

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

UNDER/ 204/3
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PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

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MR Spence

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Mr Hammett

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I attach the latest political analysis by PAB of developments in Northern Ireland since the latter part of February. Whilst there have been some political developments, these have been overshadowed by security issues and the impact of events, in Ireland and elsewhere on both the Anglo-Irish process and local reaction.

Security Incidents

2. There has been a cumulating toll of security-related events from the end of January and the particularly horrifying sequence set in train following the Gibraltar shootings, and the resultant funerals, now totally dominates matters. Within both communities there is an aversion to the widely publicised acts of violence but there are also two significantly different interpretations of these events.

3. Crucial in this is the view taken by the unionist community that there is a distinction that must be drawn between those who on the one hand set out to commit murder and are killed by the forces of law and order in their attempt to stop them and, on the other hand, those who are murdered by terrorists. Conversely there is a belief within the nationalist community that the due process of law requires that all efforts should be made to prevent acts of terrorism by the use of minimum force and in particular that the three terrorists in Gibraltar could and should have been taken alive.

4. There can be little doubt that matters are developing sectarian overtones even more pronounced than those evident in the community in the past. Thus Cardinal O Fiaich's address at the funeral of Aidan McAnespie is regarded by the unionist community as grossly provocative. His comment that he has never hesitated to call paramilitary killings "murder" even when they were accidental and so he could not fail to call murder "the killing in broad daylight of

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one of the best known men in the parish" is seen as biased. The UUP's David Trimble, a law lecturer, said the remarks heightened tensions and were "tantamount to incitement" as well as prejudging the guilt or otherwise of the soldier who fired the fatal shot. Former SDLP leader, Lord Fitt, also criticised the Cardinal saying "the sentiments which he expressed will do nothing to relieve the situation". The remarks at the requiem mass for Mairead Farrell when Father Murray said "she was barbarously assassinated by a gunman as she was walking in public on a sunny Sunday afternoon" are seen in similar vein.

5. This is not to say that there was much support for Stone's attack at the Milltown Cemetery. However once again there were clear signs of a difference of view. The unionist community viewed this as a bizarre but isolated attack by an unbalanced individual. However there was greater suspicion within the nationalist community - many of whom saw at least the possibility of a link between Stone and a paramilitary group (where did he get his weapons?) and the ease with which he had carried out his attack (why did the RUC van move away?). These sort of questions may have generated a level of hysteria and tension which boiled over into the murders on Saturday.

6. Whatever may be the basis of the generation of mob violence that occurred the murder of the two soldiers has affected the unionist community in a very deep and personal way. They are particularly incensed that it occurred because the RUC were standing back to allow the funerals to proceed. There was distaste at the obvious evidence of self-martialing at earlier Republican funerals but there was some grudging acquiescence in the light of Stone's attack on Milltown. However the developments on Saturday, and the graphic television and still photographs which recorded the tragic events of that day, have stirred a deep-seated anger which will demand that the security forces "retake the streets". To this extent the statements of unionist politicians have so far reflected the views of the majority population but have not, as so often in the past, been more extreme than the popular view.

7. It remains to be seen if the statements of the Cardinal and other Catholic clergy, in denouncing these murders in unequivocal terms will have a conciliatory effect. The evidence so far is not encouraging, moreover the murders have hardened unionist attitudes and strengthened the view that there should be no truck with Sinn Fein or their fellow travellers.

The Unionists

8. The reaction of unionist spokesmen to the various security developments has largely been to call again for greater security, more arrests and tougher action on the streets, in particular they have called for more direct policing of republican funerals and they have made the usual instinctive allegations that the security forces have been held back under "orders from Dublin". However it remains to be seen how their comments will develop as the mood of the unionist community progresses.

9. In more general terms, and before the developments of last week, Unionist leaders reacted against suggestions that the Secretary of State's invitation to the SDLP to meet for discussions was linked to their own discussions with the Secretary of State in the series of "talks about talks". Paisley rejected references to "dialogue by proxy" and said "Mr King's plans to meet the SDLP have nothing whatsoever to do with our talks. He will not be acting as a vessel for communication between us and the SDLP or vice-versa". Molyneux accused the Secretary of State of trying to confuse current political development "by using the same language of 'talks about talks'" and giving "the impression that the two meetings are related".

10. In a recent address to unionist students at Queens University John Taylor said that unionists must be prepared to propose an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement to help resolve the current impasse. He stressed that unionists should not give any consideration to any form of devolution on the basis of the Agreement remaining, but that they should "establish an alternative to this failed Agreement". He acknowledged that any alternative

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would require the acceptance by Dublin, Belfast and London of basic facts, which included not only the continuation of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom unless the people of Northern Ireland decide otherwise, but also recognition of both British and Irish dimensions as well as "an Ulster dimension which means that an alternative agreement must have Ulster participation and an official structure for constructive cooperation between Dublin and Belfast".

