

STATE PAPERS Belfast and Dublin



This year's release of previous confidential state files from Stormont and the Northern Ireland Office covers 1988. Reporting on the Belfast files for The Irish News, on the second day of coverage, is political historian **Dr Éamon Phoenix** with additional reporting from Press Association

Irish army feared calls for troops to cross border

ARMY chiefs feared the British and nationalists would call for Irish troops to be sent over the border in response to near civil war in Northern Ireland, state papers have revealed.

While the idea would never have got past the cabinet table, a secret aide memoire compiled for ministers on November 7 1985 – the week before the Anglo Irish Agreement was signed – warned of the scenarios.

In documents released from the Taoiseach's office under the 30-year rule, advisers said the more likely reaction to the agreement would be harsh and confrontational. They contemplated anything up to "intercommunal fighting".

But the idea of a cross-border mission was rejected by defence chiefs because they said the army's size and equipment was "hopelessly inadequate".

They also thought an assignment into Northern Ireland would not have a clear military objective while Irish soldiers could only serve overseas with the United Nations. The memoire warned: "Depending on its scale and intensity could lead to pressure for intervention by the Defence Forces either by request from beleaguered Nationalist communities or by request from the British government if it thought its forces were unable to cope or if it wished to involve the Republic for political reasons [prelude to withdrawal or share the responsibility for what would by then be seen as a failed initiative]."

"Depending on the scale of the fighting there could also be political pressure in the Republic for intervention on the basis of 'we cannot stand idly by'".

The defence minister at the time, Paddy Cooney, had got the advice after summoning the Council of Defence – made up of the chief of staff, adjutant general, quartermaster general, a junior minister and his department secretary – on August 28 1985. He rejected any possibility of Irish soldiers going north without a reform of the law. "It is valid to guess that the opposition will be mild, developing into a grudging acceptance of, or at least acquiescence to, the new regime," the notes stated.

"It is equally valid and arguably more realistic to guess that the opposition will be harsh and confrontational."

This ranged from peaceful protest to civil disobedience, industrial action, marches which would need policing, riots and inter-communal fighting, advisers said.



■ **'DAMAGE TO TRUST AND CONFIDENCE':** Justice minister Gerry Collins asked the secretary of state 'whether there was really no hope of clemency' in the decision to reject the appeal of the Birmingham Six adding that the case 'smacked of a mighty cover-up'

Dublin anger over Stalker and Birmingham Six appeal

THE deep anger of the Haughey government at the rejection of the appeal of the Birmingham Six is disclosed in declassified files from 1988 released in Belfast.

Papers also concern the decision of the British attorney general not to prosecute RUC officers involved in an alleged shoot-to-kill policy.

The Irish government's concerns were relayed to British ministers at two special meetings in Belfast and London in February 1988 by justice minister Gerry Collins and energy minister Ray Burke, standing in for an ill Brian Lenihan.

At their first meeting at Stormont Castle, Mr Collins said the Anglo-Irish Agreement's twin aims – bringing peace and stability by ending the alienation of the minority community and cooperation between the two governments in dealing with terrorism – had received a serious setback.

Among the issues which caused Dublin concern were the shoot-to-kill policy, the seriousness of which it was impossible to exaggerate; a cover-up involving senior RUC officers; a covert Special Branch operation in Irish jurisdiction; and the disturbing

circumstances of the removal of [John] Stalker from the Stalker Inquiry.

Stalker, deputy chief constable of Greater Manchester, was replaced as officer in charge of the investigation into an alleged RUC shoot-to-kill policy in north Armagh in 1982 by Colin Sampson, Chief Constable of West Yorkshire in June 1986.

On February 5 1988, Stalker claimed he was taken off the inquiry because his investigation showed that trained RUC squads had shot dead six unarmed republicans and then embarked on a cover-up.

Mr Collins told the NI secretary Tom King that confidence in the RUC had received a "devastating setback" as a result of recent events. [North-south security] co-operation would also suffer when it was known that the RUC was shielding officers strongly suspected of serious crime. The Garda would lose support if it was seen as closely associated with the RUC. The British government must put matters right.

In the Irish view, the Stalker-Sampson report should be published and all those against whom there was evidence of wrongdoing

should be prosecuted.

In addition, the decision of the Court of Appeal in the Birmingham Six case had serious consequences for confidence in the administration of justice. The prisoners should be released.

This was one of the most serious and emotional issues in Mr Collins's public life and its impact in Ireland could not be over-emphasised.

In response, the secretary of state said he appreciated both the strength of feeling and the calm way in which the points had been expressed.

"He most regretted that the events of 1982 cast a cloud over the moderate RUC."

However, in considering whether or not a prosecution was warranted in the Stalker-Sampson cases, the attorney general Sir Patrick Mayhew had been statutorily bound to consider the public interest.

Responding, Mr Collins made it clear that the Irish government still wanted prosecutions, not just disciplinary proceedings. This was not out of vindictiveness – "the whole question of confidence was involved".

At the resumed meeting in Lon-

don on February 10 1988, the two issues were again considered.

The NI secretary told the Irish ministers that "in strict confidence, Mr Stalker had done a lot of good work".

"Some of the things which he was now saying in public were helpful, in particular his endorsement of the view that there had been no official shoot-to-kill policy and that it would be wrong to mount further prosecutions at this stage. However, the speculation that there had been some form of cabinet plot to remove him from the inquiry was absolute rubbish."

Turning to the dismissal of the Birmingham Six appeal, Mr Collins asked the secretary of state "whether there was really no hope of clemency". The case "smacked of a mighty cover-up".

However, the NI secretary said that three of the most eminent judges in the land had heard the case and there was "no question of his being able to reach a different and better conclusion".

Mr Collins said "he spoke in deep sorrow, not in anger" when he said that recent decisions "had done colossal damage to trust and confidence".



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