

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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CONFIDENTIAL

20 March 2000

FOR SECRETARY GALLAGHER FROM AMBASSADOR

RE: WHITE HOUSE CONTACTS WITH PARTY LEADERS

1. In addition to the sense which I understand Jim Steinberg gave you while you were here of some of the meetings, the following further details may be of interest.

2. The President met with Seamus Mallon (alone), Trimble with a larger delegation (Empey, Rogan, Campbell, Anne Smyth, Daphne Trimble), Sinn Féin (Adams, McGuinness, O'Hare), with Hume (privately). Time did not permit anything more than a collective photocall with the smaller parties.

3. The President's meeting with Trimble was dominated by Trimble's comments earlier that day on a new sequence. The President jocosely opened the meeting by asking whether Trimble's statement had elicited death threats. Trimble replied that he felt like issuing death threats of his own against the Belfast media who had distorted his message. However, notwithstanding this degree of qualification, the President felt that Trimble was signaling that the deal of last November could be put back on the table. The President and Trimble were also in agreement on the need to see the Republicans "bottom line" in terms of

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the commitment to put weapons beyond use. The meeting did not otherwise produce any new ideas or initiatives. It was essentially a matter of touching base and updating contacts rather than an intensive debate on the options. The President raised with Trimble a suggestion put to him earlier by Seamus Mallon that if or when the institutions were reestablished it should be on the basis that they were irreversible and Trimble seemed to acquiesce on this point.

4. The President's meeting with Sinn Féin reflected Sinn Féin's anxiety to consolidate their base. They spent a long time listing several grievances e.g. the map of British Army installations, Rita O'Hare's inability to return to Northern Ireland, other failures of British demilitarisation, etc. The President, sensing that Sinn Féin needed to "vent", heard them out on these points.

5. The President then pressed them on the need for clarity on their bottom line. Adams countered with a depressing account of attitudes within the Republican camp (e.g. Brendan Hughes, other un-named close comrades were now saying openly that the leadership had miscalled the situation or betrayed their position). He told the President it was not possible to secure an IRA statement that the war was over. President Clinton, sensing perhaps that Sinn Féin needed to lick its wounds in the wake of the suspension, stayed in persuasive rather than aggressive mode on the need for clarity but felt his point had got across. I had a short exchange with the President at the White House about this meeting. He jocosely said that "he had carried out the Taoiseach's instructions" on the need for clarity and that while there were difficulties, he had not heard any doors being slammed. For that reason he was inclined to take a positive view of the

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meeting. (As you probably gathered Steinberg was less upbeat and would have preferred a more insistent pressure on Sinn Féin to spell out where they stood).

6. Seamus Mallon saw the President alone. Apart from the notion of irreversibility mentioned above, he urged very strongly a "hands-on" involvement by the President to give the process the momentum and direction which he felt it lacked. He even went so far as to recommend direct contacts between the Americans and the IRA, an idea which they tactfully dismissed.

7. John Hume's meeting lasted about ten minutes, much of which was devoted to an appeal by Hume for help on orders to Harland and Wolf.

ENDS

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