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Criminal Justice Policy Division
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cc as attached list

File
Strand 1
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PS/Secretary of State (L&B)

TALKS: SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETINGS:
MORNING OF 8 APRIL 1998

Meeting between the British Government and the
Independent Chairman

The Secretary of State met Senator Mitchell at 09.15. The Secretary of State briefed Senator Mitchell on developments overnight and the likely movements of the Prime Minister and Taoiseach in the course of the day. Following his breakfast meeting with the Taoiseach at Hillsborough, the Prime Minister moved to Castle Buildings where he would meet all those parties he had not seen the previous evening, after which he would remain available. The Taoiseach would meet the SDLP and Sinn Fein at Stormont House before leaving for his mother's funeral: he would return to Castle Buildings later in the evening.

After speaking to the Prime Minister's party at Hillsborough, the Secretary of State reported on the Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach, noting that the Prime Minister had discussed Strand Two text (which had been revised by the PM's party overnight), focusing on paragraph 7 and Annexes A and B. The Taoiseach had agreed to consider the suggestions and to revert to the Prime Minister later in the day. She also noted that Lord Alderdice's comments to the media after his meeting with the Irish the previous evening had been deeply unhelpful. Mr Hill added that he had offered revised text of

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paragraph 7 and the annexes to the PM's party, which appeared broadly in line with text drafted by the PM's party overnight. Mr Murphy was working on a revised Strand One text.

Senator Mitchell indicated that the two Governments should aim to produce revised Strand One and Strand Two texts for the Independent Chairmen by early evening. On handling, the Secretary of State noted that there might be a need for a plenary meeting that evening to consider a revised text, and that cover would be required from the Prime Minister for further discussion of Strand Two wording with the Irish.

Senator Mitchell indicated that he planned to meet the Irish to discuss handling.

Meeting with officials on prisoners

The Secretary of State met Brian White and Geoff Huggins at 10.05 to discuss the detailed paper on prisoner. Textual revisions to the paper were discussed and agreed, together with handling issues. The Secretary of State reported that the Prime Minister and Taoiseach wished to hold the paper back until broad agreement had been reached on Thursday.

In preparation for meetings with the PUP and UDP the Secretary of State wished to have available a list of prisoners (numbers, rather than names) relevant to each party, split by determinate sentenced prisoners and lifers, and figures on the impact of 3-year and 2-year cut-off points respectively.

The Secretary of State noted that handling was difficult. The PUP and UDP were unlikely to discuss the terms of the proposal in

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advance of receiving the detailed paper. Equally, the Prime Minister and Taoiseach were unlikely to agree to the paper being released to the PUP/UDP unless Trimble had agreed the proposal. An alternative might be to let the PUP and UDP discuss the proposal with Trimble. If they agreed, and the Prime Minister was content, Sinn Fein could be briefed again.

Second Meeting between the British Government and the Independent Chairmen

The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy met the Independent Chairmen at 11.25. Senator Mitchell reported on his meeting with the Irish Government. The Irish had not favoured the approach he had earlier suggested. Their apprehension flowed from their belief that to present a revised text to the parties at an early stage would spark a fresh round of discussions based on new questions. They favoured an approach in which the Heads of Government would tackle all the issues raised by the participants, meeting with the parties as necessary, before producing a further text. They believed that this approach had been agreed by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach at that morning's meeting. He also noted that the Independent Chairman did not have a list of the UUP's concerns. If the Prime Minister could press Trimble for a list, it would be very useful. He suggested that the Secretary of State might seek a meeting with the Irish to clarify what had been agreed with the Prime Minister and which approach was to be adopted. He added that he did not believe that the Irish wished to exclude parties from the discussions, and that they would probably wish to meet party leaders. Providing Strand Two issues were resolved, other issues, while great in number, should fall into place. The Secretary of State agreed that she would revert to the Independent Chairmen after seeing the Irish.

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Meeting with officials

The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy met officials at 11.40 and agreed that a list of known Strand One and Two positions should be drawn together and compared with those compiled by the Irish and the Independent Chairman. Alastair Campbell reported that the Prime Minister and Taoiseach had agreed that it might be premature for Senator Mitchell to produce a revised document that night and that, until the Taoiseach returned, the two Governments should continue to assemble material on party positions and take stock on the Taoiseach's return.

The Secretary of State suggested to Mr Campbell that the Prime Minister should press Trimble for a complete list of the UUP's concerns.

Mr Campbell reported that Trimble had written to request sight of the draft British-Irish Treaty. It might also be necessary to show Trimble revised Strand Two text and ask him if it met his concerns. Mr Ferguson noted that the text of the Treaty had yet to be agreed, but that the Governments aimed to circulate text with sidelining where detail emerged from the Agreement.

(Signed)

IAN MAYE