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**Reference Code:** 2021/50/176

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16 MAY 1996

TO HQ FROM WASHINGTON  
FOR SECRETARY O LUIGINN FROM P HENNESSY

VISIT BY MICHAEL ANCRAM

1. I discussed Ancram's meeting with Lake with Mary Ann Peters of the NSC. She said that Ancram had arrived with this morning's British press clippings, clearly anxious to draw attention to the political difficulties which they faced at their back. He observed that this kind of coverage, while not a deterrent to action, meant that they would be operating under the glare of publicity to an even greater extent than usual.
2. As regards Mitchell, he said that they were coming to the view that he should be Chairman of the Plenary and of Strand 4, but not of Strand 2. The argument was that the Plenary would now have a more substantive role than originally envisaged, and, in particular would be the vehicle for resolving the decommissioning issue. Ancram suggested that dealing with decommissioning required an active interventionist Chairman, and that this would be the best use of Mitchell's talents. He also claimed that Mitchell would be needed to look after what he predicted would be an intensively political initial phase of Strand 4, once the opening plenary session had concluded.

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3. Ancram said that the dynamics of Strand 2 would be quite different. He sought to suggest that the key relationships there would be those between the Irish Government and the Unionist parties, and between Hume and Trimble. By this thesis, there was less need for a pro-active chairman; the role would be rather one of holding the ring while the parties did their deals. Taking a different tack, Ancram claimed at another point in the discussion that Trimble did not want a prominent role for Mitchell on North/South discussions.
4. On decommissioning, Ancram again emphasised the need to accommodate Trimble's bottom line demand for parallel decommissioning. He urged against being unduly prescriptive regarding the choreography for dealing with decommissioning at the outset of the talks. He argued that this would make it easier to get Trimble to the talks, and that once in it would be difficult for Trimble to leave.
5. While taking careful note of Ancram's presentation, Lake drew attention to the pressing need to address lack of confidence on the Nationalist side, and recalled the reasons which had initially led the White House to support Mitchell for the Strand 2 role. Lake also noted that the importance of Mitchell's involvement in Strand 2 was as much symbolic as substantive, and that in any event he felt sure that Mitchell could carry the extra burden.
6. The White House team were clearly sceptical of Ancram's "efficiency" arguments and saw concern to accommodate Trimble as the main motivation. They emphasise that there was no question of offering Ancram any endorsement of his

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latest ideas. You will have seen from Adrian O'Neill's report on the subsequent press briefing that while Ancram generally masked his position, he did say that Mitchell's role would be decided in consultation with the parties and on the basis of "consensus".

### Capitol Hill

7. At a meeting with Senators Kennedy and Dodd, Ancram made a similar pitch to that at the White House. The two Senators argued strongly that agreement on Mitchell to chair Strand 2 was critical to securing a resumption of the ceasefire. They pointed out, contrary to Ancram's premise, that Strand 2 was central to the success of the whole talks process, and the choice of Chairman correspondingly vital.
  
8. Ancram also met with the four Ad Hoc Co-Chairmen and with Jim Walsh of the Friends. While Ancram was less precise than in his other meetings on the role envisaged for Mitchell, those present sensed an obvious reserve on the point. All of the Members pressed strongly for a leading role for Mitchell. King questioned Ancram on the "government of Northern Ireland" terminology in the Major article, and was assured that this was not intended to suggest a return to internal government. The British side admitted that this section could have been better drafted, but suggested that any uncertainty would be clarified in contacts between now and the opening of the talks.

ENDS

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CONFIDENTIAL

Ancram visit with Senator George Mitchell

1. Senator Mitchell contacted me to brief me on his meeting with Michael Ancram in Washington yesterday.
2. Ancram's proposal was that Mitchell should be Chairman of the Plenary, and that de Chastelain should be chairman of Strand Two. Ancram sold this concept by presenting the plenary as the key role, whereas the chairmanship of Strand Two would be merely a "ring-master" role. Ancram envisaged the plenary lasting several weeks, because of the difficulty of handling the decommissioning issue. He had suggested that Senator Mitchell might wish to make a preparatory visit to Northern Ireland in the interval between the election and June 10th.
3. Senator Mitchell said that his own view was that the chairmanship of the Plenary and of Strand Two should go together. That was important for the perception people would have of his role. (He said his instincts in this respect had been increased by informal soundings with a number of Irish people at a reception which the Irish Times had given later that evening for Conor O'Clery's departure).
4. I told the Senator that the respective weights of the plenary versus Strand Two still had to be established. The only thing certain about the plenary was that it would be the opening mode of the negotiations. It might largely lapse thereafter, or, conversely, become the significant focus if the various strands tended to merge. However, the independent chairperson role had been envisaged primarily for Strand Two. There was an obvious danger if Senator Mitchell's role was confined to the plenary that he would be used only at the opening stage and on an agenda dominated by decommissioning, and any further

involvement would be largely dependent on whether or not participants reconvened the plenary.

