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TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST

FOR: A/SEC O HUIGINN

FROM: JOINT SECRETARY

PST

PSS

*Mr F. Murray*  
*Mr T. Dalton*  
*Amb Small*

*llh*

*23/v*

NIO/IRA Contacts and the Panorama Programme

1. We have had some discussion here about Monday night's Panorama Programme, which reports that a British Government representative, apparently a senior NIO official, had given the IRA an indication at an "unauthorised" meeting on 23 March last year that the British intended to withdraw. The Secretary of State was doorstepped by Eamonn Mallie on Monday and pressed hard on the issue. The exchanges, which were not fully reported, are interesting and I attach a transcript.
2. You will see that the Secretary of State's response to Mallie was tetchy to say the least. I have been told by the British side that he could have cheerfully strangled him! Mallie claims he has spoken with the officials concerned, later referring to them as JC (John Chilcot) and QT (Quentin Thomas) and asks the Secretary of State if he was suggesting that they were acting unofficially and without his permission. The Secretary of State says no one has ever been authorised to say on behalf of the British Government that it intends to withdraw from Northern Ireland. But he says that it is not for him to say whether an intention to withdraw was said or not said. (Comment: This answer allowed the impression to be created that it was said, although one official said to me that Mayhew was again a victim of his tendency towards a lawyerly exactness, meaning that since he was not there himself, it was not for him to say what was said or not said. The Panorama claim about what the official said to the IRA at a meeting on 23 March last year seems overdone. The actor playing the British Government representative says there must be a North/South settlement, there is a historical train, Britain is committed to Europe, Unionists will have to change, the island will be one. That may imply an intention to leave, but he does not use those words. It is the kind of language which I have heard privately from a number of people here, including a lower-key version from the Secretary of State, and it tends to be part of the attempt to persuade us that a modest approach will serve us better for now.)
3. Panorama says that when the SIS contact, the "mountain climber" retired in 1991, he left his channel to the NIO;

and the Government after deliberation decided to ask an official (presumably a NIO official, and if so, probably Chilcot) to take it on. Chilcot has said to me that he has never met Adams, but has not said the same about McGuinness. There is a view in the NIO and the security forces which I have heard again this week, that McGuinness is the more reliable interlocutor and his intermediaries the more reliable channel. In this view, Adams presents as the nicer guy but is in fact less trustworthy and less likely to stand up to hardliners. Part of the British anger at the issue of the American visa to Adams, therefore, may relate to the building up of Adams personally. As we have seen in a variety of ways, for example, in their response to a query from the Chairman of IFI as to whether he should agree to meet Adams, the British seem keen to deny him favours. The latest is the pressure they are exerting on the Australians not to let him visit there. They expect to succeed although I hear the Australian High Commissioner in London said to Ancram that the British response to the American visa had seemed muted (!), seeming to suggest that an Australian visit would not be a big deal. The High Commissioner was left in no doubt that the Prime Minister felt he had been kicked in a painful place by President Clinton and that the Australians could expect a very unmuted response if they attempted the same.

- Note*
4. There is no doubt that morale in the NIO/NICS has been affected by the revelation of the IRA "contacts" and by their own Office's involvement through the Secretary of State and, very likely, senior officials. Civil servants of all ranks, who are mostly Unionist, were genuinely shocked and felt the anger of their own community. I understand the problem has been recognised and that there is internal debate going on under Chilcot's chairmanship on how to deal with it. I have heard this will include a new statement of aims or strategy for the NIO/NICS.

QUESTIONS RE "PANORAMA": TALKS ETC

*Note: All or most questions  
from Lannon Mallie*

COMMENTS BY SECRETARY OF STATE WHEN OORSTEPPED BY MEDIA DURING VISIT  
TO CORRYMEELA ON MONDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 1994

Interviewer

Sir, could I just ask you, in the wake of the meeting on Saturday: to many people it still seems that you're rather unfocused despite the fact that you're talking of giving focus and direction to what exactly you're doing within this talks process. Is there any specific target in sight?

Secretary of State

I think that we want to satisfy the parties who have taken part in the talks process before that there is a real practical prospect of their reaching an overall agreement together where it's appropriate with the two Governments, if they get round the table once again. At the moment, as you know, we have had a series of talks, one to one, one party to the British Government, and we want to move on from that, and that is therefore the objective that we have to satisfy them at this stage that there is a real practical possibility of getting agreement. From then on we can get back into the real substantive talks round the table.

Interviewer

But is that realistic, Sir Patrick, when you consider that the DUP aren't going to take part and the SDLP, that's also a bit shaky?

Secretary of State

Why not concentrate on the positive for a change and recognise that the Alliance Party the Ulster Unionist party, the SDLP, all at different times said, and all agree now, that the talks process does offer a way forward and they wish to see it continue. I of course want to see everybody taking part who has a political viewpoint. Those who do not take part, I think should not assume that they will retain the amount of electoral support they previously have. Perhaps they will, perhaps they won't. They shouldn't assume it.



**Interviewer**

Sir Patrick, can I ask you about allegations to be made in tonight's Panorama programme that a representative of the British Government met Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein last year and told him that Britain intended to disengage from Northern Ireland over a period of time?

