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M. Keating -

Mr. McHughen Sec 41
for file. This is urgent

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Reaction of nationalist community in Northern Ireland
to UDR/collusion controversy

This note is based on soundings by travellers among contacts in the nationalist community over the last few weeks on how the UDR/collusion controversy is perceived on the ground by nationalists.

Overview

A recurring reaction has been that the revelations come as no surprise. Collusion by elements within the security forces, particularly the UDR, with loyalist paramilitaries is believed by most nationalists to have been a regular occurrence since the beginning of the Troubles. Notwithstanding this, there is serious concern and indeed outrage at the scale of the latest developments, their implications for the security of the nationalist community and for relations with the security forces. In particular, the controversy is seen as a serious setback for the RUC at a time when they appeared to be making slow but steady progress towards greater acceptability by the nationalist community. As regards the UDR, the affair has done no more than copper-fasten and vindicate universal nationalist distrust of, and antipathy towards, the Regiment.

No reaction
to 'suspect
lists'?
Keating
Cooperation?

A number of contacts have referred to the casualness with which 'suspect lists' appear to be handled by the security forces. They understand from police contacts and others that in many police stations and barracks such documents are left lying around in places to which, say, visiting workmen would have easy access. There is concern, therefore, among nationalists that not alone is there active collusion between some members of the security forces and loyalists but that in general terms the procedures for handling classified documents by the security forces are seriously negligent.

Role of the Irish Government/A-I Agreement

There is strong approval among nationalists for the line being taken by the Irish Government and the Minister on the matter. There have been references by contacts to a "new toughness" and this has been strongly endorsed. The Agreement

is also seen as a significant factor in the situation. As mentioned, there is no surprise at the revelations; such allegations (and evidence to support them) have frequently been made in the past. However, this is the first time since the signing of the Agreement that allegations/evidence on this scale have surfaced and what is different now is that there is a mechanism available through which the British Government can at least be made to "give an account of their stewardship" on the issue. In that context, the Government are seen by nationalists as making effective use of the machinery of the Agreement to put strong moral and public pressure on the British Government on the issue on this occasion.

Expectations as to the outcome

Despite the approval of the line being taken by the Government, there is a jaded cynicism among nationalists about the British Government's willingness to deliver anything significant in relation to their own security forces. They consider that the record - the Stalker affair, Private Thain, Private Holden, Corporal Hastie, etc. - demonstrates overwhelmingly that in the last analysis the British Government will always "support their own" and that nationalist concerns and perceptions take a poor second place. Contacts have suggested that if any inroads are to be made into nationalist cynicism in this regard, it is vital (a) that the Stevens enquiry be completed quickly, (b) that it results in prosecutions/convictions and positive and demonstrable action on the handling of classified material by the security forces and (c) that some constructive and clearly identifiable measures in regard to the UDR emerge from the process.

As to what (c) might mean in practice: there is no realistic expectation among nationalists that the UDR are going to be disbanded. Among the options suggested to us by contacts which would be regarded as progress were:

- [As the second most desirable option after disbandment] that the UDR be withdrawn to duties which did not involve contact with the community;
- [In the event that this too were not conceded] that full RUC accompaniment be implemented immediately and that the point of contact with the public be the RUC;

- that the decision to equip the UDR with plastic bullets be reversed;
- that demonstrably stricter vetting be introduced for entry into the UDR and
- that a more direct and transparent complaints procedure be introduced for the UDR.

Conclusion

There is a bit confused.

Overall, therefore, there is serious scepticism among nationalists that the British Government will be forthcoming (other than in a cosmetic way), particularly on the UDR issue. On the whole, however, nationalists would stop short of seeing the issue as a make-or-break one for the Agreement. In general, nationalists regard their overall position under the Agreement as a significant advance on what it was previously and would be most reluctant to relinquish this advance, even in the face of yet another example of British intransigence. What would be called into question, however, is the effectiveness of the Agreement to deliver on the fundamental issue of confidence in the security forces and in the administration of justice generally and, to that extent, an unsatisfactory outcome to the present difficulties would undoubtedly lead to an undermining of the Agreement. This would be particularly so in strongly nationalist areas such as West Belfast, where the Agreement is seen as having brought about no appreciable difference in terms of the behaviour of the security forces. A negative outcome to the present controversy would serve to reinforce this perception of the Agreement as incapable of making a serious impact on British security policy. Contacts feel, therefore, that it is important that some positive and tangible (even if limited) developments along the lines of the last paragraph above emerge from the present process, if such an erosion of the overall effectiveness of the Agreement is to be prevented.

Anglo-Irish Section

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