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3 July 1995

DISCUSSION AT WHITE HOUSE

Dear Secretary

1. I had a detailed discussion at the White House this morning with Nancy Soderberg, the Deputy National Security Adviser, on all aspects of the peace process. Understandably, our conversation initially focussed on the Private Clegg release but then moved on to the broader agenda, including the fate of other prisoners, decommissioning and, of course, the urgent need to underpin further the peace process and move it forward as quickly as possible.

Private Clegg

2. Ms Soderberg described the decision to release Private Clegg in a vacuum as "stupid", and one that is clearly quite unhelpful to the peace process. It would, in particular, put Gerry Adams in a more difficult position. She was also quite unhappy that the British had not briefed Washington in advance of the release; she was likewise surprised that we had not been alerted.
3. From the vantage point of the White House, it was difficult to understand the British position, even in their own domestic political context. She could not understand, in particular, why London was unwilling to move ahead on a broad prisoner front, given also that the same message on remission and releases was coming from both the Republican and Loyalist sides. This latter point had been brought home forcefully to her in discussions with both sides at the Investment Conference.
4. The White House was considering how best to respond to the Clegg decision; possible options were a formal statement, a "press guidance" approach, or to avoid comment completely. One problem with a formal statement was that it might be interpreted as being deliberately designed to damage John Major. I said I felt the situation warranted a public indication of U.S. concern; this could be satisfactorily achieved by either the statement or guidance options. I went on to say it would also be extremely helpful if this concern, and the obvious need to address urgently the

cases of Republican and Loyalist prisoners, could be conveyed bilaterally to the British. In this regard, I left Ms Soderberg a copy of the Taoiseach's statement, and subsequently faxed her the text of the Tánaiste's RTE interview. Our understanding now is that Washington will approach the British in this sense.

Decommissioning

5. I also took the opportunity to brief Ms Soderberg at some length on our approach to decommissioning. I conveyed the view that, while decommissioning was a very desirable objective, it had to be seen in perspective and, in particular, not allowed to usurp the wider political agenda and, in the event, perhaps endanger the whole peace process.
6. This led on to a discussion of the recent U.S. demarche on decommissioning to Sinn Féin, and also to the Loyalists (see separate reports from Mr Kilkenny and Mr Collins). Ms Soderberg said that the background to the demarche was concern in the State Department - presumably fuelled by the British - about the Sinn Féin decision to discontinue the (exploratory) talks with Michael Ancram; this she felt had been a mistake and, coupled with a number of injudicious remarks about a possible return to violence, had raised questions among some in Washington about Sinn Féin's commitment to the process.
7. There was also irritation in Washington that Sinn Féin had not become engaged on decommissioning, beyond accepting a paper from the British, especially in the context of Adams' commitment to the White House to do so in return for a fund-raising visa. In this regard, Soderberg said she could not understand why the party were not "pro-active" on the issue and (in the context of taking pressure off themselves) did not come up with some kind of a paper.
8. Soderberg said that she and Tony Lake, having "cut back" on the draft demarche the State Department had sent over, had agreed that it should be put privately to Sinn Féin (and the Loyalists). She then went on to express unease about the manner in which Ambassador Crowe and his colleagues may have conveyed Washington's views to Sinn Féin at their recent meeting in Belfast. In this regard, she had heard (from Sinn Féin) that they had insisted that the IRA hand over some weapons immediately. If Crowe took this line - and his cable on the discussion makes no reference to it - she emphasised that he would "have exceeded instructions". The U.S. position was precisely as set out by the President on 25th May at the Investment Conference when he spoke of the need "to discuss serious decommissioning of weapons". Washington

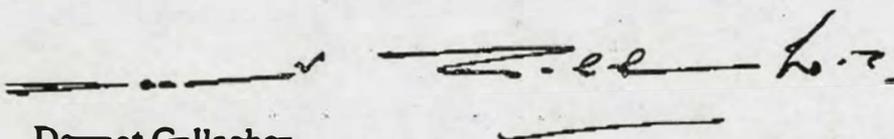
was not asking Sinn Féin to deliver on weapons now - she agreed that this was not an achievable objective at this stage. She added that, in researching possible decommissioning precedents, they had discovered only one group who had handed over weapons - the Serbs to the UN and they had, of course, subsequently taken them back.

9. Ms Soderberg again expressed concern about the Sinn Féin perception of the message that had been conveyed in Belfast and said she had sought to convey reassurance to the party about it. She went on to emphasise that the priority now was to find a way round the decommissioning roadblock and, in this regard, she thought the Government's idea of a Commission, perhaps with international involvement, was very attractive. She added that the U.S. should not become directly involved in any such Commission - "we would be too top-heavy". I agreed, and said that the U.S. could be most helpful to the process through a continuation of its present critical role.

Presidential visit

10. Ms Soderberg said that she hoped the Presidential visit would go ahead, as envisaged, on the November/December dates. However, there could clearly be no development until the Tory Party leadership contest had been resolved, one way or the other.

Yours sincerely


Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs