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Mr B Malan
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Meeting with Barra McGrory

Belfast, 5 December 1996

Taoiseach
This informed perspective offers some elements of comfort but again not necessarily for the immediate future LHK 12/12/96

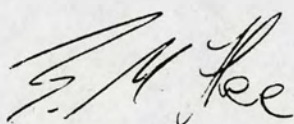
Barra McGrory's law firm, established by his father Paddy, is based in West Belfast. Like his father, Barra represents many republican clients and because of his work with them often has insights into the current mood and thinking within republicanism, particularly in West Belfast and amongst republican prisoners. The following points of interest arose in our conversation:

1. He was optimistic about the possibility of a cease-fire, though admitted he was in a minority. He felt that the republicans were genuinely seeking one and that the gap between what they required (a date for entry to talks) and what was offered by Major (the possibility of entry) was very small. He hoped that the summit could bridge this gap. For republicans, he felt that the problem with Major's statement was the manner in which it was delivered and what that suggested about British intentions. Republicans wanted reassurance that the British would not seek to further frustrate their political engagement. McGrory felt that the idea of a set time frame was not critical to them and could be massaged.
2. I agreed that there appeared to be a momentum within the republican movement toward a cease-fire over the Christmas period but advised that the differences on entry might not be that easily bridged. It may be the inch that became a mile; the British found it very difficult to offer guaranteed entry if that meant exchanging a room full of unionists for a room full of Provos. One could sustain the argument that the British were genuinely interested in seeking the presence of both unionists and republicans in talks but approached the question against a background in which they believed that the IRA was actively preparing for renewed conflict. The Government was doing all it could to maximise the possibility of a restoration of the cease-fire.
3. However, there was also a strong argument that the republican movement should consider a cease-fire on their own terms i.e. to decide that their political engagement was a prize which should not be contingent on the British. In its own way, such deference to London was a perverse form of colonialism. It allowed the British to set the pace for the development of republicanism as a political force. I mentioned to him Marty Rafferty's thought that republicans feared becoming an anachronism (see report). Perhaps an appeal from Dublin to republicans to join, through a cease-fire and long term political engagement, the broad community of nationalists on the island and abroad might provide an opportunity for a positive response. McGrory thought this could help but would have to come from the top.
4. On the question as to whether the IRA could stop targeting, training and so on during a cease-fire, McGrory said that the 1994 cease-fire had been agreed on the basis that such activities would continue and provide a safe outlet for idle hands. That said, he thought that the IRA was capable of halting such holding operations during a cease-fire (the implication being that it would have to be agreed beforehand).

5. As to IRA intentions, McGrory thought that they were suffering considerable set backs at the hands of the security forces (he was speaking about Belfast in particular). The loss of Bobby Storey and half of his ASU was a blow in and of itself. Perhaps more significantly, it was the accuracy of the security forces intelligence which was most alarming for them. New recruits working with Storey had been arrested and, as part of their interrogation, were given specific details of their movements and contacts. Some eight individuals had been detained recently in Castlereagh, five of whom had been detained for the full seven days. One had held out for five days but signed a confession on the seventh. Another was arrested with a diary of his life as a provo as well as a record of the surveillance information he had acquired on possible targets for assassination. McGrory said that interrogations lasted from 8.00 am to midnight by rotating teams. All but one of those detained was, as McGrory put, "spot on". The accuracy of the arrests and the quality of the information had unnerved the Provos in West Belfast. None of their veterans could move without the likelihood of it being known. Younger recruits had proven as vulnerable to detection as known activists. But the surveillance, opined McGrory, was clearly intermittent given the successful operation at Thiepval.

6. I said that there appeared to be some indications that the IRA would allow some political breathing space over Christmas but thereafter might resume in the absence of political movement. McGrory said that the IRA would always be able to mount operations but would do so in the full expectation that at least some of those involved would likely be arrested and receive hefty sentences. The leadership was very aware of this price and, he suggested, were chastened, if not quite stumped, by it. One young activist recently arrested was likely to be charged with attempted murder. The activist now deeply resented the prospect of a lengthy prison sentence because the operation was not intended to cause loss of life but as a political stunt. It was an example of the realisation that the price for involvement in operations designed to make modest political points as opposed to furthering the cause of a united Ireland could be too high. McGrory clearly believes that the IRA and many of its activists (particularly its more politically sophisticated ones) have mentally ended the war, though will brace themselves for further battle, fought in the knowledge that the republican community in West Belfast may have deep reservations about a return to hostilities but see little option for an alternative political course.

7. Republican prisoners wanted a cessation, he believed, but added that the state of thinking of republican prisoners was irrelevant to republican policy; Bic McFarland bluntly told him that policy was determined by the "outside leadership".



Eamonn McKee
Security Section
6 December 1996