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FROM: A J N Tansley
British Embassy
DUBLIN

DATE: 17 November 1997

File
Huski

CC: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins
Mr Leach
Mr Bell
Mr Stephens
Mr D Ferguson
Mr Brooker
Mr Perry
Mr Maccabe
Mr Beeton
Mr Priestly
Mr Woods
Ms Mapstone
Mr Warner
Mr Fergusson, RID
Mr Holmes, No.10
Mr Sanderson, Cabinet Office
Mr D Cooke, Cabinet Office
Ms C Byrne, TPU Home Office

Mr Hill

LIAISON GROUP MEETING, DUBLIN : 14 NOVEMBER 1997

Present:

British side

Mr Thomas
Mr Stephens
Mr Bell
Mr Hill
Mr Ferguson
Mr Cooke
Mr Tansley

Irish side

Mr Gallagher
Mr Mansergh
Mr Donoughe
Mr Cooney
Mr Hickey
Mr O'Connor
Mr Montgomery

1. A meeting of the liaison group was held in Dublin on 14 November, beginning at 1200, and continuing over lunch at Kildare Street Club.

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2. A productive meeting at which agreement was reached ad referendum on the paper for Senator Mitchell's bilaterals on Strand 2. There was also broad agreement on taking matters forward with the decommissioning commission. The Irish side again called for the British Government to take action on prisoners, security force levels and Irish language teaching.

Paper for Senator Mitchell

3. Opening the meeting, Mr Gallagher said that, while he was grateful for the British re-draft of the paper for Senator Mitchell, he questioned whether this should include a list identifying the key elements in any settlement. To do so in advance of the bilaterals was premature, and might confuse Senator Mitchell. In addition, it was important that the parties should have a sense of ownership of whatever emerged at the plenary. Mr Gallagher indicated that he would prefer a short, neutral document corresponding exactly to what Senator Mitchell had requested.

4. Mr Thomas said that the intention had been for the British redraft to build upon the original Irish paper, introducing only minor modifications. He emphasised that the British side did not intend the paper to be shown to the parties. Instead, it was to help Senator Mitchell to draw up an annotated agenda which he could use in the bilaterals. Mr Gallagher argued that Senator Mitchell was very well versed in the issues involved, and had a good knowledge of the Frameworks documents. He did not think he needed further guidance. The intention behind the Irish paper had been to raise only the essential questions and to be neutral in tone.

5. Mr Thomas said he recognised that the parties needed to have "ownership" of whatever emerged. He suggested that the relevant section of the British paper (ie paragraphs 6-10) be dropped, but that Senator Mitchell be asked whether he would find useful an overview of the likely key elements of a settlement. Mr Gallagher said that he saw no difficulties with such an approach. There then followed a discussion of when such a briefing should take place, with Mr Donoghue saying that this should happen after the bilaterals, and Mr Hill

g that this should be before. It was agreed that Senator
asked for his preference on this.

6. Moving on to the section headed (in the British draft) "Issues to be resolved, Mr Gallagher expressed concern that the linkage between constitutional issues and North/South arrangements in the first indent was akin to language used by Unionists. Neutral wording was required. Mr Thomas agreed, and in the subsequent discussion changes were made to this and a number of other tirets (as given in the final text, circulated separately).

7. Mr Gallagher questioned whether there was a need for the preamble to the section headed "Questions which might be put to the parties". Not only did this appear to be identifying key elements of a settlement, but it was also unbalanced, downgrading Strand II relative to the other strands. Mr Thomas disagreed, saying that there was a need to draw out the issues. Mr Stephens added that the point of the exercise was to tempt the parties, particularly the Unionists, to move forward and to accept North/South bodies. Mr Donoghue argued that other parties would be forced out by such an approach. Mr Thomas said a possible way forward would be to include wording in the preamble which gave North/South bodies a status equal to the other elements referred to. This was agreed, and after some discussion, the language in the final text was agreed.

