

262/93

ONATHAN STEPHENS
PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L)
17 JUNE 1993

URGENT
IMMEDIATE

- cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Mates (L&B) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Cooke - B
- Mr Leach - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Ms Steele - B
- Mr Archer RID, FCO - B
- HMA Dublin - B

ASST *in the 533/6*
SEC 18 JUN 1993
CENT SEC

W. H. H. H.
UNDER/ 669/6
SEC
18 JUN 1993
CENT SEC

Mrs Mumpsey

Mr Cooke - B

VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND BY PRESIDENT ROBINSON

Thank you for your submission of today providing lines to take and a draft reply to Reg Empey's letter of yesterday. The Secretary of State decided to ring the Lord Mayor, rather than write at this stage, and their conversation took place at 5 pm today.

2. The Lord Mayor said that he personally had a high opinion of the President. She had a large reservoir of respect and goodwill among the unionist community. At some point in the future, she might have a very helpful role yet to play. Against this background he was very concerned that the proposed meeting in West Belfast would cause her long-term damage. It would appear to legitimise Sinn Fein. It would dissipate very rapidly the goodwill she had built up among the unionist community.

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3. Emphasising that he was speaking privately, the Secretary of State said that he shared Mr Empey's view. We had only learnt the details of the guest list on Tuesday night. He feared the meeting would be seen as the Head of State of a country with a territorial claim over Northern Ireland meeting Sinn Fein which justified violence in pursuit of that territorial claim. That would cause very grave damage to her, to the Irish Government whose credibility with unionists would be undermined, and consequently to the interests of the British Government in pursuing political development.

4. As soon as the details of the guest list had been known, our Ambassador in Dublin had been instructed to deliver a very strong message of concern to the Irish Government. At last night's summit, both he and the Prime Minister had urged most strongly that this meeting should not happen for exactly the sort of reasons Mr Empey had mentioned. It was clear that the Irish were deeply embarrassed and realised this was a disaster in the making. But this was a private visit and the Irish Government seemed to have no control over it.

5. Nevertheless, it appeared that the President was taking some heed of the very strong representations that we had made. She was curtailing the meeting, was aware of the dangers of being photographed with specific individuals and intended to include a clear denunciation of the use of violence for political ends during her visit. But she took the view that she was above politics and that cancelling the visit would cause more damage than proceeding.

6. The Secretary of State said that if the meeting happened, and caused the adverse reaction expected, then he would take the line that this was a private visit in which the British Government had not been involved by way of approval or advance planning. He would say that this particular element of the visit was taking place

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again our strong advice. Nevertheless, he did not want to hype the situation in advance, nor to make self-fulfilling prophecies. She might yet successfully manage the meeting in such a way that the consequences we feared did not come about: we should have to wait and see. But he would consequently avoid public comment in advance of the meeting.

7. Mr Empey agreed that there was an outside chance that the visit might yet pass off without difficulty, but Sinn Fein would be making every effort to exploit the situation. Many unionists would see such a meeting as fitting into part of a wider strategy involving the Hume/Adams dialogue. He had a high opinion of the President personally, but feared her visits to Northern Ireland might be being manipulated by others. For himself, he would continue to keep his head down and was not interested in any sort of publicity stunt in advance of the visit. But, in the circumstances, he would not be meeting the President himself.

8. The Secretary of State said this was quite right. The RUC would naturally ensure that the President's security was not put at risk. For the future, it was clearly agreed with the Irish Government that there was a need for fresh, and more tightly formulated, ground rules for both public and private visits by the President. There was clearly the potential for frightful damage if this was not sorted out.

SIGNED

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17 June 1993

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