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SECRET

COVERING NOTE FOR CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE
ON NORTHERN IRELAND

A PROPOSAL FOR CANNES

Sinn Féin/IRA will only decommission arms if they are involved in something that is leading towards a political settlement acceptable to their electorate. Such a settlement is theoretically quite feasible, and probably would approximate closely enough to the Frameworks model. But nothing much is happening to bring that settlement any closer.

Our present tactics seem to be to keep Sinn Féin on ~~a~~ side with some concessions wrung from the British, to ignore the fact that little or nothing is actually happening on the political talks front, and to hope that a new leader of the Official Unionists will begin to take positive steps. ✓

This is overoptimistic. It is not realistic for Sinn Féin to expect political talks to start with or involving Unionists as long as arms are retained as a matter of principle by the IRA. Meanwhile Unionists have nothing to lose by remaining outside the talks process and making no concessions. That will remain the case even under a new leader. Objectively, nobody is putting them under any pressure.

20/6

The two Governments should set a time limit to their consultative process on the issues related to the future Governance of Northern Ireland. Consideration might be given to involving the people of Northern Ireland more directly in the process through a consultative referendum which would set very broad parameters for talks, consistent with the framework document but leaving room for change. If serious discussions did not take place either bilaterally or multilaterally, the British Government, in consultation with the Irish Government could put forward their own substantive proposals. These could be put to a referendum in Northern Ireland. The (possibly second) referendum would be accompanied by a simultaneous referendum in the Republic

*2 clearly stated
provisions except
and concerns (the latter)*

A PROPOSAL FOR CANNES

I am becoming worried that there is no strategy underlying our approach to the peace and political talks processes. Sinn Fein will only decommission arms if they are involved in something that is leading towards a political settlement acceptable to their electorate. Such a settlement is theoretically quite feasible, and probably would approximate closely enough to the frameworks model. But nothing is happening to bring that settlement any closer, and none of the advice I am receiving sketches out any critical path to bring it closer. Unionists are just opting out.

Our present tactics seem to be to jolly Sinn Fein along with little concessions wrung from the British, to ignore the fact that little or nothing is actually happening on the political talks front and to hope that if Jim Molyneaux is dumped something will happen and that Unionists will begin to move.

This is a cul-de-sac. It is, in fact, not realistic to contemplate largescale early releases of PIRA prisoners as long as arms are retained by the IRA. It is not realistic either for Sinn Fein to expect political talks to start with or involving

Unionists as long as arms are retained as a matter of principle by the IRA.

Meanwhile Unionists have nothing to lose by sitting pretty and making no concessions, and that will remain the case even under a new leader.

Objectively, nobody is putting them under any pressure.

I would suggest that we consider the following approach,

1. Pro-actively canvass a proposal to break the decommissioning deadlock
(This is already in hand)
2. Abandon our non-involvement in Strand One issues, and actively canvass the British to set a time limit to their consultative process on a basis to be approved in a referendum in Northern Ireland. This consultative referendum would set very broad parameters for talks, consistent with the framework document but leaving plenty of room for change. It could take place very early, say the first week in September. Under this referendum the parties could be given a limited space of time (say 3 months) to come forward with alternative proposals to those in the framework. These could then be discussed bilaterally or multilaterally. After that the British Government, in consultation with the Irish

Government, could put their own substantive proposals into referendum in Northern Ireland, if a cross community agreement has not been reached. If such an agreement had been reached, that agreement could be put in referendum. This (second) referendum would be accompanied by a simultaneous referendum in the Republic.

Please give me a better strategy than this, if you see faults in it.

*Written by
Taoiseach*