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*W. Hafe
A. Loran*

Document

to see please

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PST

PSS

Mr Flanagan

Mr I Deaton

Mr S Boulton

Mr T Dalton

File

1/2

SECURE FAX 137

IMMEDIATE

PAGES: 2

1 February 1995

TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST

FOR: Second Secretary O hUiginn

FROM: Joint Secretary

Conversation with Ronnie Flanagan (1)

To confirm:

1. The Assistant Chief Constable in charge of Special Branch, Ronnie Flanagan, was here for a conversation today. Mr Mellett will be following up with a detailed report, but the following will be of immediate interest.

2. Alone in his system, Flanagan was confident of the ceasefire last summer and told us so here. His views on the current situation are of special interest for that reason and because his present job gives him a particular insight.

3. He believes there will not be a full IRA Convention at Easter, or for the time being, which I think conforms with our own information. Instead, there have been meetings involving the army council and local IRA commanders and there will be others. Flanagan's information is that the leadership have shown considerable self-confidence at meetings held to date. They have told the rank and file in no uncertain terms that they are in the peace process for the long haul. Flanagan is, therefore, more optimistic than he was in discussion with us when he was here in December (I should mention that his judgement today was given outside the context of the Times story and subsequent developments).

4. At the same time, he continues to be worried about the pace of the British response to the cessations. He is suggesting within his own system that at least one battalion could be safely removed from Northern Ireland (which we endorsed) without any threat to the so-called principle of reversibility.

5. We took the opportunity to comment again about lack of prior information and publicity on important initiatives taken by the security forces here. Flanagan said we had been better informed than the Prime Minister about the most recent decisions; Mr Major had been reduced to telephoning to find out what had happened; he had been particularly interested in the decision to take troops off the streets of Newry because he had visited there recently.

2

137/2

6. We said we were aware from direct discussion with the GOC, that anything of any consequence is immediately reported to British Army HQ and that there is simply no excuse for failure, therefore, to pass on information from that quarter to the NIO (Flanagan agreed). What of the the police however?

7. Flanagan said the original decision to leave matters to local police commanders had a lot to do with a fear that circulars from Knock would get to the IRA or into the public domain. He hinted also that there had been disagreement within the police last September about the nature of the response that should be made to the ceasefire and that it had been convenient, therefore, to leave decisions to local commanders. Unfortunately, some local commanders had been fearful of taking on the responsibility that had been given to them. He said HQ were conscious of the problem and had begun a deliberate effort to talk to local commanders and to encourage them to proceed further with "de-escalation" measures as the authorities now call them. He said he had done so himself in his own former area of responsibility, ie, Belfast.