

CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM: R J ALSTON
US(POL)

24 January 1991

cc Mr M^cConnell
Mr Walker

- cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Feild - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Wilson - B
- Mr Hamilton o/r - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Dodds - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Maxwell - B
- Mr D J R Hill - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Archer, RID - B
- Mr Thorp - B

MR BELL - B

THE NATIONALIST COMMUNITY

Thank you for your minute of 13 January. I share the view that we should not let the Irish brush off your intervention.

2. As you acknowledge it is a theme on which I have been seeking to focus attention since last August. Mr Ledlie held a short discussion during the Autumn the conclusions of which were distinctly cautious. This was, as I recollect, largely because those involved did not want to distract attention from the considerations which led to SECRASP, or to seek to pretend that there was no further work to be done. I do not believe that what we are feeling our way towards should fall into either of these traps. It seems to me that our strategy in this whole field encompasses three dimensions; the acknowledgement of what has been achieved; carrying forward further improvements with the security forces wherever possible; and our presentational strategy. Mr Thomas has made the point that we should not make claims we cannot

substantiate. I totally agree, both in this context and in that of presentational strategy. My point here is that there are things we can substantiate but do not currently make enough of.

3. It may in the event be sensible not to look, in the first instance at least, specifically at public statements. If we can build up a convincing case for deployment in private with the Irish and with nationalist opinion formers, we may get further and avoid risks of the argument becoming polarised.

4. I have another reason for seeking to develop this line of argument further with the Irish if we can. With some continuing reason, many within the system as well as outside it feel that the working of the Agreement is distinctly one-sided and that the Irish are able to bring pressure on us over a wide range of issues whilst giving little in return. Emphasis on economic topics over the past couple of years has done something to redress that balance. We are seeking, through PUS's visit to Dublin this week, to induce a further improvement on the security co-operation front. At present however the Irish have the initiative almost completely in the confidence field. Almost regardless of how far it gets, to develop the proposed line of argument with them would origude a counter-balance for the arguments they will undoubtedly continue to bring to bear in seeking to secure improvements in fields of concern to them and to the nationalist community. !7

5. Time is clearly too short to develop anything for the 28 January Conference. I think anyway that this is ground that will benefit from careful preparation for at Secretariat level, and then perhaps in the Ledlie/O hUiginn group, before it is ripe to introduce into a Conference. It seems to me that the most useful next step may be to articulate and discuss among ourselves a possible line of argument for use with the Irish, at first I suggest with Mr O'Donovan. A

first shot at such a speaking note is attached. I hope it takes account of the comments on my earlier minute, as well as Mr Thorp's on yours. It might perhaps be discussed at the next meeting of AIPG as you suggest. It may however be that it would be preferable to look at it ad hoc, either at Mr Ledlie and Mr Thomas' level, or at that of Mr Wilson, you and me.

[signed]

R J ALSTON
Ext 2507

R 768/92/sh

DRAFT SPEAKING NOTE FOR USE WITH THE IRISH

The two Governments have a clear and acknowledged shared interest in bringing terrorism to an end and restoring peace and stability throughout Ireland. This pre-dates the Anglo-Irish Agreement but is enshrined in it. The Agreement also recognised that one major area to address was the profound alienation present in the nationalist community in the period after the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s.

2. Both Governments have worked hard at these issues through the structures of the Agreement. The prime responsibility in addressing the problem in Northern Ireland of course lies with the British Government. The Irish Government has been able to make its contribution through the structures of the Agreement. If we compare the situation now with that when the Agreement was signed many advances have been made. It is not we alone who assert this. Many of them are acknowledged by opinion formers such as Cardinal Daly and Father Faul. There is no argument that there are issues still to address. You will legitimately have points to make. We for our part have to balance what we do to meet this objective with the

security requirements of the anti-terrorist campaign and the parallel maintenance of the confidence of the majority community that adequate steps have been made to bring terrorism to an end.

3. It is in no way inconsistent with this recognition to assert that we have a common interest in getting nationalist opinion to acknowledge what has been done, and how the situation now differs from that in the mid-1980s. In part this is a matter of sustaining the credibility of the effectiveness of the Agreement and its procedures. More important however there is a continuing need to address the need of stubbornness of nationalist opinion in responding to change because this is a critical element of the fight against the IRA. You have yourselves pointed to aspects of this problem in the context of the Social Attitudes Survey, and it has been evident also in the broad holding up of the Sinn Fein vote, and the of the ability of the IRA to maintain enough active support to throw a broad protective screen around its operations.

4. These are worrying features of the situation in terms of the overriding objective of wearing down the terrorists. We readily acknowledge that radical change is unlikely, not least because of a need for the continuing high level of security activity. The continuing difficult issues will have to be addressed. But it genuinely seems to us that the recent statistics suggests that opinion discounts to a significant degree, evidence that progress has been made. It is in the interests of bringing terrorism to an

e and of the nationalist community itself, to encourage such recognition as part of the process of eroding support for violent pursuit of political ends.

5. It may be helpful to have a systematic look at this evidence, perhaps building on the work that was done at the time of the 1989 review of the Agreement. A good deal more has happened since then. Illustratively, such a list might cover economic and social policies including Making Belfast Work, the Derry initiative, the CRISP programmes, Targetting Social Need, community relations, and integrated education; prisons policy; confidence issues per se including changes in the 1991 PTA; and the Secretary of State's emphasis on the importance of finding fair and effective ways of returning political authority to elected representatives in the Province.

6. It is not ringing public endorsements that we are seeking, though we hope these will continue to come where they are due. Absence of public criticism, which can only be welcome to the IRA when directed by the Irish Government against the British, can be an equally important contribution, and we acknowledge the extent to which public comment in Dublin in recent months has been carefully balanced. Going beyond this we would like to develop a dialogue on why it is that there is an apparent disjuncture between trends in nationalist opinion and the efforts made to address what we know to be their principal problems, and on the most effective ways of

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working with political, church and other opinion formers to ensure that, in the interests of the fight against terrorism and of constitutional political and against those of the IRA and Sinn Fein, that opinion can be brought to acknowledge more clearly that Government does acknowledge the concerns and needs of the peace loving nationalist community and has worked extensively to meet these.

[7. In all of this there are some parallels with the security co-operation field where a good deal has been achieved in recent years, where further improvements are nonetheless necessary if we are to make the Border a sharply waning asset to the terrorists, but the two Governments nonetheless share an interest in ensuring that public opinion is aware of and acknowledges the progress already made.]