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AMBASAID NA HEIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

20 May 1996

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*Taoiseach*

*I am asking  
D/Justice for a  
view on A  
below*

*in kin  
20-5-96*

Dear Secretary

**Another IRA attack? - a conversation with a senior British official**

I had an opportunity over the weekend to talk with a senior British official who has access to intelligence briefing on Northern Ireland.

A. | According to this official, intelligence sources "in Northern Ireland" are reporting that "some members of the IRA" want to stage a major attack before the election on 30 May and in advance of any renewal of the cessation of violence. It is presumed on the British side that this group is a minority within the IRA and within the Army Council. However, it is not clear to the British whether an attack by a particular IRA unit needs a decision by the Army Council or could be conducted "on a nod from an individual member of the Council".

The attack in question - which I took it would be in Britain - would be against a significant target and would be of such a kind that lives would very likely be lost.

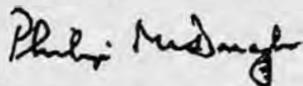
My interlocutor expressed great concern about the effect of an event of this kind on John Major's policy. Discussions on decommissioning within the Cabinet sub-committee have been difficult. There are well publicised fears on the back-benches. A major attack now would have a crucially different effect on the British body politic to the Canary Wharf bomb. A bomb attack in which lives were lost could make Major's policy unsustainable.

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My interlocutor mentioned that Major and Mayhew have put very significant pressure on the Home Secretary to be more forthcoming on prisons issues. Pressure from the Irish Government and the Embassy has been an important long-term factor. In the short term, the tactful way in which President Clinton raised the Kelly case at his meeting with the Prime Minister in Moscow has helped to bring about the changed approach. [**Comment:** Labour sources here have surmised in recent days that the Home Office has received new instructions from Downing Street on prisons issues.]

My source said that on decommissioning, the Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind has played a key role in recent discussion in the Cabinet sub-committee, arguing that due weight should be given to a realistic assessment of what Sinn Fein/IRA are likely to deliver. It was implied to me that Rifkind's influence [**comment:** not previously discernible in this area] has been very important in tilting the balance in Major's favour within the Cabinet.

Yours sincerely



**Philip McDonagh**  
Counsellor