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BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON

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NO.165 002

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From: Peter Westmacott

Date: 7 January 1997

cc: Minister  
Mr McDonald  
PS/Michael Ancram, NIO(L)  
Mr Stephens, NIO(L)  
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO  
Mr Priestley, NAD, FCO  
Mr Holmes, No 10

PS

MARTHA POPE

1. I had a private talk over lunch today with Martha Pope, George Mitchell's Chief of Staff, at her suggestion. We didn't spend too long raking over the coals of The Mail on Sunday's revelations: she was grateful for our efforts to set the record straight with the media, and for the reassurances we had provided about HMG's attitude. She remained convinced that there were those in Belfast who had been out to get her; either mischievously or because they had believed "intelligence" reports about her, but she was now satisfied that there had not been any high-level campaign to discredit her and Mitchell.
2. Clearly enjoying the decompression of being away from the Europa Hotel for a couple of weeks, Pope was not greatly looking forward to her return to Belfast. She had become increasingly disillusioned with the political leadership there - with the notable exception of the Loyalists and, to a lesser extent, the Women's Coalition. She thought it unfortunate that the political structures in Northern Ireland allowed the politicians to behave irresponsibly, knowing that the British Government would pick up the tab and they would not have to face the consequences of their actions. The place seemed to be awash with money: every special interest group, community organisation - even parts of the Government machine - seemed to have unlimited funds at its disposal. Perhaps there were just too many people with a vested interest in the status quo?
3. I asked about Mitchell's mood. Pope said that he was resigned to the talks process not producing much more in the way of results, but not despondent. Mitchell had not decided how long he would stay at the job, but her private guess was that he would probably go when the talks were mothballed for the election. If London and Dublin wanted another American to take his place, there weren't many obvious choices. Senator Kassebaum was probably too nice, as well as recently married; Nunn wouldn't be right, and in any case still harboured

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political ambitions; Foley was perceived to be too partisan; Ben Bradley was a possible, but would need to have his arm twisted. The Irish had mentioned Dick Holbrooke. Pope's view was that Holbrooke would have been emphatically the wrong person when the talks had opened last June, but she wondered whether the participants didn't now deserve him. She would be happy to stay on, for a while, as Chief of Staff to the new chairman, provided she was not regarded by the parties, or either of the two Governments, as damaged goods.

4. On the cease-fire front, Pope said the Irish Ambassador had told her that people were "trying again" to put breathe life into Hume/Adams. She had heard nothing herself - except dire warnings from the Loyalists that their cease-fire was in grave danger (Washington telex 24). Mary Ann Peters (NSC) told me separately that she was unaware of any initiative: if the Irish and/or Hume and/or Adams were up to something, they hadn't yet shared it with the White House. Hume had been in touch with Soderberg before the weekend, taking the line, in his usual optimistic way, that Adams was still working for a cease-fire and trying to bridge gaps. But that had been before the latest spat between Sinn Fein and the SDLP over their proposed electoral pact.

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