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*Mr. Swift,
To see pl.
1/3/78*
Border Incident Reports

Mr. R. Harris of the British Embassy called to the Department at my request on 27 February to discuss the border incident reports generally and, in particular, the new form of monthly reports recently proposed by them.

I began by referring to the system of weekly reporting which had been bilaterally agreed at a meeting in Dublin on 7 February 1975 between the former Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Stanley Orme MP. I reminded Mr. Harris that the purpose of the system of reporting was to enable details of cross-border incidents and of Garda/RUC contacts to be given to us as soon as possible, in order to enable us to cross check our own security operation and see if there were any loop-holes in the system. I made a formal request to Mr. Harris to have that system continued as heretofore, as the system they now proposed did not fulfil the original purpose to which I referred.

I then went on to refer to the new format, entitled "Terrorist incidents having a probable connection with the Republic". I told Harris that with the possible exception of 4 or 5 of the 25 incidents listed by them, it would not really be possible on the basis of the information given to establish whether or not the incidents had a cross-border connection or to take any positive follow-up action in relation to them. I therefore requested the following information in respect of the individual incidents listed:

- (a) the basis for the British claim that the incidents (excluding nos. 6, 18 and 20) had "a probable connection" with the State
- (b) what steps if any were taken at the time to notify the Gardaí of the incidents in question and what information was supplied to the Gardaí. I also asked for details of the Garda station to which notification was sent, together with details of the time and date of notification.

I told Harris that the Irish authorities could not accept, on the basis of what was said at nos. 17 and 19 on the list, that these incidents fell within the category of incidents having "a probable

connection" with the State, within the meaning and context here in question. With regard to no. 17, a bomb hoax call received at Dundalk Garda station, I made the point that the fact that the call was received at Dundalk Garda station didn't seem a fundamental factor. While it could be said that this incident had a "possible" connection it seemed to be stretching it to describe it as having a "probable" connection. Harris accepted this. He also accepted a similar point I made in relation to no. 19 - report of gunfire. I said that these two cases illustrated the type of concern we would have in this particular regard.

I recalled that John Goulden of the British Embassy had informed us that the new list included two categories of incident - (a) incidents about which the British authorities had no doubt that there was a cross-border connection and (b) incidents which occur within two miles of the border. I pointed out that the latter category would in theory include all incidents in, say, the Bogside in Derry as well as all incidents in Strabane, Crossmaglen, Warrenpoint, etc. Harris accepted that there was a weakness in claiming that all incidents in the Bogside had a probable connection with the border and I went on to make the point that this weakness ^{which} applied most clearly perhaps in the Bogside area also applied to all of the other areas which I had mentioned. I pointed out that in order to be of any practical value in the context of security co-operation all of the incidents would need to have been the subject of prior contact between the Gardaí and the RUC.

I also made a general reference to the disquieting statements that the border was a factor of increasing importance in relation to the violence in Northern Ireland. I said that the Irish authorities were clearly doing everything possible in the security context and pointed out that available statistics indicated that the border was indeed a factor of diminishing significance in relation to Northern violence. I instanced the border incident reports which showed that the number of alleged cross-border incidents showed a continuing decrease over the past three years and, moreover, were a decreasing percentage of the total number of incidents in the North as a whole.

I also referred to the British statistics on finds of explosives and detonators in the North. In relation to finds of explosives, again the trend was favourable, with a smaller quantity of Southern material for Southern use being found in the North and this quantity being a smaller percentage of total finds in the North. On the detonators front, again the trend was downwards - indeed, during the first 11 months of 1977 the proportion of British-made detonators in illegal finds in the North was almost double that of finds from Southern sources. I also made a general reference to the dangers involved in the loyalist paramilitary reaction to statements that the border and the Republic were factors of increasing importance in the Northern violence.

Harris' initial reaction was to point out that Mr. Mason had recently said in the House of Commons that there had been no decrease in cross-border security co-operation since the Fianna Fáil Government had come into office. He said that his authorities were in no way suggesting that there was a lax approach in regard to security matters. His authorities were, however, concerned at the constant repetition of the 2% figure by the Taoiseach, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and by his predecessor. Harris said that the timing of the introduction of the proposed new monthly list of incidents with "a probable connection" with the Republic was purely coincidental - they had been considering this move for some time. Harris said that the British authorities have always maintained that the border is a much larger factor in relation to Northern Ireland violence than their weekly figures have shown. He said that the weekly figures referred to incidents which were confirmed to have a connection with the border whereas there were many more incidents which they were sure had a Southern connection but about which they had no evidence. He said that most of the commercial explosives in the North does come from this side of the border. He said that the Provisional IRA use the Republic as a "hidey-hole" in between operations and that much of the planning of Provisional IRA operations was done in the South. I said that I obviously couldn't accept this and pointed out that the only way we could deal meaningfully with this type of vague allegation was on the basis of

hard information and evidence. If the Northern security authorities had such information, I said I was sure we would be only too happy to receive it and take the appropriate action. Harris said that a lot of the information they had was of this rather circumstantial nature but that he understood that his authorities might be bringing such information to our attention in the very near future. As regards the 2% figure, he said he did not think we could possibly believe it and he referred again to the details of explosives finds in the North. He said that the Gardaí would surely have further information on cross-border incidents and that they would surely not accept that less than 2% of Northern violence had a cross-border connection. I reiterated that we were here dealing with cases listed by the British authorities and that we could proceed only on the basis of hard information.



D. Hamill

1 March 1978

cc. Mr. Kirby, D1 Justice