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to PM's Party  
via Uton

FROM: A J N Tansley,  
British Embassy, Dublin

DATE: 5 February 1998

cc: PS/SofS (L&B)  
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)  
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)  
PS/PUS (L&B)  
PS/Mr John Semple  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Steele  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Leach  
Mr Bell  
Mr Hill (B&L)  
Mr Brooker  
Ms Bharucha  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Fergusson (RID)  
Mr Richards (via RID)  
PUSD (via RID)  
Mr John Holmes, PS/No10 (by fax)  
The Hon M A Pakenham, Cabinet Office (by fax)  
Mr David Cooke, Cabinet Office (by fax)

PS/SofS

# **SECRETARY OF STATE'S CALL ON THE TAOISEACH, 5 FEBRUARY 1998**

1. The Secretary of State called on the Taoiseach this morning for half an hour. The meeting began with a short tete-a-tete. Martin Mansergh, Wally Kirwan, the Ambassador and I then joined it.
2. The Secretary of State opened by saying that it was important to send the right message to parties that both governments were committed to reaching a settlement by May by, for example, enacting the necessary legislation to allow referendums to go ahead. If 1 May were the target date for the referendums to be held, and assuming that three weeks would be required for the campaign, and three weeks to get the legislation through respective Parliaments, it would be necessary to start work before the end of February.
3. The Taoiseach agreed. Turning to the talks, he highlighted that much work had still to be done. the Propositions document and the papers on the three Strands were a good start, but these had to be worked up quickly if the Governments were to make the May deadline. The Secretary of State commented that she had been impressed by the progress which had been achieved in the Strand 1 Committee earlier in the week. For the first time, Reg Empey had

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answered Sinn Fein directly and had given them a hard time on their proposals about Regional Councils. As he had carried on, he had appeared to grow in confidence, and for the first time Sinn Fein had appeared rattled. Mr Mansergh commented that Sinn Fein were hamstrung in any discussion on Strand 1 by their own rules forbidding them from supporting an internal settlement. They would only accept an Assembly once everything else had been agreed (an even this could not be guaranteed).

4. The Secretary of State agreed with this analysis, but argued that it might be possible to part Strand 1 issues pending agreement elsewhere. She also thought that Sinn Fein were slowly appreciating that any discussion on North/South bodies would need to take on board to whom the Northern side of the body were accountable. She envisaged getting to a point where it might be possible to get them to consider a Northern Ireland Assembly as a means of getting North/South co-operation.

5. The Taoiseach commented that it might not be as easy as this. The reports he was receiving from Sinn Fein's grass roots suggested that they were not happy with the route the party leadership was following. The party's next Ard Fheis was due to take place in April. It was unlikely that the leadership would want to go to it having agreed anything substantial in the talks.

6. The Secretary of State accepted that difficulties remained. But if a settlement was to be reached, the two Governments had to push harder. At the same time though, it was essential that the parties to the talks had ownership of any settlement which emerged. As for Sinn Fein, if their final position was one of acquiescence, or even peaceful and democratic opposition to a final outcome, it should prove possible for the two Governments to live with this.

7. The Taoiseach argued that the broad parameters of a settlement were generally accepted. He had been struck during a debate on Northern Ireland in the Dail the previous day by how little opposition there had been to the broad thrust of the Irish Government's policies. The opposition parties seemed more worried about the final details of any settlement - for example, the role of an accounting officer in a Northern Ireland Assembly, and who would pay for the staff of the North/South Bodies - than in the underlying principles. That said, constitutional change was likely to be a large problem for any Irish Government. The issue was highly emotive in the Republic. By way of example, the Taoiseach referred to a Christmas card he had received from Bobby Buller, who had ended by saying that if the Government changed Articles 2 and 3, there would be an unholy war.

9. Concluding the discussion, the Secretary of State reiterated her desire to see a timetable for the holding of referendums, and suggested that the two Governments meet to agree this when the talks moved to Dublin.

(SIGNED)

A J N Tansley

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