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From: V E Sutherland
HM Ambassador
Date: 19 March 1997

PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Leach
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr Beeton
Mr Brooker
Mr Hill
Mr Perry
Mr Steele
Mr Maccabe
Mr Stephens
Mr Lamont, RTD
Mr Holmes, No 10 - By fax
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office - By fax

File
pm 24/3.

BLOODY SUNDAY

1. I had a word this morning with Paddy Teahon about Bloody Sunday. I mentioned the reports in this morning's Irish Times that the Taoiseach has said that the latest evidence from a British Paratrooper further bolsters calls for a fresh enquiry. Dick Spring had spoken on similar lines on Morning Ireland (see Annex), adding however that it would be some weeks before current Irish investigations were completed. Both statements were less extreme than Bertie Ahern's, who has claimed that the British authorities "need to acknowledge Bloody Sunday for what it was, an unacceptable act of state terrorism that was subsequently covered up and spawned many other vile acts".

2. Paddy Teahon told me that two officials in the DFA have been charged with sifting through eye witness accounts held by the Irish. These have been on file since 1972 in the DFA, and the Departments of the Taoiseach, Finance, Justice, and the Attorney-General. The Taoiseach has asked that this material should be examined in a coherent manner. It will then be necessary to consult expert legal opinion as to its validity. The opinion of ballistic experts will also be sought. Once this work has been completed the Irish Government will decide how to take matters forward. Much will depend on the extent to which it constitutes truly new

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evidence: at present it is not clear whether the Irish material was made available to Widgery.

3. Emphasising that he was speaking personally, Paddy said he thought that at the very least the British Government would have to arrange for recent accounts of Bloody Sunday to be looked at by impartial observers. Only thus could worries currently circulating be allayed. It was unfortunate that the issue was being stirred up by Republicans. This in turn was arousing genuine human rights concerns among a much wider audience.

Comment

4. In the absence of any significant developments in the North, the Irish Government feel the need to appear active if only by reacting strongly to "secondary" issues such as McAliskey and Bloody Sunday. It is therefore unhelpful, but not altogether surprising, that the Taoiseach and Tanaiste are speaking out publicly about Bloody Sunday. Realistically however they could scarcely do less in an election year when they are already being criticised for the weakness of their attitude in comparison with that of Bertie Ahern.

5. I have considered whether we should do more to remonstrate. For the time being we are sheltering behind our line that we will examine any new evidence and take appropriate action. I deployed this once again with Paddy Teahan. However, in the light of Bertie Ahern's assertions about "state terrorism" Ministers may wish to rebut this on the record, while continuing to emphasise our measured approach as deployed at the IGC.

(Signed)

V E Sutherland