



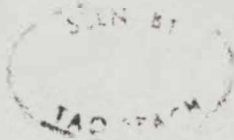
An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Meeting between the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major
in Downing Street on 26th February, 1992.

*Taoiseach
To see
please.
This is
treated as
a secret
document.)
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The meeting took place in the Prime Minister's Office in Number 10 Downing Street. It began with a tete-a-tete between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, accompanied only by the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, Stephen Wall, and the undersigned. At the same time, the Minister for Justice, Mr. Pádraig Flynn, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. David Andrews, were meeting separately with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Brooke, and Minister of State for Europe, Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones.

The tete-a-tete was followed by a working Dinner attended, in addition, by Ambassador Small, Secretary Dorr and Assistant Secretary O hUiginn (Foreign Affairs) and Secretary Brosnan (Justice). On the British side, were Cabinet Secretary Robin Butler, Ambassador Blatherwick and John Chilcot (Permanent Secretary, Northern Ireland Office).

This note deals only with the tete-a-tete - which was scheduled to last only for one hour approximately, but which, in the event, extended to about 1½ hours. The note is not verbatim.

The meeting began with a welcome by the Prime Minister and some exchanges about the sort of baptism of fire which both he and the Taoiseach had experienced on taking up office. The exchanges also covered election prospects in both countries. The Prime Minister referred to the atmosphere in the U.K., particularly in the Commons, which he said had been like a bear garden since last May - in anticipation of the forthcoming election.

In these initial exchanges, the Prime Minister said that he had undertaken with the Taoiseach's predecessor to meet twice a year alternately in Dublin and London and would like to renew this arrangement - so that meetings took place at least twice a year.

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Taoiseach:

I am delighted with that proposal.

Prime
Minister:

The (Brooke) talks are at an impasse. The Unionists say that they can't guarantee to go on if there is a Labour victory at the election. The SDLP can't concede the opposite. Therefore Strand I can't start. I understand the politics of both stances - but people are getting murdered all the time (said with emphasis). The tit-for-tat killings are just unsustainable.

They've agreed to start talks - in perhaps a fortnight. Maybe they are saying that because they know there could be then be an election situation. This business of the talks - do you support it?

Taoiseach:

Yes.

Prime
Minister:

I didn't think we would get this far against the sort of opposition we had been experiencing. But the opposition crumbled. I am not putting Northern Ireland on the back-burner: it is on the front-burner: the Secretary of State knows my views.

Taoiseach:

It is on the top of my agenda also. I am very glad to hear you say that.

Prime
Minister:

Increasingly, we see the idea of partnership in Europe coming about. That could be helpful in Northern Ireland. But the question still remains, where do we go? And where do we go at the intermediate stage to whatever is to happen? And, where do we start? I would like to hear you on these issues.

Taoiseach:

I live within 35 miles of the border. My wife goes North frequently. We understand both sides: we deal with them frequently in business: I have spoken to people of all persuasions there and I appreciate the fears of both sides. In any moves, we must take these fears into account.

Prime
Minister:

What I have in mind is that we should push through Stages I, II and III: in parallel, both of us should undertake a series of unconventional confidence-building measures. I would intend, speaking, if this is alright with you, in Dublin in my EC Presidency capacity: I would see many more meetings in London and Dublin dealing with Northern Ireland and with things other than Northern Ireland. I would like to see you and me meeting in Belfast. Does that cause you a problem?

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Taoiseach:

Certainly not. You know you have an invitation to Dublin next December to address the Institute of Directors? (Prime Minister did not seem to be aware of this).

Prime Minister:

I have the misfortune not to be an Irishman but I understand the importance of symbolism. We must be prepared to do unconventional things: so I would go to Northern Ireland and I would come to Dublin and speak to backbenchers there: I would expect that you could also speak to backbenchers in London, in a similar way.

Taoiseach:

Neither of us comes to this question with any baggage: but I do have the conviction that there are young children growing up now who must not be faced in Northern Ireland with what children born 22 years ago grew up with. We have the shared objective of reaching peace there. We cannot have another generation of violence.

Prime Minister:

We must talk to the people: I was surprised at the warmth with which I was met on the streets of Belfast. There are an awful lot of people there who know who is carrying out this violence. We must get close to them. We must get to the point where they want to push the men of violence out.

Taoiseach:

My own impression is that the talks are not getting anywhere.

Prime Minister:

Peter Brooke thinks they have some life.

Taoiseach:

I would say that here (referring to his own comments) but not outside.

Prime Minister:

Let's agree to push them. We should also push more North/South co-operation.

Taoiseach:

The Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference is a vehicle for doing that.

Prime Minister:

The whole situation is so ridiculous - we are neighbours - both North/South and East/West but we are not behaving like neighbours. This is a problem for both of us - but I have an election coming up! Have you anything general, in this respect, which you would like to raise?

Taoiseach:

I would like to talk about the peace text. I think there may be an opportunity - there may be something in it. I am certain that the IRA are serious. We may well be able to get peace by following this up: I know that you find things objectionable in it but the text is not written in stone.

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Prime Minister:

If we pursue that, we could run into very serious opposition here: you know that more bombs are threatened in Whitehall. If they are serious, they are certainly going the wrong way about it. They will not get peace by putting bombs in Whitehall - rather the opposite. Why do they behave as they are now behaving if they want peace?

Taoiseach:

They always do that. If you watch closely, you will see that before a cessation of violence, they always become more active. They always like it to appear that if a cease-fire comes about, then they have not acted from weakness. That is why there are behaving as they are. Is there any way in which we could look at the language, with a view to moving things along?

Prime Minister:

I know that Gerry Adams and one or two others are involved in this. They think we are suffering from battle fatigue. They're wrong. They could be engaged in a very cynical game.

Taoiseach:

Peace may well be in sight. What they have produced is not written in stone. This may be a way to get people into the constitutional process.

Prime Minister:

But this is impossible on the back of violence: and we must deal with generations of mistrust: there is high emotion in all this. How do you think Articles 2 and 3 come into it?

Taoiseach:

I mention the 1920 Act to bring balance into the picture.

Prime Minister:

I had thought that we had got away from that by the 1922 legislation.

Taoiseach:

In 1920 we were talking about a Council of Ireland to deal on an all-Ireland basis with fisheries, railways, and diseases of animals. It really doesn't matter what the institution would deal with, nowadays. In trying to deal with this, I always go back to my experience with hardline trade unions. I ask can there be delivery? That is really the most important question. I believe now that the IRA can deliver. I have satisfied myself.

Prime Minister:

Why do you think they can deliver and sustain peace? Why this growth of violence, if that is what they want?

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Taoiseach: They are always at their worst when they intend a cease-fire: I think I can read them pretty well. Of one think you can be sure: they will do what they commit themselves to do.

Prime Minister: Who carries the clout?

Taoiseach: The Army Council.

Prime Minister: Who in the Army Council?

Taoiseach: I cannot go into names. What I am asking is that we should look at the draft. They can deliver. It is not written in stone.

Prime Minister: How cohesive are they?

Taoiseach: They are very cohesive. You can take it from me that there is a very strict discipline: there is a command structure and a hierarchy.

(At this point there was discussion of the Brosnan/Chilcot talks and the Prime Minister stressed the need for swift action. The point was made that the channel for this type of operation was the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference whose next meeting is fixed for 6th March.)

Prime Minister: It is impossible to move because of the way they have been behaving. There is no prospect whatsoever if these murders continue. I agreed with your predecessor that we could look at things but you will appreciate my difficulty of trying to make this stand against that type of outrage - that is just intolerable. (referring to Teebane).

Taoiseach: Yes I know: I appreciate your position. But do you still think that the whole project should be put on ice?

Prime Minister: We will reflect on this: but whatever happens, it will not be before an election (said interrogatively).

Taoiseach: Could we look at the words so that if there were to be action, we could move fast.

Prime Minister: I will reflect on all this. I have gone out on a limb on many things.....

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Taoiseach:

On the security questions you raised - I don't think there is any great difficulty on the finger-printing proposition. On the anti-terrorist squad: your form of police organisation is different from ours; and, in any event, we do have this type of force (he went in more detail into this). The place of the border in terrorism, can be over-emphasised.

Prime
Minister
tentatively:

Do you think we could have joint manning at the border?

Taoiseach:

This year, so far, there have been thirty murders in Northern Ireland. Of these, one was within ten miles of the border. Joint manning would be very difficult for us. Remember also the border is 300 miles long, over difficult terrain.

Prime
Minister:

What about Army to Garda contact: I know that Charlie Haughey didn't like this.

Taoiseach:

With us, the Gardai have primacy in security. The Army work in support of the civil power, which are the Gardai for this purpose.

Prime
Minister:

What about Intelligence? We made some proposals about covert surveillance.

Taoiseach:

The situation on the two sides of the border is very different (goes into detail). Do you think we can defeat the IRA?

