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CONFIDENTIAL FAX

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2 December 1993

For Assistant Secretary O hUiginn

From Ambassador

Because of my absence in Cardiff from Monday to Wednesday of this week arising from President Robinson's visit, and in view of tomorrow's meeting in Dublin between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major, I decided to seek a meeting at short notice today with the Head of the Northern Ireland Office, John Chilcot, to review recent developments and discuss prospects for tomorrow's meeting. The following summarises our discussion.

British/IRA Contacts

Chilcot accepted that the debate in Parliament on Monday had gone far better than expected. I suggested to him that the Opposition parties and the media could, with much justification, have wreaked havoc on the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, had they opted to do so, given the vehemence of earlier denials. They had obviously refrained from doing so in a very responsible way because of a desire not to interfere with the peace process. The yearning for peace is palpable, not only in Ireland, North and South, but also in Britain. I put it to him that the reaction within and without Parliament should be a source of enormous encouragement to the British Government and strengthen their hand considerably in moving with us towards a formula that has the prospect of delivering peace. He agreed that the Government's position had been strengthened and that this had enabled them to elaborate their own proposals and put them to us. I said it was my understanding that there was a yawning gap between the two sets of proposals and that their draft could not be taken seriously. His reply was that bridging the gap was the challenge facing the Prime Ministers and officials over the coming days. Time was required to enable officials from both sides to narrow that gap and, hopefully, come up with an agreed text for a meeting of the Prime Ministers on 13 December. I put it to him that their side would have to advance their thinking quite a bit if peace is to be delivered. We, for our part, had already moved to a significant extent and he accepted that readily, as he had done in an earlier conversation two weeks ago. I reminded him that they had gone a certain distance in their discussion paper on Northern Ireland over twenty years ago and, more recently, in speeches by Brooke and Mayhew, in dealing with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. A little courage and statesmanship was now required to go the extra mile to achieve the prize of peace. Chilcot, in response to this, spoke of the obstacles in the way, including the

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anticipated Unionist backlash to any concessions that would have the effect of placing the British Government in the ranks of the "persuaders". My reply to this was that this perceived threat had paralysed successive British Governments for the past hundred years and it was necessary, sooner rather than later, to face up to these threats, real or imaginary. The Unionists simply were incapable of moving on this issue on their own, as history had clearly shown, and it was up to the British Government, with our assistance, to face up to realities. Our demands were very modest and we continued to place the emphasis on consent. The Taoiseach had been very honest and open in all his dealings with the British and felt badly let down over recent days when it became known that the traffic was all one-way. He had every reason to be extremely angry by the week-end revelations. Had the IRA "doves" been damaged by what happened? He conceded that they may have suffered some damage in the short term. He said that the British side had taken great care in its secret contacts and exchanges to say nothing that they could not stand over in public. Besides, there was a clear difference between contacts and exchanges of the kind that occurred and substantive talks or negotiations. I said that the general public would have difficulty in making such a distinction.

The Unionists

I expressed surprise that, apart from his gratuitous insult to Kevin McNamara in the House of Commons on Monday, James Molyneaux had said very little about the recent developments. What was the explanation for this? Chilcot said that Molyneaux is by nature low key in his approach, adding that Willie Ross, in contrast was much more critical. As for John Taylor, Chilcot observed that by his standards his contribution was relatively restrained. In the course of our general discussion about the opportunity for peace now presented and the need as I put it, for real statesmanship and courage, Chilcot made the point that, having regard to the "numbers situation", the Prime Minister had been showing commendable courage. I asked him bluntly whether the prospect of making concessions in Dublin was a factor in the British approach and influenced their tactics. He denied, naturally, that this was a primary or even a secondary consideration, adding that concessions anywhere - in Dublin, Brussels or London - would be unwelcome to the Unionists, but conceded, interestingly, that it would be easier for the Unionists to swallow a deal forged in London rather than Dublin.

Peace Prospects

I encouraged Chilcot to use his considerable influence as Head of the Northern Ireland Office to embrace our modest proposals with a view to achieving a permanent peace by Christmas. We would be harshly judged if we failed to grasp this unique opportunity to bring violence to an end and create conditions for a lasting settlement. The Prime Minister's stature would be considerably enhanced if peace materialised. Chilcot's comment on this latter point was to deny that this was a factor in John Major's own calculations.