



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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24 May 1996

COPY TO: <sup>4E</sup> PST PSS MR. P. TEAHON MR. S. DONLON MR. T. DALTON	<sup>27</sup> / <sub>6</sub>
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**DISCUSSION AT THE WHITE HOUSE**

Dear Secretary

1. I took the opportunity to-day to review with, and update Nancy Soderberg on the present state of the preparations for the 10th June talks (Tony Lake was in Chicago). The meeting, which lasted just over an hour, was extremely reassuring, with Soderberg fully sharing our anger and concern about the reintroduction of the British precondition on decommissioning, and seeing the urgent need to free the process from any undeliverable requirement of this kind.
2. It also came across clearly that the White House was quite unhappy with the approach taken by Michael Ancram during his recent visit. Apart from their strong views on the decommissioning issue, they simply were unable to take seriously his proposal that the Plenary would continue in session for a month. In their view, it should meet for the shortest possible time, with the two Governments having firmly agreed in advance when and how the talks should move into the various strands. In this regard, Soderberg saw the attraction of the independent Chairman being able to decide this but seemed to have a preference (perhaps out of a sense of protecting Mitchell) for the two Governments doing it. However, she was very firm on the need for a clear exit strategy from the Plenary if the whole process was not to be held hostage to a lowest Unionist common denominator position (McCartney) on decommissioning.

3. The White House is also strongly of the view that Sinn Féin will not be able to deliver a ceasefire until they are given the necessary comfort and assurance from the British on how decommissioning is going to be handled at the talks. Mitchell's position was also of crucial importance in securing a ceasefire. This gave me the opportunity to set out clearly again our views on the respective chairing roles of Mitchell, de Chastelain and Holkeri during the talks.
  
4. Soderberg is at one with us, therefore, on the need for the British to move on the decommissioning precondition if the process is to go forward. In this regard, I suggested that it would be enormously helpful if, at the appropriate time, the President could speak to the Prime Minister and urge him to reconsider his position. Give the sensitivities arising from the election, this would perhaps best be done over the weekend after the poll, or early the following week. Soderberg immediately agreed and, while she understandably could not guarantee delivery, said that both Lake and herself would strongly recommend that the President make the call, probably early in the week beginning the 3rd. For balance, they would most likely suggest he also speak to the Taoiseach. I expressed great appreciation for this understanding and support.

#### Trimble letter

5. Lake has spoken on the phone to Trimble in response to his recent letter to the President about George Mitchell. In their discussion, Trimble seemed to have a particular concern that Mitchell might have moved away from the view, as expressed in his report, of the value of achieving some decommissioning during the negotiations. Lake sought to reassure him, including quoting a response Mitchell had given in Sarajevo to a question on parallel decommissioning. He is now thinking of giving this

reassurance in writing to Trimble.

6. I counselled caution about including the Sarajevo quote (as had Pat Hennessy in his contacts earlier in the day), and worried in particular about any gloss, however benign, on the actual text of the report. Soderberg readily agreed to reflect further. We will pick up a copy of the quote here, and consider matters further in the light of it. (You indeed may already have seen it, as it apparently was carried in the Belfast Newsletter).
7. Soderberg expressed surprise that a Trimble visit to the U.S. in the second half of June (week of the 16th, apparently) seems to be back on. She considers the timing very strange indeed, given that the talks process will just have got under way.

#### MacBride Principles

8. Pat Hennessy has been reporting fully on the Republican Party's efforts to embarrass the President over his recent vetoing of a bill that included the extension of the MacBride Principles to the International Fund. The veto had, as reported, absolutely nothing to do with MacBride.
9. The White House feels somewhat vulnerable on the issue, in particular as Lake (foolishly) signed a letter to Fr Seán McManus to the effect that it might not necessarily be helpful to place such a requirement on the IFI. Soderberg said that, in signing the letter, they had taken their eye off the bureaucratic ball. They now needed to recover the situation, on which they were being pressurised by some Democratic Irish-American friends, including Joe Jamison in New York. In the circumstances, they were considering recommending that the President might sign an executive order

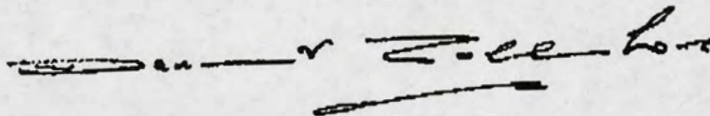
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extending the Principles to the IFI, and wondered if we had any objection to such a move. I said that, while the decision was for them, I did not think we would have any difficulty with it. It probably also wouldn't impact much on the IFI, who already required all grantees to accept fair employment guidelines.

10. I might add that, as is our policy, we should continue to keep a low profile on MacBride. There is nothing to be gained but pain, including a disproportionately negative response from some groups in the Irish-American community (many of whom are very supportive on other key issues), in getting embroiled in any way on the issue.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely



Dermot Gallagher  
Ambassador

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas  
Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs