

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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SECRET and PERSONAL 11/11/85

DEAR GARRET,
THANK YOU FOR YOUR MESSAGE OF 7 NOVEMBER. I ENTIRELY AGREE WITH YOU THAT, AS WE MOVE TOWARDS THE CONCLUSION OF AN AGREEMENT, CONTACT AT POLITICAL LEVEL IS ESSENTIAL TO MAKE SURE WE AVOID MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

2. I AM GLAD THAT AT THE MEETING THAT DICK SPRING AND PETER BARRY HAD WITH GEOFFREY HOWE AND TOM KING THEY WERE ABLE TO REACH A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING ON THE MATTER OF SECURITY CO-OPERATION BETWEEN US. THIS IS IMPORTANT IN ITS OWN RIGHT, AND IT IS NECESSARY FOR US TO BE ABLE TO SAY PUBLICLY THAT THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINED CO-OPERATION BETWEEN US IN COMBATTING TERRORISM, PARTICULARLY ALONG THE BORDER.
3. AS TO THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE AND THE SECRETARIAT, I RECOGNISE AND AGREE WITH THE IMPORTANCE YOU ATTACH TO ARRANGEMENTS THAT MAKE POSSIBLE CLOSE AND CLEAR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN OUR PEOPLE AND YOURS IN PURSUIT OF THE PURPOSES OF THE AGREEMENT. YOU CAN BE SURE THAT ALL OF US, NOT LEAST TOM KING AS THE JOINT CHAIRMAN OF THE CONFERENCE, ARE DETERMINED TO MAKE THE AGREEMENT WORK AND TO SET UP ARRANGEMENTS WHICH WILL ENABLE THE CONFERENCE TO CARRY OUT THE TASKS WHICH THE AGREEMENT GIVES IT.
4. WE ALSO WANT THE AGREEMENT, AND THE ARRANGEMENTS SET UP TO GIVE EFFECT TO IT, TO BE DURABLE. THERE WILL BE PLENTY OF PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SEE IT FAIL, AND WILL BE LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO UNDERMINE IT. YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO THAT IT WILL NOT BE WELCOME TO THE UNIONISTS. WE SHALL MAKE IT CLEAR THAT WE ARE FIRM IN OUR PURPOSES, AND ARE NOT PREPARED TO SEE THE AGREEMENT FRUSTRATED OR DESTROYED BY ACTS OR THREATS OF VIOLENCE, FROM WHEREVER THEY COME= BUT IT WILL MAKE SENSE TO TAKE THE IMPLEMENTATION AT A MEASURED PACE, AND TO GIVE PEOPLE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE ON WHICH TO WHIP UP OPPOSITION AND EMOTION. FROM THIS POINT OF VIEW WE ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE SECRETARIAT= IT WILL TAKE TIME FOR PEOPLE TO GET USED TO THERE BEING A PRESENCE OF YOUR GOVERNMENT IN BELFAST.
5. GEOFFREY HOWE, TOM KING AND I HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THIS AND DISCUSSING IT SINCE I RECEIVED YOUR MESSAGE, AND I VERY MUCH HOPE THAT YOU WILL FIND THE CONCLUSIONS WE HAVE REACHED AND THE PROPOSALS I NOW MAKE A REASONABLY SATISFACTORY COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE NEED TO GET THE AGREEMENT WORKING EFFECTIVELY AND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING UNNECESSARY POINTS OF CONFRONTATION FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE OUR OBJECTIVES.
6. FIRST, WE ARE AT ONE WITH YOU IN THE VIEW THAT THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE SHOULD NORMALLY MEET IN BELFAST (THOUGH WE WOULD NOT WISH TO PRECLUDE OCCASIONAL MEETINGS ELSEWHERE, SUCH AS DUBLIN OR LONDON, IF THAT WAS CONVENIENT)= THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SECRETARIAT WITH BRITISH AND IRISH CO-SECRETARIES TO SERVE THE CONFERENCE ON A CONTINUING BASIS= AND THAT SINCE THE CONFERENCE WILL NORMALLY MEET IN BELFAST, IT IS SENSIBLE THAT THE SECRETARIAT SHOULD BE THERE AS WELL.
7. SECOND, WE REMAIN OF THE VIEW THAT IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE NOT TO HOLD THE FIRST MEETING IN BELFAST. HOWEVER IN VIEW OF THE STRENGTH OF YOUR FEELINGS ON THIS, WE ARE PREPARED TO AGREE THAT THE MEETING SHOULD BE HELD IN BELFAST, PROBABLY ABOUT A FORTNIGHT AFTER THE EXCHANGE OF NOTIFICATIONS HAS BROUGHT THE AGREEMENT INTO EFFECT. WE WOULD HAVE TO COME BACK TO YOU ON THIS IF, AFTER THE AGREEMENT IS SIGNED, THE REACTION TO IT WERE TO BE MUCH WORSE THAN WE AT PRESENT EXPECT.

8. THIRD, AS TO THE LOCATION OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE SECRETARIAT IN BELFAST. THERE SIMPLY IS NOT ROOM TO HOUSE THE SECRETARIAT IN STORMONT HOUSE OR STORMONT CASTLE, AND WE AGREE THAT A PORTAKABIN SOLUTION WOULD BE ADEQUATE NEITHER IN STANDARD NOR IN SECURITY. WE HAD THOUGHT THAT IT WOULD BE EASIER TO PROTECT YOUR PEOPLE IF THEY WERE IN THE SECURE PERIMETER AT STORMONT- BUT WE HAVE NOW CONCLUDED THAT TO HOUSE THE SECRETARIAT IN STORMONT WOULD BE PECULIARLY LIABLE TO ATTRACT ATTEMPTS TO ATTACK IT WHICH WOULD PUT NOT ONLY YOUR PEOPLE BUT ALSO OURS AT RISK.

9. WE HAVE THEREFORE LOOKED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY FOR AN ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT BUILDING REASONABLY NEAR STORMONT FOR WHICH WE CAN PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SECURITY. INDEED, WE HAVE NOW IDENTIFIED AN EXISTING GOVERNMENT OFFICE CLOSE TO STORMONT WHICH WILL PROVIDE OFFICE ACCOMMODATION FOR BOTH SIDES OF THE SECRETARIAT, AND POSSIBLY RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION FOR THE IRISH SIDE OF THE SECRETARIAT. IT IS FREE-STANDING IN SEVERAL ACRES, OVERLOOKING BELFAST LOUGH, AND PREFERRED BY THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY ON SECURITY GROUNDS. MINISTERIAL MEETINGS COULD STILL BE HELD AT STORMONT- BUT SUB-COMMITTEES SHOULD MEET IN THE SECRETARIAT BUILDING. WE EXPECT THE BUILDING TO BE AVAILABLE IN A FEW WEEKS' TIME- BUT IT IS AT PRESENT ON SHORT LEASE TO US, AND WE MAY HAVE TO NEGOTIATE PURCHASE. SUBJECT TO THESE POINTS, IT SEEMS AS IF IT WOULD BE VERY WELL SUITED FOR OUR PURPOSE. IT WILL PROVIDE GOOD ACCOMMODATION AT A PROPER STANDARD FOR THE CONFERENCE AND ITS SECRETARIAT IN CONDITIONS WHICH CAN BE MADE REASONABLY SECURE- IT WILL FACILITATE RAPID AND EASY COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO SECRETARIES WHO WILL BE THE NORMAL CHANNEL OF CONTACT, AS WELL AS EASY ACCESS TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AND NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS WHEN IT IS NECESSARY FOR OTHER OFFICIALS TO BE INVOLVED. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO SIDES WILL WISH TO EXAMINE HOW BEST THE BUILDING COULD BE ADAPTED (IT WOULD REQUIRE CHANGES FOR PERMANENT RESIDENTIAL PURPOSES)- BUT THIS COULD BE DONE IN ADVANCE OF THE AGREEMENT BEING SIGNED WITHOUT BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY.

10. UNTIL THE BUILDING CAN BE READY, WE SHALL HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENTS WE CAN. I HOPE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE DURING THIS TIME TO KEEP TO AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM THE NUMBER OF OFFICIALS WHO NEED TO BE IN BELFAST ON A CONTINUING BASIS, EVEN IF THAT MEANS PEOPLE TRAVELLING TO AND FROM DUBLIN MORE THAN IS REALLY CONVENIENT. IT MAY WELL BE THAT ANYBODY WHO STAYS OVERNIGHT WILL HAVE TO BE PUT UP IN A HOTEL (AS MANY OF OUR OWN PEOPLE WERE IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF DIRECT RULE AND STILL ARE WHEN MAKING SHORT VISITS). WE SHOULD OF COURSE BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PROTECTION. ON THAT BASIS I AM SATISFIED THAT WE SHALL BE ABLE TO FIND OFFICE ACCOMMODATION, FROM THE TIME OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE, TO ENABLE THE SECRETARIAT TO SERVE THE CONFERENCE EFFECTIVELY AND DO WHAT IS NECESSARY.

11. AS TO THE TWO HEADS OF THE SECRETARIAT, WE AGREE THAT THEY SHOULD BE OF A RANK COMPATIBLE WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AGREEMENT. OURS IS IN FACT LIKELY TO BE SLIGHTLY LESS HIGHLY GRADED THAN YOURS- BUT, OPERATING AS HE WILL BE IN BELFAST AND CLOSE TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS, HE WILL NOT NEED TO BE QUITE SO HIGHLY GRADED. HE WILL NONETHELESS BE A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF PROVEN CALIBRE AND COMPETENCE, IN WHOM ALL THREE OF US HAVE CONFIDENCE.

12. I HOPE THAT ON THIS BASIS YOU WILL BE READY TO GO FORWARD WITH OUR PLANS TO SIGN THE AGREEMENT SHORTLY. WE BOTH KNOW THAT IT IS NOT GOING TO BE ALL PLAIN SAILING: AS THE NEW ARRANGEMENTS SETTLE DOWN DURING THE COMING MONTHS WE SHALL NEED ON BOTH SIDES PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE, AS WELL AS THE UNDERSTANDING AND GOODWILL THAT HAVE BEEN BUILT UP DURING THESE LONG MONTHS OF NEGOTIATION. THEY WILL BE FORTHCOMING ON OUR SIDE, I ASSURE YOU.

YOURS SINCERELY

MARGARET.