Moderation under Fire: the Arms Trial Crisis, the Lower Falls Road Curfew and Anglo-Irish Cooperation on Northern Ireland

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ABSTRACT

When the Northern Ireland Troubles began, Taoiseach Jack Lynch resolved to pursue a policy of non-violence and cooperation with the British government in order to facilitate reform in the North. Lynch's moderate program was rejected by elements within his own party and challenged by escalating violence in Northern Ireland. By the middle of 1970 the Arms Trial Crisis exposed the depths of opposition to Lynch from within the cabinet while the Lower Falls Road Curfew alienated Northern nationalists from the British Army. Despite these pressures Lynch firmly stood to his moderate stance. He skilfully placated the public opinion in Ireland that favoured a more belligerent stance toward Great Britain's policies in Northern Ireland, while avoiding any real damage to Anglo-Irish relations. Lynch also extracted some concessions from London by exploiting the possibility that he might be replaced by a much more militant government in Dublin unless his moderate policies showed some results.

INTRODUCTION

By the spring of 1970 Jack Lynch's Fianna Fáil government had been dealing with the growing crisis in Northern Ireland for almost a year. As had been the case from the very beginning of the Troubles in the summer of 1969, there were limited options for Dublin to pursue in order to influence events in the North. When violence in Northern Ireland exploded in August 1969, Dublin initially responded with provocative steps such as a military mobilisation and the deployment of army field hospitals on the border. In conjunction with these movements, Lynch's government made a high-profile attempt to involve the United Nations in a peacekeeping role in Northern Ireland. Ireland's minister for external affairs, Dr Patrick Hillery, travelled to New York to address the Security Council on 23 August. In a pre-arranged compromise made possible by diplomatic stagecraft, the Security Council heard from both Hillery and British representative Lord Caradon and then promptly adjourned without taking any action. Hillery returned to New York in September 1969 to raise

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the Northern Ireland issue in the General Assembly. A ploy similar to that used earlier by the Security Council allowed for a public airing of the positions of Ireland and the United Kingdom without formal action being taken. The major achievement for Lynch was that the UN initiatives demonstrated to Irish voters that his government was engaged in trying to end the crisis in Northern Ireland and had brought the issue before the world community.[1]

After the initial burst of very public and outwardly confrontational military and diplomatic activity, Lynch settled on a moderate policy of engagement with London to encourage the British government to force reforms on the Stormont government, while promoting the peaceful reunification of Ireland as the long-term solution for the crisis in Northern Ireland. This policy adhered to Dublin's traditional rejection of partition. The Irish government claimed that the unrest in Northern Ireland was clear evidence that partition was a failure. Reunification was presented by the Irish government as the only path to stability. However, Lynch unequivocally rejected the use of violence and stressed that reunification could only take place with the consent of the majority of the population of Northern Ireland. Lynch acknowledged that Dublin had its own work cut out for it, as it had to modify Irish laws to make sure that any all-Ireland state would appeal to at least some of the people who had traditionally been unionists. He admitted that this would be a slow and gradual process and that a united Ireland was not on the cards in the near future. In the short-run, Dublin recognised that the British government had a vital role to play in forcing Stormont to enact reforms that would placate Catholic demands for equal rights in Northern Ireland. Lynch meant to work with London to promote the needed reforms and make sure that the British would stand up to unionist extremists who rejected meaningful change in the North.[2]

While the Irish government had few other practical options for influencing events in Northern Ireland, Lynch's peaceful cooperation with the British government and rejection of militant republicanism was not universally accepted in Ireland, or even within his own party. In addition to being the cause of domestic political opposition, Dublin's moderation did not always seem to be fully appreciated by London. Events in the spring and summer of 1970, therefore, put a severe strain on the measured stance of Jack Lynch's government. Two specific incidents—the Arms Trial Crisis in the Republic and a controversial curfew and search for arms in the Catholic neighbourhood of the Lower Falls Road in Belfast by the British military—presented Lynch with major political and diplomatic challenges. The purpose of this article is to examine the impact that these events had on Anglo-Irish relations and on the commitment that the taoiseach had to his Northern Ireland policies.

