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LC PB
✓ Press

From: Peter May
Police Division
14 January 1997

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS,DOE&L) - B
PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Priestly - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B
Mr Sanderson, Cab Off (via IPL) - B
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B
Mr Lamont, RID, FCO - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Jones, HO (via IPL) - B
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B
Mr Holmes, No10

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 1997: SUMMARY

A full record of today's proceedings is in preparation. No real progress was made. Discussions in the early part of the day focussed very much on the position of the two loyalist parties in view of the recent loyalist car bombs. In wider terms, the idea of giving the Chairman a prominent role was raised, but no substantive progress was made towards producing a safe landing for talks in advance of an election with the UUP sticking to their preconditions and the SDLP in very frosty mood.

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2. The British Side had a bilateral meeting with Irish Officials (Messrs O'hUiginn, Donoghue and Cooney) to examine progress made. The British Side noted that the UUP, DUP and UKUP and SDLP all seemed to want to remit the next steps to either HMG or the two Governments working together.

3. The Irish Side reported that Seamus Mallon had recommended that any new paper on decommissioning should be at the Chairman's initiative. If rejected, there would be no loss because there was no prospect of any other paper being accepted. The Irish suggested that the two Governments look again at the 1 October paper with a view to re-tabling it. The British side said that some change would be needed to broaden the terms of trade and demonstrate cognisance had been taken of the fact the paper had been rejected once already. The two Governments agreed that this would be based on the Mitchell Report.

4. The Irish were opposed to any formal procedure against the loyalist parties. More widely they noted they would be ready to consider any constructive scheme to enable progress under the umbrella of the two Governments and the Chairman provided it was rooted in the Mitchell Report and led into three stranded Talks.

5. The Secretary of State met the two loyalist parties separately. The PUP acknowledged the problems facing the Government and the Talks process in view of concerns over the loyalist ceasefire. They stressed that so far as they were aware the CLMC ceasefire remained in place, although they could not predict for how long. They would not remain in talks if the ceasefire broke down and were not apologists for violence. The Secretary of State stressed the importance of a public statement which removed any accusation that the PUP were tainted by the recent loyalist attacks. They agreed that they could repeat their opposition to violence. The Secretary of State stressed the importance of the party being able to show it had not demonstrably dishonoured the Mitchell Principles, which was the criterion upon which any decision about future participation would depend.

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6. At the meeting with the UDP, a similar analysis was given. They had sought and received assurances that the CLMC were not involved in those attacks and that the ceasefire continued. The UDP had no difficulty in stating their active opposition to violence from whatever source, but believed that was more appropriate than using the language of condemnation. Michael Ancram stressed the need to have a credible basis upon which to ensure future loyalist participation. Both Messrs McMichael and English stressed the work being done by the UDP to avoid a breakdown in the loyalist ceasefire, and noted that continued media hype could lead to a position where the CLMC concluded that if no one believed there was a ceasefire there was no point in their maintaining it. They also agreed to consider what public statement could be made to clarify their position with regard to the use of violence.

7. The Secretary of State's meeting with the Alliance Party and a trilateral with the Independent Chairmen and Irish officials examined the prospects for making progress on the substantive issues without offering new light on the situation. HMG agreed to consider what scope there was to close the gap.

8. In pursuit of that, British Side officials met both the UUP and SDLP to examine the scope for movement on the trilateral paper and the UUP's preconditions. The UUP indicated there was no scope for compromise on the two decommissioning preconditions (to which HMG opposition was reiterated) and whilst prepared to accept the deletion of both passages in square brackets from the trilateral paper, rejected any linkage of confidence issues with the decommissioning liaison committee.

9. The SDLP were dispirited and frosty. They were not clear about whether the bracketed sections could be deleted and were not hopeful about wider agreement on the preconditions. They argued for a Government paper to be produced setting out any proposition to overcome the impasse, but obviously felt they had contributed all they could prior to Christmas, and had nothing more to add.

Signed:

PETER MAY