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STATEMENTS ON POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The following statements of policy have been made by successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland; all of them, no matter by whom made, reflect current Government policy.

The '100 days' Interview: Peter Brook 1 November 1989

Interviewer:

Not so long ago a very senior Republican described to me that in the present state of play there were yourselves and themselves, basically that it was a Mexican stand-off position. Can you ever see the day when maybe not you but the British Government can sit down one day and talk to Sinn Fein?

Secretary of State:

I'll need to give you a slightly elaborate answer to that because there are obviously a number of factors which weigh with it. The first factor is that I would recognise that in terms of the late twentieth century terrorist, organised as well as the Provisional IRA have become, that it is difficult to envisage a military defeat of such a force because of the circumstances under which they operate, though the security forces can exercise a policy of containment to enable, broadly speaking, normal life to go within the Province. So in that sense it would require a decision on the part of the terrorists that the game had ceased to be worth the candle, that considering the lifestyle they have to adopt, that the return which they were securing from their activities did not justify the costs that it was imposing in personal terms on those who were engaged in their activities. There has to be a possibility that at some stage that that debate might start within the terrorist community and that moment might come. From the Government's point of view, clearly the improvement in the conditions of life for everybody within Northern Ireland, and that includes obviously economic developments, bringing jobs in, including to West Belfast and other areas of high unemployment within the Province, would not, of itself, cause terrorism to falter, but it would be a contribution towards conditions in which

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that debate might occur within the terrorist community. And likewise a transfer of political power to local politicians, under a principle of consensus, would also, without again being decisive, be a contribution towards a solution. Now, if all that were to occur, then you would move towards a point, if in fact the terrorists were to decide that the moment had come when they wished to withdraw from their activities, then I think that Government would need to be imaginative in those circumstances as to how that process should be managed. I think it would be foolish to be making statements today about what would happen then, but I hope that because of the welcome which would be given to a return to peaceful conditions in the Province by everybody living here, I hope that the Government at that stage would be imaginative in how it responded.

Interviewer:

That's quite a remarkable statement.

Secretary of State:

That's an observation for you rather than me.

Interviewer:

That is quite an admission on the part of the Government that they would in fact consider speaking to the Gerry Adams and Danny Morrisons of this world.

Secretary of State:

Let me remind you of the move towards independence in Cyprus and a British Minister stood up in the House of Commons and used the word 'never' in a way which within two years there had been a retreat from that word. All I'm saying in what I say is that just as I would hope that, in answer to an earlier question, the Unionist parties while remaining consistent in their position, would retain sufficient flexibility to be able to bring solutions to come to pass, so I hope that the British Government on a long-term basis would be sufficiently flexible, that if flexibility were required it could be used, but I am in no way predicating or predicting what those circumstances would be.

Interviewer:

But one clear circumstance, as you made clear, is that the IRA must stop violence. That would open up a whole new vista, you are saying.

Secretary of State:

It goes without saying, there are any number of circumstances within the Province which would be a great deal easier to address in the interests of everybody if violence was not occurring.

Interviewer:

Do you think earlier release of long-term prisoners could contribute to improving the atmosphere in the community and deter support for the IRA?

Secretary of State:

I think that in a number of ways which have already been exercised in the terms of the release of long-term prisoners and in their release on leave, both in the summer and at Christmas, have made contributions to a relaxation of tension within the Province.

Whitbread Speech: The British Presence: Peter Brooke, 9 November 1990

'In Northern Ireland, two views about the ideal pattern of government have long confronted each other. There is the present reality - in fact and in international law - of the Union - the Union, that is, between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Union is affirmed by the first Section of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973 which declares that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part of it cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We stand firmly by that solemn declaration and assurance. But in so doing we acknowledge that there is another view - strongly held by the nationalist minority within Northern Ireland. That is the aspiration to a United Ireland - not simply to the Republic of Ireland which exists today but to a 32 county state

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covering all the territory of the island, and worthy in their view of the support of all Irish people.

It is possible to take either position with integrity. It is acceptable to uphold the one or advocate the other by all legitimate peaceful and democratic means. What is not acceptable, and what totally lacks integrity, is the promotion of either view by the crude and brutal methods of violence and coercion

....An Irish Republicanism seen to have finally renounced violence would be able, like other parties, to seek a role in the peaceful political life of the community. In Northern Ireland it is not the aspiration to a sovereign, united Ireland, against which we set our face, but its violent expression...

....There is a need for reconciliation at three levels - between the communities in Northern Ireland; within Ireland; and between the peoples on both these islands. The terrorists constitute a major impediment on the road to peace and greater understanding and to new political institutions which adequately reflect everyone's interests. The British Government has no selfish or strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland: our role is to help, enable and encourage. Britain's purpose, as I have sought to describe it, is not to occupy, oppress or exploit, but to ensure democratic debate and free democratic choice.'

Culture and Identity Speech: Sir Patrick Mayhew: 16 December 1992

'Likewise, the aspiration to a united Ireland, representing the second view referred to by Peter Brooke, is also wholly legitimate... [refers to prominent politicians of the Nationalist tradition]

.... they are so, not least because of the manner in which they sought to pursue their aims. What is not acceptable and is without integrity, is the prosecution of either the Unionist or Nationalist view by violence.... in other words, the aims of both Unionists and Nationalists are wholly legitimate and unexceptionable, but sadly pursue means which are not ...

Unity cannot be brought nearer, let alone achieved, by dealing out death and destruction. It is not sensible to suppose that any British Government will yield to an agenda for Ireland prosecuted by violent means. Nor would any government be pressed to do so by any serious body of opinion...

.... provided it is advocated constitutionally, there can be no proper reason for excluding any political objective from discussion. Certainly not the objective of an Ireland united through broad agreement fairly and freely agreed...

.... in the event of a genuine and established cessation of violence, the whole range of responses that we have had to make to that violence could, and would, inevitably be looked at afresh... thus when terrorism is seen to have genuinely ended, there will be profound consequences for the maintenance of law and order and the administration of justice.'

Prime Minister/Taoiseach Joint Statement, 29 October 1993

'If and when such a renunciation of violence had been made and sufficiently demonstrated, new doors could open, and both governments would wish to respond imaginatively to the new situation that would arrive.'