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PSM

The British Embassy was pressing yesterday for a reaction from us on dates for the forthcoming Ministerial meeting and preparatory official and Commissioner/Chief Constable meetings. I received Mr. Smyth of the Embassy last evening to discuss the matter.

I repeated that the timetable laid down by the Prime Ministers at Downing Street was already quite tight. On our side we were busily engaged on a process of analysis and review. None of the changes being proposed could be easily made and of course there was very little that was really new under discussion. We had previously considered most of the British suggestions but had not been able to meet them. Nonetheless, we were anxious and indeed committed to "substantial improvement" and needed most carefully to examine the British proposals in this connection. This was, however a process which could not be rushed and while we could envisage that a meeting at official level might be helpful at a certain stage, we were not yet that far forward.

Our consideration was going on at various levels, the professional police analysis, official consideration and Ministerial consideration. On our present programme we could tentatively envisage that should a meeting at official level prove to be desirable, the optimum time for such a meeting would be in the second half of next week.

I queried Mr. Smyth on their view of the purpose of an official level meeting. As he saw it, such a meeting would be designed not so much to discuss the questions of substance but to put the subjects which would be discussed by Ministers in a proper and if possible an agreed context. In their view, such official preparation could avoid a situation in which Ministers' time would be wasted on "red herrings". He gave as an example the usefulness of agreeing at official level that there was no point in getting into the general question of extradition: discussions should concentrate rather on the problem of getting evidence.

I also queried Mr. Smyth on the distinction operational/non-operational in their aide memoire. The explanation he gave was, in effect, that by operational they meant the second list [(i)-(iv)] and by non-operational they meant points (a)-(f). Their idea that the police discussions could lead to a "joint paper" was based on the idea that these discussions could be on a professional objective basis. The official level discussions, on the other hand, would seek to set out clearly for the information of Ministers the different points of view of the two sides.

Commissioner/Chief Constable

I told Mr. Smyth that the Chief Constable was already aware, from contacts which pre-dated the Downing Street meeting, that the coming weeks would be particularly difficult for the Commissioner and the Garda generally because of the Papal visit and various other visits requiring security cover. I also said we were not clear what could be added by such a meeting in advance of political decisions to be taken by Ministers. The police chiefs have however their own channels of discussion and if there were points which required discussion at this stage no doubt they could be raised directly. Mr. Smyth then spelled out, as described above, their view of the purpose of the police meeting and said that in their opinion it would be useful for the professionals to "have a real go" on points (i)-(iv) of the aide memoire in order that, when these matters came up at the Ministerial discussions, it would not be necessary to refer them back for police consideration.

I again adverted to the tight timetable laid down in Downing St. for the consideration of the points which were more or less summarized in the aide memoire (a)-(f). We would have difficulty in accepting, I said, that within the same time-scale we could also deal with the additional points raised in (i)-(iv). However, we closed this part of the discussion by referring again to the channels of communication available to the Commissioner and the Chief Constable.

Ministerial Meeting

I told Mr. Smyth that there had been some disappointment here that the date suggested by us was not acceptable to Mr. Atkins as the Minister had a very heavy programme in the previous week. I told him that the Minister was attempting to re-arrange the programme with a view to making free a day at the end of the previous week but had not yet succeeded in doing so. We would hope to be in contact with them soon to confirm a date.

Mr. Smyth said in conclusion that they would be most anxious to hear from us as soon as possible on a date for the Ministerial meeting. They would very strongly hope that a meeting of officials could be arranged for next week and preferably for Wednesday rather than later. I said that if the idea of such a meeting were accepted, Wednesday afternoon would be the very earliest date we could envisage, and Thursday or Friday would be more realistic. We would wish any such meeting to be in Dublin.

Hugh Swift

Hugh Swift

14 September 1979

c.c. PSS

Mr. Neligan

Ambassador London

Mr. Michael Donnelly, D/Justice

Mr. W.P. Kirwan, D/Taoiseach

Note

In relation to the attached note, the Taoiseach has indicated that he would wish the matters now being examined at official level to be considered by the Cabinet in appropriate committee on Monday 17 September.

I have ascertained from the PSM that the Minister leaves Dublin at 12 noon on that day for Brussels and it is therefore unlikely that he could attend the proposed Cabinet discussion.

D.M. Neligan

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12.9.1979

Mr. Swift has sent a copy of the attached to Mr. M. Donnelly and to Mr. L. Keenan. The last sentence of the first paragraph, ^{of the attached note} to be redrafted to indicate probability, in terms of "substantial improvement" in security cooperation referred to in Downing Street communiqué, that we will have to go some of the way to meet British requests.

D.M. Neligan
12/9/79