

World Insight

British officials meet with IRA reps

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (NYT)— For the first time in 23 years a British government official sat down Wednesday for formal talks with stand-ins for the IRA, the organization waging a long and violent struggle to unite Ulster with the rest of Ireland.

The news was in the event itself, just that it was happening, rather than in any hope that the tortuous, eight-month peace effort would succumb to a sudden breakthrough. None was expected and afterward none reported.

For more than three hours, each side read statements to the other and laid out long-standing — and opposing — positions.

The British government restated its insistence that the Irish Republican Army begin handing over weapons before full-bodied peace talks involving all the parties to the conflict can begin. Britain says these talks are merely "exploratory."

"I was able to explain to them that if we got to the round-table talks it would have to be on the basis that all parties went there armed only with their mandates," said Michael Ancram, the Northern Ireland Minister at a news conference.

And representatives from Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, repeated their demand to put "demilitarization" — a code word for the withdrawal of British troops — at the top of the agenda.

In their search for what they call "equality of treatment," they asked for a meeting between the Sinn Fein president, Gerry Adams, and the top British official responsible for the province, the Northern Ireland secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew.

On Tuesday Mayhew met with leaders from the largest Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, who advocate staying part of Britain, as part of an on-going effort to sooth fears that the British are not going to force them to join the predominantly Catholic Irish republic to the south.

"Most people would accept it's not unreasonable now for us to want to meet with Patrick Mayhew in the course of bilateral discussions to which he's invited other parties," Martin McGuinness, the chief Sinn Fein negotiator, said.

The British team passed along the request but made clear to reporters later that no affirmative answer was to be expected soon.

NOT SINCE 1972 when the British government secretly flew Adams and McGuinness to London for talks has a top British official sat face-to-face with bargainers from what it regards as a terrorists, Wednesday Adams and McGuinness are the No. 1 and No. 2 in the group.

So there was a sense of historical moment when the five Sinn Fein delegates arrived at 11:15 a.m. under drizzly skies at the Stormont parliament. The gigantic columned building was constructed on a high bluff outside Belfast in 1928 to house Ulster's own assembly. Its monumental bulk seems to serve as an architectural statement that the province intends to remain separate.

Such an anathema is the building to Northern Ireland's Catholic nationalists, who recall discriminatory legislation passed by the Assembly when it was dominated by the majority Protestants, that the Sinn Fein

delegation refused to allow television cameramen to use it as a backdrop to its news conference. This had not been a problem during half a dozen lower level meetings between Sinn Fein and British civil servants.

Those sessions have not made progress in resolving any of the key issues that include "decommissioning" of IRA weapons, withdrawal of British troops, release of prisoners and ways to reform the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which is 97 percent Protestant.

The lower-level meetings ended Feb. 7, when Sinn Fein asserted it had found a bugging device inside an electrical apparatus in a discussion room it used near the conference hall. The British government insisted it was not a listening device.

No one expects much headway to be made anytime soon since both sides have dug in on points they care about. Prime Minister John Major has lately emphasized his demand that Sinn Fein agree to get rid of the IRA weapons stockpile, which British intelligence experts say includes at least 1,500 rifles and machine guns, more than a ton of Semtex plastic explosive and perhaps one million rounds of ammunition. And Sinn Fein is insisting it should be allowed to join in the all-party talks.

There was a touch of symbolism in Wednesday's opening handshakes since the Sinn Fein delegation included Gerry Kelly, who was convicted of planting bombs, and Ancram escaped assassination in an IRA bombing in 1984. He was trapped for some time in the rubble from a devastating blast at a Brighton hotel where Margaret Thatcher and other Conservatives were meeting.

Focus

Senators debate expanding Pentagon authority

WASHINGTON (NYT)— The new Clinton administration counterterrorism proposal would bar the military from arresting terrorists possessing chemical or biological weapons, but give the armed forces a role in "disarming and disabling" such suspects.

This latest version of the Omnibus Counterterrorism Act of 1995, introduced Friday in Congress, two weeks after the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, evoked strong criticism from GOP senators opposed to further expansion of the Pentagon's role in civilian law enforcement.

At a hearing Wednesday, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., wondered "whether this language would authorize the military to use deadly force" against suspected terrorists.

"While I favor the limited use of military forces to provide technical assistance to aid civilian law enforcement agencies... I have great reservations about allowing the military to disable" civilians through force.

Military participation in civilian law enforcement is defined by the 1878 Posse Comitatus Act, passed in the post-Reconstruction era to appease Southern resentment over U.S. troops enforcing civil rights laws after the Civil War.

