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20 JANUARY 1995

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S SPEECH TO THE ROYAL UNITED SERVICES FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES (RUSI) - RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for the draft provided with your minute of 13 January for the Secretary of State's speech to RUSI on 19 January. In the event, the Secretary of State spoke along rather different lines and I attach a copy of his text for your information and those of other copy addressees.

2. Questions after the speech were relatively straightforward and covered the following key issues:

- a. The difference between this ceasefire and the truce which took place in 1975.
- b. Whether or not there has been any change in the US attitude following the recent congressional elections.
- c. The effect of demographic trends on the balance between Catholic and Protestant in Northern Ireland.

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- d. The distinction between the Government policies in Northern Ireland compared with Scotland in terms of enthusiasm for the illusion. Union
- e. The overwhelming public desire for peace and the effect this had had on Sinn Féin/IRA.
- f. What exactly was meant by arms decommissioning.
- g. The difficulty the IRA might have in settling for less than they might expect to get.
- h. Whether or not a high level of Government investment and public sector employment would continue in Northern Ireland if there were a permanent end to the emergency.
- i. Sinn Féin/IRA claims that their holdings of weapons should be equated to those held by the RUC and the army.
- j. The Government's attitude towards loyalist paramilitaries.
- k. The response that the Government might make if the ceasefire fails to hold.

3. All these questions were answered along conventional lines and in general the speech and the Q&A session after it were well received by a good audience, which was, not unnaturally dominated by military and security experts.

SIGNED

MARTIN HOWARD
PS/Secretary of State

SOFS/DEH/25091

'RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND'

Lecture by The Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSI).

It is an honour to be invited to address this historic and distinguished Institute - and a privilege for which I am most grateful.

When you wrote to me, Admiral, on 9 September last year, 25 years and 25 days had gone by since the British Army first reinforced the RUC in Northern Ireland. Ten days had gone by since the Provisional IRA had announced the cessation of what they called their military operations. The Loyalist ceasefire was yet to come.

You perceptively said that events showed all too clearly that we were going through an historic and pivotal period, and you asked me to come in the near future 'while events are still unfolding'.

The near future proved to be rather crowded: but I was confident that if I were to come in January, events would still be unfolding - and they are. Perhaps paradoxically, it is harder to foresee the patterns that are yet to be unfolded than it was to foresee the ceasefires. I for one believed that with the Downing Street Declaration signed, a ceasefire was a matter of time alone. Now, however, it is harder to see forward, and the options are more complex. But I shall tell you what we are hoping and working for.

A review of the situation

First, however, I hope I may be permitted a little self-indulgence. Before setting out, let me survey with you the terrain, so newly arrived at, but from which we must at once push on.

Last Sunday the terrorist threat was judged sufficiently diminished for routine daylight patrols by the Army in Belfast to be ended. Belfast then joined Derry and numerous other parts of Northern Ireland where, in daylight hours at least, the RUC manage policing on their own and no soldiers are to be seen in the streets.

Troops have long been put into berets or other soft headgear, instead of helmets. Policemen no longer carry long barrelled weapons, and frequently carry nothing but a revolver, and sometimes not even that. Flak jackets are no longer generally worn.

The broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein and other live broadcasts have been lifted. Exclusion orders on Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness have been lifted. All crossing points from the Republic are being opened, all closure orders having been rescinded. There is a wholly open Border.

Perhaps most importantly of all, our officials are in exploratory and explanatory discussions with Sinn Fein, and with the Loyalist Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party - all parties formerly excluded from such contact by reason of their association with, or support for, those who advanced their political aims by terrorist violence.

Many in this audience will have served in Northern Ireland in the last 25 years, often no doubt for several tours. What I have described is very far from the Northern Ireland you knew, and perhaps disliked. So far away from it, that perhaps you feel in your bones that there must be something not quite right about it.

In the sense that the peace may not stick, your bones may be vindicated - although I fervently hope not. But let me tell you of the response of those people in Northern Ireland who quite literally have never known anything like this recent Christmas.

They would have to be about 30 years of age to have done so. As a young man of just that age said to me on Monday evening, 'all my life I've been listening for the bullets and the bombs.'

Crowds of people have poured into the centre of Belfast who have not risked going there for years. Trains and coaches from the Republic have been crammed. Customers haven't been searched going into shops. Out in the street the RUC band has been playing, and the band of the Royal Hussars - and delighted crowds have gathered.

It has certainly seemed right to them. To the young people in particular, if this was peace they wanted more of it.

So did the traders.

So did everyone - ourselves included.

Will it stick? Like everyone else we are hoping, of course, that it will.

And that is what we are working for within the context of our overall political objective. That objective is ambitious. It is to help achieve peace, stability, reconciliation and prosperity for all the people of Northern Ireland, and to establish locally accountable democratic institutions carrying widespread support and acceptance within a wider framework of relationships, harmoniously based on consent.

Why a ceasefire?

You cannot approach the first question sensibly without an analysis of the objectives over these past 25 years of, in the first instance, the Republican paramilitaries.

Here is mine.

Their objective has been the ending of British rule in Northern Ireland, the departure of the British Government and its armed forces, and the disbandment of the RUC. This remains their aim.

Military means were held to be justified because, in their eyes, an invalid state was maintained in place by dint of military force, and because they believed that such means would be effective.

So a further question arises. Why have they, as they claim, now moved away from violence for good? At first a great many unionists suspected that a secret deal had been done. It hadn't but

suspicions of every kind are not far below the political surface in Northern Ireland. And people could not see why, unless they had been promised what they had been fighting for, they should have given up fighting. But I think the promise of a referendum has finally dispelled that fear.

There is a more persuasive reason. I suggest they announced a ceasefire because after 25 years they realised violence has not brought them to their objective, and there were no signs that it would do so. The will of the people to resist violence was undiminished. So was the resolution of the security forces and the Government. The basis on which Northern Ireland is governed remains unchanged. Well-informed people like Father Faul of Dungannon, strongly sympathetic to the nationalist ideal of a United Ireland, state publicly that a high proportion of nationalists are in no hurry to see the Union ended. And that is before you bring into account those on the other side of the community who support the continuance of the Union.

All that has changed in that sphere is that the Irish Government, by the end of 1993, had joined with the British in stating that the constitutional future of Northern Ireland would and should be determined by the wishes of the people living there.

The Downing Street Declaration has both Governments upholding the principle of democracy, and proclaiming that there can be no place in a democracy for the use, or the threatened use, of violence in order to gain a political objective. Once it is made clear that every substantial party with an electoral mandate has a right to a chair at the Conference Table, provided only that it is a constitutional party, wholly committed to peaceful means of resolving issues, then the continued use of violence implies one thing only. It implies that you recognise you may not get your way in democratic negotiation, and that you are not prepared to put up with that. There is a stance so unattractive as to be untenable. Hence the ceasefire, in my belief, was only a question of time.

It had been expected widely that a ceasefire, if it came, would be expressed to be conditional, and also that it would be for a fixed term. In the event it was neither. But nor, in the Government's view, was it clearly and unambiguously expressed, as we had made plain that a ceasefire announcement had to be. You will remember, therefore, that we responded with caution, and collected a lot of criticism in consequence. But anything less than a permanent ceasefire could not provide the passport to the negotiating table, along with the main constitutional parties of Northern Ireland and the British Government, that it had been Sinn Féin's objective to secure.

Only PIRA can know what their true intentions are. The rest of us have to go on the things they say and the things they do - or more aptly, the things they no longer do.

After 25 years of violence we were determined to be prudent rather than hasty. As the weeks went by, punctuated by punishment beatings and, in November, by the monstrous and brutal murder of the postal worker in Newry, Mr Frank Kerr, the criticism of us died away.

I believe our cautious approach did a lot to encourage the loyalist ceasefire, which was announced in its turn on 13 October.

Maintaining the momentum

On the other hand, we have always seen it as desirable to sustain a momentum, and not to allow unnecessarily the undoubted progress represented by the ceasefires to come to a halt.

Accordingly after 7 weeks, the Prime Minister, on 21 October announced in Belfast that we would now make a working assumption that PIRA's ceasefire was intended to be for good, for real, and that if it was maintained then we would enter exploratory dialogue with Sinn Féin before Christmas.

In the event our officials held an opening meeting on 9 December, and two more have since been held.

These are to explore 3 areas:

- how Sinn Féin might enter normal democratic life in the Province;
- how Sinn Féin might enter the political talks process; and
- what the practical consequences may and should be of PIRA's decision to cease violence.

This exploratory dialogue and its designated topics are in sharp distinction from the topics for the round table political negotiations which occupied 6 months in 1992, and which we wish to do all in our power to help get started again.

Similarly and with the same purpose our officials have held exploratory discussions on three occasions with the representatives of the two political parties previously associated with loyalist paramilitaries. In the case of each dialogue it is our hope that our inter-locutors will prove that they have shed those attributes which up until now have disqualified them from participating fully in the democratic life of the Province.

In the case of Sinn Féin the size of their vote in Northern Ireland, although not large (about 11% of the total vote) is sufficient to qualify them to participate in substantive political talks, other things being equal.

Decommissioning weapons

Other things, however, are as yet not equal. PIRA, with whom Sinn Féin have been and remain so closely associated, as their political arm, remains in being, with large quantities of arms and ammunition which it possesses illegally. Insistence upon continuing the

illegal retention of arms, such as, for example semtex, detonators, and heavy machine guns, when they have in the past been ruthlessly used for terrorist purposes, is sharply at odds with what is needed to inculcate the necessary confidence in PIRA's intention. I am speaking of confidence that the ceasefire is intended to stick.

Without securing that confidence they cannot expect to find other parties, or ourselves, prepared to negotiate substantively with them. Of course, manufactured weaponry is not the only element in a continuing capability to wage war on society. The so-called 'military' organisation of the terrorist groups' other capacity for home made explosives and weapons is also part of the picture. But, in the language employed last month by both the Prime Minister and Mr Bruton in Downing Street, there has to be substantial progress made on the issue of decommissioning, and made in this exploratory phase.

This is by no means the only topic for discussion in this phase, it is one of many; but it is one which as a matter of reality must see some substantial progress. I think this principle is very widely understood and supported. I hope very much that we shall see it fulfilled, not least because I believe very firmly that the negotiation of a political accommodation between the two traditions in Northern Ireland represents far and away the best chance of achieving stability. I believe, too, that the process will be the stronger if Sinn Féin can properly be included. Properly is the word that bears the weight here.

The Security Forces

Exploratory dialogue is one illustration of the way in which momentum in the peace process is being maintained. Let me, for another illustration, revert to the responses of the security forces to the ceasefire. I am responsible for security policy in the Province, and I am answerable to Parliament for it. My principal advisor is the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Hugh Annesley, in whose support there are deployed 6 resident battalions of the Army, 6 roulement battalions and 5 battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment,

under the command of the GOC, Lt Gen Sir Roger Wheeler. The Army have no jurisdiction of their own. Their mission is to support the RUC in upholding the law.

In the security field each and every response that has been made to the ceasefires has been made on the advice of the Chief Constable and of the GOC. That advice has been given in the light of a continuing assessment of a risk against which it is their duty to guard. None has been made as the result of any political or ministerial pressure, for there has been no such pressure. No adjustment has been made that is not capable of being rapidly reversed if circumstances require it.

I read with some surprise the other day that the decision to discontinue daylight patrolling by the Army in supporting the RUC in the streets of Belfast was described by one Northern Ireland politician as a crazy concession to the IRA. That decision derived from precisely the process that I have described. The soldiers have not been removed from Belfast: they are, in daylight hours, occupied in training within their present locations. For a politician to describe this professional judgement of the Chief Constable and the GOC as crazy is likely to be thought more vivid than persuasive. I do not recall meeting anyone who enjoys or sees some inherent advantage in the sight of armed soldiers patrolling our streets, grateful though thousands have been to them. I have met innumerable people who see disadvantage. Until you get used to it, it is rather a shocking sight. The image presented to visitors in an unfavourable one. The public generally, and no doubt nationalists in particular, have therefore welcomed these reductions. The RUC, for their part, look forward to the day when they can police without needing the help of the Army. And so do the troops, who did not join the Army to be policemen.

These changes too, therefore, have contributed valuable momentum; but that has not been their primary purpose, and no changes of similar character are going to be made with that primary purpose. As and when the professionals believe it to be appropriate to the risks against which they must guard, further reductions will be made: but not before.

I intend to devote the last part of this address to examining the political thrust of our policy, and in particular the purpose and prospects of the Joint Framework document now under discussion with the Irish Government. But before I do so I feel it would be appropriate in these surroundings to say something of what we all feel about the service in Northern Ireland given over the last 25 years by the RUC, the Army and the other security forces. In the RUC, 296 officers have been killed and nearly 7,350 injured by terrorist activity. There has been the continuing carnage of cold blood, and it has been shared in full measure by the families. We can be sure of one thing - that without their dedicated and often sacrificial service the casualties of the civilian population would have been far, far higher. They never weakened, even in the darkest days, in their duty to the law and to all the people of Northern Ireland, and they did not flinch even in the face of the greatest danger. I feel huge admiration as well as gratitude for them.