11. Despite this apparent pragmatism it has been reported in the News Letter that there are no unionist plans to make direct contribution to the review of the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November this year. Molyneaux is reported as saying "there will be no unionist input in the review, except in the sense that our views and objections are publicly known. We would be prepared to give public clarification of our position, if it was needed, but we have no intention of attending any conference on the review". Molyneaux's comments were issued in response to a call from Geraldine Kennedy (Progressive Democrat's Northern Ireland spokesperson) who called for the unionist leadership to be invited to the conference table for the review. Molyneaux made it clear that he (and Paisley) are interested in an alternative agreement, "the review would simply be looking at the mechanics of the deal and trying to find ways of improving it". He also rebuffed suggestions that failure to take part in the review procedure could leave unionists open to the charge of "missing an opportunity".

The SDLP

12. Like everyone else the SDLP are pre-occupied with the current range of problems. On the one hand they are faced with the Stalker/Sampson Enquiry, the Birmingham Six Appeal, the proposal to make the Prevention of Terrorism Act permanent, the release of Private Thain, the McAnespie shooting at Aughnacloy and the deaths of the three IRA members in Gibraltar. All of these are seen to suggest that HMG are insensitive to the concerns of the Nationalist community. But they are also faced with the reality of violence on the streets and the murders of Gillian Johnston and the two army corporals. This has led to some signs of division so that whilst

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most SDLP politicians have stuck to the demands for continued low-key policing at funerals a few have admitted that the policy may need "review".

12. Some matters stay outside the direct impact of the latest atrocity and John Hume remains concerned about the position of prisoners in Northern Ireland jails. Hume described the release of Private Thain as straining "the normal limits of compassion" but asked that the same degree of compassion be extended to all those young people in Northern Ireland, from both sections of the community, who are serving long sentences after becoming involved in terrorist violence.

13. The recent invitation from the Secretary of State to John Hume, and his SDLP colleagues, to discussions under the talks-about-talks label has been welcomed by the SDLP leader. Although unionists have tried to distance themselves from the extension of the process there is considerable belief that the proposals tabled by Paisley and Molyneaux during their last discussions with the Secretary of State will be raised with the SDLP. In an interview John Hume said he would be happy to discuss directly with the unionists their proposals for political progress but he went on to say that in order to have stability unionists must sort out their relationships with the rest of the island.

14. Recent reports that the SDLP is unlikely to cooperate in the appointment of a new Northern Ireland Police Authority have led to criticisms from other parties. The advent of the Anglo-Irish Agreement had given encouragement to the hope of more normal political consensus on law and order and SDLP participation, and there were some tentative signs that some SDLP's members were beginning to rethink the idea that to cooperate would imply acceptance of responsibility for the RUC. However the chance of any relaxation of the non-cooperative approach appears to have been stifled by recent events. Gordon Mawhinney of the Alliance Party attacked the SDLP, and in particular Seamus Mallon, for this stance, "it is clear that Mr Mallon wants to accept no responsibility in

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relation to the policing of a divided society. He takes obvious comfort in the idea that if he is uninvolved he is free to criticise if anything goes wrong". The DUP's Sammy Wilson said this was yet another manifestation of the determination of the SDLP to destroy the RUC's credibility in the Catholic community, "The SDLP must make it clear that the alternative to the police is the Provos.... If the Catholic community wants an alternative to this then members of that community should join the RUC and get on with the job".

Alliance Party

15. The Alliance Party leader, Dr John Alderdice, recently announced the creation of a group of four senior members - including Gordon Mawhinney (deputy leader) and Dan McGuinness (party chairman) - to study and develop the party's previous devolution proposals. Although he said that once the proposals were ready he would seek formal discussions with the Secretary of State, Dr Alderdice expressed the view that the possibility of devolution still seemed to be "some way in the future" and doubted "that either the unionist or the nationalist politicians have succeeded in bringing devolution back into the political agenda". In a reference to the forthcoming review of the workings of the Anglo-Irish Conference, the Alliance leader said the procedure should be handled with "flexibility and a constructive frame of mind".

Sinn Fein

16. The republican movement set out to derive as much benefit as they could from the Gibraltar deaths. Consequently they stage-managed the arrival in Ireland, the transport of the bodies up to the north and the three funerals through West Belfast. They tried to create every appearance they could of a link between the events surrounding the two funerals and the RUC and the army. Therefore they have sought to draw suspicious inferences between the RUC traffic van drawing away during Stone's attack at Milltown, and the presence of the two soldiers in plain clothes on Saturday. However in putting these views forward, especially in relation to the murder of the two soldiers, as with Enniskillen, they have made no apologies for the deaths and present them only as a consequence of the existence of the border.

