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4 APRIL 1995

TO HQ FROM WASHINGTON
FOR G CORR FROM M COLLINS

RE: PRIME MINISTER MAJOR'S VISIT

*1st 7 Jun 1995
1755
Secretary of State
Mr Murren
Mr Trehan
Mr Donlon
Secretary of State
Mr B. London
Counsellor A1*

1. As you are aware, PM Major completed his visit to Washington today with a breakfast meeting with Vice President Gore, meetings with Speaker Gingrich and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and a White House meeting/working lunch/joint press conference with President Clinton. (A report on the non-Northern Ireland issues that arose in the course of these various discussions will follow later).

Meeting with President Clinton

2. At the White House press conference, President Clinton, in his prepared remarks, saluted the Prime Minister for the "tremendous efforts" that he has made in advancing the peace process. He suggested that Major was deserving of a large measure of the credit for the "vision and courage" that he had shown. He said that he agreed with the necessity for the paramilitaries to get rid of their weapons "for good" and referred to the importance that he attached to next month's White House Investment Conference on Ireland.
3. In his prepared reply, Prime Minister Major did not refer to Northern Ireland but both he and the President took questions from the media on the subject. On the issue of whether the British Government should engage with Sinn Fein at Ministerial level, the President insisted that this was a decision for the British Government to make. He emphasised the importance that both he and Mr Major attached to the decommissioning issue and said that he (the President) was very clear when the Adams visa was granted that there must be an agreement to "seriously and quickly discuss arms decommissioning". The Prime Minister said that the British Government were trying to do with Sinn Fein exactly what they had done with the loyalist paramilitaries. He said that both sides needed to discuss what he called "the modalities" of decommissioning, e.g. the when and the how, and that it was right that this be done at Ministerial level if Sinn Fein were prepared to do this. He said that unless progress was made on decommissioning, there was "no prospect" of Sinn Fein being able to sit down with the unionists.

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4. In response to a further question as to what advice he could give to Prime Minister Major in the light of the fact that he had "broken bread" with Gerry Adams and whether Major might now do the same thing, the President reiterated that this was a decision for the Prime Minister to make in the context of the peace process. As he did more than once at the press conference, he extended high praise to Major - "we are where we are today because of the risks that John Major has been prepared to make for peace."
5. On the broader issue of their personal relationship, both the President and Prime Minister insisted that this was good and that it was "honest and open". They said that they knew one another well enough to have their disagreements with Major adding that it would be astonishing if there was not from time to time an issue on which they disagreed. He said, however, that the two countries had an instinctively similar outlook on a huge range of issues where there was "not a scintilla of difference". Major added that the relationship was sufficiently close "for the President and I to have the occasional disagreement without any harm coming out of it".

Meeting with Senate Foreign Relations Committee

6. Following his breakfast meeting with Vice President Gore and a call on Speaker Gingrich, Prime Minister Major met with Senator Helms and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee including Senators Kennedy, Sarbanes, Pell, Robb, Dodd, Thomas and Grams. The meeting, which lasted about one hour, again had a heavy emphasis on Bosnia but with a significant portion of time also being given over to Northern Ireland. In the entire proceedings, Adams' name was never mentioned once. Major made a point of the importance of the US/UK relationship emphasising that the relationship was still strong. He said there was a lot being made of a rift but that this was "nonsense".
7. In his opening remarks, Major referred to the cooperation between the British and Irish Governments, particularly in the context of the Framework Document which opened up the prospects for a negotiated future for Northern Ireland. The British Government was now moving ahead with their dialogue with the loyalist side. The issue of Sinn Fein and demilitarization was being worked on between the two sides and they were seeking a way around the impasse. However, if demilitarization meant "Brits out", the British Government and Parliament would not go along with this. Major said that he did not know how long it was going to take for negotiations to be completed - there were too many "intangibles". The whole process could take some time. It would not be completed in a matter of months. He seemed to imply that decommissioning was necessary before proceeding to round-table negotiations. It would not, he said, be easy for the Unionists and Sinn Fein to sit down together until "after" decommissioning. While the specific issue of a link between IFI funding and arms decommissioning did not arise, the Prime Minister, in response to a question on the IFI, made some helpful remarks. He said that the IFI had helped prevent the paramilitaries recruiting young people and he emphasised, as he did yesterday in the House International Relations Committee, the importance of economic aid in the context of peace.

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