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Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams blamed Secretary of State Shaun Woodward today for the controversy surrounding a military parade planned for Belfast.

Unionists have called for the public to support Sunday's homecoming parade organised by the Ministry of Defence for troops returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

But Mr Adams defended plans for a Sinn Fein protest and said that while relatives had a right to welcome their loved ones home, the Secretary of State should have warned against a

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military march.

His comments came as Presbyterian Moderator Dr Donald Patton told Mr Adams he believed the protest would be unhelpful.

But Mr Adams said: "I hold the British Secretary of State responsible for the controversy that has arisen around the British Army's military parade in Belfast on Sunday.

"While the British Ministry of Defence may be oblivious to the sensitivities involved, surely Shaun Woodward should have realised that Sunday's event is ill-advised.

"A civic reception and a religious service would have provided families and supporters of the British Army with the opportunity to welcome back their loved ones.

"And while many Belfast citizens may not support such events there would have been little protestation."

There have been concerns expressed that while Sinn Fein says it plans to hold a peaceful protest, dissident republicans opposed to the peace process will hold their own demonstration.

The Sinn Fein leader added: "I very publicly want to acknowledge that the families of the soldiers involved are pleased to see their loved ones return from a dangerous situation. This is very understandable and acceptable.

"But the decision by the British Ministry of Defence to organise a military parade through Belfast city centre is totally unacceptable, not least because of the role of British forces in Ireland and in the city of Belfast.

"Republican and nationalist Belfast has suffered dreadfully under British military rule in the recent conflict."

He said working class unionists had also felt the brunt of British military actions and said loyalist gunmen had in the past opened fire on British troops.

"So there are lots of contradictions in the unionist and loyalist position," said Mr Adams.

"There are also people, including many who are not Sinn Fein supporters, who feel that a march to celebrate the actions of the British Army and the British government in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is wrong."

He said Sunday should pass off with dignity and restraint and said Sinn Fein had gone to great lengths to ensure its protest would be well-marshalled and peaceful.

He added: "The remarks by some unionist representatives have been over the top. They too have a responsibility to use their best influence to ensure that Sunday's events pass peacefully."

Meanwhile, Dr Patton said that in a letter sent to Mr Adams he had raised his disappointment at the plans to protest at the parade.

Sinn Fein said it had not received the letter, but Dr Patton said he had highlighted that both Catholic and Protestant soldiers had served side-by-side.

"Such an example of cooperation is to be welcomed in this divided land of ours," he said.

"Regardless of the merits or demerits of the war in those countries these soldiers obeyed their orders and served at great risk to their lives.

"It is not in a spirit of triumphalism that we welcome these soldiers home but in a spirit of thanksgiving, sharing in the relief of their families that their loved ones are safe."

The Moderator said: "It seems that tolerance, understanding and cooperation continue to be the casualties of our convoluted politics," he said.

"Whatever happens perceptions will remain and can only impede progress towards creating better relations across our communities."

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To john paul-portadown,

27 Comments

- [First](#) |
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- [1](#)
- [2](#)
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Your assertions against the British Army are very wrong and factually incorrect. Read "Lost Lives". Read the facts. My point in raising the fact that IRA murdered so many innocent people is to show the hypocrisy of Sinn Fein in claiming that they are protesting against murder and oppression when in fact they had actually been defending it over 30 years as long as the victims weren't republican. Sinn Fein need to move on. If they don't they will drag this country backwards, but then again some in republicanism probably want that. They could be opening Pandora's Box.

Posted by Cliff | 29.10.08, 14:13 GMT

The Belfast telegraph should not be belittling itself and publishing these garbage point scoring arguments from biggotted people constantly referencing the 'north of ireland' and hypocritical shiners and John Paul learn some diction and leave your mummys computer alone. GDW has it right grow up and move on. Northern Ireland is Northern Ireland tough!

