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Secretary of State Brooke's Statement
on the Musgrave Park Hospital bombing
4 November, 1991

Attached please find copies of statements made by Secretary of State Brooke and Kevin McNamara MP in the Commons this afternoon.

1. The House was surprisingly full for a Monday afternoon, three days before critical by-elections. Brooke was flanked by Mawhinney and Hanley and on the Labour benches McNamara was joined by Roger Stott - Jim Marshall being absent canvassing in the Langbaugh by-election. An unexpected presence on the Labour frontbench for the half hour debate was Employment Shadow spokesman Tony Blair. The OUP was represented by Molyneaux, Trimble, Taylor and Maginnis. Maginnis and Taylor spoke; Trimble's determined efforts to catch the Speaker's eye, failing on this occasion to get him called much to the satisfaction of his colleagues. The full DUP team were in attendance and Paisley and McCrea were called. Mallon was on his own.
2. Excluding Brooke and McNamara, there were ten speakers. Apart from the OUP, DUP and SDLP contributions, other speakers were Jim Kilfedder, who called on Brooke to call on the Catholic Church to excommunicate the IRA; on the Conservative side, Barry Porter, who warned against a loyalist paramilitary backlash; and Keith Speed, who urged more determined efforts by the Government information services in combating IRA propaganda in the US; on the Labour side, Barry Barnes, predictably, returned to his familiar theme of the activities of the various peace groups with which he is heavily involved viz. New Consensus, the Peace Train and Families Against Intimidation; and David Winnick, who warned the Government against playing into the hands of the IRA by reintroducing internment.
3. Responding to McNamara's statement, Brooke said that the RUC's bid for additional manpower, was at the final stage of examination and an announcement could be expected soon.
4. Maginnis found it peculiar that Brooke would link the deaths of two soldiers with that of a car thief. He noted that no mention was made of Roger Elwood killed on 1 October. (This was a point which found strong resonance on the Tory benches and one which right wing backbench Tories returned to in private conversation in the bar afterwards.) Maginnis called for the introduction of internment and asked Brooke to ensure that this option is kept open.

Brooke endorsed Maginnis' comments on the Elwood killing. On internment, he said that the Government had kept the option on the statute book although the EPA could have

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allowed for its removal. However, he saw its use as a very serious step, difficult to implement with consequences difficult to predict. He said that he would only consider using it in very particular circumstances and for obvious reasons would not predict them at this time. He restated, however, that internment is on the books and is available.

5. Paisley reiterated his view that internment is a necessary weapon in the armoury of any civilised country wishing to take out those who seek to destroy it. He asked for an assurance that, if introduced, it will be under the authority of a British Minister in response to the House of Commons and not in consultation with the Dublin Government. He asked that Brooke show that he is in charge and that his hands are not tied by influences from the South. He also asked the Secretary of State if he was not concerned at the rising scale of explosions and the rising tide of murders and was it not time to reconsider his whole security policy.

Brooke replied that if internment were introduced, it would be by majority Government decision and through action taken by the House of Commons. He paid tribute to the security forces reminding Paisley that in the last 2 months 97 people have been charged with terrorist offences, 11 of them for murder.

6. Mallon said that he had thought he had seen it all and did not expect, at this stage, that the IRA would break every precept of human compassion and morality. He agreed that there was no such thing as a legitimate target and that to accept that there was would be to say that murder is proper in certain circumstances. He said that he would not tell the Secretary of State what to do and he did not know of any way of preventing the placement of a small explosive device in a vast complex such as Musgrave Hospital. However, in the political process, he felt something could be done and that politicians had a responsibility to play a part in trying to end the spiral of killing. He suggested that their responsibility was to start proper negotiations to end the nightmare.

Brooke replied that he was not in the business of calibrating the relative evil of atrocities committed by the IRA but he was conscious that this one followed in the train of Enniskillen and the proxy bombing and that these are crimes against humanity. He agreed that all constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland have a responsibility to continue talks. It was quite clear that the recent peace talks would not bring an immediate end to the violence but they are one of the pressures that can be mounted on the terrorists.

7. McCrea recalled Needham's colourful condemnation and asked rhetorically how the Government could expect the unionist community to sit in council chambers with "fascist beasts". Responding, Brooke reminded the House of Gerry Adams specific failure to condemn the bombing.

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8. Taylor said that the finger of condemnation must be pointed at the Secretary of State for his failure to take on the IRA and that the introduction of Dublin Rule through the Anglo-Irish Agreement had served to encourage the terrorists. In subsequent conversations in the bar, Barry Porter, Beaumont-Dark and other Tories were critical of Taylor's heavy-handed inferences which they felt were inappropriate to this particular occasion. Brooke's brief reply avoided taking up Taylor's main point.

EXPLOSION - MUSGRAVE PARK HOSPITAL

I regret to have to tell the House that a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded in Musgrave Park Hospital at 3.53pm last Saturday, killing 2 soldiers and injuring 11 other people, among them a 5 year old girl and a baby of 4 months. The murdered soldiers were Warrant Officer Philip Cross of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) and Driver Craig Pantry of the Royal Corps of Transport. Two of those wounded have very grave injuries. I am also sorry to report that early on Sunday morning in a separate incident a young man was found dead in West Belfast in a car which had earlier been seen in suspicious circumstances and pursued by police; this incident is being investigated by a senior police officer and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC) has been asked by the RUC to supervise the inquiry. I know that the House will join me in extending sympathy to the families of all those killed and injured.

The bomb which the IRA left in the hospital is estimated to have contained 20lb of Semtex. It was part way along a service tunnel between 2 hospital buildings: one - the Withers Block - containing orthopaedic and childrens' wards, and the second wards and other medical facilities administered by the RAMC for the benefit of servicemen and their families and some civilians. I must stress that this building is not, as the IRA have callously and cynically claimed, an operational military base - rather, like the

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rest of the Musgrave Park complex, it is purely and simply a hospital, dedicated to healing and the relief of suffering. The nearest security force base is more than a quarter of a mile away and was manifestly not the target of the attack.

In addition to the deaths and injuries, the blast from the explosion caused severe damage to both buildings. In particular, a newly refurbished children's ward in the Withers Block was damaged, with debris falling on a father who was nursing his baby daughter. Other children in that ward were immobilised in traction. So far 97 operations due to have been performed early this week have been cancelled and 80 out of the 200 National Health Service beds in the hospital have been rendered unusable and damage totalling at least £1/4 million has been caused.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in utter condemnation of this appalling attack. But the cynical depravity of this outrage - of placing a bomb that was inevitably going to cause massive damage to a National Health Service hospital and was intended to kill medical staff when it exploded, and which only by great good fortune did not cause many more deaths and injuries - must surely mark one of the lowest points in the IRA's inglorious history. I reject all attempts to justify this attack. Let there be no doubt that it has shown the IRA in its true colours. It was an attack on the whole community - on sick children and their parents, on old people whose much-needed operations will have to be delayed, on the medical staff who devotedly care for them, and on the security forces who will continue to defend the community and to bring terrorists to justice. Such attacks will not deflect the

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Government or the security forces from doing their duty in seeing off these evil men who want to destroy all that is best in our community. The horrible nature of this attack only underlines that these are the sort of people whom all democrats oppose.

Just as the emergency services and the staff at Musgrave Park Hospital reacted with superlative speed and dedication to allay the effects of this atrocity, so the security forces - to whom I pay the warmest of tributes - will continue with vigorous and impartial professionalism to defend the community and to bring suspected terrorists to justice.

CHURCH AGAINST DELIVERY

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