

ASSISTANT SECRETARY
SECURITY POLICY & OPERATIONS 1

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NORTHERN IRELAND (B)

19 July 1996

John Holmes Esq
No 10

Dear John,

US/NORTHERN IRELAND

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CC PS | SJS (L+B)
PS | Sir J Nicks (L+B)
PS | M Anderson (L+B)
PS | DUS (L+B)
PS | Sir D Fell
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Mr Hill
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1. Nancy Soderberg called from the White House this morning. There were several points she wanted to discuss, to see on a personal basis, which she would be going through with Tony Lake later in the day. She expected Lake to give you a call afterwards, either this evening or over the weekend. *See info*

Talks

2. Soderberg was not up to speed on this week's Belfast sessions, or on the content of yesterday's IGC (on which I had not seen a record either). But she was concerned that the talks might be running into the sand. (I am copying to you separately a note of a conversation I had this morning with Martha Pope conveying a similar message). Perhaps the talks would collapse; but the Administration wanted to explore all the alternatives with us first. She continued to think it desirable to reach out in some way to Sinn Fein. She took my point that extraordinary efforts had been made to accommodate their wishes, eg over the role of George Mitchell, with nothing from SF in return; and that recent events, including the discovery of bomb factories in both Britain and Ireland, meant that there was little inclination in London to make additional overtures to Adams. But she argued that the events of the last ten days had altered the politics. SF were now in the ascendant, especially in relation to the SDLP. Could we, perhaps, hold a meeting with Sinn Fein at official level, as the Irish had done, under cover of a need to discuss the handling of future parades and marches? This would not be a break from existing UK policy. Alternatively, there might be scope for some kind of proximity talks in the margins of those being held under Mitchell's chairmanship in Belfast. I pointed out the dangers of any attempt by HMG to bring SF into the talks through the back door, particularly in terms of Loyalist reactions. Soderberg said she accepted that Mitchell probably could not be involved - she has obviously

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thought better of the idea since floating it with me on 13 July (she discussed it briefly with Mitchell while he was in the US last weekend). She also realised that her first suggestion might be unacceptable to us. But the options had to be thought through.

3. Soderberg said that the Loyalists also needed to be rewarded for their restraint, particularly if there was to be any effort to establish a dialogue with Sinn Fein. Could we do something about prisoners? Gary McMichael had complained to her recently that conditions for Loyalist prisoners were horrific (rats in cells, etc). Something on prison conditions, or even releases, would go a long way towards keeping them on course.

4. She appreciated that it was up to the British and Irish Governments, in consultation with Mitchell and the parties, to decide how to take things forward. But the Administration were ready to help in any way that we would regard as useful. Should the talks be transferred to the United States? I said no. Should the three Governments get together to try to chart a course? Again, I was unenthusiastic. Would it help if she and/or Lake visited London, Dublin and Belfast before the end of the month to take soundings/offer support/nudge people in the right direction? I said we were always glad to talk; but Lake should see what you thought about this idea.

Jimmy Smyth

5. Soderberg said that the Administration had to decide how to handle this extradition case (the NIO have the details.) Her own view was that all such villains - and she was aware of the other three in the pipeline - should be sent back to complete their sentences. But there was a lot of political pressure coming from Irish Americans. The Supreme Court had rejected Smyth's latest appeal, and the clock had started ticking yesterday for the 60-day period during which the Secretary of State could sign the extradition order. How did we want the White House to play it? Her instinct was to kick the case into touch, pleading the national interest, because she feared that extraditing Smyth could damage the peace process.

6. I disagreed. I did not think that allowing the law to take its course in the Smyth case would damage the peace process, unless others wanted to use it as a pretext. On the contrary, extraditing an IRA terrorist, who had never contested his conviction, could send a useful signal about the Administration's determination to have no truck with violence, strengthening Adams' hand in any negotiations he was conducting with the harder nuts on the PAC. Soderberg

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said she saw the point: perhaps this was a way of reminding the Provisionals of the price to be paid for not restoring the ceasefire. But she would welcome our considered views. (Comment: her second thoughts were better than her first, but I don't think we should let Soderberg think that we would be happy with a decision not to extradite Smyth in the event that the IRA did restore the ceasefire.)

Certification of IRA as a Terrorist Organisation

7. I mentioned this as another issue on which it would be important for the Administration to convey the right signal about terrorism. A little to my surprise, Nancy said immediately that there was no question but that the IRA would be added to the list of groups designated by the State Department as terrorist organisations. The IRA was a terrorist organisation; and that was that. I said I could not fault her logic; I thought it applied equally to the case of Jimmy Smyth.

MacBride

8. The White House was coming under heavy pressure from the MacBride lobby, and from Irish Americans generally, to get the President to sign an Executive Order giving effect to the MacBride language in the Foreign Relations Authorisation Act which Clinton vetoed (on other grounds) in April. The President was in favour of the MacBride Principles, and had said so on a number of occasions. The domestic policy people in the White House were saying that Tony Lake's recent letter distancing the President from MacBride had been a tactical mistake and Clinton should now sign the Executive Order to get the lobby off his back. Soderberg said that, here again, she would welcome our advice. There were alternatives, such as simply allowing the latest MacBride bill (tabled by Congressman Eliot Engel - details with the NIO) to take its course and die in the Senate. Alternatively, a different version could be tabled in the House, in a form which might get it through the Senate. She recognised that the exercise was entirely symbolic (I ran through the usual arguments about the irrelevance of MacBride legislation). But it was becoming difficult for the White House to hold the line.

9. I said we would like to discuss further, and to see any draft the White House prepared. Any Order linking MacBride to the US contribution to the IFI would go down badly with the IFI themselves, as well as with Unionists (she wasn't clear whether the proposed Order would be linked to the IFI or not). I will suggest that Soderberg also seeks John Hume's views - he has, in the past, been sensible on this issue. We do not want any further gratuitous blows to

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Comment

10. It is, I suppose, encouraging that the NSC remain willing to be so open with us about their thinking, and the pressures to which they are subject. But here is further evidence that, the nearer we get to 5 November, the more we are going to find domestic politics affecting our dialogue with the Americans on Northern Ireland.

Yours etc.

Peter.

Peter Westmacott

cc: Martin Howard Esq, NIO
William Eherman Esq, FCO
HM Ambassador, DUBLIN
Sir John Kerr o/r

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