Posted by Bored and disillusioned | 29.10.08, 14:12 GMT

ME - so ur speaking on behalf of every protestant in the north of ireland...? so do u agree that the IRA were right to kill every1 they did in the war to free the north? cse it seems to me ur agreeing with the thousands of cilvians that the british army killed due to thier 'job' against a country who has OIL.....

Posted by john paul - portadown | 29.10.08, 13:44 GMT

Many of you miss the point of this whole issue. My friends in Dublin say that most people are completely turned off by the whole debate and refer to it as typical northern bigotry from both sides. A lot are actually sympathetic to the returning troops because they view it in a wider global context than our narrow-minded perspective whilst some naturally oppose the parade. The point however is that most or all of the opinion is that they wouldn't touch Northern Ireland with a 100 mile barge pole. They do not want us. They see nothing but aggression, disagreement, provocation and hatred. So Sinn Fein - keep it up cos your Irish unity is becoming a more distant dream than ever.

Posted by My friends in the North | 29.10.08, 13:43 GMT

Steven clearly meant protesting this sunday not protesting in general! you're just picking holes and trying to be smart! Good try

Posted by moon | 29.10.08, 13:41 GMT

Ahhh I love the smell of keyboard testosterone at lunchtime..grow up everyone and move on. Peace be with you all.

Posted by GDW | 29.10.08, 13:39 GMT

maggie - dont speak till you know the facts.... go google it if you want... and who said the INLA, i was staten the I.R.A.....

i would love to know how u think the I.R.A/INLA have killed more cillivians than the Brits/U.V.F/L.V.F.... but together? is amazes me how u got that....

Posted by john paul - portadown | 29.10.08, 13:35 GMT

Stevie, lad. You just made a big bo-bo. You said 'Protesting just shows me a complete lack of tolerance.' But the few lines before that, you were telling us how brave you were protesting against Gerorge W! Silly billy, you. Perhaps you meant those naughty nationalists like me shouldn't be marching? Eh? A wee slip up there, lad? So much for your idea of democracy. An awful lot of people getting hot under the collar here. The cheek of Nationalists and Catholics daring to march against the 'brave'RIR. The cheek of them. Next they'll be looking to vote!

Posted by no longer fooled republican | 29.10.08, 13:24 GMT

John paul there is no way any of the protestants who disagreed with the war will be there to protest on the same day! I for one will be there solely to welcome those who made it home! They were ordered there to do a job! Sunday 2nd Nov is NOT the day to air grievances with any sanctions of the war!

Posted by me | 29.10.08, 13:16 GMT

Sinn Fein are hypocrites. They are happy to cosy up to Bush and his cronies when it suits them. I will be out to protest this march but not with the backward looking fools of Sinn Fein. All working class people should come out and show that this war was not in our name and we do not support it. The ordinary people of Afganistan and Iraq should be the comrades of the working people of Ireland and not our emenies. Our real enemy is the work mongering ruling class which Sinn Fein are so keen to side with time after time.

Posted by Liam | 29.10.08, 13:04 GMT

Wrong on that one, John Paul - IRA/INLA killed more than all the rest put together. Now, maybe someone could explain why more citizens of the 26 counties are members of the UK armed forces than of Ireland's - so much for neutrality, aussie. Strange but true

Posted by maggie | 29.10.08, 13:02 GMT

Letdownxsoldier,

I to am sad and angry with the hypocrcacy, intolerance and bigotry that Sinn Fein are showing by holding these protests, but I have faith that they are small in number and that the majority of Republicans will not support these protests.

Some people seem incable to move on, hatred has been their lives; Sinn Fein use words like an inclusive and equal Ireland for all, but refuse to accept that some Irish people are proud to be British Citizens as part of the UK? But do not let them bring you down to their bigoted level, we have come so far in the past decade, lets not go back to the old days.

Look at what the last fifteen years have given us; there is water in the river Lagan, the turnstiles are gone, we have new bars and restaurants, jobs for all, we beat England at the football, Ulster GAA teams dominate the All Ireland, Ulster won the Heineken Cup and the Magners League, people want to come here on holiday; lets just hope they see how bigoted they are being.

