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Conversations with contacts re. breakdown of ceasefire

1. I met with a number of contacts in Belfast on 16 February to get their sense of why the ceasefire broke down and what the future holds (Note: the contacts took place after the South Quay and Shaftesbury Avenue incidents but before the bus bomb last Sunday night.) The views expressed concur largely with the media assessment that the Sinn Féin leadership probably did not have foreknowledge of the breakdown.
2. Alex Attwood (SDLP) would have fairly regular contact with his Sinn Féin colleagues on Belfast City Council. Since the breakdown they are hard to track down and have not kept appointments to meet Attwood and others. This, he feels, is probably a factor of their coming to terms with what has happened. Last week John Dunlop organised two meetings to which people from both sides were invited. Sinn Féin said they would attend but were no shows.
3. Attwood also has links to the Loyalist parties. He understands from Billy Hutchinson that he was instructed by his people to go on TV on the night of the South Quay bomb to urge restraint. Davy Ervine was due to go on but was too drunk to do so. There is still genuine concern on the part of the Loyalist parties that they may not be able to contain the hardmen on their side. 'King Rat' (Billy Wright) in Portadown has been making loud noises and graffiti has appeared on walls in the Shankill questioning who the PUP speak for. Attwood suggested that encouragement from all sides for the position taken by the Loyalist parties would be helpful to them.
4. Pat McGeown of Sinn Féin asked Attwood to convey a message to Hutchinson in confidence that he should be careful as no one knew what would happen if there was a total breakdown and a return to violence in Northern Ireland. Hutchinson has decided to move house as a precautionary measure.
5. Attwood and Hutchinson had both agreed to run the Boston marathon together. The BBC

have got wind of this and want to send a crew to cover the event. In the light of recent events Attwood is unsure if Hutchinson and he will be able to go ahead with their plans.

6. Attwood had just come from the ICTU peace rally in front of Belfast City Hall. He feels that such expressions of public feeling are very important, although ironically Sinn Féin had the strongest representation at the rally. The Unionist parties ignored it.
7. Barra McGrory, who is a solicitor in Belfast, has represented many Republicans and would have good lines into Republican thinking. He was out of the country on a skiing holiday when the South Quay bomb exploded. He made the following points:
  - He genuinely believes that Adams did not have advance knowledge of the breakdown. He and McGuinness may have known of a decision in principle to restart but it would have made sense for them not to know the timing.
  - The political faction within the movement probably went along reluctantly with the decision, which was probably taken some months ago, to avoid a serious split.
  - Republicans became convinced that Major was not going to move. The "binning" of the Mitchell Report was probably the final straw. Major thought he could call the IRA's bluff, but he overplayed his hand.
  - As to the duration of the planning of the operation, McGrory said the reality is that the IRA probably made several dummy runs over the last number of months in preparation for a possible decision to press the button.
  - He has heard a report that the South Quay bombing was planned by two individuals, without advance authorisation, who then went to the Army Council to obtain clearance.



- On the ground in nationalist communities there is a great deal of anger, mostly directed at the British Government for now, but likely to be increasingly directed at the Provos if the ceasefire is not restored.
  
- He is seriously worried that if the situation is not retrieved that the politicisation of the Republican movement which began from the time of the hunger strikes and which is manifested most closely in Adams, Pat Doherty and Mitchell McLaughlin will be seen to have been a failure. Those with a military mindset will regain control. This he says would be a disaster of enormous proportions. In response to my question on whether Adams can bring about a reinstatement of the ceasefire he said he just didn't know. It would depend on what Adams has to offer.
  
- Some of the people McGrory has spoken to believe that the campaign will be at a "stop and go" nature to seek to prod the British Government into "facing up to their responsibility".
  
- The moral high ground being adopted by the loyalist parties is galling to Republicans and may provoke the IRA to do something to pressurise them into responding

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