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Meeting with British Ambassador

5 September, 1994

1. I had a meeting today with the British Ambassador at his request, to review the current situation in the aftermath of the IRA cessation.
  
2. I stressed to him there was growing concern and dismay on the Irish side at how the British were handling the very delicate aftermath of the announcement. We were at no point asking them to go out on a limb for our assessment that the war was indeed over. We accepted fully the need to reassure the unionists on all points of substance, and were doing our utmost in that respect ourselves. What we could not understand was the apparent need on the part of the British, at a juncture which was extremely delicate for the Sinn Fein leadership, to insist on specific formulations, to minimise the scope of what had been achieved, and to impale themselves unnecessarily on various hooks (e.g. no rescinding of exclusion orders, the clock not ticking, the need for new IRA statements, etc). Surely it would have been sufficient, and indeed much better politics from their own point of view, to say that what had happened was highly encouraging but that the proof would be sought in actions on the ground, which could be assessed in a pragmatic way over the coming period.
  
3. I said the events at Lackey Bridge the previous evening had added still further to the concern on our side. It was an open secret that the closed border roads were in recent years much more a political than a security necessity. While accepting that the actions of the demonstrators was deplorable, the idea of the security forces moving in in the dead of night, as if for some dire emergency, suggested a very insensitive attitude to opinion in nationalist areas.

It would be objected that the security forces found time for this ritualistic action, but were not apparently able to deploy sufficient resources to protect Sinn Fein Headquarters. I suggested to the Ambassador that if, as was more than likely, the Republican leadership had dissident and disgruntled elements in their ranks, the British response would be grist to their mill.

4. I suggested furthermore that they were misreading the unionist leadership. They were certainly unsettled and insisting on reassurance that no fundamental principle had been breached. The unionist people had also however a strong interest in the cessation being fully consolidated. They expected the British to distinguish between shadow and substance in terms of issues of principle, and would not thank them if the cessation became derailed because of an inept reaction to what we believed were essentially marginal issues. I cautioned also that British neglect of the needs of the Republican leadership, at a time of manifestly great political and other risk for them, increased the pressure on other agencies involved, including ourselves and Americans, to compensate for that situation. I felt there was a grave danger that the Governments might find themselves publicly at variance at the whole response to the peace process, unless there was more sensitive handling on the part of the British Government.
  
5. The Ambassador stressed the sensitivity of the unionist case, and British fears of increased loyalist paramilitary activity. He suggested that this evening's meeting between the Tanaiste and the Secretary of State would be an excellent opportunity to thrash out the issues. He was not aware of the border roads incident, and opined that there

were probably standing regulations which had been implemented, without regard to context, by the security forces locally.

Sean O hUiginn  
5 September, 1994