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**Reference Code:** 2003/13/16

**Title:** Report of a meeting in London on 27 April, 1972, between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Patrick Hillery, and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. Topics discussed included initiatives towards Northern Ireland, action by the Irish government against the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and towards controlling movements across the Border, the issue of a United Ireland, sympathy for the IRA in Ireland and amongst Catholics in Northern Ireland, proposed constitutional changes in Ireland, the cost of Northern Ireland to Britain, and the representation of meetings to the press. .

**Creation Date(s):** 27 April, 1972

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 8 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of Foreign Affairs

**Access Conditions:** Open

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MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS AND SIR ALEC DOUGLAS-HOME,  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN  
AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS  
ON 27/4/72

The meeting, which took place in the Foreign Secretary's office at the House of Commons, started at 3 p.m. and lasted forty minutes. The Foreign Secretary had with him his Private Secretary and Mr Kelvin White of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Minister was accompanied by Mr McCann, Secretary of the Department, and the Ambassador.

After welcoming the Minister and expressing pleasure at the opportunity for a discussion on the North, Sir Alec enquired how the Minister would now sum up the position. The Government, Sir Alec said, had taken a great risk in introducing the initiative. The Minister said he thought the Taoiseach could give a firm lead if he knew what direction the initiative was taking. If a lead is not given by the Taoiseach at this stage, the vacuum could be filled by the IRA. Consequently, the Taoiseach is anxious that the Minister should get, during his talks, an assessment of the direction in which the initiative is going and of its likely effect.

Sir Alec said Mr Whitelaw is trying to get the people in the North to develop more confidence. The situation there is, on the whole, going somewhat better than expected but, unfortunately, a greater number of soldiers have been killed since the initiative. Can any more be done in the South about cross-Border movement and

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about the Courts? The Minister told Sir Alec that the Taoiseach has been doing his best on the Border and that the Garda Force there has been considerably strengthened in recent times. There is some public feeling in the South against the adoption of any abnormal legal procedures against the IRA. The Minister then questioned whether there is any evidence that the recent outbreaks of violence in the North have stemmed from the South.

Sir Alec said that he felt there is at least some evidence of activity from the South. One of the most important things to be done now is to hasten the process of isolating the minority in the North from the IRA. The Protestant backlash has proved to be less than expected. The Minister said he doubted if recent killings originated to any extent from the South to which Sir Alec made the rejoinder that it is well known that the IRA are travelling freely across the Border. Mr White intervened to say that it would be very helpful to the situation if charges could be pinned on some of the more prominent IRA people South of the Border. It could be argued that both Goulding and MacStiofáin could have been arrested on their visits to the North. It would, however, be out of the question to have a shoot-up in crowds. The Minister said that everything possible is being done to bring the IRA in the South before the Courts.

Sir Alec then enquired whether it would not be possible to have a policy directive from the top requiring a more serious effort by the Gardaí stationed on the

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Border. Mr McCann said it would be better to let the Forces settle this themselves rather than have a policy directive from the top. The Minister also favoured co-operation at technical level.

Mr White described the performance of the Gardai on the Border as somewhat patchy. Some of the Gardai do a really good job while others appear to be reluctant to come too near the Border. This, in a way, is understandable as many of them have wives and children and are slow to expose themselves to undue risk. In the view of the British, a clear directive down the line could be helpful. The Minister undertook to discuss the matter with the Taoiseach. He added that internment in the South is, of course, not politically possible.

Sir Alec then asked if there are still some people in the South who sympathise with the IRA. The Minister told him that this is definitely the case, and the fact that this sympathy exists operates to inhibit the Courts. If the Taoiseach were in a position to see to his own satisfaction that the initiative is moving to a final solution, then he could give a strong lead. Unless he is in a position to give this lead, people will begin to wonder whether the present exercise is merely a way of calming the gunmen.

Sir Alec said that, as a first step, the Westminster Government wants to see an end to killings. Mr Whitelaw would, no doubt, be explaining later to the Minister what he is trying to do to bring the people in the North

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together <sup>to consider</sup> ~~and to make progress about~~ the future of Northern Ireland. The Minister repeated that, if the Taoiseach is to give an effective lead, he will have to be able to say that he sees the solution of a United Ireland at the end of the road. The initiative represents the first big step. It is, however, essential that the Taoiseach should know generally the view of the Government here as to how it sees the situation evolving. He could not co-operate towards a restoration of the position which previously existed.