5. Michael Ancram had asked Senator Mitchell to come back to him with a reaction. After some reflection Senator Mitchell said that he would adopt the following position:

- He would indicate to Michael Ancram that he would welcome a joint approach from both Governments, setting out their preferences in regard to his role.
- Secondly, in that process, he would ask for their best joint assessment as to how the talks would unfold, and in particular how the decommissioning issue would be handled in that context.

6. I briefed Senator Mitchell on our preferred scenario for the opening. I assured him that we for our part would want him involved as Chairman both of the plenary and Strand Two. I mentioned we had suggested to the British a flexible approach, whereby he could use his other colleagues on the body as vice-chairmen. If it were helpful for the British that could include some involvement by General de Chastelain in Strand Two, in Senator Mitchell's absence. However, the essential point would be that it would be under Senator Mitchell's overall aegis, and that the Senator would be involved as of right in the key North/South strand.



Sean Ó hUiginn

17 May 1996

Australia and the Peace Process

*Kaddy: This unwarranted  
run supports a rather cavalier  
attitude to intergovernmental  
partnership*

1. I briefed Andrew Todd, Director, West Europe Section of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on the peace process this morning. Mr. Todd was accompanied by David Morris of the Australian Embassy, Dublin. Todd described his responsibilities as covering 26 European states.
2. Mr. Todd emphasised the strong interest of the new Australian Government in the Northern Ireland problem and remarked on the frequency with which parliamentary briefing on the issue must be prepared in Canberra. He was at some pains to point out that the new government's renewed focus on Europe was not London-centered. His present visit to Europe has a particular focus on smaller countries (he had been in Copenhagen already). Australia hopes that the framework agreement with the EU will be completed during our Presidency.
3. Todd remarked that he himself had decided to cover the Irish part of his visit in the order Dublin-Belfast rather than the traditional DFAT practice of going to Belfast first (out of London) on such visits. He readily agreed with my point in response that those Foreign Ministries with a strong interest in the Northern Ireland problem could only benefit from assimilating both Irish and British perspectives and that the more flexible and all-island of Ireland approach now being adopted by some Dublin-based embassies was helpful in this regard.
4. In the course of a lengthy discussion of the present situation and the prospects for 10 June, Mr. Todd told me **"in confidence"** that **the British had approached Malcolm Fraser the former Australian PM and an Australian general named Gration, who had been involved in negotiations with Indonesia, regarding possible roles in all-party negotiations and decommissioning.** Todd also referred to Frank Millar's story in today's Irish Times (copy attached for ease of reference) suggesting that the British were considering the involvement of an "Australian diplomat". He joked that he hoped that it wasn't himself and appeared not to be briefed on who might be involved.

*cc Mr G  
Mr D  
PST  
PSS  
print  
and*

X |

5. Todd said that the British approaches in Australia had been outside the normal channels and direct to those involved. However, the British High Commission had informally advised DFAT and FM Downer has been made aware. Todd emphasised that he did not anticipate an Australian role at this point and felt that the involvement of Mitchell in particular was far more likely. I briefed him on our view of the particular strengths which Mitchell could bring to chairmanship of core political negotiations and repeated our appreciation of Australia's continuing strong interest in Northern Ireland (Todd is meeting with Tom Russell on International Fund issues later today).
6. Both Todd and Morris showed a keen awareness of how the media and the parties here might view different Australian personalities (Fraser, Keating etc.) e.g. in the light of the internal Australian debate on the question of a republic. However, Todd downplayed any suggestion that Fraser would be "pro-British" and recalled his clashes with Margaret Thatcher on South Africa.
7. In general Todd struck me as having a serious interest in Northern Ireland reflecting at least some level of interest on the part of FM Downer. He noted that he had stuck his neck out by recommending the first ever DFAT "travel advisory" for the UK after the recent London bombings. This had apparently caused some raised eyebrows at the top levels of DFAT, despite its essentially precautionary nature, but had duly been promulgated. Todd referred positively to contact with Ambassador O'Brien in Canberra.

Colm Ó Floinn  
15 May 1996

cc PST, PSS, Secretary Ó hUiginn  
Counsellors AI  
Mr. McKee/File  
Joint Secretary  
Ambassadors London, Washington and Canberra  
BOX