

RELEASE IN FULL

**From:** Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 6, 2012 7:48 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Fw: Situation in Belfast  
**Attachments:** 06DecLocalNewsStories.docx.docx.docx; 06DecNationalNewsarticles.docx.docx.docx

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**From:** Burton, Gregory S (Belfast)  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 06, 2012 07:04 AM  
**To:** Abedin, Huma  
**Cc:** Susman, Louis B; Stephenson, Barbara J; Sullivan, Jacob J; Doherty, Kathleen A; Noyes, Julieta Valls  
**Subject:** Situation in Belfast

Huma: Ambassador Susman told me he had heard from and asked me to prepare and send this analysis to you. There is a broader demand from our colleagues on the press side and in Washington for this analysis. If you are comfortable with it, I would re-package it and send it to a broader distribution. What follows is a brief description of another night of limited violence in Northern Ireland -- this time not in Belfast, but not far away in outlying towns. I have talked to the First Minister's political advisor and to an Assistant Chief Constable in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Also attached are a set of links to local and national media on this story.

**The Trigger:**

The small centrist, non-sectarian Alliance Party holds the balance of power in the Belfast City Council when unionist and nationalist parties are split along sectarian lines. Sinn Fein and SDLP wanted the Union Jack removed from City Hall and proposed a bill in November toward that end. Alliance proposed a compromise bill that would allow the flying of the Union Jack on 17 days (similar or identical to the policy regarding the Union Jack at the Assembly Building at Stormont). The bill did not gain any unionist support, but with the Alliance support it carried the day. The protests were immediate and the protesters were carrying leaflets that excoriated the Alliance Party's "betrayal" of unionism.

**What Happened Overnight:**

After the initial outbreak of violence at City Hall, the action turned to outlying towns. Four police officers were injured during trouble linked to Belfast City Council's decision to stop flying the union flag every day. About 1,500 people gathered in Carrickfergus (5miles outside Belfast) to protest over the flag decision. Most of these were not violent, but again there was a core group bent on destructive behavior. An Alliance Party office where Alliance MLA Stewart Dickson has a constituency office was ransacked and set ablaze during the trouble. The home of a couple who are both Alliance Party councilors in Bangor, County Down, was also attacked. A paint bomb was thrown at Michael and Christine Bower's home, smashing a front window close to where their daughter normally plays. North Down Alliance MLA Stephen Farry, Minister For Department of Employment and Learning, said there was an attempted arson attack on his constituency office in Bangor, which was disrupted by a passing PSNI patrol.

**Reaction:**

Alliance are saying the two main unionist parties have to bear responsibilities and that this is an "outright attack on democracy." Stewart Dickson, an Alliance MLA whose offices were attacked, has suggested that the Secretary should visit the scene of the attack in Carrickfergus. Early statements by some unionist political leaders voiced anger over the flag vote, but most statements, and particularly those issued since the outbreak of

violence, have condemned the violence. Mike Nesbitt, UUP, talked about unionism needing brains not brawn. The First Minister has called for restraint. Sammy Wilson, a DUP stalwart and Minister of Finance, said the people involved in the violence did a disservice to the flag they were supposedly trying to protect. However, when Alliance leader David Ford effectively accused Wilson of hypocrisy, Wilson asserted that Alliance should have known that opening this Pandora's box would lead to something like this and if they didn't they were out of touch. After last night's renewed violence, all responsible voices are united in condemning the violence and calling for calm.

**PSNI View:**

Assistant Chief Constable Finlay (protect) told me that these protests/attacks are not taking place through the normal unionist political channels, but are being organized through social media. Finlay said that the organizers are seeking to organize a larger demonstration at or near City Hall on Saturday. There are also indications that there may be similar incidents tonight in East Belfast and Glen Gormley. This could also happen on Friday evening, but such events are not likely until 18:00 or later -- the hours of darkness. Finlay noted that the venues for the visit would be secured and swept tonight but added that there will be a larger police presence. He also noted that the PSNI are monitoring social media traffic closely. **Finlay strongly stated that there was no threat whatsoever to the Secretary or for disruption at the venues of her visit.**

**View from the First Minister's Office:**

I spoke to the political advisor to the First Minister, Richard Bullick (protect). Bullick suggested that there is involvement in this from the Progressive Unionist Party, which he asserted would be seeking to flame the embers of its fading political status. (It was originally an attempt to replicate on the loyalist side the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA). He also suggested that the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) a paramilitary grouping within Loyalism was involved. He did not feel like he could make a prediction about violence tonight. He noted that while the Alliance Party is the immediate target, this also represents an effort to stoke fears of working class unionists and to try to move them onto the fringes of unionist politics. He said the First Minister and other DUP leaders would continue to condemn the violence. He added that he did not think the First Minister would support the call from the Alliance Party for an extraordinary session of the Legislative Assembly because that could only take place on Friday, the day the Secretary will be in Belfast. The Assembly is in session on Monday.

**The Secretary's Speech:**

Separately, I will make some recommendations for how to adjust the Secretary's remarks to take these developments into account.

**Possible Media Line:**

I join Northern Ireland's political leaders, who have rightly condemned these attacks upon the police, Belfast City Council staff, and the offices and homes of Alliance Party members. The violent actions of this small minority of people offer nothing for Northern Ireland's future.

If pressed: While I will not have time to travel to Carrickfergus, I reiterate that attacks such as the one that took place there on the offices of Alliance Party Member Stewart Dickson have no place in a democracy.

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