

16. Jul. 1997 8:44

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FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS
Political Director
15 July 1997
QT/MR/151

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE(L&B)

cc

PS/Mr Murphy(L&B)
PS/PUS(L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Stephens
Mr Brooker
Mr Lavery
Mr Budd CabOffice-Fax
~~Mr Holmes~~ No.10-Fax
Mr Ray-Fax
Mr Warner

File
Murphy

EXCHANGES WITH SINN FEIN: POSSIBLE SPEECH ON CONFIDENCE
BUILDING MEASURES

In the margins of today's meeting of the Liaison Group Mr Martin Mansergh took me aside, with Mr O hUiginn in attendance, to tell me something of his latest exchanges with Sinn Féin.

2. Mr Mansergh said that Sinn Féin hoped that the Secretary of State would find it possible to give a speech on confidence building measures. To assist this Sinn Féin had even produced a draft, which Mr Mansergh put on the table ready to give me. He said that in his own assessment it was encouraging that much of it was on conventional lines and, with some exceptions, within what he judged to be our margins of tolerance.

3. In response I asked whether he assessed that a ceasefire was now likely. Mr Mansergh replied that he could give no certainty, but he judged that the pieces were falling into place. It appeared that a speech of the kind requested would be an important building block. I recalled that we had been told successively that the essential requirement was a date, some certainty on decommissioning and now something more on confidence building. We had to wonder where the bottom line was.

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4. I recalled that McGuinness had put to me directly the idea that Ministers might make a public statement setting out their approach to confidence building. Indeed the Secretary of State had asked me to fax to Sinn Féin some remarks she made last Friday in an interview with CNN about confidence building measures.

5. However I went on to say that it would be very difficult for British Ministers to give a speech apparently in response to a draft suggested by Sinn Féin. It might be better for our common project if I did not receive the text Mr Mansergh offered me.

6. Mr Mansergh at first expressed concern. It would be taken as a negative signal if I refused to accept the text. He need not put it like that, I said. And if he really wanted I would accept it.

7. In subsequent exchanges, and with Mr O hUiginn's assistance (he being faster to get the point than Mansergh), we arrived at a point that:

- I would not receive the text Mr Mansergh had brought with him;
- Mr Mansergh would say to Sinn Féin that he had explained to the British Government the Irish Government's view that it would be helpful if something more was said publicly about confidence building and perhaps,
- that he would register with them that I had taken from my last conversation with Martin McGuinness that this was an important issue for Sinn Féin;
- that the Irish Government might favour us with any thoughts they had themselves about what we might helpfully say (Mr O hUiginn to draft);
- that I would report this, without any commitment, to Ministers.

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8. In other words if the Secretary of State decides to make a speech, or some other public statement, emphasising the Government's commitment to confidence building, it can truthfully be said that we have not been given guidance, let alone a draft, of what might be said from Sinn Féin.

9. We now await whatever suggestions the Irish system, through Mr O hUiginn, puts to us. Other things being equal, there is much to be said for the Secretary of State making a speech, or some further public statement, reinforcing its commitment to confidence building; and, as always, any advice from the Irish Government would be gratefully received.

(Signed: Quentin Thomas)

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