Posted by Steven | 29.10.08, 12:49 GMT

cliff - sorry but there are a number of people who were against the war in iraq and its not just SF who will be protesting, there'll also be protestants...

for u directing that SF hate everything to do with the Brits, in a way ur correct... if they had done half the stuff they done to the catholic community to the protestant i think u'd have a different approach to the march too.

How many innocent lives has the british army killed over the years, never mind in iraq?

and another thing the IRA killed less innocent civillians than the brits/UVF/LVF in ireland alone....

Posted by john paul - portadown | 29.10.08, 12:36 GMT

This is just more evidence to add to the others, to show how narrow minded and hypocritical sinn fein and republicans are. When they harp on about their human rights; what about the normal protestant British citizens that live in Northern Ireland and their human rights, that can't show the same patriotism to the rest of the UK and British related activities, as they do on the mainland. How that we are disadvantaged and constantly have to struggle to show our culture and heritage and affiliation to the rest of the UK. Those human rights are conveniently forgotten, or is that becasue, even though I was born and brought up in Northern Ireland, as am a protestant, I'm actually "occupying" this area and have no right to expect the same abilities as thos in England, Scotland and Wales..

Posted by Andy | 29.10.08, 12:36 GMT

As an ex soldier I have supported all the efforts at peace and power sharing since the good friday agreement, i thought we had all moved on. now i see SF have shown thier true colours, they hate us and want to smash all that is British in this land

it is very sad. I for one am now not only repulsed by the comments of the SF spokesmen but can say I will never support any Unionist Party that will share power with these people again, this insult to those brave young men and women has been the final straw for me.

Posted by Letdownxsolider | 29.10.08, 12:25 GMT

■ No Longer Fooled Republican, are you seriously suggesting that you are protesting on Sunday because of the wars in Afgan and Iraq? If this is the case, where you there with the rest of us protesting when the wars began? Did you protest when George Bush visited the city in June?

Or, are you really protesting at the fact that Irish men and women from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland chose to fight for the British Army? These brave people do not chose where they go to war, and many of them will not agree with the wars in Afgan and Iraq, but they have chosen to serve and that is why some of us would like to show our respect for the difficult jobs they have to do.

I'm sorry, I'm just confused, what exactly are you protesting at, please, I really would like to know if you have some legitimate reason or if you are just a bigot that refuses to move on with life in a peaceful, tolerant and understanding nature.

Protesting just shows me a complete lack of tolerance.

Posted by Steven | 29.10.08, 12:08 GMT

■ Aussie, no harm to you, but you need a wee bit of educating. The Royal Irish Rangers is indeed part of the British army and contains Protestants & Catholics from all 32 counties of the island of Ireland. The Republic of Ireland has apparently declared itself neutral, however this parade is taking place in Northern Ireland, ergo within the confines of the UK (who along with the USA and others, have decided to take up arms, root out terrorists to help achieve peace in an unstable land).

Don't worry yourself, the Irish Republic is perfectly safe from Muslim extremists.

Finally, and just to remind you, the term "Irish" does not imply tricolours, rebel songs, GAA etc etc, but increasingly has a dual meaning, much to the dismay of Republicans I'm sure...

Posted by mickey | 29.10.08, 11:57 GMT

■ SF regularly takes an active part in commemorations for recognised terrorists. How they can claim to take the moral high ground on this is beyond me. Could you imagine their indignation if protests were held at their Republican memorials? This is just another attempt of theirs to whitewash anything British from NI.

Posted by ChrisW | 29.10.08, 11:43 GMT

■ no longer fooled republican - the Republican movement killed more of its own community than the police and army - what do you say to that?
Afghanistan, where these troops are returning from, was sanctioned by the U.N which includes your beloved Ireland. You are the ignorant people.

Posted by Paedar | 29.10.08, 11:43 GMT

■ I'm a bit confused no longer fooled republican - are you going to be there to support the parade or as part of the protest?

Posted by moon | 29.10.08, 11:40 GMT

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- [First](#) |
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