



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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- There is an essential role for the British Government to play if these strains are to be contained and the peace secured. It must demonstrate on a continuing basis that it is willing to make fundamental policy adjustments in response to the new situation;
- However, the pace of the British response to the cessations of violence has been inadequate - "too little and usually too late";
- A perception in the nationalist community that the British Government is dilatory and begrudging in its response to the ceasefire is fuelling resentment and making it more difficult, therefore, to "bed down" the peace.

In our conversation on Saturday night, Flanagan renewed his criticism of the caution displayed by the British Government and the security forces. The Sinn Fein leadership have to be able to show their supporters some concrete dividends from the ceasefire. The delaying tactics favoured in relation to many key decisions, as well as the reluctance to offer Sinn Fein any political rewards for the IRA ceasefire, could eventually lead to a "destabilization" of the situation.

When I put it to Flanagan that he should be making these points (with which we would strongly agree) to the Secretary of State, his own Chief Constable and the GOC, he replied that he has been but that there are "a lot of deaf ears around".

He went on to suggest that matters could eventually degenerate to the point where there might be a partial resumption of IRA violence - but on the British mainland rather than in Northern Ireland. The view of the "man on the street" in Northern Ireland, he suggested, might well be that the British Government had brought this on itself because of the inadequacy of its response to the ceasefires.

### Decommissioning

- Flanagan commented that the British Government has "foolishly impaled itself on a hook" with its three Washington conditions. There was never any hope of the paramilitaries agreeing to hand over even a small quantity of arms in advance of political negotiations. This holds true, in Flanagan's view, for the Loyalist paramilitaries as much as the IRA.
- He criticised the Secretary of State for "sticking blindly" to the Washington Three condition in a recent Panorama programme in which he himself also participated.
- Most "ordinary people" in Northern Ireland, he suggested, would be willing to accept the unconditional admission of Sinn Fein to talks as a price worth paying for

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a ceasefire which is now into its fifteenth month. They would be willing to see the arms issue taken care of in the course of those talks.

- In any event, what worries the RUC most of all is not the current stocks of guns or ammunition but the IRA's "improvisational capacity". The ability to develop and manufacture new types of explosives and weaponry is of much greater concern than the materiel currently hidden in IRA caches. The Government's insistence on the handover of existing arms is geared more to symbolism and Unionist sensitivities than to the practical needs of the situation. NB.
- Flanagan suspects that the British Government's continuing hard line on decommissioning may result from an overly complacent view of the mood within the Republican movement in the wake of the relatively uncontentious conference which Sinn Fein held in Dublin recently.
- He does not, however, exempt Sinn Fein from the need to make confidence-building gestures of its own. Albert Reynolds began what Flanagan considers to be an important "process of re-education" by making clear that he does not expect to see Irish unity in his lifetime. Sinn Fein's fairly relaxed reaction to this and similar statements has also been helpful. Unionists need every possible reassurance about nationalists' view of Irish unity and their commitment to the consent principle.

Rosemount Tower

- Flanagan said that, at his meeting with Derry City Council today, the Chief Constable would announce the complete dismantling of the Rosemount Tower.
- We have sent to you a note received from the British side this afternoon which confirms this information.
- Flanagan was critical of the British Government for its slowness in reaching this decision, for which he has been arguing internally for some time. When I observed that the Secretary of State would claim to be dependent at all times on the advice of the Chief Constable in such matters, he extended his criticism to include the Chief Constable also.
- A decision a year ago to remove the Tower, he suggested, would have had a real impact on local opinion at a sensitive stage in the peace process. Coming at this late stage, however, its impact has been substantially vitiated. I entirely agreed and regretted that Flanagan's point of view had not prevailed earlier.
- Flanagan's recommendation some months ago was that the upper part of the tower might be removed and left on the ground alongside the lower part (for possible future reattachment in the light of developments). In the event, the Chief Constable

went for complete dismantling of the Tower. The reason, Flanagan told me in confidence, is that the latter's surveillance capacity can be transferred to a nearby mast carrying cameras with high-powered lens (which is much less obtrusive than the present Tower). You will note from the British note that it is intended to build a new mast on the site to replace the present one; we are seeking clarification of what exactly is involved in this respect.

- I asked Flanagan why, if it is possible in Derry to achieve the requisite degree of surveillance by less obtrusive methods, the security installations in South Armagh cannot also be dispensed with on the same basis. He replied with the comment that "there are things we can do in Derry which we cannot do in South Armagh". South Armagh is logistically far more difficult and the discretion which might be available elsewhere is not available there for the time being.
- He noted that the IRA is maintaining its organization and command structure intact. While there are, of course, significant advantages for both Governments in an intact command structure which can ensure discipline and strict observance of the ceasefire, the continued existence of an "organized enemy" will rule out for the foreseeable future any lowering of defences in South Armagh.

Withdrawal of a further Army battalion

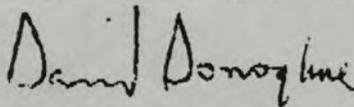
- Flanagan confirmed that the roulement battalion in East Tyrone will be the next to be withdrawn and that this should happen over the next few weeks.
- Again, he commented that the public relations gains which could be made in this area have been dissipated by an unduly cautious approach. For maximum impact, the decisions to remove these roulement battalions should have been taken months ago. Flanagan anticipated that little attention would be paid at this stage to the withdrawal of Army units.
- A practical difficulty is that there is no surplus barracks accommodation in Britain to absorb the hundreds of soldiers involved. It has been difficult enough to find space for the battalions transferred hitherto (last April and last week's decision). The East Tyrone battalion will stretch capacity even further.
- A related question is the extent to which transferred battalions can remain in any real sense "on stand-by" in Britain. It would not be practical to have large numbers of soldiers permanently on stand-by at British bases, available for recall to Northern Ireland within five or seven days. What is more likely, Flanagan suggested, is that at any given time one of the battalions would be on stand-by on this basis but the others would be placed on a more relaxed footing.

- I observed that an arrangement of this kind would have some presentational advantages and Flanagan agreed. He warned, however, that there are those in the military establishment who will argue that it is foolhardy to transfer battalions out of Northern Ireland unless they are matched in Britain by comparable numbers available to return at short notice. They may well try to prevent further withdrawals taking place unless "stand-by" replacements can be ensured.
- They will also be able to play in aid the argument that there can be no withdrawals from sensitive areas for as long as the IRA's organization remains intact.

#### Remission of sentence legislation

- Flanagan expects the Secretary of State to bring forward the enabling Statutory Instrument without delay. The new arrangements must be in place in advance of Christmas, as they have a bearing on the decisions to be taken on Christmas parole arrangements, and his understanding is that that is the Secretary of State's intention.
- He was critical of the Secretary of State, however, for not introducing this legislation months ago "when it might have done some good". Specifically, if the changes had been introduced prior to the Clegg decision, much of the heat would have been taken out of the latter issue.
- Everything, Flanagan remarked, lies "in the timing". To illustrate this point, he said that he recently received two envelopes in the post. Opening one, he found that it contained an unwanted bill for a certain amount. Opening another, he found that it contained an unexpected tax rebate involving an identical amount. The combination of both pieces of news provided peace of mind and that approach, he suggested, was how the British Government might have saved itself a lot of trouble over the Clegg case.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue  
Joint Secretary