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Taoiseach
20.9.99

TUESDAY, 21 SEP 1999

Meeting with Fr. Alex Reid

I met with him yesterday afternoon, with a view to discussing the possibilities of encouraging the Republican Movement to adopt or facilitate a forward and constructive approach to the Mitchell Review in a context where Unionist obstructionism was becoming very clear. The discussion was not encouraging, and Fr. Reid was in a very defensive mood.

He repeated that the discussions in July (Way Forward, fail-safe legislation, talk of a seismic shift) had seriously damaged the Sinn Féin leadership in the eyes of the IRA. Pushing on decommissioning and in particular the fail-safe legislation could drive people back to war. The main problem now was simply to hold the movement together and keep the ceasefire, not to be trying any new initiatives, otherwise the current political and military leadership might be overthrown. Martin McGuinness had not even been aware of the IRA message he had been conveying initially.

John Hume had taken up with some enthusiasm the idea of 'dumping' IRA arms as had Rita O'Hare. But Adams had warned of the need to be cautious about this, lest 'dumping' too be interpreted as 'surrender'. To go any further

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on this issue would require an IRA convention with a 2/3 majority for change, and there was no possibility of this in the present climate.

I argued that the situation had moved on, and I urged on him more long-term strategic considerations, and the fact that we could be facing long years of a political wasteland if the Agreement failed without any political dynamic, except the effects of slow demographic change and possibly a major crisis at the end of the period if no real relationship had been built up at political level between the two communities. I had the distinct sense that the establishment of, and SF participation in, the institutions had a considerably lower priority ranking with the IRA than holding onto their arsenal, and he repeated the view that the ceasefire would hold, provided that the rest of the Agreement were implemented.

He felt there might be more scope for action to limit punishment killings and beatings, and that perhaps there could be some confidence-building in this area

Mark Mansergh

10 September 1999.

PS I met Professor Ronan Fanning and gave him a full briefing on the situation, as he wants to make maximum impact at the British-Irish Association this weekend where he is to give 'a view from Dublin'.

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