AFTER THE OKLAHOMA CITY bombing, President Clinton put forward legislation that, among other things, would permit military assistance to civilian law enforcement

when terrorists possess chemical or biological "weapons of mass destruction." Since 1982, the military has been allowed to intervene in cases involving nuclear terrorism.

Republicans in Congress complained that expanding the military's powers would compromise American reluctance

to use troops for enforcing domestic laws. On Wednesday, those misgivings bubbled to the surface in a joint hearing of members of the Senate Judiciary and Armed Services committees.

"I have grave reservations with this proposal," Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said.

Testifying at the hearing, Former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger pointed to a section of the Clinton proposal that would permit "technical assistance in disarming and disabling individuals in possession of (chemical or biological) contraband."

The same section prohibits military participation in arrests.

Weinberger said the proposal suggests "that the military could kill a suspect, but they couldn't arrest him." He added that if approved by Congress, it could yield "enormous amounts of litigation."

But Kent Markus, acting assistant attorney general for legislative affairs, defended the administration's position, saying the military could be called in only after the attorney general and defense secretary both declare a state of emergency, after determining civilian law enforcement does not have the necessary expertise.

THE CLINTON proposal falls "comfortably within the established fabric of federal law governing the proper, limited role of the armed forces in domestic law enforcement," Markus said.

Civil liberties advocates say pre-Oklahoma City counterterrorism legislation is already too broad. Under existing law, the attorney general has almost limitless authority to call in the military for investigations involving "terrorism transcending national boundaries."

"We remain concerned about the scope of activities the military could engage in," said Louis Bogard, a lawyer with the American Civil Liberties Union. "While the bill purports to limit the military to technical assistance, the definition of that term seems quite far reaching."

At the hearing, Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, suggested a military role in disarming or disabling terrorist operations might be appropriate if the military is already on the scene.

The cost of training local law enforcement to control chemical and biological weapons would be "staggering," he said.

He added: "If we're not better prepared than we are now, it seems to me we're headed for trouble."

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said the military could play a major role if approved, for instance, ever tried to contaminate California's water supply in remote parts of the state.

"If there is to be a major incident in this country, I would want to see a highly specialized, highly trained, highly mobile military outfit able to go into an area and provide the kind of assistance that might be necessary," Feinstein said. "Not to do so is to jeopardize the lives of a large number of people."



Associated Press Photo

LONDON—Simon Kidston of Coys Auctioneers inspects the 1935 Alfa Romeo 6C 2300 sports car which originally belonged to Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, at Chiswick House in London Wednesday. The auction estimate for the vehicle, which goes on sale Thursday, is between 120,000 to 150,000 pounds (\$190,000 to \$240,000). Mussolini kept the car until 1939.

In Japan, sect leaders seen as teen heartthrobs

TOKYO (NYT)— Her hair in a bob, her blue school uniform as neat as could be, Isuko Watanabe, 14, clutched a book bag filled with the night's homework assignments and waited eagerly for her idol to emerge.

She pulled out a binder, assembled with loving care and filled with scores of pictures and notes about the sect's activities. She and her hero: Fumihiko Joyu, 32, the spokesman for Aum Shinrikyo, the religious sect suspected of killing 12 people and injuring 5,500 in the nerve gas attack in March on the Tokyo subway system.

Joyu is about to be arrested, according to Japanese news accounts, but he has become perhaps Japan's No. 1 media star of the moment. A college debating champion, he has been on television so many times lately that he may be more recognizable than the emperor.

There is no doubt about Joyu's tall, lean good looks, charm and intelligence. He graduated from one of Japan's top schools, Waseda University, with a degree in engineering.

A fluent English speaker, Joyu comes across on television as earnest and passionate, without being overbearing. It would be difficult to imagine a more telegenic spokesman for any organization.

But in a phenomenon that is troubling many older people, teen-age girls and

young women all across the nation are falling in love with Joyu — a doe-eyed monk who says he shuns wine, women and sex. They are collecting his photos, writing letters to him and sending him flowers.

Sensational weekly magazines are investigating Joyu's way of life in the sect and gossiping about his former love life. "Ain't he neat?" read a recent headline.

ONE MAGAZINE ran a long interview with Joyu, in which he reportedly said it would "be fine" if his "honored teacher," the sect leader Shoko Asahara, spent the night with Joyu's former girlfriend.

Even the sect's national headquarters in Kamikushiki, near Mount Fuji, where police suspect the deadly sarin was produced, has become a popular tourist site. Somewhat taken aback, scholars and professionals are partly blaming the press, which they say is romanticizing Joyu the way movies sometimes glorify the Mafia.