THE ARMS TRIAL CRISIS AND ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS

The Arms Trial Crisis brought to the surface the tensions between Lynch's peaceful approach toward the Troubles and the more militant stance of hard-line elements in

[1]For more information on Dublin's initial reaction to the Troubles see: Michael Kennedy, "'This tragic and most intractable problem": the reaction of the Department of External Affairs to the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 12 (2001) 87–95; Ronan Fanning 'Playing it cool: the response of the British and Irish governments to the crisis in Northern Ireland', 1968–9', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 12 (2001) 57–85. For more information on Dublin's approach to the UN see: Daniel C. Williamson, 'Taking the Troubles across the Atlantic: Ireland's UN initiatives and Irish-US diplomatic relations in the early years of the conflict in Northern Ireland, 1969–72', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 18 (2007) 175–89.

[2]For a summary of Lynch's position on Northern Ireland at that time, see: National Archives of Ireland (hereafter cited as NAI), Department of the Taoiseach (hereafter cited as DT), 2001/6/517, 7 September 1970, 'Memorandum for the information of the government: policy in relation to Northern Ireland'.

the Fianna Fáil party. Within his own cabinet, Lynch faced opposition from Minister for Finance Charles Haughey, Minister for Agriculture Neil Blaney, and Minister for Local Government Kevin Boland.[3] According to the generally accepted narrative of events, the Arms Trial Crisis began in April 1970, when Irish police seized an illegal arms shipment into Dublin that was apparently bound for nationalists in Northern Ireland. The taoiseach initially accepted private assurances from Haughey and Blaney that they were not involved in the plot. However, as news of the arms seizure became publically known, Lynch took a dramatic step to distance himself from any charges that he was complicit in arms smuggling. On 6 May Lynch sacked Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney from the cabinet and quickly thereafter lost Kevin Boland, who resigned in solidarity with his fired colleagues. Haughey and Blaney were subsequently arrested and charged with illegal importation of arms. This open break in the ranks of Fianna Fáil caused a severe political crisis for Lynch's government.[4]

Scholars have increasingly questioned the validity of Lynch's stance that he had no knowledge of the plot to illegally import arms until late April 1970. In his book *The Arms Trial* (2000), Justin O'Brien claims that Lynch must have had some idea of what was going on in 1969.[5] In *The transformation of Ireland* (2004), Diarmaid Ferriter acknowledged the controversy surrounding the facts of the case. He concluded that the plot to purchase arms may not have been 'at variance with government policy' when it was set in motion in 1969, but asserts that the real problem was that Lynch did not have close control over his own cabinet.[6] Jack Lynch's biographer Dermot Keogh rejects specific claims that the taoiseach was informed about the plot in October 1969 but believes that the continued mysteries regarding the arms conspiracy need to be more fully investigated by historians.[7] Despite these lingering questions, there is no doubt that Lynch was wholly committed to a moderate, non-violent policy before the beginning of the public phase of the Arms Trial Crisis. It is also clear that it seemed for a time that Lynch would fall in the wake of the crisis. The outcome of the judicial process seemed to hand Lynch's enemies a victory, as the charges against Blaney were dropped on 2 July and Haughey was acquitted on 23 October. However, by the time of the acquittal, the party and the general public had rallied around Lynch and his peaceful stance on Northern Ireland.[8] While Lynch and his moderate policies survived, this outcome was by no means clear in the spring and summer of 1970.

The possibility that the Arms Trial Crisis would lead to the collapse of Jack Lynch's government was quickly recognised by London. In a meeting with George Thomson, chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in London on 6 May, Irish Ambassador Donal O'Sullivan warned that it was possible that Lynch might not survive, as his government's moderate policies were increasingly challenged by more extreme elements in Fianna Fáil and the general public in Ireland.[9] In a British cabinet meeting the next day, Thomson reported that the sacking of Blaney and Haughey had left Lynch's government 'badly shaken'. He speculated that now that the Fianna Fáil hardliners were out of the cabinet, Lynch would have even less control over that wing of the party. The result of this would be that the 'relatively moderate' policy that Dublin had taken, and which London approved of, would be in danger. Seeking to limit the damage to Lynch, Prime Minister Harold Wilson

[3]Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798–1998* (Malden, MA, 1999), 327–8.
[4]Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: the persistence of conflict* (New York, 2006), 175.
[5]Justin O'Brien, *The Arms Trial* (Dublin, 2000), xiv, 216.
[6]Diarmaid Ferriter, *The transformation of Ireland* (New York, 2004), 688–9.
[7]Dermot Keogh, *Jack Lynch: a biography* (Dublin, 2008), 219–20, 242.
[8]Jackson, *Ireland*, 328–29.
[9]British Public Record Office (hereafter cited as PRO), CJ 4/23 122658, 6 May 1970, record of luncheon at the Irish embassy.

