

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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13/1/76

SECRET

Memo

The British Ambassador, accompanied by Mr. J. Hickman, called in today. The following is a summary of the main points discussed:

X 1. SAS: In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Taoiseach had asked for an indication of the role proposed for the SAS. The Ambassador went into some detail to explain the qualities sought in respect of SAS members, all of whom volunteered from other units of the armed services. The main quality sought in recruits was power of observation and following recruitment the particular skill which they were taught was the ability to operate in small patrols for long periods without "the normal military and administrative logistical support". The SAS role in Armagh would be "covert patrolling and surveillance and reporting on what they saw to their military commanders". They would be equipped with special lightweight, long-range signalling equipment. Normally they would wear military uniform but if particular circumstances required it they would operate in civilian clothes. This was also the position, and always had been, for other units of the British Army in Northern Ireland. The SAS members were subject to the normal military regulations, and civil law and the yellow card instructions on shooting would apply. In reply to a question, the Ambassador said he did not know what weapons the SAS would carry but he would make inquiries and let me know.

2. Security Meeting: This was discussed under four headings:

- (a) terms of reference for further discussions by the Joint Garda/RUC Co-ordinating Committee. The Ambassador handed me their understanding (attached) of what was agreed at the meeting on 8 January. I confirmed that this seemed to conform with my notes and said I would pass the document to the Department of Justice. If there was any disagreement, I would be in contact with him;
- (b) operation of the Offences Against the State (Amendment) Act 1972. The British want to find out from us how the Act works and it was agreed on 8 January that a meeting



might take place at official level to consider the matter. I told the Ambassador that the initiative rested with them to suggest a date and place and that we would then make the necessary arrangements. He agreed with this;

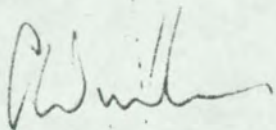
- (c) Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill. It had been agreed that a joint UK/Irish team should look at the implementation of this in anticipation of its enactment. I suggested that a further move on this should await completion by the Dáil of its consideration of the Bill - I had discussed and agreed this line beforehand with the Department of Justice (Mr. Colwell) - and the Ambassador said he thought that would be acceptable on his side. He will contact me in due course to suggest a meeting date and on their side it was likely that the FCO, NIO, RUC, DPP's Office in Belfast and possibly the Home Office would be involved;
- (d) on border overflights, I told him I would let him have a letter within a few days setting out our understanding of the current procedure for handling applications. (This would provide for the current situation which might, of course, be altered following the study by the Joint Co-ordinating Committee referred to at 2 (a) above.)

3. The British Ambassador handed me an extract from the Evening Press of 9 January 1976 (attached) and said they had the strongest objection to Commdt. Savino's statement on two grounds, viz., firstly they do not think he had any business to be in South Armagh and secondly they object to his remarks about the British security situation in South Armagh. If the report was inaccurate, they assume it would have been corrected by now. I pointed out that British spokesmen, including military spokesmen, were not shy about commenting on our security arrangements but that I would, of course, convey the British views to the appropriate authorities here.

4. We talked generally about the statements in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister's statement on Panorama last night. I referred the Ambassador to the Taoiseach's speech last night and gave him the full text pointing to the passage about the aspiration to unity and contrasting it with the very negative remarks on the



Irish dimension by Rees in his House of Commons statement and by Wilson on Panorama. I also referred to Wilson's remarks about the murderers of the ten Bessbrook Protestants and pointed out - I had cleared this point with the Department of Justice - that there was no conclusive evidence to say whether the murderers had come from the Republic or not. No doubt the British would let us have the available evidence through the normal police channels. I also reminded the Ambassador that the main problem in sectarian assassinations since 1973 was that of Catholics by Loyalist paramilitants and that the British presentation of the problem was more than a little out of balance.



Seán Donlon

13 January 1976

c.c. PSM  
PSS  
Mr. Nally (D/Taoiseach)  
Mr. Colwell (D/Justice)  
Ambassador, London