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SECURITY POLICY & OPERATIONS 1

RECEIVED 27 NOV 1996

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FROM: J McKERVILL  
Political Affairs Division  
26 November 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir David Fell - B  
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Ray - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Hill (B&L) - B  
Mr Perry - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Beeton - B  
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B  
Mr Lavery - B  
Ms Mapstone - B  
HMA Dublin - B  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office - Fax  
Mr Holmes, No 10

c- (A)

PS/Michael Ancram (B&L)

#### HUME/ADAMS: DISCUSSION WITH SEAN O'hUIGINN

Sean O'hUiginn, accompanied by David Cooney, had a meeting with Mr Thomas in Castle Buildings this afternoon to report on Sinn Fein reactions to the British Government's text. I was also present.

2. Mr O'hUiginn reported that the universal consensus among Sinn Fein representatives, led by McGuinness, at the meeting with senior Irish Officials was that the British text was "very very depressing". Sinn Fein's reaction had been that the "British want a victory, not a ceasefire". They confirmed that the text as it stood would not wash. That said, Sinn Fein would be having a meeting in the next day or two with the IRA at which they undertook to give the fairest possible assessment of the text.

3. Recognising that Sinn Fein needed both equality of treatment and some certainty, at the meeting O'hUiginn had explored with them the

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possibility of the talks being adjourned for a long Christmas break. If a ceasefire were declared during the adjournment, the break might continue to the end of January at which point Sinn Fein would be admitted when the talks resumed. Sinn Fein representatives were non-committal in their reply but, O'hUiginn reported, were not hostile at what the Irish were trying to achieve.

4. O'hUiginn registered a number of other points. Sinn Fein were anxious to know of their request for a meeting with the British Government at official level. The Irish had replied that the matter was still under consideration and that it was, to some extent, dependent on Sinn Fein's response to the British Government's text. Secondly, Irish officials had gained a strong sense that Sinn Fein were happy to take things forward fully in accordance with the Mitchell Report. They also received the sense that if the talks process proved inconclusive between any ceasefire and the general election, that that would not lead to a breakdown in the ceasefire. Sinn Fein, they believed, had factored that into their analysis of the Talks process. Finally, Sinn Fein had been left in no doubt that the strength of language of any ceasefire announcement could prove highly beneficial. There was a tacit acceptance, O'hUiginn said, that this was an area to be revisited. It was left, although no fixed date was agreed, that there would be a further meeting between Sinn Fein and Irish officials towards the weekend.

5. Thanking Mr O'hUiginn for this account Mr Thomas said that enormous pressure had built up on our side to publicise the text, caused much by the talking up over the weekend of the initiative by both John Hume and Martin McGuinness. The talks had virtually frozen, as delegations were transfixed by the Hume/Adams initiative, while there was further pressure coming from back benchers. These pressures were coalescing towards publication on Thursday of this week, which, he recognised, was an unfortunate mis-match of timing.

6. Reacting, Mr O'hUiginn said that if the text were published in the wrong format, it would be seen as merely tactical by Sinn Fein and it would consequently be very difficult to retrieve the



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situation. It would be deeply destabilising if a scenario came about which locked Sinn Fein into a situation where their admittance to the talks would be at the discretion of the Secretary of State. Any sense of a probation period would be absolute poison for Republicans. Continuing, Mr Thomas said that he was not sure that any of the text was negotiable. But, given the hype put on the initiative by others, although no firm date had been decided upon, there was heavy pressure to publicise by the end of the month. Thursday began to appear a critical day and he asked O'hUiginn to report that back to his Ministers. He was quite sure however that the British Government would not publicise the document without first warning the Irish, not least to check the wording given the references to both Governments in the text.

7. Mr Thomas continued by asking what would be the end point if the text were not published on Thursday. Mr O'hUiginn replied that he was as anxious as the British Government to bring this matter to a conclusion as soon as possible although, he argued, it would be counter-productive to do so if it did not achieve the shared aim of bringing about a ceasefire. Otherwise, it would be better not to do anything at all. Mr Thomas repeated that he did not want to leave the Irish in any doubt: the British Government needed powerful arguments why, if it was not to publish the text on Thursday, the situation would be better any later. He repeated that he did not want to imply that the scheme was negotiable. O'hUiginn curtly responded that if not, then further discussion was a total waste of time.

8. Mr Thomas repeated that it was helpful to have Mr O'hUiginn's views and particularly his agreement for the need to move as swiftly as possible. Any response so far from his Irish colleagues had implied a lack of urgency or end point. Mr O'hUiginn replied that there was no doubt at all that he wanted to move quickly. He undertook to explore again what could be done in terms of ceasefire language. He could not say however whether the scenario he sketched out was going to take the trick with the Republican movement although

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he strongly believed that it represented almost the only terrain in which a deal could lie. He was anxious to firm it up.

Signed:

J McKERVILL  
Ext 27088

CC: Secretary of State  
FBI/John Warner L.B.  
FBI/Michael Armstrong L.B.  
PS/PUS  
PS/Sir David Peel  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Steele  
Mr Ray  
Mr Bell  
Mr Lamb  
Mr Watson  
Mr Chapman  
Mr Hill  
Mr Jones  
Mr Marshall  
Mr Martin  
Mr Murray  
Mr Rogers

4 for report under 1/1/77  
only on 1/1/77

From: John McKervill  
To: LBA Director  
Subject: Name: [illegible]  
Date: 15/1/77

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