stressed that any false rumours that the British government had put pressure on Dublin to remove Blaney and Haughey had to be clearly and publically denied.[10]

While the threat to Lynch was genuine, Dublin was not above playing upon British fears about the stability of Lynch's government to press its own agenda. Eamonn Gallagher from the Department of External Affairs told the British embassy in Dublin that reform in the North had failed and that Lynch's moderation was becoming a political liability. While Gallagher said that Dublin had no specific advice to offer regarding short-term British policy, the Irish believed that something had to be done about the deteriorating situation. Pointing out that Lynch had stood up to his own hard-line elements despite the political danger, Gallagher suggested that London now had to do the same with hard-line unionists. The British embassy reported that due, in part, to the Arms Trial Crisis, Dublin 'may continue to press the line that in order to preserve a Government in the South sympathetic to H.M.G.'s policies in the North, we will have to take account of their views'.[11] Later on in May, British Ambassador to Ireland John Peck went so far as to tell the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that the survival of Lynch was 'an absolute priority' for the security of Northern Ireland. However, Peck added the caveat that Lynch's fate could not be controlled by London but was rather in the hands of the Irish themselves.[12]

Indeed, London had to be careful not to further damage Lynch's standing in Ireland through ill-advised efforts to prop him up. When Irish Minister for External Affairs Patrick Hillery met with British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home in late June 1970, the two men agreed that, despite London's desire to help Lynch in his domestic political struggle, the best course of action for the British was to avoid publicly praising Lynch.[13] Kind words from the British government would hardly be of assistance to the taoiseach in his struggle against the more republican-minded elements of Fianna Fáil.

THE DIPLOMATIC RESPONSE TO THE LOWER FALLS ROAD CURFEW

With the Arms Trial Crisis still unresolved, events in Northern Ireland dealt Lynch's government another public relations blow and further challenged the wisdom of his Northern policy. The Lower Falls Road Curfew, or as it was known more viscerally within the Northern nationalist community, the 'rape of the Falls', began when a minor incident escalated into a major confrontation. On Friday, 3 July 1970 British soldiers, acting on an intelligence tip, searched a house on Balkan Street in the Falls Road and seized 19 illegal weapons that were presumably part of an Official IRA weapons cache. When rioters harassed the army detachment, Lt. Gen. Sir Ian Freeland, commander of British forces in Northern Ireland, ordered 3,000 troops, backed by helicopters and armoured cars, to conduct house-to-house searches of the entire Catholic neighbourhood of the Lower Falls Road, and declared a curfew of the area confining people to their homes. The searches were conducted with great brutality and destruction of property. There were heated exchanges between residents and the army and members of both the Official and Provisional wings of the IRA carried on a running gun battle with the troops. Rioters took to the streets harassing the soldiers and were met by CS gas. J. Bowyer Bell described the violence as a 'continuous moving riot'.[14]

[10]PRO, Cabinet minutes (hereafter cited as CAB) 128/45, 7 May 1970 CC (70), 21st conclusion.

[11]PRO, CJ 4/23 122658, 8 May 1970, David Blatherwick, British embassy, Dublin to Maureen McGlashen, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter cited as FCO).

[12]PRO, CJ 4/23 122658, 28 May 1970, Ambassador Peck, Dublin to FCO.

[13]PRO, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 33/1610 122676, 29 June 1970, Record of conversation between Douglas-Home and Hillery.

[14]J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: a generation of violence, 1967–1992* (New York, 1993), 178–9.

By the time the curfew ended on Sunday, 5 July, 5 civilians were dead and over 60 people had been wounded, including 15 soldiers. The army seized a total of 52 pistols, 35 rifles, 6 automatic weapons and 14 shotguns, in addition to ammunition and explosives. After the curfew was lifted, the army escorted two ministers from the Unionist government in Stormont through the area to view 'the pacified Falls,' an act that further enraged the nationalists of the area. The fact that in London the Labour Party's Harold Wilson had recently been replaced by the Conservative Party's Edward Heath at 10 Downing Street added fuel to nationalist fears that the British army was now acting as a wing of the Unionist establishment at Stormont.[15] The Lower Falls Road Curfew was a major event even by the standards of the increasingly troubled province. The curfew has repeatedly been described by scholars as the incident that did the most to alienate Northern nationalists from the British army, and as a major cause for the increase in support for the Provisional Irish Republican Army.[16]

