

CONFIDENTIAL

cc. JP
AC

Ref: BO.2445

MR HOLMES

cc Ms Polley
Mr Sanderson
Mr Fittall**"BLOODY SUNDAY": IRISH GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES**

Mr Sanderson copied to you Mr Fergusson's (RID, FCO) note of 1 December, recording Philip McDonagh's (Irish Embassy) view that the Irish Government would be satisfied with a paper inquiry under the chairmanship of a British judge. We have checked with Mr Fergusson, who thinks that this was McDonagh's own gloss, and that he was not speaking on instructions. McDonagh's comments are contradicted by reporting from a more authoritative source, which you have seen, which says that the Taoiseach would be satisfied with nothing less than "a review under the aegis of an international committee". I think that this must be taken to mean something akin to a public inquiry, hearing witnesses.

2. This subject also came up at lunch I had with Ted Barrington yesterday, when it was clear (I have copied you my note) that he was well informed about our thinking and implied a belief that the Prime Minister had ruled out an inquiry, Barrington took the view that it would be very much a personal decision by Ahern on how much internal flak he could withstand - and there would be a lot - if he did not have a major row with us in that event.

3. We therefore see no purpose in opening up a dialogue with the Irish in the hope of reaching common ground as Mr Fergusson suggests. This would only confirm Irish suspicions that we were vacillating. Even if McDonagh's interpretation was correct, if we attempted at the outset to confine any review to the papers it would be seen as pre-judging the review's conclusions. In any event it is probably not a position which could be sustained.

*Temporarily retained**MPakenham*

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3 December 1997

MICHAEL PAKENHAM

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PREM 49/121 Letter dated 03 December 1997