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Tavinead
Some encouraging
Confidential indications here
15-1-97

The Loyalist Ceasefire

15/1
PSI; PSS; Ministers Owen, de Rousa & Taylor; Attorney General; Minister of State Cooney; Messrs. Teahon, Donlon & Dalton; Ambs. London and Washington; Joint Secretary; Counsellors A-I.

I had an informal conversation today in Castle Buildings with Gusty Spence of the PUP, who went to some effort to reassure me of the current stability of the CLMC cease-fire. He suggested that the two recent car bomb attacks against republicans were the responsibility of elements within the UFF, an assessment which I understand is shared by the security forces here. (While not explicitly admitting to this charge, Joe English, the Chairman of the UDP, told me yesterday of his party's efforts - successful to date - to prevent any further attacks.)

Spence told me that the UFF actions had caused some anger within the UVF and that this had been taken up with the CLMC. The CLMC had responded by indicating that the incidents in question had taken place without their authority, and that the CLMC ceasefire was still intact. Spence regretted that, given where we were coming from, there was always a possibility that isolated incidents could occur which were not in conformity with a ceasefire; this had also happened in respect of the last IRA ceasefire and could not be ruled out in relation to any future ceasefire. While making clear our total condemnation of all acts of violence, I indicated that we acknowledged, albeit reluctantly, the reality of what he said.

A

Spence said that he and his colleagues had argued strenuously that it made no sense for the loyalist paramilitaries to end their ceasefire: the union was safer than ever; the security forces were more than capable of dealing with the IRA; therefore, "the Prods should stand back and milk the situation". He appeared confident that this analysis had prevailed for the present and assured me that were the ceasefire were to break down he would readily acknowledge the fact and bid farewell to the negotiations. I expressed the hope that this would not come to pass, as there were no logical grounds on which to justify the abandonment of the loyalist ceasefire.

Spence expressed satisfaction that the DUP and the UKUP appeared to have backed away from submitting a demand for the expulsion of the loyalist parties, musing that they must have realised that such a move would not be popular on the ground. I concurred, but pointed out that our concern that nothing be done to further destabilise the prospects for peace should in no way be interpreted as our condoning any act of violence.

B

Spence was critical of media speculation that the loyalists were about to attack targets in Dublin, stressing that, as far as he was aware, this was not part of current loyalist thinking. He was particularly scathing of the reporting of Alan Murray in this regard.

Spence expressed interest in our analysis of what "the Provos" were up to. I indicated that we were at a loss to explain their actions and that we were reconsidering the value of our official level contacts with them. Spence urged that the Government should maintain such contact, even indirectly, as a way would eventually have to be found to bring the Provos to the table. He was critical of the efforts of the mainstream unionist parties to prevent this happening, arguing that the best way of dealing with the Provos was to confront them with the democratic process.

David Cooney

David Cooney
14 January 1996