Lynch's already shaky government had to take some kind of action to placate public outrage in Ireland in the wake of the events in the Lower Falls Road. With limited options available to him, the taoiseach instructed Patrick Hillery to pay an unannounced visit to the Lower Falls on 6 July. According to Lynch's report to the Dáil, the aim of the visit was to 'reduce tension in the area by demonstrating the Government's interest in the welfare of the people of the area and also to obtain confirmation, at first hand, of the information we had already received, and to ascertain the feelings of the people'.[17] While Hillery's visit surely demonstrated Dublin's interest in the North, sending the foreign minister on an informal inspection cannot credibly be seen as the best method of gathering intelligence on events in Belfast.

Although Hillery's trip was unannounced, he actively discussed and defended his visit with the press as soon as he returned. At a press conference held the same day as his brief tour of Belfast he reported, 'I was in the Falls Road and I met people there and saw what had happened…and talked to people who are not public representatives—those who survived the week-end'.[18] He said his 'impressions of the people were that they had a sudden, unexpected and to them quite unwarranted visitation from the British army and I am afraid that they don't regard the British army any longer their friends and protectors'. When asked if his visit had any practical impact, Dr Hillery replied, 'It is hard to answer that. We want to demonstrate to the people there that they are not isolated'. When questioned about any possible embarrassment he might feel on an upcoming official visit to London due to the unannounced nature of his trip to Belfast he replied, 'Well, it would be an awful thing if we had to regard a visit by me to Northern Ireland as something to be embarrassed about. After all, they come to the [Dublin] Horse Show and we say nothing'. He added that he was unconcerned about any bruised feelings among unionists as they had done nothing effective to stop the violence in Northern Ireland, nor did the nationalists of the North see any sign of reform from Stormont.[19]

[15]Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA: a history* (Niwot, Colorado, 1994), 262; Bowyer Bell, *Irish Troubles*, 178–9; Thomas Hennessey, *A history of Northern Ireland: 1920–1996* (Dublin, 1997), 174–5.

[16]Hennessey, *A history of Ireland*, 175; Bowyer Bell, *Irish Troubles*, 179; Coogan, *The IRA,* 262; Patterson, *Ireland since 1939*, 218; David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making sense of the Troubles: the story of the conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago, 2002), 61–2; Ed Moloney, *A secret history of the IRA* (New York, 2002), 90–1.

[17]*Dáil Debates*, Dáil Éireann, vol. 248 (7 July 1970), private notice questions–Northern situation. See: http://www.historical-debates.oireachtas.ie (15 October 2010).

[18]NAI DT, 2001/6/516, 6 July 1970, 'Text of press conference given by Dr Patrick Hillery'.

[19]NAI DT, 2001/6/516, 6 July 1970, 'Text of press conference given by Dr Patrick Hillery'.

As Lynch's government surely predicted, London did not equate Hillery's Belfast visit with a holiday to the Horse Show. On the morning of 7 July, Sir Edward Peck of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office blasted Irish Ambassador Donal O'Sullivan, claiming that Hillery had '"made life hellishly difficult" for the British Government and for [Northern Ireland's prime minister] Major Chichester-Clark'.[20] Sir Edward complained that the British had been forced to spend the night trying to ensure that Chichester-Clark did not take any 'rash' action. Furthermore, he suggested that Hillery must have seen that reports from the Falls Road had been exaggerated, although O'Sullivan responded that the opposite was in fact true. Sir Edward compared Hillery's visit to espionage and told O'Sullivan that it was unlikely, given the circumstances, that Hillery would be able to meet with Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home as scheduled. O'Sullivan was not cowed and replied that 'the impression is rapidly gaining ground, not only among the Minority in the North but also at home, that the one-sided raids which took place over the week-end can only be interpreted as a return to the hard-line attitudes of the past'. O'Sullivan went on to say that 'the resentment which had been generated as a result of the events of the week-end…pose a serious threat to my Government'. This statement caused Sir Edward to curtail his anger somewhat and express appreciation for Lynch's moderate response to the crisis in Northern Ireland as a whole.[21]

