

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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~~Mr. Sheehan~~
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Note

The London Embassy and the Forum Report

Although the Forum's conclusions have not yet been reached, the Report is likely to contain an elaboration of the nationalist position and a list of elements which would be considered essential in any future political structures in Northern Ireland. Although it is not yet known what the four parties concerned will do with the Report after publication, there are a number of levels of activity, involving this Embassy, which could be envisaged regardless of the detailed contents of the Report (as long as it is an agreed one), or the decisions to be taken regarding its presentation to the outside world, Britain in particular.

Activity which could be given consideration at this stage might include the following:

- detailed briefing of the diplomatic staff at the Embassy on the conclusions of the Forum;
- advance copies of the Report to be distributed?;
- copies to be received in advance in time for issue here to politicians, the media etc. at the same time as the Report is issued in Dublin;
- comprehensive advance briefing in Dublin of the London-based British, foreign and Irish press;
- a public "launching" of the Report in London as well as Dublin;
- meeting(s) between Irish and British Ministers/Politicians to discuss the Report and what it might lead to;

- a major address by Minister Barry, during his forthcoming visit to London (probably around St Patrick's Day), on the subject of the Forum;
- lobbying of MPs prior to the Report, and immediately following it, bearing in mind the possibility of a House of Commons debate after its publication;
- encouragement of a House of Lords debate following its publication;
- efforts to get special media coverage of it;
- monitoring of developments in the BIA-Chatham House Study Commission being established to make an informed British response to the Forum;
- encouragement of a formal British Government response to the Forum.

Some initial thoughts on these points are as follows.

1. Detailed briefing of the diplomatic staff of the Embassy.

If the Embassy is to act authoritatively in assisting efforts to disseminate the ideas contained in the Report, and to help evoke responses from the British Government, politicians, the media etc., it is essential that we be fully briefed on its contents. The level of understanding required will very probably not come from reading the Report itself: the nature of the Forum exercise may require that the Report be built on a complex and delicate balancing of emphases, nuances and so on. It will be distilled from consideration of nearly three hundred submissions, of which only a handful have hitherto become available.

We might seek:

- (i) a dossier of what the Forum secretariat consider to be the most important submissions not yet seen (Ted Smith?);
- (ii) a full day's briefing of the Embassy as far in advance of the publication date as possible (Assistant Secretary Lillis?).

An alternative to this would be for one officer of the Embassy (the Ambassador?) to be briefed in Dublin and relay the information to his colleagues in London. A briefing in London, if feasible, would, however, be preferable as it would give those concerned opportunities to raise specific questions and points.

2. Advance copies of the Report.

Measures will no doubt be taken in Dublin to ensure confidentiality and to prevent leaks prior to publication. However, consideration will no doubt be given to transmitting advance copies to carefully selected readers. From the London perspective, who should this list include?

- (i) Mrs Thatcher and Mr Prior. The considerations in favour are set out in the Ambassador's note of 18 January. Consideration might be given to:
- exactly how far in advance this might be done;
 - whether the Taoiseach should write to Mrs Thatcher covering a copy of the Report, or whether the Report should be forwarded in the name of the four party leaders;
 - whether Minister Barry should write to Mr Prior covering a copy of the Report, or whether, again, the Report should be forwarded in the name of the four party leaders;
 - whether Minister Barry should arrange a meeting with Mr Prior at which he would present the Report and initiate substantive discussion on it, the question of a British Government response, etc.
- (ii) (possibly) Mr Kinnock, Mr Steel and Dr Owen. The decision on this may result from the extent to which it is decided that advance copies are a good idea in principle. If it were decided to provide them with advance copies, this could be done closer to the date of publication.
- (iii) (possibly) selected politicians. Brian Mawhinney has already indicated that a confidential advance copy would help him to do some work here to influence those who would

be involved in preparing a British response. Others, such as Michael Mates, would be interested in it. We should compile a list of those whom we believe it would be desirable and advantageous to give advance copies to if it is decided in Dublin that the principle is desirable. We should seek Dublin's views as to what margin for manoeuvre, if any, will be considered in this area.

- (iv) (possibly) selected journalists. It would be of great assistance to political editors, leader writers and so on to have copies in time to respond in a comprehensive way on the day. While there is a clear interest in having a major response from the media, we should ask what is being considered in Dublin in this regard. We should draw up a list of the journalists concerned on a provisional basis.

