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10 DOWNING STREET
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16 September 1997

From the Private Secretary

See Mem,

NORTHERN IRELAND

I should record the conversations relevant to the talks in Belfast in which I have been involved today.

Following a discussion with Dr Mowlam this morning, I spoke to David Trimble (an attempt to set up a call between the Prime Minister and Trimble having temporarily failed). Trimble said that the bomb was obviously affecting his plans. He would need to change his tactics, although not his strategy. He probably would not now be in the talks today. He thought the bomb had been planted by the IRA. It could be the Continuity Army Council, but it was not their normal territory. He feared that the IRA were trying out a no claim/no blame policy. He was heading for the scene himself, not least because it was near his constituency.

I said that we continued to hope that the UUP would be in the talks tomorrow, if not today. I was also concerned that the amendments to the procedural motion he had sent to Paul Murphy might prove unnegotiable, and undermine the understandings we had. Trimble said he did not see why this should be the case. He had discussed with Paul Murphy the day before what the UUP needed. Paul had said he would take these concerns into account in a revised draft, but the draft had scarcely changed when it appeared. It was nevertheless possible that the UUP suggestions went too far in the other direction. He accepted my suggestion that the need was to get round the table and negotiate an agreed text. His bottom line was that the UUP could not accept wording which suggested they had agreed to the paper of the two governments.

The Prime Minister was able to speak to Trimble not long afterwards. Trimble was on his way to Markethill. He said that he had intended to be in the talks today, but this now looked tactically inadvisable. But he thought it would be sensible to get together with Dr Mowlam to sort out a form of words on the procedural motion. He repeated what he had said to me about the bomb, adding

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that even if it was the Continuity Army Council, there would at least be connivance from the IRA.

The Prime Minister said that it was difficult to prove responsibility. If there was evidence that the IRA were responsible, Sinn Fein would have to leave the talks. In the absence of evidence, it would be very difficult to take action.

Trimble assumed that the Security Forces would put together what evidence they could. It was certainly clear that there were divisions in the republican movement. It could be that Adams and McGuinness were having to agree to a resumption of violence on a no claim/no blame basis. He repeated that the bomb would not change his strategy, although he would have to think carefully about his tactics. He meant this.

The Prime Minister commented that those who planted the bomb clearly had the intention of disrupting the talks. We should all bear that in mind. Trimble seemed to accept this, and the conversation concluded with Trimble saying again that he hoped to thrash out the procedural motion with Dr Mowlam.

I have passed all this on to Paddy Teahon to ensure that the Irish were in the picture. He took it all calmly. He said that he had been given news of the bomb by Rita O'Hare (!), although it had already been on the television by then. He assumed it was the Continuity Army Council, but he said that security experts on both sides should have a hard look at what was really going on. Teahon called me later to say that there were of course serious tensions within the Republic Movement. Sinn Fein were suggesting to them that, if they knew for certain that Trimble would be in the talks, even if this took more time, this would help them. Adams and McGuinness had to have something concrete to show for their efforts. But he understood that this was not an argument which could easily be used with Trimble. Like us, he hoped that Trimble would use his challenge to Sinn Fein's credentials as the vehicle for joining the talks.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).


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