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Dear John

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SECRETARY OF STATE'S CONVERSATION WITH US AMBASSADOR: 15 JULY 1996

The Secretary of State had a short telephone conversation with Admiral Crowe this evening. This was at the Ambassador's request.

The Ambassador started off by saying that he had seen events in the House of Commons that afternoon and thought that it had gone well. The Secretary of State said that overall it had been a successful occasion. He said that the interview conducted by the Chief Constable the previous day had been extremely useful in setting up the facts and he promised to provide a copy of the transcript to the Ambassador.

The Secretary of State said that obviously recent events had been very bad. They had revealed very strong fires of antagonism. What was particularly worrying was that a large number of middle class Protestants, while deploring the violence occasioned by the Orange Order demonstrations, nevertheless had some sympathy with the argument that a line had to be drawn somewhere. This was rather depressing. Nevertheless, it meant that people could be under no illusions as to the strength of feeling of the Unionist community.

The Secretary of State said that there were some positive points nevertheless. One of the most crucial was the existence of an elective Talks process involving twice as many parties as had been the case in 1992. He was sure that the UUP wanted to continue and that the DUP would do so as well. The SDLP were clearly very sore and had said they would withdraw from the Forum, but he expected them to attend the Talks, if only to carry out their threat to challenge the UUP's attachment to the six Mitchell principles. There would obviously be a good deal of huffing and puffing when the Talks reconvened on 16 July. We had also agreed to an IGC with the Irish, probably this Thursday in London. The Secretary of State said that the Government had been incensed by language used by the Taoiseach in his interview on Saturday. It seemed very difficult to make people understand the reality of the operational independence of the Chief Constable. However we did not want to dwell on this and wanted to look ahead.

The Secretary of State said that the decisions that the Chief Constable had had to make were extremely difficult. No-one on the nationalist side had criticised him for bending the knee to violence when he decided not to let the march down the Garvaghy Road because of the fear of significant disorder. But when the decision was reversed in the light of dramatically changed circumstances, there was nationalist uproar. The Secretary of State had nevertheless been extremely critical of the Orange Order and their support for a campaign deliberately aimed at overwhelming the police.

The Ambassador asked if there was anything that the US could do to help. So far they had remained relatively low profile. The Secretary of State said that the Government was grateful for the helpful attitude shown by the US Government. If the administration

could continue to promote the political process, that would be very useful. In response to a question from the Ambassador, the Secretary of State said that a call from the President to the Prime Minister would be a good idea.

The Secretary of State finished by referring to his intention to set up a review of the whole issue of marching, with an independent element. This was noted and welcomed by the Ambassador.

Comment

The Ambassador was in friendly and constructive mood, but was generally in receive mode. He seemed sympathetic to the arguments put forward by the Secretary of State both in the House of Commons and in this conversation. But, as we have noted before, his influence in the White House and the NSC is not necessarily all that it could be.

I have copied this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and to Colin Budd and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours
David Kyle
for MARTIN HOWARD