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# Northern Ireland Office

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*Michael*  
*Secretary of State*  
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### SECRETARY OF STATE TO MEET GERRY ADAMS AT US INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

After Michael Ancram's meeting with Sinn Fein in exploratory dialogue on 10 May the Government announced that, providing exploratory dialogue continued, meetings between Ministers and Sinn Fein representatives would be considered on their merits.

In line with this, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, announced today that in the course of next week's White House Investment Conference he intended to ask Mr Adams to meet him.

The Secretary of State said:

"I intend to go to this important Investment Conference to put forward the case for investment in Northern Ireland.

I want this Conference to achieve for Northern Ireland the strongest possible economic boost, from which all its people will stand to benefit.

I will therefore be asking Mr Adams to meet me informally as early as possible at the Investment Conference, which he will also be attending. Economic progress for Northern Ireland, including especially inward investment, depends crucially on the permanence of peace and on people's confidence that peace is truly permanent. My purpose will be to explain this, and to say that public confidence in the permanence of peace requires, among other important matters, substantial progress on the decommissioning of arms held by paramilitary organisations who

have declared that violence is at an end. I shall make clear again that substantive political talks with Sinn Fein will only be possible when there is a satisfactory outcome to exploratory dialogue, including the progress on decommissioning which we have already publicly stated to be necessary.

I shall look to Mr Adams to respond positively to this, as is plainly the wish of the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland."

Exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein continues. Michael Ancram will attend the next meeting.

MITCHEL Mc LAUGHLIN,  
ROSLEA, Co.FERMANAGH. 27/12/95

Speaking here on the refusal of the British government to adequately address the issue of the hundreds of people who remain imprisoned as a result of the conflict in our country, Roslea seems a highly appropriate place to be.

When we look around us we can see the manifestation of British intransigence in the shape of military bases and checkpoints which remain intact despite 16 months of an IRA cessation. There is one British soldier to every four residents in Roslea. At the border with Monaghan the British Army checkpoint is still operational with its infra red sensors and cameras.

I suppose that the level of British army activity is a back-handed compliment of the resistance which this community has shown since partition effectively cut off Roslea from its natural hinterland in Monaghan.

Whilst the British government has refused to pick up any of the threads which make up the tapestry of the peace process, the response of both the British and Irish governments to the demand for the release of political prisoners is particularly disappointing and, for the families of prisoners doubly so at Christmas time.

The release of political prisoners is an integral part of any peace process. To date, we still have 400 prisoners of the conflict in gaols throughout Ireland, England and the United States. The much vaunted reintroduction of 50% remission last month fails abysmally to redress the situation and once we cut through the manipulations and distortion of statistics by the British government it is easy to see that John Major appears incapable of bestowing any generosity or magnanimity towards such an important element of the peace process.

The harsh reality, and one which must be highlighted, is that the vast majority of the POW's will still be incarcerated as we move into the 21st century, under the policies of the British government.

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10 Republican prisoners are now into their 21st year of imprisonment and, with the exception of Paul Norney who has only recently been transferred to the north, they have all spent those years in English jails where they have had to endure some of the most brutal and repressive conditions which could be imposed on them.

The British Home Office are still intent on vengeance, by subjecting these prisoners to the harshest regime possible. Those in the notorious SSU's are living in virtual solitary confinement and are subject to 'closed visits' which effectively means they are denied physical contact or privacy with their families or other visitors.

The Dublin government has recently ratified the Council of Europe Convention for the Transfer of Sentenced prisoners but signals from the British government suggest that they intend to deal with requests for repatriation in the same way as it has every other aspect of the prisoner issue - in a begrudging, minimalist and negative manner.

It is this behaviour which leaves me feeling that this British government has no interest in addressing any element of the peace process. This British government has no interest in pursuing anything other than the surrender of, not only the Irish Republican Army, but the nationalists of Ireland.

It is becoming daily more apparent that the British Government has no intention whatsoever of advancing, or, indeed, of maintaining the Peace Process in Ireland. Despite the demand for real and lasting peace from the people of Ireland, despite the best efforts of the political parties attending the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, despite the endeavours of the Irish Administration, the EU, and a host of other countries, despite all the hope and optimism, it is clear that the British were never truly serious about the Peace Process.

Some elements within the British Government are worried about their slender parliamentary majority in Westminster, preferring to cosset the Unionist leadership rather than address the issues necessary for lasting peace in Ireland. Other members within the British Cabinet are undoubtedly seeking to force a re-run of the war on terms which they imagine are much more favourable to their side.

They are sure that they have manoeuvred the IRA into a position of extreme vulnerability, into a position where any outbreak of hostilities would be a deluded and despairing short-lived fling, swamped by a ground swell of condemnation, rejection and disgust. In this scenario, the British are convinced that they could rapidly mop up any resistance within a fairly short space, and that even if their methods were more repressive and vicious than ever before, there would be a tacit acceptance of such necessity, both here and abroad. Such are the misunderstandings and historical antagonisms between Irish Republicans and British Governments that John Major appears to be prepared to surrender the chance for peace in a vain attempt to smash the Republican Movement forever.

We are, all of us, standing on the verge of a disaster created by another lethal British miscalculation, and it is vital that all those with the interests of the Irish and British peoples at heart should pause and reflect on what has been happening this past 16 months. Given that the British Intelligence services are still recruiting informers and agents, given that Britain's vast military machine in Ireland, is in full operational capacity, given that there has been no movement on either the release or more humane treatment of prisoners, given that Britain has thrown up one blockade after another to slow any momentum that might develop in the Peace Process, there is little doubt that they are ready, and anxious, to go to war again. But even the most cursory examination of Irish history reveals that British misconceptions and British misrepresentations have never solved anything, but have led to an intensification of struggle and resistance. All wars leave a bad taste in the mouths of their protagonists and hindsight has always been a great general.

This should have been done, that should have been tried. But wars can never be fought over again. Conditions change, strategies and tactics change. What was done last year may never again be attempted. And this is where the British militarist analysis breaks down because the paths of Irish history have seldom conformed to Britain's master-design.

Not only the peoples of Ireland and England, but the international community too, know that Britain is spoiling for a fight. Peace was, and indeed still is, within our grasp, but that grasp is rapidly loosening. Intransigence, coupled with historical ignorance and an absolute lack of political imagination will lead us all, inexorably,

back to war. If Britain, tragically, forces a resumption of hostilities in Ireland and Britain, it will not be the first time that the British Government has overestimated its position.

We have heard all their boasting and bravado a hundred times before. From Heath to Thatcher and Major, from Whitelaw to Mason and Mayhew, they have all been sure that they had the IRA on the run. According to every British Prime Minister and Secretary of State, the IRA, down the years, has had its backbone broken, its fighting capacity smashed, been squeezed like tooth-paste, played its last card, thrown its last dice, and lost any support it ever had; the IRA has been gangsterised, criminalised, Cubanised, Mafia-ised, ostracised, demonised. And yet, when it declared a military cessation on the 1st. Sept. 1994 it was stronger, better armed, better-trained and in better shape than it had ever been. That is an historical, and an undeniable, fact. It is not a threat, nor is it belligerent posturing.

If, as is now generally recognised, there can be no outright military victory in wars of this nature, what is the rationale behind Britain's strategy? Why pose unrealistic demands that are guaranteed to smash an already fragile process? The IRA has not made any illogical demands. It has taken an unprecedented risk for lasting peace in Ireland. Given the vindictive nature of British establishment politics, why should the IRA leave itself at the mercy of a Government that is renowned, above all, for its cynicism, deceit, and insincerity. If the IRA were to demand that Britain disarm all its regiments and militias in the North of Ireland, and that John Major announce, publicly, in a formal communique with binding international effect, that Britain intends to prohibit, in perpetuity, the use of force to settle disputes, their call would be treated with scorn and incredulous laughter. So why should the British treat Irish republicans with such disdain?

There can only be one explanation for such irrationality. The British want war and they want to force the IRA into ending its cease-fire, hoping that the IRA will then be blamed by all and sundry. And naturally, Britain is most anxious to appear the innocent, offended party in any such break-down. But people are not stupid. Apart from an unholy alliance of Tory Ministers, Establishment Neanderthals and a self-censoring British media, there is no demand, either here or abroad, for an IRA decommissioning prior to all-inclusive, meaningful negotiations. Everyone knows

that Britain has not made one serious gesture for peace, and all the PR in the world cannot alter that stark reality.

If Major and Mayhew and the faceless advisors behind them believe for one instant that they can prepare for, and provoke, war, and still claim to believe in peace, they are again fundamentally misreading both the situation, and the resolve of Irish Republicanism.

It cannot be denied that we are now rapidly approaching a defining moment in Irish-British relationships. For months now, Republican leaders have been grotesquely depicted as war-mongers. Their statements warning of imminent danger have been dismissed as the rantings of frustrated and blood-thirsty people who cannot get their own way. And all because they simply sought to place the entire Peace Process in its historic context. Neither peace nor war is inevitable. The participants in any struggle will determine, by their actions and their sincerity, just what will occur. Any student of Irish history will, and can, verify what Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have been saying. Britain has not won a war. The IRA has not surrendered. The conditions for peace are still present, but so too are the conditions for renewed war. If Britain is determined to prove its supremacy, then the whole peace process will explode, literally and figuratively. Sadly, recent Irish history provides cogent proof of Britain's inability to come to terms with Irish Republicans. If there is ever to be peace in Ireland, Britain must stop seeking either military victory or the destruction of Republicanism. Examine each instance of British intransigence and political ignorance, and you will see that, rather than destroying Republican resistance, it has enhanced and deepened the struggle in Ireland.

In October 1980, after nearly four years of prison unrest, ranging from the blanket protest to the no-wash protest, from inconvenience to misery, Irish Republican prisoners embarked on a hunger strike. That hunger-strike ended almost 3 months later on the 10th. December, when the prisoners were promised, secretly, that their demands had been essentially accepted by the British Govt. This was a prison dispute that was both negotiable and resolvable, a dispute that could have been, and should have been, settled across a table.

Republican prisoners showed their willingness to be flexible by calling off the strike when they received verbal assurances that the British intended to honour, substantively, their main demands.

Within a week, however, it became clear that the British had again been playing civil service-semantic with the dying prisoners and their families and intermediaries. Furthermore, they believed that they had dealt a severe blow to both the IRA and to the wider nationalist population who had generally supported the demands of the Republican prisoners. By renegeing on the settlement they had reached with Irish prisoners, Britain's true motive was exposed. Their much flaunted search for 'justice' was simply a sham. Believing that they had effectively demoralised Republican resistance, the British were again confident that they had broken the struggle for justice in Ireland, and this, sadly, seems to be the root of their present posturing as well. Tragically the British completely misread the mood of the prisoners. Within three months IRA prisoners under the leadership of Bobby Sands, embarked upon a second Hunger-Strike that was to call into question all around the world Britain's very role in Ireland. That hunger-strike began on the 1st. of March, ironically, the proposed date for the beginning of the proposed Twin-Track Talks Process.

The British thought they had defeated the Republican Movement after the 1980 Hunger-Strike and they know what happened then. They have convinced themselves yet again, that they have brought about a situation in which Republicanism can be smashed. How many tragedies must now occur before Britain realises that victory is not in its grasp, that peace means peace and can never be interpreted, nor implemented, as a ploy to achieve the unachievable.

Peace is still available and peace is still possible. Even at this late hour John Major has the power to rescue both our peoples from looming disaster. A short statement of serious intent, a simple phone-call, can pull us all back from the brink. And whatever happens, the commitment of Sinn Fein to a strategy for peace will remain constant.



This British government, or, for that matter, any British government to come, will find that the nationalists of Ireland are not into the business of surrender. What we are about is the release of Irish Republican prisoners from British gaols, the removal of British injustice and inequality from our midst, and the search for agreement among all the people of Ireland on how we govern ourselves in the days, months and years to come.