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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH TAOISEACH: IRISH PRESS REACTION

SUMMARY

1. WIDESPREAD MEDIA COVERAGE OF PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH. RECOGNITION THAT FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS NEEDED. BUT SIGNS OF GREATER REALISM THAT SUBSTANTIAL DIFFICULTIES EXIST WHICH MAY NOT BE RESOLVED. EVIDENCE OF IRISH GOVERNMENT PRESS BRIEFING.

DETAIL

2. THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH IN DUBLIN DOMINATES THE IRISH MEDIA. ALL THE PAPERS TODAY (4 DEC) DEVOTE NUMEROUS PAGES TO COVERAGE OF THE MEETING, THE PRESS CONFERENCE AND ANALYSIS.

3. COMMON THEMES TO EMERGE INCLUDE THE COMMITMENT BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS TO ATTEMPT TO PRODUCE A JOINT DECLARATION, THAT BOTH PRIME MINISTERS WILL REVIEW PROGRESS IN BRUSSELS NEXT WEEK, FOLLOWING A JOINT MEETING OF OFFICIALS ON TUESDAY, AND A BELIEF THAT THE FRANK TALKING REFERRED TO DURING THE PRESS CONFERENCE IMPLIED ANGRY EXCHANGES BETWEEN BOTH SIDES. BUT PREDOMINANT IS A RECOGNITION THAT MAJOR PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES STILL REMAIN WHICH MAY NOT BE CAPABLE OF RESOLUTION. THE TAOISEACH'S REMARK THAT IT IS BETTER TO HAVE TRIED AND FAILED RATHER THAN NOT TO HAVE TRIED AT ALL IS REGARDED AS PARTICULARLY FATALISTIC AND DISCOURAGING. MORE GENERALLY, YESTERDAY'S MEETING SEEMS TO HAVE BROUGHT TO THE IRISH MEDIA A GREATER REALISM OF THE DIFFICULTIES IN REACHING AN AGREED JOINT DECLARATION.

4. THERE IS MUCH EVIDENCE THAT DURING YESTERDAY'S MEETING THE IRISH GOVERNMENT WAS BRIEFING THE PRESS ON THE TAOISEACH'S INTENT TO REGISTER HIS ANGER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OVER THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S CONTACTS WITH THE IRA. AND THERE WAS SUBSEQUENT BRIEFING THAT THREE OR FOUR SUBSTANTIAL ISSUES STILL REMAINED TO BE RESOLVED. THESE ARE WIDELY REPORTED TO RELATE TO THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S DEMAND FOR THE RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION ON THE ISLAND AS A WHOLE: THE BRITISH DEMAND FOR MORE CLARITY ABOUT THE

IRISH GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS ON ARTICLES TWO AND THREE AND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UNIONIST CONSENT:
AND WHETHER THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD ADOPT THE ROLE OF
PERSUADERS.

5. THE IRISH PRESS EDITORIAL FOCUSES ON THE LACK OF AGREEMENT
BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENTS SUGGESTING THAT THE FACT THE TALKS
CONTINUED ALMOST TWICE AS LONG AS EXPECTED 'SERVED MERELY TO
EMPHASISE THE GULF THAT SEPARATES THE TWO GOVERNMENTS ON HOW TO
RESTORE MOMENTUM TO THE PEACE PROCESS. DESPITE THE SMILES AND
PREDICTABLE BONHOMIE THE UNMISTAKABLE MESSAGE WAS THAT THE
GULF REMAINS UNBRIDGED.'

6. THE IRISH TIMES RECOGNISES THAT THE DIFFICULTIES '' ARE WEIGHTY
AND SUBSTANTIAL'' BUT INJECTS SOME OPTIMISM THAT BOTH LEADERS HAVE
ARRIVED AT A COMMON POINT OF DEPARTURE. ''THAT IS NO SMALL
ACHIEVEMENT GIVEN THE STRESSES AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF THE LAST
FEW WEEKS. THERE IS A GREAT NEED FOR CLARITY ABOUT BASIC CONCEPTS
LIKE SELF-DETERMINATION: IF CONCENTRATION IS NOW FIRMLY ON THESE
ISSUES HOPES OF A PRODUCTIVE OUTCOME ARE CLOSER TO BEING
REALISED.''

7. THE IRISH INDEPENDENT EXAMINES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO
GOVERNMENTS AND SUGGESTS THAT IT WAS ''IN A DEGREE ENCOURAGING THAT
THEY (THE TWO PRIME MINISTERS) ADMITTED THE SHARPNESS OF THEIR
EARLY EXCHANGES ON THE SUBJECT OF THE LEAKED COMMUNICATIONS
BETWEEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND THE IRA. BUT THERE MUST BE SOME
SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE CLAIM THAT THEY REALLY CLEARED THE AIR.''

BLATHERWICK

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