

FAIT briefing file M

FROM: LINDA MELDRUM
Security Policy & Operations Division 1
25 August 1995

Mr. Carson..

Mr. [unclear]

a file s. 29/8..

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Marsh - B
Mr Corbett, CCRU - B
Ms McGimpsey - B

s. 29/8..

PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B

SIR JOHN WHEELER'S MEETING WITH MR SEAMUS MCKENDRY (FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED) - WEDNESDAY 30 AUGUST 1995

Sir John Wheeler is to meet Mr Seamus McKendry as a result of the latter's letter to the Prime Minister which sought a meeting. A copy of the draft correspondence is enclosed at Annex A. John Steele will attend the meeting along with the Minister. Seamus McKendry was inspired to set up 'Families of the Disappeared' by the continued grief suffered by his wife Helen following the disappearance of her mother Jean McConville in 1972. In preparing this briefing I have spoken both to Seamus McKendry and to Henry Robinson from FAIT. Henry Robinson has encouraged the 'Families of the Disappeared' to start their public campaign and indeed he allows them to use the FAIT office facilities.

2. Seamus McKendry expects to bring with him to the meeting Mrs Margaret McKinney and Mrs Mary McClory, both of whom had their sons abducted in 1978. The fourth member of the party is a sociology student, John Manley currently on placement from University.

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Background

3. Over the last 25 years a number of people have disappeared without trace with media reports suggesting that anything between a dozen to 20 may have been interrogated and tortured by terrorist groups before being murdered. While most allegations refer to the IRA, Loyalist abductions and murders cannot be ruled out, but the police have little information to suggest that the latter have been a significant factor. 'Families of the Disappeared' and FAIT say they know of 14 people who were abducted by the IRA and murdered.

Media Attention

4. The 'Sunday Times' and 'Sunday Life' newspapers of 18 June contained allegations that bodies have been buried in the Black Mountain area of Belfast - this is currently being investigated by police. Coverage sympathetic to the families has been widespread in the 'Irish News' and 'Belfast Telegraph'. There has been a complete UTV 'Counterpoint' programme on this subject. President Clinton and Monsignor Faul have also called for action.

The Sinn Fein Response

5. The families have met Gerry Adams on several occasions. He claimed that he had launched an enquiry and it would seem that when no movement happened the families decided to go public in their campaign, encouraged and supported by Henry Robinson. Martin McGuinness is reported as saying that this is an issue that must be resolved. The need for action to locate and return the bodies has also been driven home during exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein but there is no sign of any move by the terrorist organisations to respond in any substantive way.

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RUC Investigation

6. A team of officers from the Serious Crime Squad has been set up and they are currently concentrating their investigations on 9 reported cases of missing persons. Investigations include the cases of Jean McConville abducted from her Divis Flats home in 1972, Brendan Megaw taken from his Twinbrook home in 1988 and two friends Brian McKinney and John McClory, abducted on the same day in 1978 while separately making their way to work. Information has been received from the victims families and other sources and this is being pursued by the RUC.

Agenda of Families of the Disappeared

7. 'Families of the Disappeared' claim to operate to a simple agenda of having the bodies of their loved ones back for burial and to allow the families to mourn. From my telephone conversation with Seamus McKendry, they do not appear to have any wider agenda or interests.

Individual Cases

8. Jean McConville was abducted in 1972. A Protestant who had converted to Catholicism on her marriage, she and her husband had been driven out of East Belfast and had moved to the West of the City. Her family believe that their mother was taken from her Divis home and murdered because she was seen as a Protestant living in a nationalist area and who had given comfort to a British Soldier shot by the IRA.

9. Jean was dragged from her home by a group of 12 IRA members including 4 women. The 8 children (whose father had died 10 months earlier) were so frightened that they hid under the bed. They begged for food to survive and it was only 6 weeks later that the Social Services discovered their plight. The family was split up when taken into care. The eldest child was mentally handicapped and
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the youngest were 6 year old twins. One of the children, Helen, who was 15 at the time is now married to Seamus McKendry.

10. Brian McKinney and John McClory were abducted on the same day in 1978. Brian was 22 and John 18 at the time. It was thought that they had been involved in a robbery some time before but that both had returned their 'cut' of the money. Both were abducted separately, on the way to work and it is believed they were taken to a flat in Lenadoon and interrogated.

11. The families believe that John jumped through the window and was shot in the back. Brian had witnessed this and he was also taken out and shot. They are thought to have both been buried at the Glen Colin housing estate, no more than 400 yards from their parent's homes.

Minister's Approach

12. The Minister will wish to use this meeting as an opportunity to listen sympathetically to the tragic stories of the families of the disappeared and to reassure them (a) that the Government is sympathetic to their plight and (b) that the police will investigate all evidence and leads thoroughly.

Lines to take:

- To lose your loved ones was a tragedy. To have this compounded by the inability to mourn them properly and to give them a decent burial is callous in the extreme. Express my deepest sympathy to yourselves and to the others in your position.

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- with the approach of the first anniversary of the IRA ceasefire, time is long overdue for terrorists to release details concerning the whereabouts of the bodies of the disappeared so that their families can give them a proper burial. This point has been driven home during exploratory dialogue. The Government will continue to exert pressure both publicly and privately.
- The RUC are actively investigating the disappearance of these people and a special team in the Serious Crime Squad has been set up to persue this end.
- Black Mountain allegation in Sunday Times and Sunday Life newspapers of 18 June - Allegations that bodies of terrorist victims are buried in the Black Mountain in Belfast are currently being investigated by the police.

