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Confidential

13 July 1999

Mr Dermot Gallagher
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Visit of Mr Martin McGuinness

Dear Secretary

1. After their hour-long meeting at the White House yesterday evening Mr McGuinness and Ms O'Hare called around to the Embassy.

2. As you will be aware from Mr Steinberg's call to Secretary Teahon after the meeting last night, the White House view of the meeting was fairly negative. Steinberg told me that the Sinn Féin strategy for the way forward, as far as he could decipher it, was for d'Hondt to be sprung regardless and to take it from there. He had made a strong pitch for an IRA statement in the presence of his colleagues Butler and Norland, and at one stage in the meeting asked his colleagues to leave and pleaded with the Sinn Féin representatives more directly on behalf of the President for an IRA statement before Sunday, and preferably before Thursday. He warned them also that in the circumstances of non-delivery on decommissioning the President would have to come down on the side of exclusion, and not any other. He had not however taken any

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comfort from their reaction.

3. Mr McGuinness conversation with me was also unyielding. I said that the new and more operational Republican commitment on decommissioning was now a trump card in their hands which they should play pro-actively, and not grudgingly, to cut the ground from under those who still clung to a strategy of trying to exclude them on this ground. The requested IRA statement seemed to be the key which could unlock the whole situation, and seemed a sensible tactical follow-on to their commitments in Belfast.

4. Mr McGuinness spoke at length about how 'it had been a bad week' for Republicans. People should be glad there had not been an IRA statement since it would have been negative. The Republicans were deeply unsettled by the 'spin' from Downing Street. Trimble was seen to pocket each concession without giving anything in return and the agenda was still about giving him more. People like the newly resurfacing Bernadette McAliskey and Bernadette Sands were biding their time, waiting to recruit impressionable youngsters. Susanne Breen was using her position in the Irish Times to discredit the Sinn Féin leadership as merely office-hungry. Republicans were very angry at the terms of the draft legislation, particularly the role of the Assembly.

5. I said the Government too had remonstrated strongly on that point (I understand Secretary of State Mowlam rang them in the White House to suggest changes might be possible in the context of an IRA statement). I

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pointed out that from Trimble's point of view the dish consistently set before him was the full implementation of the Agreement, however much the condiments might be varied. The Governments had set their face against any significant departure e.g. linkage to prisoners. Mr McGuinness took me up on the notion that Trimble could lose a fatal five Assembly supporters, invoking a comment by Mallon to him there would be at most one or two.

6. The only (dimly) encouraging note in our conversation was his reflection that the first ceasefire too had seemed impossible, but hard work by many people had made that miracle possible. The British and the Unionists had actually more influence on the IRA than Sinn Féin had, if they would only use it. In his remarks there was no repetition of the former themes that decommissioning was excluded or only vaguely imaginable. On the other hand, he seemed explicit (whether tactically or sincerely) that an immediate and positive IRA statement was not attainable in the present unsettled context.

7. I found it difficult to decipher the underlying Republican position from this conversation. I stressed that it would be a fatal mistake now for Republicans to think their commitment to decommissioning under the Agreement and to the Governments could in future be 'finessed' away, and that it would be tragically wasteful if their defensive requirements vis-a-vis their own recalcitrants prevented them from exploiting to the full the potential of the trump decommissioning card, once they could play it, to cut through all remaining obstacles. Mr McGuinness neither agreed or disagreed. His posture was

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however much more consistent with resisting pressure on decommissioning rather than accepting that agenda. Conceivably this could relate to immediate tactics, and to time-tabling within the overall envelope to May 2000, rather than any more fundamental issue relating to the decommissioning commitment in the Agreement itself.

Yours sincerely

Sean O'Huiginn
Ambassador

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