

cc Press

FROM: HM AMBASSADOR
 DATE: 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

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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,

some of which may have been intended to disrupt the Euro 96 Final at Wembley on Saturday. The Taoiseach had spoken to the Prime Minister about this on Tuesday.

4. 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 destabilisation of the process in the North, which was making progress, if painfully slowly.

5. 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).

negativity +
positivity!

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 guess, based on past experience, is that the officials were being over-optimistic.

8. 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

logical, but it seems implausible. The hard men of the IRA would be once again faced with the prospect of not only abandoning violence, but also of making a commitment to decommissioning. The find in Laois provided further evidence that it is most unlikely they are ready to do that. On the other hand, there are no obvious alternative responses more likely to succeed.

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)

V E Sutherland

2. 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.

3. 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".

ANNEX A

SUMMARY OF TAOISEACH'S QUESTIONS ON 25 JUNE

1. 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. The "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.
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4. 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."

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E C HALLETT

26 June 1996

SIR JOHN HANNON'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Sir John Hannon, who was Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary from 1980 to 1989, has passed to the NIO a copy of the draft autobiography which he has been working on. We do not know when the book will be published. Sir John wanted to ensure that his book did not breach his duty of confidentiality as Chief Constable.

David Pell and I are content that there is nothing in the draft which is directly against the national interest in terms of national security. However, I am writing to alert colleagues to the strong possibility of public comment and re-opening of old issues when the book is published, in particular in relation to the Stalker/Sampson affair.

We do not think it necessary to circulate the draft to colleagues (it has in any case been given to us in confidence). The book deals with Sir John's childhood and progress through the ranks of the RUC. However, I should draw colleagues' attention to the fact that there are some ill-judged references in the draft to former NI Ministers, the RUC, the Security Service and the DPP(NI). These could be objected to on the grounds that they may be breaches of courtesy, accuracy or confidentiality (though not such as to be a breach of national security). Such references, coupled with the re-telling of the Stalker/Sampson affair, may be picked up by the media and the public more generally.

In the event that such issues become the subject of press interest, we of course give Ministers appropriate lines to take. We also note that the views which Sir John expresses in the book are entirely his own.

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