**Secretary of State**

Well, I made a full statement about exchanges down a link of communication between the British Government and the Republican party, the IRA, I should say, at the end of last year, and I don't propose to add to what I said then in the House of Commons, save to say this (which really it shouldn't be necessary to be said at all) I referred to the fact that there had been two unauthorised meetings and I'll say this, if it needs to be said, that nobody has ever been authorised to say on behalf of the British Government that the British Government intends to withdraw from Northern Ireland. On the contrary, time and time again, going back over many years and very much more recently expressed, the British Government has said that Northern Ireland status depends upon the wishes of the greater number of the people living in Northern Ireland and that has most recently been expressed and reiterated, not just by us, but by the Irish Government themselves in the Joint Declaration.

**Interviewer**

Sir Patrick, let me clarify something. When did you say there were two unauthorised meetings. You spoke always, as I understand you, of one unauthorised meeting?

**Secretary of State**

Well, I think you will find that when I spoke in the House of Commons I referred to two meetings that were unauthorised that had come later to our notice.

**Interviewer**

Sir, could I just ask you about that because I have spoken with them, your people, who were involved in those conversations, officials,

people at very high level in your Government who actually spoke with these people. Are you suggesting that those people, known to you in the Northern Ireland Office at Westminster or at Whitehall, are acting unofficially, people of the level of Permanent Under Secretary, and Assistant Under Secretary. Are you suggesting that they were acting without your permission?

Secretary of State

I don't make suggestions to you, Mr Mallie, or to anybody else. I am telling you that nobody has ever been authorized on behalf of the British Government to say that the British Government has an objective of withdrawal from Northern Ireland. Everybody who has been authorized to speak on behalf of the British Government has been authorized to say only this - that Northern Ireland's future remains for the majority wish of the people of Northern Ireland. And if you look at the dossier of documents consequent upon the exchange, on the message received on the 22 February by the British Government, you will see that it is entirely consistent with the messages subsequently received from the IRA.

Interviewer

We weren't disputing the fact whether anybody said there was disengagement on the plate, that's not what's being disputed. It's your claim, Sir, that your officials were not engaged. Isn't the reality that they were engaged and up to this point, isn't it a fact they haven't denied it?

Secretary of State

I don't make claims to you, Mr Mallie. I make statements and I have stated to you that nobody has been authorized on behalf of the British Government to suggest that it is the intention of the British Government to leave or anything else .....

Interviewer

That's not in dispute, Sir. That's not in dispute.

Secretary of State  
Anybody else?

Interviewer

Are you denying that the statement was made?

Secretary of State

I am saying that nobody was authorized to say anything on the British Government's part to that effect. Whether it was said or whether it was not, is not for me to say.

Interviewer

But surely if it was said, surely this person must have been expressing at least a sentiment of the British Government that they did require withdrawal or saw withdrawal as the best possible solution?

Secretary of State

From what I have said, it is perfectly clear that my answer to that is "No" and you will see that it has been the consistent policy of British Governments from 1970, referred to in an Act of Parliament in the early 1970s, referred to again in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, now referred to most recently in the Joint Declaration, that it is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide what is the future of their Province and time and time again I have stated, as have my predecessors, that until such time as they wish, by democratic process, to say if they ever do that they want to join a united Ireland, they will be entitled to and will receive all the advantages that go with being part of the United Kingdom.

Interviewer

Does it fall into the category, then, of black propaganda in your view, perhaps a response to your Government's claim that the IRA said they wanted to give up?

Secretary of State

I am not going to speculate.

Interviewer

*in Chief*  
*within*  
*hours*  
Sir Patrick, are you denying then that the two Civil Servants of the initials of JC and QT, known to you, who work with you daily, engaged in this without your permission, talked to Sinn Fein without your permission. Are you saying they were unauthorized in their capacity, as link people with those people?

Secretary of State

I am saying to you what I've said to the House of Commons and I don't propose to reiterate it, that nobody has been authorized to conduct talks or to enter into negotiations on behalf of the British Government, with the IRA or with Sinn Fein, and I am saying that on no circumstances, and in no occasion, has anybody been authorized to say that Britain wishes to withdraw from Northern Ireland. .... I am not going on with that.

Interviewer

OK. Why don't you sack these people then if they were acting without your authority, Sir. If they were acting in such a capacity, why haven't they been sacked then?

Secretary of State

I'm familiar with this technique of yours, Mr Mallis, and I don't propose to engage further .....

Interviewer

But you're ducking the answer, aren't you, Sir. Isn't that what you're doing, you're just ducking?

Interviewer

Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister, has held out the prospect for the IRA and Sinn Fein, that the British Army could be withdrawn to Barracks within 5 years if peace were to come, because the Army could be off the streets. Does he have your authority to say that?



Secretary of State

I don't authorize - did you say Mr Reynolds.....?

Interviewer

No, Dick Spring.

Secretary of State

Oh, Mr Spring. I am afraid I don't authorize, nor would they seek any authority from me, any member of the Irish Government to speak on behalf of the British Government. Now I have said very recently in an article which I submitted to the Irish Times which they published, that in the event of peace properly attained, that is to say an end of violence, then we would be able to manage without the assistance of the British Army having to be given to the police. That's what they're there for; they're there under the direction of the Chief Constable to help the police police Northern Ireland, the whole of the community. We would be able to manage without that. The RUC would be very glad if that was the case; the RUC are very glad to have them now; they would be very glad if they could manage without them, and that is the position.