The contentious nature of the O'Sullivan-Peck meeting did not match the more moderate tone that the British government took in private on the matter later that same day. At a cabinet meeting on 7 July, Sir Alec Douglas-Home said that Dublin had 'in general adopted a responsible and constructive attitude' towards Northern Ireland, which made Hillery's visit 'all the more surprising'.[22] Although the foreign secretary characterised the event as a 'serious diplomatic discourtesy', the cabinet concurred with his assessment that Lynch's government faced domestic 'political difficulties' and strong resistance even within his own party. It agreed that Dublin might have hoped that Hillery's trip would take some of the pressure off Lynch during the on-going Arms Trial Crisis. It was concluded by the cabinet that Dublin's tactic was counter-productive, and had enraged the unionists, so it could not be ignored, but that there was little sense in doing anything 'which would aggravate the existing strain and shake more the already precarious position of Mr. Lynch, the continued existence of whose administration was on balance in our interest'.[23]

Later that day, Douglas-Home made a statement in the House of Commons regretting that Dr Hillery had not 'consulted H.M.G. in advance if he wished to make a visit. Not to have done so is a serious diplomatic discourtesy. His visit has magnified the difficulties of those who are working so hard for peace and harmony in Northern Ireland'.[24] Lynch and Hillery clearly understood that the latter's visit to Belfast would roil Anglo-Irish relations. When the British ambassador to Dublin, John Peck, delivered the text of Douglas-Home's statement to Hillery, the minister for external affairs called the House of Commons statement fair and observed that a British rebuke would actually be politically helpful from Dublin's point of view. Hillery made no apology and characterised the Falls Road Curfew as a mistake that had helped to alienate Northern nationalists from the British army. Peck reported to London that when Hillery met with Douglas-Home as scheduled, he was 'likely to be extremely frank about his and Mr. Lynch's political problems, and welcome

[20]NAI, Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter cited as DFA), 2000/5/38, 7 July 1970, Donal O'Sullivan to DEA.

[21]NAI DFA, 2000/5/38, 7 July 1970, Donal O'Sullivan to DEA.

[22]PRO, CAB 128/47 (part 1), 7 July 1970 CM (70) 4th conclusions.

[23]PRO, CAB 128/47 (part 1), 7 July 1970 CM (70) 4th conclusions.

[24]NAI DFA, 2001/43/1351, 7 July 1970, photocopy of House of Commons debate.

indications that we understand them. Their survival largely depends on being able to show some results for Northern Catholics'.[25]

In fact, the British government was itself aware that the Falls Road Curfew had had unintended negative consequences. Ronnie Burroughs, the United Kingdom representative in Belfast, described the arms searches as having 'alienated virtually all Catholic opinion whether moderate or extremist'.[26] He urged London to stress that illegal arms would be seized from both nationalists and unionists with equal vigour to re-establish the sense that the British government was impartial and in control in Northern Ireland.

While Sir Edward Peck had initially warned Dublin that a scheduled meeting between the two foreign ministers might be cancelled as a result of Hillery's visit to the Falls Road, London thought better of that, and Douglas-Home and Hillery did meet on 8 July 1970. The issue of the Belfast trip came up immediately, but the British did not take Hillery to task for his diplomatic bad manners. In fact, Sir Alec opened their meeting with the conciliatory phrase, 'I am afraid I could not have said less in Commons yesterday'. Hillery remained unapologetic and took an aggressive line by reminding the British foreign secretary that Dublin had closely cooperated with London since the Troubles began 'and had done very little indeed that could be regarded as having upset the apple cart'. He went on to characterise the Falls Road curfew not only as an error on the part of Britain, but one that had demonstrated to the Irish that cooperation with London had no benefits for Dublin. 'We had cooperated all along', Hillery said:

> We were under condemnation at home for doing nothing. The Irish Government felt that our point of view was not being considered; the prestige of the Taoiseach was being eroded and suddenly last week-end we discovered that the matter was again 'none of our business'.[27]

Hillery pressed Sir Alec to control the Orange Order and reroute the traditional Twelfth of July Orange Order parades away from Catholic areas or risk growing militancy among Northern nationalists.