Prime
Minister:

Militarily that would be very difficult: I would not say this in public, of course, but, in private, I would say, possibly no. Could we ask that the four items, in the security area, between us, could be looked at very carefully. We need to move fast, if things are to be done.

Taoiseach:

Yes, certainly, there will be a Conference on 6th March. I am always conscious, in this, of the added costs we must bear (while not taking away from the absolute need to maintain security). We have increased the number of Gardai over the ten-year period from about 6,500 to approximately 11,000: proportionately, on a per head basis, security, for us, is about four times what it is for you: and the costs of the lost opportunity in terms of jobs, investment, are enormous.

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Wall:

On the point about the border, our statistics appear to show that over about the past decade, 40% of the fatalities in Northern Ireland have originated in or near the border - and about 30% of all shootings. We have not yet got really to the depths of cooperation that would be desirable.

Taoiseach:

The people operating in our jurisdiction have minimum support from the population - except at times like hunger strikes, H-Block protests etc. There is certainly very little support among our community for the men of violence. Look at our finds of arms caches.

Prime Minister:

Can we think of any confidence-building measures?

Self:

I don't like spending time on disputed statements but what we have got is nothing like 40% of the deaths being near the border. Our figures seem to show that of the 30 deaths this year, 1 was within a ten-mile radius of the border: last year out of 100 deaths or so, 16 were within the same 10 mile radius of the border.

[A description was then given of the Oliver murder in the Cooley Peninsula and the reaction among the local people.]

Taoiseach:

You can take it that we are doing the maximum in the security area - while there may be openings for improvements in detail. I think your people acknowledge that.

Prime Minister:

What about joint manning?

Taoiseach:

That would pose serious problems for us: think of the effect it would have on Intelligence gathering.

Prime Minister:

(Putting aside his brief). Can I be fanciful here? We must look to the ingredients for a solution. How do you see it?

Taoiseach:

We are dealing with a divided community: there are two traditions: there are developments in Europe which may help us: but we are dealing with different cultures and we must draw up structures to accommodate these differences; and these structures must command confidence. I am talking about the longer term - there is no instant solution. Where are the talks going?

Prime Minister:

Now I must become even more Delphic. There is an internal problem: there is a problem as between North and South: and there is even a problem involving us Big

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Prime Minister:

Brothers in the East/West context. I agree with you that we cannot suddenly move to an end product but we are walking down a path - and we can't stop: we just can't stop talking - or walking. Twenty two years is a long time: there are a lot of dead bodies in between: we must formulate our opinions by absorbing that atmosphere.

Taoiseach:

I wholly support your approach.

Prime Minister:

I am open to try: I am looking for something with a material difference from the past - incidentally, you can be assured of my total commitment to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Taoiseach:

Yes: we are looking for something better to transcend the Agreement if we can find it - after that we can think of other possibilities. One way forward would be to develop the Conference, under the Agreement, by giving it markedly increased powers and functions - and seeking to attract Unionists to it. Or we could follow another route and, perhaps, set up an Executive Commission, with other institutions, with three elected representatives from Northern Ireland, two from the U.K. and two from the South, with a Brussels representative. That could be an alternative to the IGC route. What it is important to remember is that whatever emerges must have the capacity to evolve.....

Prime Minister:

Can you develop that? Could we ask Dermot and Stephen for views?

Self:

(On invitation) The body's function is not really the important thing. Even the functions proposed for the old Council of Ireland under the 1920 Act would have been enough (railways, fisheries and diseases of animals). What matters is that the institution should do something and get people talking and acting together for just that purpose. And the functions, whatever they are, must be important enough to attract people into the institution - like maybe EC functions on an all-Ireland basis: and agriculture. That could pull in work of many Departments in an all-Ireland way on the basis of common interest.....

Prime Minister:

We must stop the violence: that is essential.

Taoiseach:

Yes, get peace and then build structures.

Prime Minister:

You must help me on this question of taking on the Unionists: I must think how - (this was said almost sotto voce). That is why I am thinking of these appearances and speeches: I must gain the trust of the people (and you must help me).

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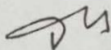
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There then followed some discussion about the approach the Taoiseach and Prime Minister were to take when they emerged on the doorstep of Number 10 Downing Street to meet the press - at approximately 8.00 p.m.

During a brief intermission, before the meeting with the press took place, the Prime Minister spoke, strongly, in the absence of the Taoiseach about the need, at the next meeting to have a focused discussion on all that had been said - with possibly specific questions to be dealt with.

I also spoke to Robin Butler separately, who spoke of coming to Dublin for further discussions, possibly during the run-up to the election.



Dermot Nally
27th February, 1992.