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Title: Report of a meeting attended by members of staff from the Department of the Taoiseach, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Justice, and Department of Defence, to discuss arrangements for a visit of the British Prime Minister, Edward Heath, to Ireland, on 17 September 1973.

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Visit of Mr. Edward Heath, British Premier,
to Ireland - 17 September 1973.

A meeting to discuss the above matter was held in this Department on 7 September, 1973. An Rúnai presided and the following were also present:

Department of An Taoiseach

Mr. D O'Sullivan Secretary
Mr. R. Stokes.

Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. H. McCann, Secretary
Mr. B. Nolan

Department of Justice

Mr. A. Ward Secretary
Mr. P. Colwell

Commissioner P. Malone Gárda Síochána
Assistant Commissioner E.P. Garvey
Gárda Síochána
Chief Superintendent L. Wren Gárda
Síochána.

Department of Defence

Mr. M.P. Healy
Mr. P. Ó hEadhra

Major General T. Ó Cearbhaill
Chief of Staff
Colonel E. Shortall, Asst Chief
of Staff
Colonel P. Dempsey, Director,
Plans and Operations.

At the outset An Rúnai explained that the meeting had been arranged on the initiative of the Minister for Defence following consultations with the Taoiseach and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice. The purpose was to afford a means of co-ordinating the measures to be taken by the different Departments concerned, by the Army and the Gardaí and by any other official agencies who would have a part to play in connection with the British Premier's visit. An Rúnai hoped that the meeting would also serve to disseminate such information about the details of the visit as it would be necessary for the different parties to have in order that they could perfect their arrangements.

An Rúnai stressed that each Department and agency would, of course, remain responsible for its own plans and actions and, while the initial meeting was being held under the auspices of the Department of Defence, this did not mean that the Department of Defence had overall responsibility for the arrangements for the visit. An Rúnai himself thought that that role could more appropriately have been taken by the Taoiseach's Department or the Department of Foreign Affairs and accordingly he had been somewhat reluctant to act as the convener of the meeting. However, it had been essential to start making arrangements without delay and he had therefore convened it. He thanked all present for their immediate and high level response.

Mr. McCann indicated that Mr. Heath's visit would be very much a "working" one. It was envisaged that he would fly to this country on the morning of 17 September, 1973, attend the meeting, have a meal, perhaps give a Press conference and fly back to Britain. There would probably be a total of about six people in all at the meeting. Security would be a paramount consideration in the selection of the venue and accordingly a city centre venue in Dublin was not considered appropriate as it would involve driving through the City. Mr. McCann understood that the use of helicopters would not be acceptable. He thought that Baldonnell Aerodrome might be suitable as a place to land and as a venue for the conference.

The Chief of Staff indicated that the runways at Baldonnell (which is used as an alternative to Dublin Airport) are long enough for the landing and take-off of any aircraft likely to be used by Mr. Heath. While the runways have lights, the navigational aids at Baldonnell are minimal so that weather conditions there could prevent its use for landing and take-off. If, therefore, Baldonnell were to be decided upon as the venue for the meeting,

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weather conditions on the day of the meeting might render it necessary for Mr. Heath's aircraft to land elsewhere e.g. at Dublin Airport. He could be taken by helicopter or by road to and from the conference venue. In this connection the Chief of Staff considered that a helicopter would be much better than a car from the security point of view.

Mr. O'Sullivan thought that the only objection to the use of helicopters was the possibility of delay and loss of time. Mr. McCann felt that the use of helicopters was generally frowned upon but he would check on the position. The Chief of Staff mentioned that the helicopters of the Air Corps are noisy but ear-pads can be made available.

The Chief of Staff indicated that Baldonnell Aerodrome is "wide open" from the security point of view and a very large number of troops would be needed to seal it off. He had first felt that McKee Barracks would be a much better venue from the security point of view but because of its location in the city and the possibility that a large and vociferous crowd could hold a demonstration in Blackhorse Avenue he now considered that, on balance, Baldonnell Aerodrome would be better. It would be necessary to isolate the aerodrome for some days in advance of the meeting.

The Chief of Staff indicated that accommodation for the meeting could be provided at the Officers' Mess at Baldonnell. An Rúnai stated that it would be the responsibility of the Taoiseach's Department to see the building and facilities and decide as to their suitability.

Mr. Nolan indicated that, apart from the conference room itself, there should be two separate nearby rooms, one for each delegation, for consultation purposes. The Chief of Staff stated that such rooms are available at Baldonnell.

The Chief of Staff also indicated that a suitable meal could be provided by the Mess at Baldonnell. Mr. McCann stated that his Department would advise as to menu, drinks etc.

Mr. Nolan stated that it would be necessary to have telex facilities and adequate telephones and operators provided. A few "scrambler" lines would be desirable. The Chief of Staff stated that the Department of Posts and Telegraphs would have to provide such facilities. Mr. McCann indicated that his Department would ascertain what precise facilities would be required. His Department would provide any secretarial assistance (e.g. confidential shorthand typist) and any furniture or carpets that might be required.

Mr. McCann stated that Army saloons would be acceptable for use between the aircraft and the Mess, with perhaps, a limousine for Mr. Heath. The Commissioner, Garda Síochána, stated that a Garda Síochána Mercedes could be provided for the British Premier.

Mr. O'Sullivan stated that Mr. Ó Conghaile Director, Government Information Services, expected big Press demands in connection with Mr. Heath's visit. The Chief of Staff indicated that the bigger the Press coverage the greater would be the security problem at Baldonnell. Mr. O'Sullivan stated that while the number of photographers could be limited, the number of reporters could not be similarly restricted. The Government Information Services would take full responsibility for ensuring that the Press complied fully with security requirements. If the meeting took place in Baldonnell, Mr. Ó Conghaile would contact the Director of Intelligence as to these requirements.

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Mr. McCann felt that one of the hangars at Baldonnel might be a suitable place in which to hold a Press conference. It would be necessary to provide refreshments (e.g. drinks and sandwiches) for the Pressmen. The Chief of Staff indicated that such refreshments could be provided by the Mess.

Mr. Nolan felt that it would be a good idea to establish a Press centre away from Baldonnel (e.g. at the Green Isle Hotel) where facilities could be provided for the reporters to write their stories. They could be driven from there to the Press conference and returned to it afterwards. It could be made clear that any reporter who came to Baldonnel on his own would be refused admittance. Mr. Mac Conghaile would decide what telephone etc. facilities should be provided for the Press.

The Commissioner indicated that the Gardaí would be responsible for security outside Baldonnel Camp. They would have full responsibility for the road which would be used in travelling between the aircraft and the Mess, keeping traffic moving on it and closing it at the appropriate times. Arrangements for a Garda Síochána presence within the Camp would be worked out in consultation with the military authorities.

It was agreed that, even if it were decided that Baldonnel should be the venue for the meeting, some preparations should be made also to hold the meeting in McKee Barracks which would serve as a useful "decoy" from the security point of view and also as a genuine alternative venue should such prove necessary for any reason.

It was arranged that the accommodation and facilities at Baldonnel would be inspected on the morning of Tuesday 11 September, 1973 (Mr. Nolan and Mr. Stokes to represent their Departments) and that a further meeting would be held in this Department at 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday 12 September, 1973.