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Secretary of State's speech "Culture and Identity".

<sup>December</sup>  
16 November 1992

Security aspects


1. The Secretary of State's speech is no doubt being analysed in the round. From the point of view of Security Section, however, a number of aspects call for specific comment. This note is a preliminary attempt to offer such comment. One general point: the speech is a carefully structured presentation of the British analysis of the fault lines of Northern Ireland in four themes (nationality, religion, culture, and economic and social disadvantage). This structure allows the Secretary of State to set out the issues of religion, culture and economic matters in abstraction from the question of national identity and to advertise what he sees as British achievements in each of the areas (e.g. funding of Catholic schools, fair employment legislation, support for the Irish language, and a heavy and repetitive emphasis on the level of British financial support to the Northern Ireland economy.) The Secretary of State also gets in some passing shots for the record e.g. implicit criticism of the GAA for their exclusion of RUC members.
  
2. In addressing the question of identity and allegiance, the primary pitch is aimed at nationalists and in particular elements in Sinn Fein and their supporters. What is involved essentially is an appeal for a ceasefire, which is prefaced by some warm - and almost patronising - words in support of constitutional nationalism; and praise, albeit tinged with bathos, of selected constitutional nationalists: "men like O'Connell, Parnell and Joe Devlin". The choice of Joe Devlin is interesting - essentially a Redmondite, a

conservative Catholic and an accommodationist with Stormont, with a strong reputation as a local politician.

3. The appeal for a ceasefire is also preceded by an implicit semi-apology for Britain's historical role, clearly designed to attract the interest of the Republican movement: "you will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been up-lifting", and by a countervailing statement of British refusal to concede in the face of violence - violence which he emphasises has no popular mandate in the island of Ireland.
4. There follows the appeal proper, interspersed with a series of carrots offered to the nationalist community viz:
  - he asserts that leading Sinn Fein speakers voice their wish for a peaceful solution and their desire to follow a constitutional path. (Note: this is arguably an exaggeration. Sinn Fein spokesmen have expressed unhappiness at specific acts of violence, and there have been indications of a desire by Sinn Fein to be part of a process of dialogue, but Sinn Fein's public statements have fallen within the framework of their official party position. Presumably Mayhew's pitch has been made in the light of soundings taken with senior Churchmen (e.g. Bishop Daly) involved in contacts with Sinn Fein).
  - The Secretary of State appears to imply that the British Government's involvement in dialogue with Sinn Fein cannot precede renunciation of violence and a ceasefire. It is worth noting that the Republican movement is described as having excluded itself from discussions. (This is essentially the formulation used by the Minister in his own comments

on the issue).

- A major carrot is dangled by the Secretary of State in his clear statement that, in the event of a durable cessation of violence, the British Government's security and justice policies would be reviewed, for example, the RUC would be able to provide proper policing to the community; "preventive measures" (presumably checkpoints, stop and search operations, which have recently caused substantial criticism among Unionists as well as nationalists) could be relaxed; the Army could return to barracks; and emergency legislation would end.
- 5. Added to the significant inducements is the promise of devolved government with safeguards, a piece of the actions for all political groupings who follow the constitutional path, and a reaffirmation of Britain's lack of vested interests.
- 6. This speech clearly puts the ball into the Republican court and would appear to be designed to constitute a point of reference for a possible extended Christmas ceasefire by the Provisional IRA. At the very least, by appealing not only to Sinn Fein but also to the nationalist community at large, it will no doubt add to the pressures for a debate within the Republican movement on the utility of continuing the strategy of violence. One final point: apart from his description of the Government as essentially a joint neutral referee, we do not figure in Mayhew's analysis, nor does the Anglo - Irish Agreement.



Declan Kelleher  
16 December, 1992

The Secretary of State's Coleraine speech (16 December 1992)

Overall assessment

The speech is a recapitulation of a number of themes which are familiar either from earlier speeches (notably the Whitbread speech of November 1990) or from discussions with the British Government during the recent Talks.

The only new element of significance is its emphasis on the importance of Irish culture and the Irish language.

Although British officials have sought to present it as an address of major importance and interest for the nationalist community (a "Whitbread Mark II"), the speech breaks no new ground in the key areas of political/constitutional matters and the British Government's relationship with the Republican movement.

It is, however, a generally helpful exposition of current British Government thinking in these areas. It also reveals a degree of effort on the British side to respond to nationalist sensitivities, even if considerable room remains for improvement in the individual formulations used.

Political/constitutional

The Secretary of State reiterates Britain's firm commitment to the wishes of a majority in NI, which, he notes, the Irish Government has also endorsed by its signature of the AI Agreement.

He describes as "no less legitimate" the aspiration to a united Ireland, provided it is not pursued either by violence or the threat of violence.      Reproducing the "non-impedence"

approach of the Whitbread speech (which he offered during the recent Talks in the context of the constitutional "balance" sought by Irish Ministers), he declares that the British Government "would never try to impede" any body of opinion which sought to achieve a united Ireland by democratic and peaceful means. If a majority agreed, the British Government would "present no obstacle". Implicitly recalling both the Whitbread speech and the AI Agreement, he notes that "all this is well known and already constitutes a binding obligation upon us".

The Secretary of State's comment that there is much "for deep regret" in Ireland's history and that the British Government "shares in that regret to the full" echoes an intervention which he made during the Talks. This appears to be the first occasion on which this point has been made by a British Minister in public.

Another concept familiar from the Talks (where it was criticised by the Irish Government) is that the British Government has no agenda or "blueprint" of its own and is merely a "facilitator of the democratic will in NI".

Conspicuously missing from the speech is any reference to the importance of North/South cooperation, let alone institutional structures.

A token gesture is made to the relevance of the EC framework for a solution of the NI problem. The emphasis on the "accommodation of difference", a favourite Hume formulation, is also of interest.

#### The Republican movement and the consequences of a ceasefire

In a passage which contains no innovation vis-a-vis the Whitbread and other speeches, the Secretary of State notes



"welcome signs that the truth is getting through to some Republicans" and that there are leading Sinn Fein speakers who are voicing their wish for a peaceful solution. Provided it is advocated constitutionally, he sees no reason for any political objective to be excluded from discussion. However, there can be no "dealing, directly or indirectly, with anyone who still espouses violence".

The Provisional movement has "so far excluded itself from discussions" because of the methods which it follows. The Secretary of State calls on the Provisionals to renounce the use and threat of violence and to demonstrate over "a sufficient period" that their renunciation is for real. In the event of a genuine and established cessation of violence, there would be "profound consequences" for the maintenance of law and order and for the administration of justice.

#### Support for the Irish language

The Secretary of State commits himself to removing "as soon as practicable" the legislation which prohibits street-names in any language other than Irish. The political/symbolic value of this gesture, however, is somewhat reduced by a blunt warning that there are no plans for "a bilingual society".

#### Economic/social disadvantage

This section, essentially a tribute to initiatives such as Making Belfast Work and Targeting Social Need, contains no new elements. One point of interest, however, is an amplification of the argument that Britain has no "selfish economic interest" in remaining in NI.

Anglo-Irish Section

18 December 1992