8. The redrafting of the rest of the section was achieved with little difficulty. The only significant point that Mr Gallagher objected to sub-paragraph (e) of the British draft, arguing that it would be wrong to float the idea that North/South bodies might relate only to the border counties in the Republic. The British side cited Foyle Fisheries and the work of the various international funds as precedents for such bodies. But after some discussion, it was agreed to drop the sub-paragraph.

Decommissioning

9. Mr Hickey said that Ministers had met the decommissioning Commission on 10 November. At the meeting, there had been a frank discussion of the approach agreed at the last IGC. A copy of the draft report agreed by the two Governments was passed to the Commission. The Commission had returned a revised version of the

on 12 November, and indicated that they wanted a further
meeting with the two Governments on the afternoon of 17 November.

10. Mr Hickey said that the Irish Government's initial reaction to the revised report was that it still contained points which could cause problems. The Department of Justice would seek to agree a joint response with the NIO to the Commission. Mr Hickey also said that the Commission had given a very mixed message on how the report was to be handled in the broader talks framework. It was necessary to impress upon the Commission the desirability of consultation with interested parties, and to agree on what basis the report would be considered in the talks. There was no question of it being amended in the sub-committee on decommissioning.

11. Mr Thomas said that he agreed with this analysis. He understood that the Commission would try to see Sinn Fein, the PUP and the UDP on 17 November. He had also heard a meeting of the sub-committee was being considered for the week beginning 1 December. The two Governments should try to head this off, as this was when the plenary was due to meet. A meeting of the sub-committee on 25/26 November was preferable, even though neither Holkeri nor Mitchell was planning to be in Belfast that week. It might be necessary for the two governments to issue a joint demarche to get one or other to attend. Mr Hickey agreed. Consultation with the interested parties had to go ahead before the report was tabled, although, he added, this did not allow them to have a veto on process.

12. Concluding the discussion on this issue, Mr Gallagher commented that that he had found the Commission at times too "gung-ho" and did not always taken account of the broader talks process.

News from the Road

13. Mr Gallagher said that some of the parties, notably Sinn Fein, were under pressure to demonstrate that progress had been made in the talks. The two governments needed to inject more momentum into the process. The Taoiseach planned to call on the talks in Belfast on 8 December. He was also considering inviting the leaders of the parties to lunch to talk over prospects for the talks, even though he recognised that the loyalists and unionists would almost certainly not come. Mr Mansergh added that the Taoiseach had flagged up the idea of

at meeting in July. The intention was to tie the lunch in with the opening of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation expected to take place in Dublin on 5 December.

14. Mr Mansergh went on to reiterate the need to maintain momentum outside as well as inside the talks. The two governments needed to take steps to reassure all the parties - not just Sinn Fein and the loyalists. The Irish government had recently sought to reassure Unionists by announcing financial support for a memorial to those who died in the First World War in Belgium, and by indicating their intention to improve protestant schools in border areas.

15. Mr Mansergh said that there was a need for action to be taken in other areas. On prisoners, unlike the Irish Government, the British Government appeared to have no programme of action. Mr Mansergh also said that current level of security force activity in Northern Ireland caused concern among nationalists. He recognised that, in global terms, security force levels had been reduced since the ceasefire. But there were areas in which activity appeared to have been stepped up, notably south Armagh. There was also no sign of plans to dismantle military installations. Lastly, Mr Mansergh referred to the Irish language sector, which, he said, was an issue continually raised with the Irish government by Sinn Fein.

16. Mr Thomas said that he found Mr Mansergh's insights useful. On prisoners, there might be scope for movement. But the British Government had played many of its best cards, notably the increase in remission, during the last ceasefire. It also had to be recognised that many of the proposals put to the British Government were out of step with what was politically possible. On the question of security force levels, Mr Thomas said that the security forces had to take into account that there were still Republican and loyalist groups active.

17. In conclusion, Mr Gallagher said he believed that Adams and McGuinness were committed to the talks process. But they needed help. On prisoner transfers there was a settled policy. Could not remaining tariffs be set (Mr Gallagher referred specifically to the case of Hugh Doherty) to allow all the remaining prisoners to be transferred?

(signed)
A J N Tansley

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