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SECURE FAX

23 November 1996

WHITE HOUSE THINKING ON A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

Dear Secretary

1. I continued my current series of discussions on Northern Ireland with the National Security Adviser, Tony Lake, at the White House this (Saturday) morning. Lake was accompanied at our meeting, which lasted for just over an hour, by Nancy Soderberg.

British Text of 22 November

2. Our discussion inevitably began with the new British text which Lake had received last night. He immediately emphasised that the paper was too complex and complicated and, for a number of reasons, did not meet the needs of the situation. Sinn Féin could not deliver on this basis.
3. I agreed with the Lake assessment, making the point that, like the White House, our concern was to find a formula that would move both sides forward and did not set tests that neither could reasonably be expected to meet. We believed that Sinn Féin were now very committed to a political way forward - the McGuinness "heaven and earth" speech in Meath to-day served to underline this even further - and it would be tragic if this opportunity were let pass. Lake said that he believed Major likewise wished to grasp the present opportunity, and also saw the possible electoral benefits involved.

White House Involvement

4. Lake, making the point that the two sides were not going to reach agreement without outside help, said the White House was prepared to help but on the strict condition that the process was leakproof. It would need to be kept very tight in Washington (where any knowledge would be confined to the White House), in London and in Dublin. In this regard, Lake hinted - with a very light touch - that Dublin might have been a source of leaks in the past. He emphasised in particular that, if knowledge of the White House involvement were to emerge in public in any way, it would make it next to impossible for John Major to move forward given the public knowledge that, in doing so, he was responding to U.S. pressure.

5. Depending on reaction in London and Dublin to the thinking he outlined (see below), Lake said he would consider travelling to one of the capitals for a joint meeting with us (he mentioned, as one possibility, getting together with Paddy Teahon and John Holmes). The first step, however, was to ensure that the British did not move unilaterally and issue a statement which would not be adequate. He added that, pending consideration of his suggested approach by the British and ourselves, it should not be run across Sinn Féin.

White House Thinking

6. The "choreography" envisaged by Lake was as follows: (a) an adjournment by George Mitchell of the talks process until the New Year; (b) this to be followed by a British-Irish Summit at which the British would make a helpful clarifying statement on its position. The Summit would also announce that, provided an unequivocal ceasefire were put in place and Sinn Féin signed on to the Mitchell principles, the

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party would be invited to the resumed Plenary session of the talks in January; (c) ideally within hours of the Summit, the IRA would issue a ceasefire statement; (d) the next step would be a meeting between the Tánaiste, the Secretary of State, Sinn Féin and George Mitchell in order to enable Adams to pledge the Mitchell principles (if thought helpful, this could be preceded by a meeting at official level).

7. Lake said that the above on its own would not do the trick without an assurance from Sinn Féin to the British that the next ceasefire would be qualitatively different from the last (i.e. in terms of the absence of surveillance, targeting and recruitment; he excluded punishment beatings from the list as being, inter alia, too difficult on occasion to identify the source). This assurance, which would be private, could be given through the White House. With Washington acting as guarantor, Lake said he could not envisage either side acting in bad faith given all the implications (e.g. the probable closing down of Sinn Féin offices in the U.S.). He hoped that, with such an assurance and with the adjournment of the talks lasting to the end of January (in order to be as helpful as possible to the British on the time front), London could be won over to the approach. He also hoped that, if his choreography were acceptable to the two Governments, Sinn Féin would also feel able to go along with it especially as, with the talks in adjournment, they could not argue they were being treated differently from anyone else.

British Statement

8. We went over the general terms of the British clarifying statement, as we had on a number of occasions previously. Lake saw the text including references to (a) inclusive talks, (b) all issues being on the table, (c) a review by the two Prime Ministers at the end of six months, etc. I added the importance which Sinn Féin

attached to the parity of esteem issue, including and in particular the position of the Irish language. Lake agreed, saying that Adams keeps mentioning the language issue to him.

9. On decommissioning, Lake said that Sinn Féin had to sign up to the Mitchell Principles, including to paragraphs 34 and 35. He also, intriguingly, raised the possibility of the British again signing up to the Principles, the objective being to discourage them from any tendency to go down the road of the present Unionist position, as set out in their recent papers. (In this regard, I had kept the White House carefully informed of our concerns about the possible slippage of British policy in this area).
10. Finally, as regards the consent principle, Lake said that he felt he had moved the British away from their insistence on this. We agreed that consent was implicit in the Mitchell principles and that Sinn Féin would simply not go further in advance of negotiations.

IRA Statement

11. This should be a relatively straightforward text, announcing an unequivocal ceasefire and a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and the Mitchell Principles.

John Hume

12. Lake thought, on balance, it might be better if the SDLP Leader did not become involved in the detail of the above. Apart from a worry on the leaks front, Lake and Soderberg have in recent times found it next to impossible to engage John in any effective way on the substance of texts.

White House Invitations

13. Lake, as he has said on numerous occasions, would like to be as creatively helpful as possible during the period when the talks were adjourned. His thinking would be to issue invitations to Major, Adams and Trimble to visit Washington (at different times!). He would also push the British to put pressure on Trimble to go along with the above. He added that, to date, Trimble has been a big disappointment, failing to take advantage of a number of opportunities to show real leadership. However, if the above scenario worked, and with an effective and on-going ceasefire on the ground, he would be faced with going down a political cul de sac with Paisley, or taking advantage of the new situation and leading his constituency forward with courage and vision. The hope therefore was that, while he would probably stay away from the first Plenary of the resumed talks, he might shortly thereafter return to the process.

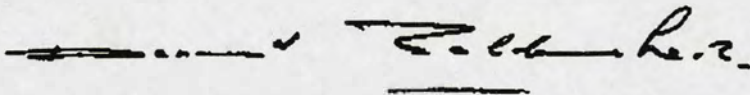
Further meeting

14. Lake asked for my personal views on the above scenario. I replied that, while we might in an ideal world have preferred a different approach, the test was whether the formula would deliver on the day. Emphasising that I was speaking privately, I said I saw much that was attractive in his approach, and thought it might just do the trick.
15. Lake said that he had been working much of the week on it. He had not run it across the British as yet. In this regard, I should emphasise that I have always found him to be upfront and straight with us, and I accept fully his assurances on this.
16. I expressed great appreciation to Lake for his efforts. He again stressed how much he valued his recent discussions with the Tánaiste, and the ease of working with us. He did, however, emphasise once more the need for the above to be leakproof. We

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agreed finally to talk together again on Monday.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dermot Gallagher", written over a horizontal line.

Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

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