3. Copies for simultaneous distribution

It goes without saying that a large number of copies should be available here for distribution at the same time as in Dublin. An initial list of those to whom we should send the Report would include the media, the (entire?) House of Commons, selected Members of the House of Lords, the FCO and NIO, the leaders of all Irish associations and Federations, BIA members, Chatham House and so on. We could probably reach 2,500 readers in a first round. Each officer should now draw up appropriate lists in his/her area(s) of responsibility and consider covering letters.

4. Briefing of journalists.

A major operation should be mounted here, to cover London-based British, foreign and Irish journalists. It would be most desirable that they be brought to Dublin (just before or just after publication?) for comprehensive briefing from Forum members and officials. Meetings with party leaders, if feasible, would also be very desirable.

Mr Hennessy and Mr Harman should now draw up comprehensive lists and Dublin's views in principle should be provided.

5. A public launching in London as well as in Dublin.

Consideration of this could be linked to 2 (i) above - i.e. whether Minister Barry, or another Minister, or a group of politicians representing the four parties, would wish to launch the Report in London and also present a copy to Mr Prior (whether or not he had been given confidentially an advance copy).

A presentation to Mr Prior, meetings with British party representatives (as during the Forum group's visit on 23-24 January) at which the Report could be presented and discussed, and a press conference could be considered.

6. Meeting(s) between Irish and British Ministers and politicians.

This point could be considered (separately to 5 above) as a first major step following a short period of digestion of the Report by the British side. It will greatly depend on what decisions are taken as to whether the Forum itself should continue in being, or not; if so, in what form and to what purpose.

It would seem broadly desirable that, on the assumption that there is a substantive "line" in the Report which it is felt should be pressed with the British, then frequent political contacts in the months following the Report could valuably be considered.

7. A major address in London by Minister Barry.

It now seems likely that the Minister will visit London around St Patrick's Day. This would provide an occasion (the St Patrick's Irish Counties Association dinner) for a major speech, perhaps built round the Forum Report as a stepping stone toward a new Ireland. Another occasion on which the Minister could speak on the subject (although more briefly) would be the St Patrick's Day reception, largely for the Irish community, in the Embassy.

8. Lobbying of MPs.

This is already being done but could be intensified over the coming month or so. (Ambassador, Mr Dempsey, Mr Ryan, Mr Hennessy).

9. Encouragement of a House of Lords debate.

Mr Ryan is active on this.

10. Special media coverage.

Over and above "feeding" information to journalists, perhaps we should actively seek special coverage. Examples could be:

- television interviews with the Taoiseach and perhaps other party leaders;
- Robin Day (who believes that NI is the gravest problem facing the Government) could be approached as to the possibility of a special programme on the subject;
- The Times and other major papers might be interested in carrying special articles by the Taoiseach, and perhaps by other party leaders, explaining the background to and substance of the Report, and touching on what it may help lead to.

If these ideas were considered useful, contacts could be taken in the weeks before the Report is published.

11. Monitoring of the BIA-Chatham House Study Commission.

While remaining formally at arm's length, as would be expected, we should ensure that we are kept aware of developments. Should we discreetly, where possible, try to nudge some of them in one direction rather than another?

12. Encouragement of a formal British response?

In the last analysis, this is what the points outlined above amount to. Decisions will be determined through contacts at the highest political level and ancillary contacts between political advisers and senior officials in Dublin and London. However, the Embassy in its contacts with politicians, officials, the press and so on should in coming months make every effort to get across, in particular:

- the reasonableness of nationalist aspirations which would have to find form in any new political structures in NI;

- the need for political movement as a corollary to simple security or containment policy in NI;
- the time factor which makes comprehensive political movement, taking account of minority concerns in NI, a priority for British Government attention.

In summary, the Embassy will in the months to come have an important supportive and co-ordinating role on this very major initiative expected shortly from Dublin. Broad-ranging contacts at all levels will be important for persuasion and for keeping Dublin up to date on perceptions here as they develop. Internal co-ordination within the Embassy and regular exchanges of information would give the overall Embassy effort direction and transparency.

R. Ryan
 R Ryan
 25.1.84

- Circulation:
- Ambassador
 - Mr Dempsey
 - Mr Townsend
 - Mr Hennessy
 - Mr Harman
 - Miss O'Hanrahan
 - Mrs Manahan Leslie