

ANDREW MARR SHOW, ARLENE FOSTER, MLA

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ARLENE FOSTER MLA

AM: We've had MI5 in effect warning that the Irish Republican terrorist threat is alive again for the mainland. Now in simple terms, why is this?

AF: Well, of course we have had that threat with us right through those 20 years that you were talking about and indeed as recently as March we had the murder of Prison Officer Adrian Ismay, so that threat has been very much present in Northern Ireland and we have had to deal with that. We were rather surprised to hear that the threat has increased, albeit not to severe but to substantial in terms of Great Britain and for me that means that we have to work even harder in terms of the administration at Stormont and to work very hard in relation to our paramilitary strategy, the resources that we've put in to deal with paramilitarism and criminality and indeed to work with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland as well to make sure that we eradicate this threat once and for all.

AM: You mentioned criminality then. Now in the view of many people on this side of the water what happened was the IRA put the guns away but then there evolved a new form of effectively, gangsterism which carried on violently and dangerously for a while. Are we now saying that gangsterism has itself mutated into a new form of Republican violence?

AF: Well, I think the dissident Republicans use the cover of Republicanism to engage in criminality in many areas. But they also seek to move us backwards and what we need to do in Northern Ireland is to make sure that we continue to move forward and to bring stability to Northern Ireland in a way that they really don't want to see happening because of course they

don't accept that Northern Ireland can be what it is today and that is an open regional economy working very hard within the United Kingdom. So we need to continue our work in Stormont to reject what has happened from these people.

AM: Now, you're very, very well known in Northern Ireland, some people watching from the other side of the water don't know you quite so well. You have had personal experience yourself of terrorism in the old days. Just tell us a little bit about what happened to you.

AF: Well, yes, my father was an RUC Officer and we lived in quite a remote part of County Fermanagh and the IRA came to murder him when I was just 8 years old, but thankfully he survived that attack at our home, and then when I was 17 years old going to school, going to grammar school in Enniskillen the bus that I was travelling on was blown up by the IRA as well, but thankfully no one was killed on that occasion. They were targeting the bus driver who was a part time member of the security forces. So I know very well what terrorism is all about. I know the fear that it can bring to communities. So that spurs me on to make sure that we don't go back to those dark days but instead move Northern Ireland forward.

AM: Sure. And now you face this new merged group which people call the 'new IRA.' Is it a sophisticated group capable of planting bombs? Does it have access to weaponry?

AF: I think they are a group that have got capability. They've certainly shown that by the murder, as I said, of Adrian Ismay back in March of this year. They tend to work with under car booby traps and things like that, but it is alarming to hear that the threat level has increased in Great Britain and obviously we will want to keep an eye on that and to monitor that situation and to

work with the security services in the United Kingdom, but also in the Republic of Ireland as well.

AM: You mentioned the Republic there. The Taoiseach has suggested that the UK leaving the EU could harm relations between Northern and Southern Ireland and could indeed endanger the peace process in some way. Are you worried about that?

AF: No, I'm not worried at all because of course the peace process is not built on the European Union. The peace process is built between the communities in Northern Ireland, the relationship between ourselves and our closest neighbour in the Republic of Ireland and with the support of our sovereign government in the United Kingdom. So it's not based in terms of the European Union and I can't understand why anyone would make those sorts of remarks. It was rather disappointing to see William Hague make similar remarks last week in the Daily Telegraph. I have to say I couldn't understand where he was coming from because the peace process and what we are trying to achieve in Northern Ireland is not based on the European Union in any way.

AM: And yet I suppose one of the great symbols of the peace process was the border barriers coming down between the Republic and Northern Ireland. And it has been said, not least on this programme, by Nigel Lawson, that if we leave and the Republic is an EU country and we are no longer part of the EU, those barriers would have to come back up again. What's your view of that? Would they?

AF: Well of course the common travel area between ourselves and the Republic of Ireland was in existence before we entered the European Union and it will be there when we leave the European Union if that's what the people of the United Kingdom decide to do. And we recognise that the Republic of Ireland is our closest

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neighbour and of course they benefit greatly in terms of trade with the UK, Great Britain's their biggest export destination, and so we will still have to work through all of that and we will do so if we come to a situation where we decide to leave. It will become part of the negotiations.

AM: Okay. The big intervention I suppose in the debate this week was the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney. Were you surprised or offended by what he said?

AF: Well, I was rather surprised given his independent role in terms of the Bank of England. I have to say, being a former Economy Minister here in Northern Ireland one of the things that alarms me is the overreaching bureaucracy of the European Union. I think we could benefit greatly if we left the European Union. We would be free of that bureaucracy and for a small region such as ourselves the key elements of growing our economy is to have speed and is to have flexibility and frankly we have neither of those in the European Union. We want to have a good strong open regional economy within the United Kingdom and we believe that the best way to have a global outlook is to leave the European Union.

AM: Very clear. Arlene Foster thank you very much for joining us.

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