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UNDER/ SEC Le81/S.
16 MAY 1997
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FROM: DAVID BROOKER
IPL DIVISION
16 MAY 1997

ASST DL 270/S.
SEC 10 MAY 1997
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DESK IMMEDIATE

cc: PS/Mr Murphy
PS/Mr Ingram
PS/Lord Dubs
PS/Mr Worthington
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir D Fell
Mr Steele
Mr Thomas
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Stephens
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr Beeton
Mr Hill
Mr Maccabe
Ms Jude
Mrs Mapstone
Mr Warner
Ms Healy

524/97

in Murphy M 20/5

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AND SECRETARY OF STATE'S LETTER TO GERRY ADAMS

Mrs Mapstone put up a handling plan last night, recommending how we should ensure that the Northern Ireland parties and others are properly briefed about, and receive copies of, the Prime Minister's speech. As we approach the home straight there are few loose ends that need to be tied up.

2. First, I recommend that you send a short letter to the Private Secretaries of other Cabinet Ministers on IN Committee, so that they are fully aware of the contents of the speech. A draft is attached. The letter should issue as soon as possible.

3. Second, officials advise that the Secretary of State's letter to Adams should be sent to him soon after the Prime Minister has delivered his

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speech, but that the text should not be made public. The current draft of the letter reflects this approach. (I have also asked Mr McKervill to amend the last sentence of the peni-penultimate paragraph, if there is time, to make it clear that the Secretary of State is "ready to authorise a meeting", rather than "consider authorising" as in the present draft). I understand that the Secretary of State has made some changes to the draft overnight and that it is therefore unlikely to issue before mid-afternoon.

4. Later in the afternoon today, after the letter to Adams has gone, we should issue a short press release confirming that it has been sent but not releasing the text. The press release could go at, say, 5.30 pm, so as not to conflict with early coverage of the Prime Minister's speech. I attach a revised, simplified draft.

5. So that everyone is aware of the timetable, we are proposing that PAB should start faxing the text of the Prime Minister's speech to the Northern Ireland parties at around 12.30 so that the parties receive it just before the Prime Minister speaks. The Secretary of State has indicated that she does not want it to be sent to Sinn Fein until after the Prime Minister has started speaking. Belfast Private Office, who will be monitoring the speech live on television, will notify Mr Beeton when he is clear to fax the text to Sinn Fein. I will also agree with Mr McKervill how, and at what precise time, the Secretary of State's letter to Mr Adams should then be faxed.

6. No 10 have already briefed the Taoiseach's office and will also be briefing the Americans this morning. Separately, IPL will fax the speech to Maryfield, to be handed over to Irish officials at 12.30, and we will also fax it down our own channels to the US Embassy at mid-day. Copies will also be made available to Irish officials during this morning's meeting of the Liaison Group, at about 12.30.

(Signed)

DAVID BROOKER

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REVISED PRESS RELEASE

Following the Prime Minister's announcement today, the Secretary of State has written to Sinn Fein confirming that the Government is prepared to allow officials to meet Sinn Fein on the basis specified in the Prime Minister's speech. The text of the letter will not be released.

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FOR SIGNATURE BY MR KYLE

BY HAND - DESK IMMEDIATE

Private Secretary to the
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
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SW1A 2HB

May 1997

NORTHERN IRELAND

As you will be aware, the Prime Minister is visiting Northern Ireland; while he is there he will be delivering a major speech. I enclose a copy for you.

The speech underlines the Prime Minister's commitment to inject new impetus in the search for peace and a political agreement, offers reassurance to both parts of the community, and announces that the Government is prepared to allow officials to meet Sinn Fein so as to establish whether the republican movement is genuinely ready to give up violence and commit itself exclusively to politics.

The Secretary of State is writing separately today to Gerry Adams setting out the Government's position on the peace process and the possibility of Sinn Fein being admitted to political negotiations; the letter restates Ministers' decision to authorise meetings with officials. The text will not be published but there will be a short press release later this afternoon announcing that the letter has been sent.

It may also be useful for your Secretary of State to see the attached short note listing the key messages in the Prime Minister's speech, as well as the attached defensive material on contacts with Sinn Fein.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries of other Ministers who are members of IN, and to Jan Polley in Sir Robin Butler's office.

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Key messages

It is important to place the announcement on Sinn Fein in the context of the broad and balanced presentation of the Government's approach as reflected in the speech. The key messages are therefore:

- The Government is committed to the principle of consent; there is no possibility of a change in the status of Northern Ireland without the clear and formal consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.
- The Prime Minister wants to see a settlement which can command the support of both nationalists and unionists. A settlement is important for everyone across the spectrum of political views in Northern Ireland.
- Violence is futile and self-defeating.
- Much to praise in the improvements in economic well-being and quality of life in Northern Ireland. Waterfront Hall the latest example of improvements in the physical infrastructure.
- The Government is ready to seize the opportunities for peace and urges all participants to recommit themselves to the talks.
- Government ready to make one further effort to achieve inclusive talks. Sinn Fein should know the talks will not wait for them.
- Prepared to renew meetings between Sinn Fein and officials, provided events on the ground do not make that impossible.
- Any meeting would be to clarify the Government's position and to ascertain whether the republican movement is genuinely ready to give up violence and commit to politics alone.
- Grateful for the resolution and professionalism of the police and armed forces. They are assured of the Government's support for their difficult job.
- Northern Ireland has a bright future. Government is determined to build on this. Government will be introducing further work on the raising of education and training standards.
- Government asks for the commitment of all in Northern Ireland to overcoming violence and prejudice, and asks them to support their political leaders in the difficult task of negotiation and compromise.

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DEFENSIVE LINES ON CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN

Will there be contact between Sinn Fein and Ministers?

The previous Government's position since the ending of the IRA ceasefire was that there would be no Ministerial contact unless and until the ceasefire was restored. It is also our policy that there can be no meetings between Ministers and Sinn Fein until an unequivocal ceasefire is in place.

What was and is the policy on contacts between officials and Sinn Fein?

Under the last Government, the possibility of meetings between officials and Sinn Fein was held open. Any such meetings were on the basis that their purpose was to be explanatory and exploratory. There was no question of officials entering into negotiations of any sort. In practice, agreement to such meetings was subject to events on the ground. Our policy is consistent with that approach.

When did officials last meet Sinn Fein representatives?

The last meeting between Northern Ireland Office officials and Sinn Fein took place in February 1996.

What do you mean by "events on the ground"?

It would clearly be difficult to justify meetings with Sinn Fein in the context of serious IRA violence.

What about the inclusion of Sinn Fein in the talks process?

As the Secretary of State said on 3 May, we want Sinn Fein to join the negotiations, but before they can join the process there must first be an unequivocal ceasefire, demonstrated in words and deeds. No one can combine terrorism and democracy.

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