

21/12/96

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NO.061

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BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON

FRI 20 DEC 96 21:44

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cc: JEH
o/r.

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Ambassador

Date: 20 December 1996

cc: PS/SOSNI
PS/Mr Ancram, NIO(L)
Mr Holmes, No 10
PS/PUS, FCO
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO
Minister

Mr Westmacott

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ho/xi

LAKE

1. I had an end of term talk with Lake on 20 December. He was in end-of-termish mood, hopes to get four days away over Christmas, and, although he expects to occupy the NSC office until at least mid-January, has already begun to shed some responsibilities to his successor, Berger. However, he said that Northern Ireland would be the last he'd hand over.

2. I thanked him for the line Clinton took with the press after the Bruton visit on 17 December: the strong call for an IRA ceasefire, and the commendation of the Loyalists for theirs. (Lake apologised for the President's slip up in calling for an IRA ceasefire "in words as well as deeds": we agreed that what he meant was pretty obvious.) Lake said that he was still urging Sinn Fein to bring about a ceasefire soon (it was clear that he had spoken to Adams this week). His line was that a ceasefire was in their interests, and that the Administration were convinced that the UK's "deeds as well as words" line would not lead to a prolonged pause before they joined the talks, provided the IRA genuinely behaved. I said that I hoped he was also urging on them how devastating - for the peace process, for them, for US opinion - would be an IRA Christmas outrage. Lake asked if there was any history of IRA violence at Christmas: I said that there certainly was, and that there also were precedents for bombings immediately before "ceasefires". He looked quizzical, but Peters and Soderberg confirmed that I was right.

3. Lake harped back only briefly to his "scenario", and his pre-28 November attempt to get us to set a date. Had we been able to do so, it might have done the trick, but he accepted that we hadn't been able to do so, and the point was now academic. He said that Dublin were, in his view surprisingly, optimistic that there would nevertheless be an early ceasefire. He wasn't sure why the Dublin view had swung round from their pre-28 November insistence that setting a date was a sine qua non. He hoped they were right now.

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4. Looking ahead, Lake said that, if there were a ceasefire, and it were satisfactory in deeds as well as words, and Sinn Fein were nevertheless still kept out of the talks, there would of course be a problem between us. Indeed it would be serious: given the line he had taken with Sinn Fein, and their sympathisers here, the Administration would be "dead meat". But the contingency seemed a rather unlikely one; he believed that the Prime Minister meant what he said, and he assumed that mainland public opinion would accept that a proper ceasefire should, after a decent interval for checking, lead to the door to talks opening. I said that HMG might of course find intelligence evidence, which might not be directly quotable in public, that deeds weren't matching words; but if that contingency arose, I would look forward to discussing the evidence with the Director of Central Intelligence, whose unbiased analytical opinion would always be valued in London. He grinned.

5. Lake asked (apparently from genuine ignorance) why the decommissioning issue had not been settled in the final pre-Christmas sessions of the Mitchell talks this week. I described how Maginnis and the UUP had backed away from the UUP/SDLP/Alliance joint position, with Taylor presumably calling the shots, and Trimble absent. I said that SOSNI had concluded that Taylor was the man on whom to work. Lake said that he might perhaps telephone Trimble, ask what was going on, and gently remind him of his firm and repeated avowal to Gore, on his November visit, that parallel decommissioning, provided it was real, would suffice, and that the UUP could live without prior decommissioning. I did not dissuade him.



John Kerr

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