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17. Before these recent developments, on a political front, Adams spoke of a further meeting with John Hume. Speculation about an IRA ceasefire or devolved government in the Province was denied as was any connection with John Hume's planned meeting with the Secretary of state. In discouraging people from having high expectations about the outcome of the talks Adams suggested that recent events had vindicated a lot of things he said at the first meeting in January, "The SDLP position is based upon the view that this state can be reformed and that the British Government can be persuaded to do certain things to facilitate this process. The Republican view is that it is this State which is the problem and recent events have underlined that".

General

18. Internal feuding in the ranks of the Campaign for Equal Citizenship came to head with the announcement of the resignation of the organisation's President, Robert McCartney, and its Chairman, Dr Laurence Kennedy. McCartney has expressed his intention to remain as an ordinary member of the CEC and despite suggestions that he is retiring on "personal grounds" it does appear that McCartney was unwilling to be seen as the focal point for particular groupings within the organisation. There can be little doubt that the loss of such a significant figure as McCartney will weaken the CEC even though he exhorted members "to give the campaign their individual loyalty, and use all their talents and abilities to support its aims".

19. In another fall from power Andy Tyrie has resigned as leader of the largest loyalist paramilitary grouping, the Ulster Defence Association. Following the murder of John McMichael, at the end of last year, and the discovery of a bomb attached to his own car Tyrie's role as Chairman was clearly under pressure. There has been increasing criticism, within the loyalist community, that a number of leading UDA figures were profiteering from extortion and racketeering. It is understood that no immediate successor will be appointed and that the organisation will be run by the "inner council". One anxiety is that the removal of McMichael and Tyrie

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will see more militant elements come to the fore and there have been reports that off-shoots of the UDA such as the UFF will be pursuing more active measures against what they describe as "Republicans".

20. The announcement of the Government's proposals for new fair employment legislation brought various reactions from the political parties. The SDLP gave them a cautious welcome whilst Sinn Fein described the measures as containing all the language of anti-discrimination measures but little of the detail of the remedial measures necessary to effect change. The Alliance leader Dr John Alderdice broadly welcomed the proposals saying "I welcome the fact that these proposals demonstrate a commitment towards a new Northern Ireland marked by equality of opportunity for all". The Workers' Party, whilst welcoming moves to counteract discrimination in employment, expressed concern about proposals to make religious classification of workforces an obligatory matter. Unionist reaction has been muted reflecting their suspicions that the exercise is a sop to nationalists.

Comment

21. All shades of opinion have been influenced by the recent security incidents. On the nationalist side the Gibraltar shootings are taken to signal that the security forces have few restraints placed upon them; and the Milltown murders are seen as a signal of the possibility of more sectarian attacks from a restructured UDA. Sinn Fein tried to exploit these events and promote themselves as the natural defenders of the minority community. The evidence that this went tragically wrong on Saturday may yet prove to be counterproductive from Sinn Fein's point of view although it is still too close to the event to predict with any certainty if there will be any long-term impact.

22. Feeling within the unionist community is as deeply touched by the murder of the two soldiers as it was by Enniskillen. Indeed in some ways more so because there is a perception that these deaths involved the cooperation of a large number of people, not all of whom were necessarily members of PIRA. As a result these murders are being taken as a marker of the feelings of the nationalist

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community at large, and no matter how misguided this view may be, there are strong undercurrents of growing division, along purely sectarian lines, across the broad spectrum of the unionist community. Against this backdrop it is difficult to speculate that unionist politicians will do much to stimulate political progress. They may be content simply to sit in the sidelines and watch developments between London and Dublin which, they believe, simply confirm their view that the Irish (and nationalists within Northern Ireland) saw the Agreement as a one-way trade. Without doubt however they will seek to put increasing pressure upon the Secretary of State and HMG to improve the security situation with demands for tougher action against terrorists. They will also seek changes in the policy with the regard to the policing of republican funerals.

23. It seems likely that the next point of major significance will be the meeting between the Secretary of State and the SDLP and any meeting that might occur between Hume and Adams. These events will influence the pace of future progress especially towards an acceptable form of devolution or indeed whether any progress takes place. The unionists already have doubts about the SDLP's commitment to progress within Northern Ireland whilst the border remains - citing recent references to unionists needing to resolve their relationships in the totality of the island. Any meeting with Adams, who is seen to be tainted directly with recent events, will only serve to consolidate unionist views that the SDLP have cast their eyes away from an internal solution and look towards unity. It is difficult to conceive that they would take part in any process for dialogue in the wake of a Hume/Adams meeting.

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cc PS/Ministers (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
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