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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2012 3:50 PM
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Subject: Fw: I'm sure you saw this photo - Belfast Consulate staff have all emailed me

Fyi

From: Lakhdhir, Kamala S
Sent: Wednesday, June 27, 2012 03:46 PM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: I'm sure you saw this photo - Belfast Consulate staff have all emailed me

Queen Elizabeth Shakes Hands With Former I.R.A. Commander



Pool photo by Paul Faith

Queen Elizabeth II shook hands with Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's deputy first minister and a onetime commander of the Irish Republican Army, on Wednesday in Belfast.

By DOUGLAS DALBY and [ALAN COWELL](#)

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BELFAST, Northern Ireland — In a moment of heady symbolism that would once have seemed unthinkable, [Queen Elizabeth II](#), Britain's head of state, shook hands on Wednesday with [Martin McGuinness](#), a onetime commander of the [Irish Republican Army](#), a group created to oppose everything for which the monarchy stands.

The gesture represented a remarkable sign of reconciliation for both figures, since the queen is the titular head of Britain's armed forces — the sworn enemy of the I.R.A. throughout the three decades of sectarian strife known as the Troubles. Her cousin Lord Mountbatten was killed in an I.R.A. attack on his yacht off the west coast of [Ireland](#) in 1979.

The queen and Mr. McGuinness met behind closed doors here in Belfast in a room at the Lyric Theater, which the queen was visiting for an event celebrating Irish arts on the second day of a visit to Northern Ireland. They shook hands once privately and a second time in front of cameras for footage to be broadcast later, British officials said.

The gesture was depicted by British and Irish officials as a milestone in the effort to secure peace, though some analysts said many political and emotional distinctions persisted in the tangled relationship between Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and mainland Britain.

John Reid, who was Britain's minister in charge of Northern Ireland in 2001 and 2002, described the event as "huge" and called it "the ultimate handshake."

"But it is only one more step in a long process," he told the BBC. "This may take generations — to get back to absolute reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland."

Video of the second, public handshake showed the queen and her husband, Prince Philip, shaking hands with a line of dignitaries at the end of her visit to the Lyric Theater. Mr. McGuinness, the second in the line, took her hand briefly and held it, speaking a few words in Irish that translated as "goodbye and Godspeed," news reports said. The queen smiled but did not reply.

The handshakes came 13 months after the queen paid a groundbreaking visit to the Irish Republic, the first by a reigning British monarch, designed to heal decades of hostility that have gradually given way to a less freighted relationship following joint British and Irish efforts to cement the 1997 cease-fire in Northern Ireland.

While the queen has no formal political power, her imprimatur on a process of reconciliation is seen as exerting a powerful influence across Ireland. The queen is visiting Northern Ireland as part of her Diamond Jubilee celebration of 60 years on the throne. She arrived on Tuesday and visited the town of Enniskillen, when an I.R.A. bomb killed 11 people in 1987.

Later on Tuesday, the police fought running battles with youths throwing Molotov cocktails in Broadway, a Republican area of Belfast, recalling lingering hostilities between the mainly Protestant Unionists who seek closer ties to mainland Britain and the mainly Roman Catholic Republicans seeking a united Ireland. Nine officers suffered minor injuries, police officials said. The violence reflected continued divisions in a city carved into sectarian zones by barriers and so-called peace walls between neighborhoods.

"Far from being reconciled," the columnist Simon Jenkins wrote in The Guardian, "most of Belfast has merely been segregated." Nonetheless, he wrote, "for a monarch to cross a divide is not to unite it, but it is better than not crossing at all."

Since the cease-fire, Mr. McGuinness has built a political career and is now the deputy first minister in Northern Ireland's provincial government.

Word of his encounter with the queen emerged on Friday when Sinn Fein, the political arm before the I.R.A. disbanded, said that its executive committee decided — not unanimously — to allow Mr. McGuinness to attend a charity event where the queen, Prince Philip and President Michael D. Higgins of Ireland would be guests.

Mr. McGuinness had described the moment as a symbolic gesture of “stretching out the hand of peace and reconciliation to Queen Elizabeth who represents hundreds of thousands of unionists in the north,” according to The Press Association news agency.

The moment was one of the most anticipated gestures in recent Irish history. But it also carried risks and imponderables for both sides.

On Friday, Gerry Adams, the president of Sinn Fein, said the decision to greet the queen “is the right thing to do, at the right time and for the right reasons.”

Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness helped to end the years of sectarian violence and give Roman Catholics an equal voice in a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland with former Protestant foes.

Mr. Adams added: “Because this involves Martin meeting the British monarch, this will cause difficulty for republicans and nationalists who have suffered at the hands of British forces in Ireland over many decades.”

Sinn Fein declined a similar invitation during the queen’s visit to the Irish Republic last year, which many political analysts have said the party saw as a missed opportunity given the queen’s conciliatory comments in several important speeches expressing regret for Britain’s past and often bloody role in Ireland.

In an editorial in Britain, the conservative Daily Telegraph said: “The republicans, for whom symbolism is of great importance, agonized over whether the meeting should occur, and should be given credit for agreeing to it. But so should the Queen.” When the plan for the two figures to meet was first announced, reaction by Irish and British officials to the planned meeting was largely positive. Peter Hain, a former secretary of state for Northern Ireland, said it would further cement the peace process, which is still threatened by dissident republican groups that disagree with Sinn Fein’s policies.

“If we get stuck in the past, we will never make any progress,” he added.

Jeffrey Donaldson, an elected representative of the ruling, pro-British Democratic Unionist Party, described it as “a step in the right direction.”

“We acknowledge the suffering of all those who have been victims of the terrorist violence,” Mr. Donaldson said. “But we’re also looking to the future in Northern Ireland, a shared future.”

Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs

Tel: 202.647.0994

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