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FROM:

DATE:

HM AMBASSADOR

British Embassy, Dublin

28 June 1996

CC:

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B

PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B

PS/PUS (L&B) - B

PS/Sir David Fell - B

Mr Bell - B Mr Hill - B

Ms Checksfield - B

Mr Maccabe - B

Mr Legge - B

Mr Watkins - B

Mr Wood - B

Mr Stephens - B

Mr Lamont, RID - B Mr Holmes, No. 10 - By fax

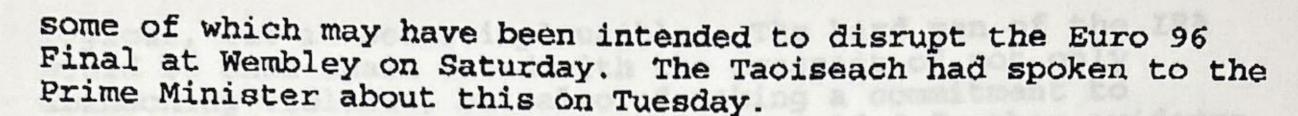
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office - By fax

Mr Thomas - B

THE TAOISEACH'S APPROACH TO CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN/IRA

- 1. I called on Sean Donlon on 27 June to follow-up the discussions over the week-end reported in my letter of 26 June to John Holmes, copied to Martin Howard. James Tansley's minute of 26 June reporting the Government's decision to downgrade its contacts with Sinn Fein/IRA in the wake of the events at Adare, Manchester and Laois is also relevant.
- 2. Sean said the present situation was confused. The Irish assessment that a ceasefire was imminent had been based in part on the last official contact with Sinn Fein on 8 June when Paddy Teahon, Sean O hUiginn and Tim Dalton had met Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and others. While the Sinn Fein members had given no explicit undertaking about the reinstatement of the ceasefire, they did confirm that the Irish Government had done everything possible to facilitate this development, and they needed nothing more. There had been no further contact since then, but it remained important to keep open the line of communication as long as the possibility of a ceasefire remained.
- 3. Sean continued that it was not clear why after almost two weeks there was still no more on the ceasefire, in spite of optimistic messages from John Hume, and certain US contacts. Possibly recent developments on the security front lay behind the delay. Sean said the Taoiseach and his colleagues (including Sean himself) had been deeply shocked by the extent of the find in County Laoise, including 36 arms of a new type,

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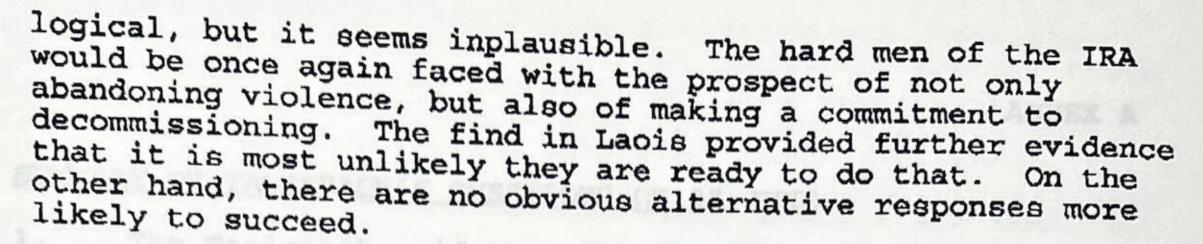


- In the wake of Adare, Manchester and County Laois the Taoiseach was increasingly of the view that if Sinn Fein were to be admitted to the all-party talks in belfast, more than just a reinstatement of the ceasefire would be required. He believed that Adam's statement of 20 May of readiness to accept the Mitchell principles if all other parties did so should be used to challenge the Republican movement as a whole to sign up to the Mitchell principles in advance of joining the talks. Without such a commitment, admitting Sinn Fein to the talks would risk a Unionist walk-out, and thus destablisation of the process in the North, which was making progress, if painfully slowly.
- The Taoiseach was still considering his options. In replying to supplementary questions in the Dail on Tuesday he had indicated the direction in which he is thinking. He had told Bertie Ahern that what is needed is for the entire Republican movement in all its manifestations to accept the Mitchell principles in full. If they did so, then they could also answer positively the two questions the Taoiseach had posed last week: does Sinn Fein continue to support the armed struggle of the IRA; and has the Sinn Fein leader gone to the IRA to ask for a ceasefire, and if not why not. (I attach at Annex A a summary of the Dail exchanges. Full text by fax to RID and IPL).
- 6. The Taoiseach had considered expanding on this theme in a speech on Wednesday, but the murder of journalist Veronica Guerin had intervened. If he did eventually decide that the only way forward was to challenge the Republican movement as indicated above, he would clearly need the support of his coalition partners and also the British Government. The Tanaiste and Mr de Rossa were supportive. As regards us, Sean expected that Paddy Teahon would discuss the question with John Holmes.