Following his meeting at the FCO, Hillery gave a press conference at the Irish embassy in London in which he chastised the British government. He condemned the Falls Road raids as having alienated nationalists and dismissed the arms found as 'old pathetic weapons' that were strictly for self-defence against the threat of loyalist mobs. He exhorted London to assert real authority in Northern Ireland and curb the Orange Order. When asked if he had been 'rebuked' by Douglas-Home earlier in the day, Hillery said 'I would remind people that I represent a sovereign state not to be rebuked by anyone else'. Echoing Irish constitutional claims to sovereignty over the entire island of Ireland, he told the assembled reporters,

> I believe that I represent any man living in Ireland and I am entitled to visit any town or hamlet in that Island…I am an Irishman. If Ireland is completely free I will obey the rules of the games that other nations laid down but while diplomatic niceties are so used as to prevent a large section of Irish people from getting fair play then I won't play the rules—I will play the main rules but not the niceties.[28]

While he denied that the trip was designed to placate public opinion in Ireland, he responded more truthfully to a later question by saying,

[25]PRO, CJ 3/24 122700, 7 July 1970, Ambassador Peck, Dublin to FCO.

[26]PRO, CJ 3/24 122700, 7 July 1970, Ronnie Burroughs, Belfast to FCO.

[27]NAI DFA, 2003/17/296, 8 July 1970, 'Meeting between Dr P.J. Hillery and Sir Alec Douglas-Home'.

[28]NAI DT, 2001/6/516, 8 July 1970, 'Text of press conference by Dr Patrick Hillery'.

> I am not a diplomat. I am a politician. I have some of the best diplomats in the world working in the Department of External Affairs and they obey all the rules [but] the behavior of Irish politicians is something related to the actual reality of our needs at home.[29]

Hillery's belligerent stance played well back in Ireland. Northern nationalist leader Eddie McAteer telephoned Hugh McCann, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, at McCann's home in Dublin with a message that he should tell Patrick Hillery

> to stand firm on the right of any Irishman, Minister or not, to walk the streets of any Irish city without prior permission of any Englishman. Do please ignore this arrogant rebuke from the British government whose studied neglect over 50 years has contributed so much to the present crisis.[30]

The American ambassador to Dublin, John Moore, reported to Washington on the popularity of Hillery's trip to Belfast, telling the State Department that it 'appealed to the Irish sense of nonconformity and was favourably received here'.[31] Moore believed that the Belfast trip helped the political position of Jack Lynch's moderate government and policies.

British Ambassador John Peck confirmed to his government that Hillery's trip to Belfast, and his performance in London, were well received by the press and general public in Ireland. More importantly from London's point of view, Peck believed that the Falls Road trip provided a benefit to Britain, in that Irish domestic support for Hillery was 'having an important steadying effect here by rallying support for the Lynch government. We should not take too seriously the fact that this is being achieved by being highly critical of HMG'.[32] Peck urged London to further aid Lynch by agreeing to re-route the Orange parades as Hillery had requested. The ambassador went on to call the Falls Road curfew a significant mistake that might drive nationalists to

> launch something as irrational and heroic as the Easter Rising. Allowing for Irish hyperbole, this is a fair description of current anxieties. Having sacked the Ministers in his Government most likely to fan such flames, Lynch feels that his future, and the future of sane relations between the two countries is in our hands.[33]

CONCLUSIONS

Despite such dire warnings from Ambassador Peck, there was not a major reordering of Anglo-Irish relations in the wake of the Lower Falls curfew. However, there were attempts by Heath's government to provide some rewards for Dublin's continued moderation. In a letter from the prime minister to the taoiseach on 11 July 1970, Heath praised ongoing Anglo-Irish discussions as providing 'great value' and expressed the desire that the communication should continue. As to Dublin's specific requests that the Twelfth of July Parades be banned for that year, Heath pointed out that there had been 'a considerable amount of re-routing' to reduce tensions. Reacting to Irish claims that the Lower Falls Road curfew showed British bias against the nationalist community, Heath also pledged that the army would not single out

[29]NAI DT, 2001/6/516, 8 July 1970, 'Text of press conference by Dr Patrick Hillery'.

[30]NAI DFA, 2001/43/1351, 8 July 1970, 'Note' by Hugh McCann.

[31]United States National Archives, College Park Maryland, Record Group 59, 1970–3 POL 23–9 UK 1/1/70 Box 2654, 16 July 1970, Moore to secretary of state.

