

19 May 1997 15:10

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

PS

No. 5330 P. 2 5

8117

FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS  
Political Director  
19 May 1997  
ID/71

F. 6 j. 2075.

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE(L&amp;B)

cc PS/Mr Murphy(L&B)  
PS/PUS(L&B)  
PS/Sir David Fell  
Mr Steele  
Mr Bell  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Ray-MUFAX  
Mr Beeton  
Mr Brooker  
Mr Hill  
Mr Lavery  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Lamont RID/FCO  
Mr Budd CabOffice-FAX<sup>4</sup>  
HMA Dublin-FAX via IPL

① cc me  
WF

Mr Holmes

cc: ~~PS~~  
SP.

② NS

CRB

19/5

MEETING OF LIAISON GROUP

A fuller note of last Friday's meeting of the Liaison Group will issue in due course. In summary the Irish side, having initially adopted their preferred position of making no further move on decommissioning unless they received a prior assurance that it would secure Unionist assent, were brought by a mixture of the carrot (an Adare meeting if sufficient progress were made) and stick (Ministers would be disappointed if their enthusiasm for the Anglo-Irish partnership were to be frustrated) to expose some ideas of their own, which on analysis seemed not a million miles from ours, and even to agree to draft the next paper which the Group will consider at a meeting on 27 May. All that, with various diversions, took up most of the meeting proper.

2. By the end of lunch, when the Irish side had managed to work their way through the text of the Prime Minister's speech which we gave them at the end of the meeting, there was a semi-fractious exchange occasioned by the allegedly pro-Unionist tone of the speech and the British effrontery in suggesting that amendment to their constitution might be a confidence building measure. (How sadly they must



13 May 1997 15:10

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106721 PS

No. 5330 P. 3 5

have discovered that John Hume had described the speech as the best since Demosthenes.)

3. If there is an Adare meeting - that is a Ministerial meeting confined to the political process with relatively small numbers - it might occur towards the end of the week beginning 26 May. In the light of our discussion we identified two main issues:

- (a) Decommissioning - in particular if officials have succeeded in drawing up a paper with a new proposition there will be important tactical questions about how this is played into the process. Beyond that there will be other issues about the handling of the talks when they are relaunched.
- (b) What Mr O hUiginn calls "Plan B" - that is how the two Governments would attempt to sustain the political process if, with a failure to resolve decommissioning, the present process implodes. We have ideas here, as the Secretary of State knows, and our dilemma will be how to encourage the Irish side that there is a good prospect that, in any event, the political process can be carried forward by a committed British Government, without rousing their enthusiasm to the point where they actually work to bring the present talks process to an early end. (We will separately provide briefing on Plan B.)

4. In the margins, and over lunch, I picked up a few more points from Mr O hUiginn:

- He raised the issue of the possible need for an early adjournment, in the light of the Irish Government General Election, soon after the talks resume on 3 June. He clearly wanted to convey that, despite the Tánaiste's fairly dismissive posture on this at our meeting at Lancaster House, he himself



19. May. 1997 16:11

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722 PS

No. 5330 P. 4/6

could see that some adjournment might well be helpful or necessary depending on the outcome of the Irish General Election.

- Mr O hUiginn feared that we would not secure an IRA ceasefire immediately. This worried him because if it were not achieved by the end of the summer he feared it might unravel.
- Nonetheless if there were no ceasefire before then, though exchanges with Sinn Féin might be continuing at official level, he made clear that he saw merit in the scenario the British side had sketched in the meeting: namely that we might aim to secure agreement on the handling of decommissioning before the summer break; use July/August to recruit people to serve on the independent commission on decommissioning and to establish the other decommissioning architecture so that that could begin its work in September at the same time that the three substantive strands were launched.
- Exchanging views about our dealings with Sinn Féin Mr O hUiginn made some interesting observations. While their meetings could be friendly enough he always found that at a certain point he ran into the brick wall of ideological absolutism. (We also exchanged nostalgic recollections of Mr McGuinness's Irish victimhood, Bloody Sunday version, declamation which each of us had experienced more than once.) On the style of meetings with them his own view that there was little to be gained by being other than relatively brisk and businesslike, though as far as possible cordial and informal. That is how Sinn Féin would approach the meetings, particularly with the British, and it was, in Mr O hUiginn's view, best to keep things on that level.
- On the personalities he explained his own strong preference for dealing with Martin McGuinness. He talked directly and bluntly with a clear view of the real issues and the bottom line. "In that he is like me" said Mr O hUiginn. By contrast Gerry Adams, rather like De Valera, suggested Mr O hUiginn, was always using complex formulations and elaborate intellectual constructs,



19. May. 1997 18:11

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106721 PS

No. 5330 P. 5/5

partly to bridge the various political strands in his movement, so that it took a long time to pin him down and you had to listen to hours of talk before you saw where he might be heading. I forbore to point out that despite, Mr O hUiginn's identification of himself with the McGuinness (Michael Collins?) tendency, his description of Adams/De Valera rather matched my own experience of him in the Liaison Group.

*(Signed)*

QUENTIN THOMAS  
11 Millbank  
Ext.6447