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**Confidential**

22 November 1995

Mr Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

COPY TO:
PST
PSS
MR. F MURRAY
MR. P TEAFON
MR. S. DONLON
MR T DALTON

*Mr Sean O hUiginn*  
*McCarthy/Mrs. Victory file* + *Boy*

Dear Second Secretary

*12 Br. Army.*  
*p. 2 - Body.*

**Conversation with the GOC**

Mr Dowling and I had a conversation with General Sir Roger Wheeler, the GOC of the British Army in Northern Ireland, at a function in Palace Barracks last week.

Wheeler, who is of Irish extraction, comes across in private discussion as fairly open-minded on matters such as the need for a high-profile and continuing response on the part of the security forces to the cessation of violence.

His two-and-half-year posting in Northern Ireland comes to an end shortly. He will be departing early next year to take over the command of all British Army operations around the world (other than those in Northern Ireland and Bosnia). His successor will be the current GOC of the British Army in Bosnia.

The following points of interest arose in our conversation:

The twin-track scheme

- Wheeler made clear that the security forces neither expect, nor are they particularly pressing for, the handover of any weapons in advance of political talks.
- He is conscious that, in practical terms, the ability of the paramilitaries to manufacture their own weapons and explosives is at least as important as the actual weaponry in their possession. Disposing of the latter will not affect the capacity to find new weaponry or to improvise. For as long as a will to use violence survives, the paramilitaries will be able to circumvent any limitations imposed by the depletion, or even the removal, of their present armouries.
- The Washington Three test, therefore, makes sense only at the level of symbolism. (Note: the same point was made to me recently from a RUC perspective by Ronnie Flanagan). It is something which arises not from any practical considerations but from an exclusively political judgment by the British Government of what is required in order to build confidence and to get Unionists to the table.
- We underlined the Irish Government's long-standing doubts about the wisdom of Washington Three. We went on to develop the logic of including this within the remit of the proposed body (in order to try to resolve the impasse, not merely postpone it by a few weeks).
- Wheeler recognised the validity of this case. It would be quite reasonable, in his view, to allow the body to express a view on whether or not the Washington Three condition was deliverable in practice.
- However, he preferred on balance a sequential approach under which the body would first establish whether agreement could be reached among all concerned on Washington One and Two. It would then build on this consensus (which might include a detailed agreement on modalities) in order to establish possible agreement

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on Washington Three.

- Wheeler fully recognised that there is minimal likelihood of such agreement being achieved. He feels, however, that the only chance at all lies in building an agreement on principles and modalities first and hoping that this may create a favourable dynamic.
- He speculated that, the longer the present impasse continues, the more the Sinn Fein leadership may drift away from the Army Council and cease, therefore, to be the "authoritative" spokesmen whom the two Governments expect them to be.
- We responded that this is one of the many dangers which exist in the present stalemate and that the British Government should be reflecting very carefully on the potential consequences of a policy position which is undermining the authority and credibility of Messrs Adams and McGuinness within the Republican movement.

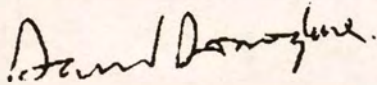
**Monaghan explosives finds**

- Wheeler commented that the crucial objective of confidence-building has been undermined by the two recent discoveries of explosives in Monaghan (even though he recognises that neither involved an IRA breach of the ceasefire).
- We suggested that these developments have brought to light a dangerous level of frustration within the Republican community over the slow pace of the peace process. The process needs to be moved forward urgently by the two Governments, as the Taoiseach made clear in his recent London speech.
- We voiced some doubts in this context about British Government reactions to the Monaghan discoveries which presented these as vindication of a cautious approach

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and played, therefore, into the hands of people intent on stifling the peace process. Wheeler took this point but felt that the essential message which the Secretary of State was trying to convey was that these developments illustrate the need for political confidence-building.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue  
Joint Secretary