Sir Alec questioned whether he could give the type of indication sought while violence continues. The Minister replied that the one way to put down violence is to remove sympathy for it. Consequently, it was highly important that the Taoiseach should give a lead but this would be difficult unless he could clearly see the way ahead.

Sir Alec said that it was a big step to abolish the Government of Northern Ireland. The next political move must be to try and work out a pattern for the future which will be broadly acceptable. It must be acceptable to the minority as well as to the majority. Real progress on this can hardly be made while violence continues. There has been no let-up on violence since the initiative. While there is evidence of growing goodwill among the minority it is nevertheless vague. The IRA still have sympathy from the minority but it may be breaking up.

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The Minister said that, in the process of this break-up, the Taoiseach is seeking for the role which he could best play. Sir Alec enquired what more the British could do to wean the minority away from the gunmen. The Minister said he felt that some of those still interned might, if released, be able to exert an influence for peace. Sir Alec said that a considerable number of internees have already been let out. This has reduced sympathy for the gunmen but it has not resulted in a lessening of violence.

The Minister said that what is needed now is assurance to the minority that there is no further need for the gunmen and that important political developments leading to a United Ireland are on the way. If this could be made clear, the Taoiseach could give a valuable lead. He could act strongly.

Sir Alec said he understood the Minister to be saying that Mr Whitelaw should indicate that violence is pointless as there is a far-reaching political move in operation. Mr McCann said this is the time to do things before the situation crystallizes. The Minister said that the important thing now is to make clear that violence has no purpose. Some Protestants in the North would like the Dublin Government to undertake certain Constitutional changes and he informed Sir Alec of the setting up of an Inter-Party Committee on the Constitution.

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Sir Alec then enquired how far it is necessary to spell out how things are going and the Minister replied that the Taoiseach would, at least, have to be able to say that an Ireland united in independence and in peace is now in the offing. He could not say this unless he believed it to be true. Sir Alec asked if the Minister wanted the Taoiseach to be able to say that a United Ireland is around the corner. The Minister replied that an indication by Britain that it would be in the interest of both countries to have a United Ireland could greatly strengthen the Taoiseach in the lead he could take at this time. Mr McCann intervened to say that, if the Unionists in the North were to see their position of privilege gone, their attitude towards joining a United Ireland could rapidly change.

The Minister pointed out that the purpose of the creation of Northern Ireland was to give a special position of privilege to the majority there.

Sir Alec remarked that this position of privilege has, of course, now gone with the abolition of Stormont. He believed it would take a long time to convince the majority that their destiny lay with a United Ireland. The Minister mentioned that the majority in the North never voted for union with Britain. What they actually voted for was their position of privilege.

Sir Alec asked the Minister to what extent he thought the IRA are anarchists. The Minister replied that

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he believed that many of the young men concerned with violence would in the proper political atmosphere be only too ready to go back to their jobs. There are some, however, who will continue to justify their activities as long as Britain is seen to be holding part of Ireland. Some of the courts in the South are undoubtedly influenced by British occupation.

Mr McCann intervened to say that the North is costing Britain millions of pounds. Its existence is causing the loss of soldiers' lives and is adversely affecting relations between Britain and Ireland. Now that we are both about to enter Europe, why not give every encouragement to the majority in the North to change their minds about a United Ireland. Sir Alec replied that to convince them could take a hell of a long time. There are economic as well as political reasons why they don't want a United Ireland. Furthermore, the IRA is an obstacle to their changing their minds.

The Minister then said that it would presumably be a little difficult for Sir Alec or Mr Whitelaw to come to Dublin at this stage. Ministerial talks in London could continue until the atmosphere changes. He hoped the time was now past when following meetings, such as the present one, there would be indications to the press that he (the Minister) was given a dressing down because of IRA activity or some other reason. There is now no Mr Faulkner to be soothed. Sir Alec readily agreed that it would be wrong to give any impression of recrimination. He himself had been

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keeping in the background of late on the Northern question. He would, however, like the opportunity for exchanges of views with the Minister from time to time. The meeting of the Ten in Luxembourg at the end of May could provide a useful opportunity for them to have a further talk.

Finally, the Minister told Sir Alec that he hoped that, in the context of a broad speech shortly, the Taoiseach could express his own conviction that the initiative will lead to the eventual political solution. Sir Alec offered no objection. This concluded the discussion.

D.O.S.  
28/4/72