Comment

- 7. As Sean said, the situation is confused. There are more questions than answers. We do not know whether Teahon, O hUiginn and Dalton were right in concluding on 8 June that Sinn Fein intended to announce an early resumption of the ceasefire, still less if or when this might happen. My best quess, based on past experience, is that the officials were being over-optimistic.
- Nor is it easy to judge whether the Taoiseach's proposed response is likely to be successful in leading to all-party talks including both Sinn Fein and the Unionists. His argument that if Gerry Adams can accept the Mitchell principles, then the IRA should not find it impossible to do so too may be

negatively +



9. I will try and discuss this further next week with both the Taoiseach's Department and the DFA. Whatever happens it is crucial that the two Governments try to co-ordinate their response to any announcement about a resumption of the ceasefire.

(Signed) ly to the Markette

V E Sutherland

In supplementaries following the statement, Bertle Abert.

for Flanna Pail, urged the Government to keep the Goor open to

path of paper and non-violent and non-threatening politics.



ANNEX A

SUMMARY OF TAOISEACH'S QUESTIONS ON 25 JUNE

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- The Taoiseach said that it was not possible to act as if the events at Adare, Manchester and Laois had never happened, particularly as the Garda had informed him that many of the bombs found at Clonaslee were intended for early use. "objective circumstances" and the context of the Government's relations with Sinn Fein had thus changed. It was these events, not the Government or the media, which was forcing Sinn Fein to face the difficult questions which the Government had put to them, which were linked directly to the Mitchell principles. It was essential to know where Sinn Fein stood "on the use or threat of force to influence the negotiations which started on 10 June". If Sinn Fein really did endorse the Mitchell principles, it would be inconsistent for them to continue to support "the armed struggle". The Government's questions merely required Sinn Fein to do what they would have to do if and when they joined the all-party talks. The Government had decided on 18 June "to keep under review the question of further official level meetings, if any, in the light, inter alia, of Sinn Fein's responses to the evolving situation and the questions put to them." In the meantime, lines of communication would remain open, but the Government will clearly be less accommodating over contacts with Sinn Fein than hitherto.
- In supplementaries following the statement, Bertie Ahern, for Fianna Fail, urged the Government to keep the door open to Sinn Fein as long as there was a glimmer of hope that the ceasefire might be restored and not to set the conditions for entry into the talks higher than they were before. Ahern argued that answering the Government's two questions would effectively require Sinn Fein to break with the IRA and thus split the Republican movement. This would be in no-one's interests. Bruton agreed that "it is not in the interests of anybody that there should be a split" and that what was needed was that the entire Republican Movement "in all its manifestations" accept the Mitchell principles in full.
- Under pressure from Ahern, Bruton robustly defended the two questions he had put to Sinn Fein. It would do the Government no credit to refrain from putting hard questions to Sinn Fein simply because the Republican Movement was not ready to answer them. Despite recent actions, however, he remained confident that there were elements in Sinn Fein and the Republican Movement "who want to accept the Mitchell principles and who want to put violence behind them for good". It remained his hope, though this was diminished by recent events, that "a united Republican Movement will go irrevocably onto the path of peace and non-violent and non-threatening politics".



Mary Harney, for the Progressive Democrats, took the opposite stance from Bertie Ahern and questioned whether there was any point in the Government maintaining contact with Sinn Fein "as long as it maintains its link with the provisional IRA". The Taoiseach replied that Sinn Fein's acceptance, on 20 May, of the Mitchell principles, "was a basis for believing that there are people in the Republican Movement who seek, not only to restore the ceasefire, but to ensure that violence ends for good. For that reason the Government has not closed off lines of communication to those people."

Six John Hermon, who was Chief Coloratele of the Boyel Dister

deals with Bir John's chilmhood and progress through the ranks of

that there are some ill-judged caferences in the draft to former

the RUC. However, I should eray colleagues' estention to the fact

breaches of courtesy, eccuracy or confidentiality (though not such as to be a breach of mational security). Such references, coupled

E C HALLETT