[32]PRO, FCO 33/1214/122751, 9 July 1970, Peck to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

[33]PRO, FCO 33/1214/122751, 9 July 1970, Peck to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

nationalists for disarmament and that his government would 'ensure that law and order are maintained with complete impartiality'.[34] When the Twelfth of July 1970 passed without major violence, Heath again sent a message to Lynch thanking him for his own efforts to dissuade Northern nationalists from violence. The prime minister went on to express his belief 'that the close co-operation between our two governments has been an important factor in keeping the tension down, and I look forward to maintaining to the full the contacts we have already established'.[35]

Any major disruption of Anglo-Irish relations after the Lower Falls Road curfew and Hillery's visit there was avoided. The announcement on 23 July 1970 that Stormont had imposed a six-month ban on parades was condemned by some extreme unionists and was at least a symbolic concession to the demands by Dublin and Northern nationalists that unionist hard-liners be brought under control.[36] On 29 July, only a few weeks after the curfew, an official FCO document described British relations with Lynch and Hillery as 'excellent. There is a regular flow of confidential messages to and from them'.[37] Heath continued his courtship of Lynch in yet another message at the end of July 1970, commending the taoiseach for 'the courageous way in which you have been dealing with a difficult situation'.[38] He also urged Lynch to recognise the political risk that Northern Ireland Prime Minister Chichester-Clark took in banning parades and asked that Lynch refrain from making too much of this development in public statements, to avoid giving more ammunition to Chichester-Clark's right-wing opponents.

Lynch did not formally respond to Heath until 11 August. He wrote and thanked the prime minister for his messages, claiming that 'They encourage me in my belief that understanding between our Governments can help greatly to resolve tensions in the North and bring us closer to a better arrangement of affairs'. Lynch went on to restate his belief that peaceful reunification was the key to peace in Ireland and to close relations between Ireland and Britain. His letter described 'Right Wing Unionists' as the major obstacle to progress on this issue. Quite naively, Lynch predicted that if London only made it clear to extreme unionists that they would not be able to 'bedevil Anglo-Irish relations, they might well turn to finding their proper place in the Irish nation'. He closed by asking for a meeting with Heath.[40] Heath's response to Lynch was cautious, and rather dismissive of Lynch's views on a united Ireland. The prime minister pointed out that both governments were 'subject to certain constraints by our respective constitutional positions'. London could not be seen to be rethinking the Ireland Act of 1949. He also warned that

> to be embarking on a dialogue about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland…would be to invite an outburst of violence…which would cause grave trouble for both our Governments and more importantly, hardship and suffering for the people of Northern Ireland.[41]

On the other hand, he did propose to meet with Lynch at the United Nations in October to continue the dialogue.

The events surrounding the Arms Trial Crisis and the curfew on the Lower Falls Road provide important insights into the state of Anglo-Irish relations during the early stages of the Northern Ireland Troubles. Jack Lynch's government proved that

[34]NAI DFA, 2003/17/304, 11 July 1970, Edward Heath to Jack Lynch.
[35]NAI DFA, 2003/17/304, 15 July 1970, Edward Heath to Jack Lynch.
[36]*Loyalist news*, 27th edn, 25 July 1970, available at: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/Loyalist_News_250770r.jpg (15 October 2010).
[37]PRO, FCO 33/1212 122689, 29 July 1970, J.K. Drinkall FCO to Sir Thomas Brimelaw FCO.
[38]NAI DT, 2001/6/517, 31 July 1970, Edward Heath to Jack Lynch.
[40]NAI DT, 2001/6/517, 11 August 1970, Jack Lynch to Edward Heath.
[41]NAI DT, 2001/6/517, 31 August 1970, Edward Heath to Jack Lynch.

it was firmly committed to a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland and was willing to cooperate with the British government, despite a great deal of political pressure to take a more militant stance. On the other hand, Lynch could not ignore his domestic critics and sent Patrick Hillery to Belfast in a very pointed affront to London. Hillery's trip was a success, as it not only played well within Ireland and the nationalist community in Northern Ireland but served as a warning to the British that Anglo-Irish cooperation had to bring some benefits to Dublin if the Irish were to continue the policy.

For its part, London showed that it placed some value on Lynch's moderation and collaborative policies. While the Lower Falls Road curfew was a serious mistake and a public relations disaster, elements in the British government quickly realised this and London tried to make amends with Dublin. Hillery's visit to Belfast was given a *pro forma* condemnation for the sake of placating unionists, but it had no adverse impact on Anglo-Irish relations. In fact, Heath's government went out of its way to cultivate friendly relations with Dublin in the wake of the Lower Falls Road curfew. The British government understood that no Irish government could afford to be seen as being indifferent to the fate of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland and hope to survive. Of course, Anglo-Irish cooperation in these first years of the Troubles did not bear any fruit, but at least the precedent was set for more substantive negotiations in future decades that would, belatedly, lead to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland.