

F. J. D.

STATEMENTS BY SECRETARY OF STATE WHEN INTERVIEWED ON GOOD MORNING ULSTER
PROGRAMME ON THURSDAY 16 DECEMBER 1993

Interviewer

A lot of people have been commenting, some with concern, a great many with concern, about the prospect of Sinn Fein being involved in talks within three months of a cessation of violence. Are you saying that it's a condition for those exploratory talks taking place that the IRA surrender its weapons and explosives?

Secretary of State

We want to see a permanent end to violence and exploratory talks will be talks at which the consequences of a declared end to violence will be explored. Obviously if people are in possession of weapons then it is not compatible with a declaration that violence is at an end, so these are matters which would be explored at that stage. The sooner, of course, arms are given up the better. We shall be talking to Sinn Fein, not to people who have actually let off bombs.

Interviewer

But do those talks, those exploratory talks, include discussion of how the IRA is to surrender its weapons?

Secretary of State

That will be a very sensible thing to be discussing, yes, of course.

Interviewer

So those exploratory talks could take place in the absence of such a surrender?

Secretary of State

Within three months. What we said is this. We've said this in public beforehand. We have said that once there is a declaration that violence is at an end, then within three months we will enter into exploratory talks as to how Sinn Fein, for example, can be admitted into the main political talks which have been going on, as you know,

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last year and again this year. Now there will be a great deal to discuss. There's the mechanics, the means by which they can be brought about. But people have got the wrong idea, I think, that they'll be sitting down within three months at the Conference table. That's not

Interviewer

Sir Patrick, if I just get this clear with you. Are you saying that while exploratory talks are going on, or indeed before they start, it would not be a condition of their starting that the IRA surrender their weapons and explosives?

Secretary of State

If the IRA have explosives and if the IRA have munitions, which of course they have, the sooner they surrender them the better. But what we have said at the moment is that exploratory talks as to how the main talks may be entered into by Sinn Fein will take place within three months. These are all matters that have got to be worked out but at exploratory talks it will obviously be highly relevant as to when and how arms are to be surrendered, because you cannot be sitting on top of arms and at the same time say you're for real when you say that violence is at an end.

Interviewer

Forgive me for saying this, but I have a feeling that the conclusion many people will be drawing from hearing you is that yes, there could be those exploratory talks without those arms and explosives having been handed in?

Secretary of State

I think that that is the position at the moment, yes. These are matters that do have to be worked out. I think it is extremely interesting that already the effect of this joint declaration is that people are thinking ahead down the line, thinking too of surrender of arms, thinking of what happens after there has been a declaration that

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violence is at an end. That is a very desirable thing. What is very important is that we do not sit down and talk in main constitutional talks with people who still held the threat of violence up their sleeves.

Interviewer

Say the Republican Movement is to convey to you the idea that, yes, there are some ways in which this joint declaration meets their position, but they would like to know from you whether you can give a little more. What is your response going to be?

Secretary of State

My response is going to be "tough". The two Governments have put their heads together over many months and they have come up with a joint declaration which constitutes their agreed position as to the constitutional principles, as to the political realities, which affect Northern Ireland in particular and its divided community, and the problems of Northern Ireland, and they have said: "Now this is a declaration for democracy, it's a declaration for dialogue, and we are not saying that agreement must be reached in one particular direction or another, but what we are saying is you must come to an agreement and we will help. We are not saying that it has got to be for a united Ireland; we are not saying it's got to be staying in the United Kingdom." What we are saying, and the two Governments speaking together, is: "You must come to an agreement and we will help you do that". Now that is what is so important and then they go on to say in the light of that there can be no possible pretext for using violence for political ends.

Interviewer

So you are saying and that you will continue with what many have interpreted as a "take it or leave it" offer?

Secretary of State

Well, you say "take it or leave it" offer. Certainly we are not in the business of bargaining with Sinn Fein; we are not in the business of bargaining with anybody who justifies the use of violence,

nor are we in the business of bargaining with anybody who uses violence. What we are saying is: "You have a political objective. It is a nationalist objective." There are plenty of people who are constitutional nationalists, who are not going to cut the ground from under their feet by bargaining with people who bring bombs to back up their arguments because they know that they can't win at the ballot-box. But we're saying this to them: "You are excluded from the Council Chamber; you are excluded from political talks only by your own decision to use weapons. Give those weapons up, give up the use of violence and then doors will open to you which have been closed up till now."

Interviewer

What happens, and I know we may be going a bit far down the road, what happens if the violence doesn't stop. What do the Governments do then?

Secretary of State

The Governments, I may say, will continue - I speak only for my own Government here - we will continue with the unrelenting campaign against men and women of violence that is continuing at the moment, but it will not mean that this declaration has had no value, no effect. Why not? Because it will be seen that the two Governments concerned, those to whom nationalists on the whole look, that's to say the Dublin Government, our own Government, the Government of the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland, in the international and national law, forms part, the two Governments will have said this is the declaration which we make about the constitutional principles and the political realities which are relevant.

Interviewer

Do you strengthen the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Secretary of State

May I just finish this. And the Governments will have said: "Now there can be no possible pretext, no even shadow of justification for

using violence for political ends", and that will be seen all round the world, as President Clinton has already made absolutely clear, in a very powerful message of support yesterday; that will serve still further to undermine and withdraw support and toleration from the IRA.

Interviewer

Do you strengthen the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a means also of doing that?

Secretary of State

There is no need to strengthen the Anglo-Irish Agreement, save to broaden it and get broader support for it if that is possible, and that's the policy of both Governments. What is wrong with the Anglo-Irish Agreement is that at present it is still not supported by a substantial proportion of people in Northern Ireland.

JOINT DECLARATION

At Cabinet yesterday the Prime Minister thanked all officials involved in the Joint Declaration and its presentation, for their hard work - often late into the night. Most of this burden fell to the Northern Ireland Office. I attach a Personal Message from the Prime Minister recording his thanks to the NIO. In passing it on, I should like to add my own.

2. The negotiation of the Declaration involved many long hours of careful analysis and persistent discussion with the Irish. By a very small team of officials. The balance of the final document, and the protection given to the Government's long held principles, reflect the skill and care with which the innumerable drafts were drafted, and advice was prepared.

3. The text was only finalised some 11 hours before it was released. So it is all the more remarkable that the department has been able to put together such an effective presentation plan, including the distribution of 200,000 copies of the Declaration already. I know this has involved a large number of people working very long hours and, in many cases, having to get to grips with