy would work only if it were continuously and vigorously expressed. We had been worried at times over the past two years that it would be watered down slightly on the British side and this of course would have the effect of making the Unionists more intransigent. However, we had had diplomatic contacts with the British in the period from September to December of last year and as a result both the British Government and the Opposition have now re-stated their policies firmly.

This is beginning to have some effect on reasonable Protestant leaders in Northern Ireland; and there is now at least a possibility that after local elections in May there could be some hope of a conference. It might be possible for example to consider some kind of two-stage operation which could help to get Protestant political leaders off the hook which they have got themselves on. The problem is that they fear the Rev. Ian Paisley who is a powerful and dominating figure. It might, however, be possible in some kind of two-stage arrangement to organise first some kind of consultative body which the British Government could consult on particular matters and if this worked there might be gradual movement towards a power-sharing arrangement. This at least was our hope at present. There had indeed been some contacts between minority political leaders and Unionists leaders in the last few days.

We of course maintain close contact with various groups in Northern Ireland including Unionist political leaders. Two years ago there would have been protests whenever he (the Minister) went up to Belfast to meet Unionists leaders. Now he can go up easily and have lunch with them and make contacts there. Indeed the Rev. Martin Smyth the leader of the Orange Order had been invited to Dublin on Friday last for the annual

dinner given for the Diplomatic Corps. He had himself met Martin Smyth for a useful discussion on the following morning.

Overall then we have been trying successfully to establish contact and this has been working very well. But of course we will never get through to Paisley. Paisley can always pull things down though he cannot build anything constructively. The problem is to get the Protestant Unionist leaders to stand up to Paisley, this is not easy - he is so big - such a towering figure physically and in every other way.

The Minister said he had been trying in what he had just said to bring the Secretary of State up-to-date on the position in Northern Ireland as we see it. He had seen some possibilities of progress but of course he did not wish to put too much stress on optimistic aspects. There were, however, at least the beginnings of some political movement and this was encouraging.

Mr. Vance thanked Dr. FitzGerald.

Dr. FitzGerald said he then would like to say something on more general topics. He would have the temerity to comment that recent signs of some shifts in US foreign policy were satisfying and were appreciated in Europe. Of course US policy would not "turn turtle" but some things are now being done to mend fences in many parts of the world and to lay emphasis on human rights. Of course we all appreciate that there are, and will continue to be, difficult problems in the matter of reconciling this concern for human rights with US strategic interests.

Mr. Vance nodded vigorously and said this was very true and it is particularly hard to convince people of this problem.

Dr. FitzGerald agreed and said ^{again} that we had noted this shift and he felt very strongly that it should continue. When he had had talks with Dr. Kissinger in the past he had tried to bring out the point that the positions on moral issues which people of a country have, can not be

ignored. It is all very well to talk of realpolitik but the point of realpolitik was ^{not} to ignore reality and the moral convictions of people in the United States for example, were a reality which could not be ignored.

The increasing US emphasis on these matters was a very good development since it would help to make clearer than ever the distinction between USA and the Soviet Union. It was necessary to keep it clear for people around the world that the two were very different and that it was ^{wholly} wrong to try to equate their basic motivations. It seemed to him that others in Europe appreciated these signs of change of emphasis in US policy also.

Mr. Vance said he was pleased at this. He said that the President is going to speak about this at the United Nations today, 17 March, and indeed would devote a major part of his speech to it.

Dr. FitzGerald said that for his part he proposed in speaking at the National Press Club tomorrow to dwell somewhat on human rights. In particular he would propose to face up to the fact that misuse is being made by the Soviet Union of the Strasbourg case in order to countercharge western countries with not respecting human rights. He would like to bring out this point clearly at the National Press Club. The essential difference of course is that the Strasbourg case which we have taken against the UK is taken before a supranational body with power to check on human rights.

Of course we must realise that any state may breach human rights - indeed we ourselves were the first state to be brought before the Strasbourg Court in a case in the late 50's and early 60's. We were in fact vindicated since it was found that we had properly derogated from the Convention on human rights on introducing internment. The important thing in countries such as ours and the United States is that our Constitutions transcend the Legislature in the sense that they have power to rule Acts of the Legislature unconstitutional. Beyond this, we in Western Europe do have a supranational human rights enforcement system. The UK, ^{but it} is now before the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, will accept, indeed

has to accept the judgment of the Court since it like Ireland has committed itself to the Convention. Indeed we would not mind if the USA at some stage thought of joining with us in a similar system!

In his talk at the National Press Club he would say that the Soviet interest in this was a matter of considerable interest to us but we wondered if they in Eastern Europe would like to do something similar. He would in effect have a little 'go' at the Soviet Union.

Mr. Vance said this was very good, this would be very welcome (he took the idea with very good humour).

Dr. FitzGerald mentioned that he had been in Moscow in December to meet Mr. Gromyko and said the visit had gone very well. Mr. Gromyko seemed, as he recalled, to be rather puzzled about what line the incoming American administration would take and had asked us about this. We could not ourselves at that stage offer much enlightenment!

Mr. Vance said he himself is going to the Soviet Union on the 25th March.

Dr. FitzGerald said he thought this would be a very important visit.

Mr. Vance agreed. He said they had a very full agenda. It covered not only strategic issues but also other problems - Southern Africa, the Belgrade Review Conference, Cyprus and so on. The Soviet side wanted to talk about these problems. There were also bilateral questions, questions of arms control, SALT and trade questions.

Dr. FitzGerald said that in his visit and his discussions with Mr. Gromyko there had of course been a lot of jargon but he found two particular points on what Mr. Gromyko said had been of some interest.

First he found that Mr. Gromyko had been very disillusioned in regard to some of the Arab positions. He himself thought this was not just an act but it was an expression of a genuine frustration on Mr. Gromyko's side