"The Aum people and Joyu, they have said what they like to say and if you repeat ridiculous things, people believe it," said Kinko Sato, a law professor at Yachiyo International University. "If you repeat something a hundred times, it will be taken as truth."

Ayako Seki, a 13-year-old seventh-grader, used her day off from

school Wednesday to come to the sect's Tokyo headquarters in hopes of snatching a glimpse of Joyu. She and her classmate, Yukiko Iwamoto, traveled by bus and on foot for five hours from a nearby city and waited for three hours with a camera. But Joyu disappointed them.

"Whenever he's on TV, I have to watch him," Miss Seki said. "I've been sad lately because he's not been in good health."

Both dressed in white shirts and sunglasses, the teen-agers said they frequently met with other fans at school to chat about the latest on Joyu. Their teachers know about their crushes, but don't say anything.

They said their parents knew they came to visit the sect headquarters Wednesday and had told them to stop the adoration. But the pleas fall on deaf ears.

Miss Seki dismissed the possibility that they might be admiring a killer. "I don't think he's a criminal," she said. "Joyu was abroad when the subway attack took place."

Indeed, Joyu used to head up the sect's office in Moscow and was in Russia at the time of the subway attack. But many people still believe he may have played a role.

Miss Iwamoto was less certain about her hero's guilt or innocence. "I don't know what to believe," she said.

Ambulance service ponders venture in Mexico

PHOENIX (NYT)— Ever traveled to a Mexican resort and worried about adequate health care in case of an emergency? That concern may be addressed soon by Arizona-based Rural/Metro Corp.

Company President James Bolin said his ambulance and fire-protection service is eyeing Mexico as a market to expand its emergency medical response and health care at resorts that are heavily frequented by American tourists.

Bolin also said Rural/Metro of Scottsdale is looking at providing the firefighting force at Mexican manufacturing sites along the Arizona-Mexico border. The new services could be expanded to sites along the entire 2,000-mile U.S. border, he said.

No decision has been reached on either the proposed service or where such services might be located, he said, but he added that the next several months will be crucial in determining "whether it can be pursued immediately or whether it would take a while."

BOLIN WAS ONE of several Arizona business leaders to accompany Gov. Fife Symington two weeks ago on a trip to Mexico City, during which the governor met with Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo and members of his Cabinet.

If realized, the proposal would be further evidence of Arizona companies' seeking new markets for their products and services in Mexico in the business atmosphere that was created under the North American Free Trade Agreement.

An estimated 152,500 Arizona adults visited the Mexican resort destinations of Rocky Point, Puerto Vallarta and Cancun in 1993, according to the 1994 edition of "Inside Phoenix," a marketing guide published by Phoenix Newspapers Inc., which publishes "The Arizona Republic."

Bolin said the current situation in Mexico in both ambulance and fire protection is "all over the map," with differing levels of service being provided by local firms. He said his aim is to hire Mexicans in the communities where his firm would provide service, thereby creating new jobs.

IN THE CASE OF RESORTS, he said, some Americans are reluctant to travel to Mexico because they fear they will be unable to get the quality of emergency care available in the United States.

His plan is to work with the resort communities in marketing the concept of foreign travel with health care consistent with that found in the United States.

He left open the possibility of working with a U.S.-based provider of medical-clinic services.

Since the resorts are a key component of Mexico's tourism industry, he said, improving medical care "would be very helpful to their economy."

Likewise, the proposal to bring on-site industrial fire brigades would benefit maquiladora plants and other facilities along Mexico's side of the border.

"The business we are quite good at," he said, adding that fire training could be offered to employees at manufacturing sites who could drop non-essential duties at a moment's notice. Or they could be part of separate, dedicated firefighting force.

Bolin called his two days of meetings with government and industry leaders "intense."

His itinerary included meetings with Tourism Secretary Silvia Hernandez and Undersecretary of Commerce Jaime Zabudovsky.

The entire provided by the governor, he said, "put us with the right people" and at a level "where you can get things done."

Rural/Metro is the only publicly traded U.S. ambulance and fire-protection service.

NAFTA will create the world's largest free-trade zone by the year 2009 as barriers to trade and investment are eliminated among Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Last year, in NAFTA's first year, Arizona exports to Mexico, the state's biggest trading partner, jumped almost 26 percent to a record \$2.38 billion.

Arizona officials concede this year's exports are likely to slow, but they do not know by how much.

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Associated Press Photo

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