

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Ambasáid na hÉireann
Londain



Embassy of Ireland
London

Mr. Dáithí O'Ceallaigh
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
DFA

28 June 2000

Dear Secretary,

I attended a lunch yesterday hosted by the Minister (Deputy Ambassador) at the US Embassy, Glyn Davies. The others present were Ken Maginnis MP, Brian Mawhinney MP, Lembit Opik MP and Sara Rosenberry of the US Embassy. NIO Minister George Howarth MP and Eddie McGrady MP were also expected but did not arrive (see *Comment* below).

The announcement on Monday regarding the inspection of several IRA arms dumps was naturally the focus of much of the discussion. Maginnis made the point that, while he had been positive in his public response to this development, he was coming under pressure from constituents who were asking for detail e.g. on the quantity of weapons or the number of dumps actually inspected. As a "simple school teacher" who had "once commanded 100 men" he was well aware of the value of 100 rifles. The IRA "probably had 1,000 assault rifles and a ton of Semtex ", although, he acknowledged, not the 100 tons claimed by the DUP. How much of this arsenal had been inspected? Maginnis said that he recognised that the inspections by Martti Ahtisaari and Cyril Ramaphosa were an important advance but questioned whether the "psychological barrier" between terrorism and parliamentary democracy had really been bridged. He added that he might not be calling at this point for actual decommissioning but what answer was he to give to the detailed questions he was being asked about the nature of these inspections?

Both Davies and the undersigned sought to emphasise in response the fundamental significance of the arms inspections as a clear demonstration of the actual direction which the Republican Movement was taking. I pointed to the fact that the inspections were part of a process for putting arms beyond use to

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which the IRA was now committed by its statement of 6 May.

In further discussion, Maginnis accused Dublin of operating what he described as an a la carte approach to involvement in the North. In a series of somewhat contradictory remarks he alleged that the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs were not involved enough, then that the Taoiseach had given support to Trimble in advance of the last UUC meeting which actually caused a drop in the latter's support and, finally, that the Taoiseach had praised the IRA after yesterday's developments. I countered appropriately pointing out that the Taoiseach, Minister and Government were fully and consistently engaged in seeking to ensure the enduring success of the Good Friday Agreement and its institutions. The Taoiseach had both praised David Trimble's leadership, including of course in his reaction to the arms inspections, and done everything possible to support him effectively.

Mawhinney, who did not participate in the discussion on Northern Ireland issues for most of the time he was at the lunch (the conversation naturally turned also to other topics such as the US Presidential campaign and the changes at the National Security Council), announced just before he left that while he did not doubt Dublin's "commitment", he agreed with Maginnis in his criticism of our alleged "a la carte" approach. He also warned that the Irish Government and nationalist parties should not expect an indefinite "suspension of judgement" on the part of those with serious concerns on the decommissioning issue. He claimed that the Conservative Party and moderate Unionists had maintained such a suspension of judgement for a considerable period already. The process was built on trust but these parties would still be demanding actual decommissioning. Lembit Opik sought to respond but Mawhinney and Maginnis left at this point for other engagements.

After they had departed, Opik in forceful terms ridiculed the notion that the Tory Party had "suspended judgement" and said that they had, in fact, almost made Trimble's position untenable in June last year by supporting the position of his opponents within the UUP. He had only survived then by backing off implementation of the Good Friday Agreement for a period. Opik also strongly praised the role of the Irish Government to the American hosts.

In earlier discussion of the Police Bill, Maginnis described it variously as "a mishmash" and "having nothing to do with policing". However, he confirmed that he was going along with the agreement to timetable the remaining business in the Committee on the Bill "because it suits us as well" and "I have issues that

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I want to raise". He made some fairly predictable comments about our approach but also launched various remarks about US-style policing at his host, including an allegation that there is an over-reliance on the use of force in New York and Washington. While praising the RUC as, in effect, the finest body of constables in the world, he was also very critical of its current senior management contrasting them unfavourably with well known senior RUC officers of yesteryear. However, in a side conversation with him before we went to the table I formed the impression that he is fairly relaxed about the work of the House of Commons Committee and, in particular, about his own and Séamus Mallon's respective roles in it (this may, of course, also reflect the Tory intention to focus on the debate in the House of Lords).

Comment: As mentioned above, NIO Minister George Howarth and Eddie McGrady were also expected at the lunch. However, when Lembit Opik arrived late, he told us that Howarth had offered both him and McGrady a lift in his Ministerial car from the morning session of the Committee on the Police Bill. The NIO had misdirected the car to the residence of the US Ambassador at Winfield House in Regent's Park, whereas the lunch was at Wychwood House, the residence of the US Minister in another part of London! Opik had eventually made his own way to the correct destination. (Mawhinney remarked, with some glee, that the incident would be good material for a newspaper diary column.) The absence of McGrady and Howarth led to a somewhat unbalanced discussion at times, with Maginnis and Mawhinney indulging themselves to some extent. If the American hosts were not fully aware of this imbalance (which I doubt very much), Opik drew ample attention to it before we left. I also offered additional points regarding the Maginnis/Mawhinney line on Dublin's role. The earlier conversation was, however, friendly throughout with Maginnis, in particular, in good form. He made a number of references to his impending retirement from politics, saying that he had reached the stage where "grandchildren are more important than knocking on doors". Mawhinney recalled working with you in his time as a Minister in the NIO and elsewhere and asked me to pass on his best personal wishes following your recent appointment.

Yours sincerely,

Colm Ó Floinn
Counsellor

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