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17 Grosvenor Place

SW1X 7HR

Mr O'Sullivan's handwritten notes
4.3.93
4/3/93

Maithon
Sullivan
12/3/93

Doisicéach
Who see please
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passages high lighted
Shz 3/3/93

PST
PSS
Mr A Murray
Asst Sec
Ambassador W ten
Counsellor A1
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CONFIDENTIAL

1 March 1993

Mr Seán Ó hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2



PRIME MINISTER MAJOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON

Dear Assistant Secretary

I called today on Raymond Seitz, the American Ambassador, to obtain a briefing on the Major-Clinton meeting last week. The Ambassador was in Washington for that visit and I was anxious to get some insights into the latest American thinking on the so-called peace envoy mission to Northern Ireland in the light of Britain's concerns about the nature and role of such an enterprise.

Successful Visit

Ambassador Seitz said that overall the visit was quite a success, especially when viewed against the advance media publicity which tended to focus on perceived differences and strains. The Prime Minister and the President got on very well together "and played to their respective strengths". The help extended to the Bush campaign by the Tory party and the Home Office's ready cooperation with the outgoing administration in checking files on Clinton's activities in Britain during his student days are matters which are now out of the way. The Ambassador agreed that the British were more worried than they were willing to admit in public about the envoy issue. However, John Major realised that the President was stuck with a commitment from the election campaign and that there were some powerful political figures around reminding him of that fact. The letter signed by the twelve Senators was proof of this. The problem was how to handle and manage this situation in a manner that all sides, including the British, could live with. The British Prime Minister had indicated he would be as accommodating as possible, so long as no serious problems were created for his side. It was of paramount importance that the envoy issue should not in any way interfere with the talks process.

Terms of Reference of Special Envoy

President Clinton's intention is to contribute to the peace process but not in any way to seek to replace the talks. The two leaders discussed this matter in a general way but did not engage in detailed negotiations to determine what mandate a Presidential emissary might have. The name and precise terms of reference of the special representative had yet to be determined as well as the timing and duration of the proposed visit and the people who should be consulted in Northern Ireland. How would he categorise or describe the proposed mission? Would it be purely fact-finding as the British would prefer, or would he envisage a wider role? It was clear from his reply that they would like to confine it to a purely fact-finding role. As to timing, his feeling was that it might take place in the Summer - after the local elections in Northern Ireland. As regards duration, he seemed to envisage a short, once-off visit rather than a process involving a series of follow-up visits over a period of time. He emphasised that all these matters had yet to be considered fully and negotiated. He accepted that the existence of a powerful Irish-American lobby would make it difficult for the President to limit the whole exercise too severely. He asked what our official attitude was to this matter. I responded by saying that we welcomed at all times American interest and concern in relation to the Northern Ireland problem. American Presidents and Administrations had always shown a sympathetic interest in the past. We particularly valued their strong support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement and their significant financial contribution to the International Fund which had made its own positive impact on the ground in Northern Ireland. The British had a very special respect for this American interest in the Northern Ireland problem and in the search for a solution. We valued American's influence in that regard. I added that the Taoiseach and President Clinton would have an opportunity of discussing this matter in Washington on St Patrick's Day. It was important that there should be the fullest possible consultation on the nature and mandate of the mission.

Sinn Fein

The American Ambassador said that one of the thorny issues to be considered in the context of consultations and contacts in Northern Ireland is the attitude that should be adopted towards Sinn Fein. There were inherent risks in talking to Sinn Fein that would have to be given very careful consideration bearing in mind the necessity to avoid any action on their part that could be construed as endorsing or legitimising violence or the methods of the IRA. He asked what our attitude would be to such contacts. I parried this awkward question by saying that, as the question had not yet arisen, Dublin would not have focused on it to any meaningful extent to-date. I was sure, however, that if the matter came up in Washington on 17 March the Taoiseach would be willing to offer a view on this as well as on other aspects of the proposed mission.

Gerry Adams

I asked Seitz what their attitude was to a visa request from Gerry Adams. His reply was that this was another difficult issue, complicated by commitments deemed to have been given during the Presidential election campaign. This matter was being examined very carefully but no decision had yet been taken.

Speaker Foley

Ambassador Seitz told me that he himself had a half-hour discussion with Mr Foley and he formed the clear impression that the Speaker is less than keen to take on the role of special representative of the President. In any event he is a very busy man and could ill afford to spend much time away from Washington. Besides, he would not relish the hassle involved.

Seitz's Address to the Institute of Directors

You will have seen the text of the Ambassador's address to the Institute of Directors in Belfast on 19 February, some days before Prime Minister Major's visit to Washington. He used the occasion to dampen down expectations of a major American initiative in relation to Northern Ireland following Clinton's accession to the White House. "Some may see the change of Administration in Washington as an opportunity for radical departure or new directions calculated to upset the balances or advance a favoured outcome in the current talks", he said, adding that "this won't happen because it won't work".

He went on to say that "President Clinton may indeed consider appointing an emissary or representative, an individual sensitive to the complexities and nuance of politics in the Province, someone who can gather the facts as they stand and report the situation directly to him and to the Congress". It is clear how American minds were working in advance of the Washington visit and how the role envisaged for the Presidential representative was to be confined to fact-finding, presumably to accommodate British opposition to any wider role. Seitz told me he was very pleased with the large audience he had in Belfast for his speech and the reaction to it.

The Talks Process

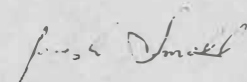
I availed myself of the opportunity to brief Seitz on the situation in relation to the talks from our point of view. It was his understanding, he said, that there was no alternative to the process that was under way. I said we would, for our part, do our utmost to get the talks relaunched and would show patience and flexibility in exhausting the possibilities offered to reach a settlement. However, it would be necessary for all sides to compromise and there was no way we could alter Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution in vacuo. That could only be done in the context of an overall package that

proved attractive to our people in a referendum, that provided for a North/South institution with significant powers, and arrangements for genuine power-sharing between the two communities in the North. Those seeking pre-conditions in relation to the talks could not be serious about a settlement and were sheltering behind Articles 2 and 3. He would be aware that Paisley and his DUP showed scant respect for the process last year, absenting themselves at will and refusing to go to Dublin. Seitz said he realised that Robinson had proved unable to "deliver" Paisley and that the DUP had the power to veto any emerging settlement. At the same time he felt that if a groundswell of support for an accommodation emerges, Paisley and his supporters may not be able to hold up progress. Taking up his point that there appeared to be no alternative to the current process, I said that if at the end of the day the talks fail it is open to the two sovereign governments to widen and deepen the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The possibility of that happening should in itself constitute a powerful incentive to the Unionist parties to negotiate seriously and that was a card that the British Government should be prepared to play at the appropriate time if the need arises. If skilfully played this should help to focus Unionist minds on the need to bring the current process to a successful conclusion.

Reciprocal Visit

I asked Seitz if any understanding had been reached in Washington about the timing of a reciprocal visit. He said that the President would undoubtedly visit a number of European capitals, including London, in due course although there was nothing in the President's travel programme to-date to suggest when that might be. Mr Clinton had been offered an honorary degree by Oxford and he will be delighted to accept this honour from his old University when the opportunity arises.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small
Ambassador