(signed)

LINDA MELDRUM
EXT 27035

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FROM: DIANNE PHILLIPS
Security Policy and Operations Division 1
7 July 1995

cc Mr Legge - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Marsh - B
Ms McGimpsey

1. Mr Maitland [AM 7/7]
2. PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L)
2. PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

FAMILIES OF THE DISAPPEARED (PML/59/95)

Edward Oakden, PS/Prime Minister has written to the Secretary of State's office enclosing a letter to the Prime Minister from the co-ordinator of 'Families of the Disappeared' asking for a meeting with the Prime Minister and for pressure to be put upon Sinn Fein to release the bodies of those terrorist victims who have never been found.

2. This matter continues to attract a great deal of media attention, with reports suggesting that a dozen - even up to 20 - may have been interrogated and tortured by the IRA before being shot. There have also been a number of public pleas including that of President Bill Clinton to Sinn Fein/IRA to accede to this request. As a result of these approaches and the campaign from the "Belfast Telegraph" on the issue, Sinn Fein is reported to have acknowledged the aims and validity of the campaign by the Families of the Disappeared but so far has failed to provide any significant information. The allegations in the "Sunday Times" and "Sunday Life" newspapers of 18 June that the bodies of terrorist victims are buried in the Black Mountain in Belfast are currently being investigated by police.

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3. I attach a draft reply and a covering note to No 10 which, whilst not accepting a meeting with the Prime Minister, offers a discussion with the Security Minister. This would be a sensitive response, and it will help maintain pressure on Sinn Fein and PIRA.

(Signed)

DIANNE PHILLIPS

Ext 27036

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DRAFT REPLY TO PS/PRIME MINISTER FOR SIGNATURE BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Edward Oakden Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

Thank you for your letter of 23 June 1995 enclosing a letter received by the Prime Minister from the co-ordinator of Families of the Disappeared seeking a meeting with the Prime Minister and calling for pressure to be put upon Sinn Fein to release the bodies of terrorist victims who have never been found.

This matter continues to attract a great deal of media attention which has obviously stimulated Mr McKendry, inspired by the continued grief of his wife Helen, the daughter of Jean McConville who disappeared in 1972, to set up Families of the Disappeared.

The return to their families of the remains of those abducted and killed by terrorists has been raised specifically during Exploratory Dialogue, and Mr Major has publicly given support to their cause. A meeting with the Prime Minister may however be inappropriate but given the importance of putting pressure on the PIRA it would be useful to offer a meeting with the Security Minister. I attach a draft reply suggesting this.

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DRAFT REPLY FOR SIGNATURE BY PS/PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter of 16 June 1995 to the Prime Minister on behalf of Families of the Disappeared. You sought a meeting with the Prime Minister and asked calling for pressure to be put upon Sinn Fein to release the bodies of terrorist victims who have never been found.

The Prime Minister fully supports the return to their families of the remains of those abducted and killed by terrorists. He believes it is long overdue for those who are aware of the whereabouts of the bodies of missing persons to release details so that relatives can give their loved ones a decent and dignified burial.

The Prime Minister has asked me to assure you that in addition to the efforts of your organisation, the media, and others both in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, Governmental pressure has been directed at Sinn Fein and to confirm that this issue has been raised specifically during Exploratory Dialogue. Indeed, Mr Major, who fully supports your campaign, has himself publicly called on Sinn Fein to end the suffering of the families. He well remembers meeting Mrs McKinney on his visit to NI in May.

Due to his busy schedule at present, the Prime Minister is unable to meet with representatives from your organisation, but will certainly bear your request in mind for future visits. He suggests however that a meeting might be arranged with the Minister at the Northern Ireland Office responsible for security, Sir John Wheeler. If you make contact with Sir John's office in Belfast (telephone 527000) I am sure a suitable arrangement can be made.

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Background Note

Over the 25 years of the 'Troubles' a number of men and women disappeared without trace. Media reports suggest that a dozen - even up to 20 - may have been interrogated and tortured by the IRA before being shot - the best known of these cases are undoubtedly that of Captain Robert Nairac, believed murdered in 1977 and Jean McConville who disappeared in 1972. Her family believe that their mother was murdered by the IRA because she was a Protestant living in the nationalist Divis area of West Belfast who had given comfort to a British soldier shot by the IRA. The RUC and the Garda investigate such cases and a number of people have been convicted of offences connected with these incidents. Whilst most allegations refer to the IRA, loyalist abductions and murders cannot be ruled out: the police have very little information on this whole subject. We have raised the issue of the return of the remains of those abducted with Sinn Fein during exploratory dialogue.

The media campaign, stimulated by the Belfast Telegraph has been extensive, and included a complete UTV Counterpoint programme. This obviously stimulated Mr McKendry to set up 'Families of the Disappeared' inspired by the continued grief of his wife Helen who is the daughter of Jean McConville. Mr McKendry has now written to the Prime Minister asking for a meeting.

The Irish Times quotes that the Sinn Fein president Mr Gerry Adams, has met some of the affected Belfast families a number of times and promised to do what he can to have the bodies located. Mr Martin McGuinness has also stated that it is an issue that must be resolved. Sinn Fein has come under pressure, both in Ireland and internationally, to help to locate the bodies. During the recent Washington investment conference President Bill Clinton urged that action be taken on the disappeared, Mr McKendry said that the IRA had also contacted him and promised to take some action to have the bodies located, "but nothing has happened, and I think they were just giving us the run-around."

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