

FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS
POLITICAL DIRECTOR (L)
6 DECEMBER 1996

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

R. G.
John 9/12.

PS/PUS (L&B) - B

CALL BY IRISH AMBASSADOR

I accompanied you when Mr Barrington, the Irish Ambassador called on you this morning. The discussion constituted a general review of the position looking ahead in particular to the meeting between the Prime Minister and Taoiseach on Monday. Nothing new emerged.

2. Initial exchanges focussed on the entry conditions and the Prime Minister's statement of 28 November. As you drew out there was a difference in the position of the two Governments in this sense: while the Irish Government appeared to see the main priority as to bring Sinn Fein in and therefore to look for language which would "do the trick"; the British Government's posture was that, while it wanted as inclusive a process as was compatible with its

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policy, and had to that end been ready to re-state its policy as urged over a period by John Hume, if that might help Sinn Fein and the IRA do what they should in any event, it was not prepared to adjust its policy to that end.

3. Mr Barrington acknowledged that while the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste had made clear that the talks should go ahead even if Sinn Fein did not join them, it was true that the Irish Government were centrally concerned with bringing Sinn Fein in.

4. I, playing the hard man, drew out one result of the difference of approach between the two Governments. While HMG had been ready to look for different ways of expressing its clear policy position, it had seemed that the Irish Government had no settled position other than to respond to Sinn Fein's demands. Thus, over a period, the Irish system had vacillated between a position that four to six weeks would be a reasonable pre-entry period; to the insistent statement that it must be immediate if there were to be any chance of a ceasefire; to its final position which appeared to involve a gap of up to two months over the Christmas break. If the Irish side had been consistent in recognising the need for some entry period it was very likely that the last week we could have presented a joint position. Then, rather than responding to Sinn Fein's demands, we could have put pressure on them.

5. Mr Barrington, somewhat uneasily, said that the Irish system had consistently emphasised the need for certainty though he did not dispute that it had at times been coupled with the idea of immediacy.

6. Mr Barrington made clear the Irish system's disappointment about the failure of their representations to delay the statment at the last minute. Declining to get into the details of a matter between the two Prime Ministers offices, you stressed how late in the day this intervention was, and how real had been the pressures on HMG to declare a clear public position.

7. In a useful exchange, of which Mr Barrington appeared to take a careful note, you spelt out that there was certainty of entry for Sinn Fein if the criteria were met. There was indeed a legal duty on the Secretary of State to issue an invitation - whatever the consequence might be for others in the process - if he came honestly to the view that the criteria were established. In that sense the question which Mr Barrington identified as being in the Taoiseach's mind - namely whether the British system could contemplate an inclusive process - was an unreal one. The carefully established legal basis for the process meant that that was a definite result if Sinn Fein and the IRA did what was necessary.

8. You drew out our understanding that exchanges between Mr Holmes and Mr Teahon suggested that there would not be a formal communique, but convergent press lines. Mr Barrington indicated that while Mr Teahon was not personally pressing for a communique, he did not feel he had formally abandoned that possibility. In discussion it was agreed that, provided the Taoiseach did not press for a specific date and acknowledged that the Prime Minister would be bound by his statement of 28 November, there was scope for much convergence. We referred, for example, to the language at the end of the Prime Minister's letter of 22 November to the Taoiseach.

9. Mr Barrington returned to the question of whether HMG could, in present political conditions, enable a statement which would lead to inclusive talks by "saying what was required". You responded by again stressing the legal requirements. I reminded Mr Barrington that the two Governments did not start with a blank sheet of paper. They had together, over many months, and despite distractions like the Manchester bomb, carefully constructed, through various communiques, the groundrules and legislation, all agreed basis for the talks carefully designed to bring Sinn Fein in on proper terms. But on 10 June they had not turned up.

10. You expressed appreciation for the efforts which the Irish system had made to engage with Sinn Fein and to explore whether they could be brought in. You gently distinguished their relatively discreet activities from those of John Hume, mentioning his propensity to gild the lily. This was by way of introduction to your suggesting that the Prime Minister would very much appreciate the Taoiseach's best assessment of whether there remains a realistic hope of an early ceasefire. Mr Barrington noted the point and said that his impression was that the Irish system was now much less hopeful. (In further hard man mode, I canvassed the possibility that this was because Sinn Fein had now achieved their tactical objective of dividing the two Governments and to an extent thereby legitimized further violence.)

11. Finally you stressed that if there were no ceasefire it was important that the talks were carried forward. If those parties in the process could find a way through the decommissioning issue this would be a significant achievement, of much greater importance than that on the rules of procedure. Mr Barrington agreed, in somewhat ritual terms, clearly finding it difficult to engage very seriously on the prospect of the talks continuing with vitality if it became clear that Sinn Fein were absent. On the decommissioning issue, Mr Barrington mentioned that the Irish system was studying Senator Mitchell's proposed compromise carefully. Despite some difficulties they could probably live with it. We mentioned our doubts whether it would meet the UUP's requirements.

(signed)

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