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FROM: J M STEELE
SENIOR DIRECTOR (BELFAST)
6 December 1996

POLITICAL AFFAIR
DIVISION
-9DEC1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr McKervill - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Westmacott, W/ton (via RID) - B

MR THOMAS - B

ALLEGATIONS ABOUT MARTHA POPE

Further to John McKervill's minute of 5 December I thought I should explain my comments as reported in the Boston Globe on 4 December.

2. While I was in Boston the Martha Pope story was running strongly and I was told by the Consul General that Irish diplomats were briefing that it was a typical dirty tricks operation by MI5 designed to damage George Mitchell. When I went by previous arrangement to the Globe office on 3 December to give an off-the-record briefing I was immediately pressed about the story and Irish comments and decided that it would do no harm, and might do some good, if I corrected the Irish implications and put HMG's position on George Mitchell beyond doubt. If I had remained silent it would of course have had the reverse effect. Hence the Globe story, which is accurate in substance if not in every particular.

3. I am glad now to see that others have been taking a similar line.

Signed JMS

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