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FROM HQ

FOR

Mr. P. Teahan

FROM

D. Conery

REF: YOUR/MY

SUBJECT

Conversation with Mr. Blair Hall

COMMENTS

REPLIES TO THIS FAX MESSAGE TO BE SENT BY SECURE FAX TO HQ
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11 April 1996

CC:

PST, PSS, S/S Ó hUiginn,
Counsellors A-I, Section,
Messrs Teahon, Donlon,
& Dalton,
Ambassadors ~~London~~ &
Washington, Joint Secretary

Mr S O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
HQ

Dear Secretary

Conversation with Mr Blair Hall of the US Embassy

Blair Hall telephoned me yesterday afternoon for an exchange of views about the peace process.

Decommissioning

Hall said that the US is attracted to the idea of a "fourth stream" on decommissioning.

While the US does not expect a "commitment in advance" from Sinn Fein that decommissioning will take place, nor can one reasonably ask the Unionists to give "an open-ended commitment" that they will not demand actual decommissioning. In these circumstances, Sinn Fein should on 10 June consider an approach based on the following points:

- * the IRA is not ready "right now" to decommission
- * Sinn Fein has influence with the IRA and is willing to use it
- * as a sign of good intent, Sinn Fein is ready to engage in serious discussion on modalities.

Hall agreed with me that it will be important to put in place an understanding or a mechanism to prevent a log-jam on 10 June arising out of possible Unionist intransigence on decommissioning. He further agreed that consideration should be given to a joint role for the two Governments in handling procedural issues at the opening of negotiations.

The Chairmanship of Strand Two

I said that the Irish Government regards George Mitchell as an ideal candidate to chair Strand Two.

Hall said that the British are briefing the Americans to the effect that

- * conclusions have not been reached with the Irish Government on this issue
- * Trimble and Paisley have expressed reservations about both Sir Ninian Stephens and George Mitchell, but both names are likely to go on a short list which will be given serious consideration.

Although the British concede that there is "no British objection or Unionist veto" regarding George Mitchell, the Americans have not been given the impression that Mitchell's appointment is being taken as read.

Hall confirmed that while the US Government is not "putting forward" Mitchell's name, both the President and Mitchell himself are willing that he should serve as Chairman of Strand Two.

A presidential statement

Hall said that the US Government is working on a presidential statement on the peace process to be issued in the general context of the forthcoming British legislation, probably in the middle of next week.

The overall goal of the statement is primarily to "assure Republicans" and "improve their comfort level" with the process.

Anthony Lake spoke in the last few days to John Holmes at Downing Street and has presumably - Hall said - also spoken to Dublin. Lake intends to contact the Northern Ireland parties over the coming week.

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Prisons

Hall asked me to bring him up to date on prisons issues. He explained that contacts between the US and the British in this area are necessarily discreet and "at political level".

I outlined a number of issues including the transfer of Patrick Kelly, transfer issues generally, and our wish to see an improvement in conditions for the prisoners at Belmarsh - which could be achieved, for example, by their re-classification.

Yours sincerely

Philip McDonagh

Philip McDonagh
Counsellor