When I speak now of the Army, I do not forget the contribution of the Royal Marines, other units of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and other services as well. All these 25 years the Army have shared the burden of policing the Province under the rule of law. Even now they have to out-number the police by a proportion of about 3:2. 648 members of the armed forces have been killed. 5,773 have been injured, nearly all of them in each category in the Army. Like the police, they have no privileges, no immunities; only duties, and often very dangerous ones. Generally very young men and women, they have habitually worked 16 or even more hours a day in exhausting conditions. Immense responsibilities have been placed on very young shoulders. Decisions of great moment have had to be taken in a space of a couple of seconds, with consequences that have occasionally been tragic and disastrous for them.

Political developments

At the beginning of this address I spoke of an overall political objective. Part of it is a political solution to an ancient quarrel that will continue to claim lives and inflict misery unless it is

smothered by a determination that hence-forward its causes are going to be managed by consent. That was the objective that all the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland committed themselves to in March 1991. They made a lot of progress in its direction for some 6 months in 1992. We want to help them, as I have said, get down to it in earnest once more.

It is hardly surprising, however, that there is a fear of incurring yet another failure to succeed. Accordingly the two Governments have undertaken the search for a shared understanding of the kind of composite accommodation that would be most likely to attract the wide support across the divided community that would be needed if it were to stick. This has come to be called the Joint Framework Document, and it will be offered to the parties as an aid.

The Joint Framework Document which would be published once it has been agreed between the Governments, would be primarily concerned with relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and between London and Dublin - Strands II and III of the Talks process started in 1991. The Government has also made it clear that it, too, will publish its own suggestions in respect of arrangements for devolved government within Northern Ireland - Strand I. The Joint Framework Document describes proposals the purpose of which would be to help the political parties launch a renewed talks process, and provide focus and direction to discussion and negotiation in that process. The Government would commend the scheme to the parties for that purpose. It would not be the purpose of the Government, in any way, to seek to impose upon the parties what would be no more than proposals. The purpose is the general one of helping the parties, and later the people of Northern Ireland, to reach agreement together. This applies to any proposals for limited North/South institutions as much as to proposals of any other character. There is no question of powers of veto or redress over an Assembly or district councils being conferred on any such institution, nor of proposals being presented as deriving any authority from the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Whatever outcome is agreed in the process - and it may of course turn out to be quite different from what the Governments propose in the Joint Framework Document - will need to secure the support of the people. The Prime Minister has specifically promised an referendum in Northern Ireland on the outcome of the Talks Process.

This, too, is a pretty ambitious undertaking. Just consider with me a few of the claims or demands made by one side which are met by something diametrically opposed to it from the other:

'Brits out'

'No diminution in British Sovereignty'

'No internal solution possible'

'A responsibility sharing Assembly is the answer'

'A united Ireland is the ultimate solution'

'Ulster must remain British'

'Cross border bodies with teeth are vital in any solution'

'No Dublin interference in the internal affairs of NI'

'Joint authority is an option'

'N/S Bodies with executive powers must be resisted'

'There must be no amendment to the Irish constitution'

'The illegal and immoral territorial claim must be removed unilaterally'

'The Government of Ireland Act must be scrapped'

'There must be no tinkering with the GOIA'

'There must be parity of esteem'

'You cannot treat a majority as a minority'

'Any solution must be the result of inclusive dialogue'

'We will never sit down with Sinn Fein, the apologists for murderers'

It is plain that any solution cannot, by definition, satisfy all these demands. It is equally plain that there has to be give and take, that all sides must recognise that if they insist that the only solution possible is one which meets all of their demands, then there will be no solution. In that event NI people will be cast, once again, into the continuing conflict that has plagued their lives. No-one can get everything they want; they must accept the need for concessions and trade-offs in negotiation. As I have said, the two Governments are seeking in the Joint Framework Document, to make their best guess at where the trade-offs might be; what one solution, which gives most people a way of satisfying their primary requirements, might look like.

And if the parties - as we all hope - reach agreement in those negotiations - that solution will still not be imposed; there will still be the opportunity, as promised by the PM, for all of the people of Northern Ireland to pronounce upon whether the solution finds widespread acceptance with them.

Therefore it is important, when the JFD is published, that it is not plundered for individual items to be exposed to instant and horrified comment; that it is not, greeted by outrage that this demand or that demand from one side or another has not been met. It is simply impossible to devise proposals that can achieve that. Instead, it will need to be studied, carefully and calmly, and a judgement will need to be made as to whether it offered a fair means of balancing the conflicting demands of each side.

If that is thought, on reflection, to be the case, then it may enable the political parties to find agreement in a settlement that embraces all the key relationships.

Of course it is a tall order. But it is a practicable one. If it were less tall it could not meet the need of the people who are relishing, exulting in this peace, but wanting it to stick and to that end are newly ready, in my belief, for a courageous lead to compromise.