



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Reference Code: 2021/95/29

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Political Developments

SPEAKING POINTS

Development of a peace process

- The meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister last Friday has set the scene for a sustained effort by both Governments to find a formula for peace together.
- We consider that work should proceed as a matter of urgency on the development of a framework which could bring about a complete and permanent cessation of violence.
- We have accepted the need to place some distance publicly between this initiative by the two Governments and the outcome of the Hume/Adams talks.
- However, it is important that this should be done in a way which does not leave John Hume exposed. We owe him a considerable debt for his political courage and the risks he has taken. We will continue to depend on the critical role which he plays in relation to constitutional nationalism.
- We in the Irish Government have taken pains to avoid saying something which could be interpreted as a flat rejection of the Hume/Adams initiative. It is important that equal care be taken on the British side.
- It is also important that we work hard together to sustain the momentum for peace which has been built up by

the Hume/Adams talks. We cannot treat lightly the public perception that there is a very promising opportunity at present to make progress in that direction. We must respond to those public expectations and be seen to be responding.

The six principles

- The six principles which I set out last week provide a point of departure for our work.
- I am encouraged by the very positive reception which they were given in many quarters.
- The remarks which you and the Prime Minister made were appreciated.
- The Unionists were a little confused and uncertain about the principles. They clearly had difficulty in finding a flank from which to attack them.
- I took this initiative for a number of reasons.
- First, I considered it important that the atrocious events on the Shankill and subsequently should not be seen to have diverted the Governments in any way from their responsibility to find a basis for peace.
- I wanted it clearly understood that the Irish Government took its responsibilities extremely seriously and would seek a framework for peace on the basis of a set of principles which offer protection to all interests in this conflict.
- I was determined that the initiative in pursuing peace

should rest firmly with the two Governments and that the men of violence should not be seen to be dictating the agenda.

- Secondly, at a time of deep anxiety in the Unionist community following the Shankill bombing, I wanted to offer particular reassurances to Unionists on the subject of consent.
- Each of the six principles carries a weight of its own and deserves careful attention. Each should be read in tandem with the others. They form a single, coherent and balanced package which addresses simultaneously the key preoccupations of nationalists and Unionists.
- I would caution strongly against any selective readings which distort the balance present in the package as a whole.
- The principles set out what I judge to be the essential parameters of a process which might lead to peace.
- I presented them for a political purpose and they were drafted with that context in mind. But, even if they are not to be read as a "statute book" (as you yourself put it), they still represent a considered synthesis of Irish Government positions. I believe that they offer possibilities for the kind of formulations which will ultimately be required if we are to secure peace.

Prospects for a resumption of talks

- We remain fully committed to the earliest possible resumption of political talks involving the two Governments and all the constitutional parties.

- We wish to see talks resume on the basis of the 26 March terms. While we are flexible about the format which might be followed initially, the collective, round-table structure which was agreed in the 26 March statement is of central importance to us and we are unwilling to contemplate any significant departures from that.
- What is your judgment of the current prospects?

Preparation of joint paper

- Our officials have been discharging the mandate we gave them at our last meeting to use their best endeavours to draft a joint paper for us on elements of a new agreement which might be acceptable to all participants.
- We are completing work on (~~or~~: we can now hand over) an Irish draft of such a paper. It sets out the components which we would wish to see. (It also incorporates the six principles for a peace process which I enunciated last week).
- If you agree, we might mandate our officials to continue their work on a joint statement in the light of this draft and to report back to us, ideally with a finished product, in time for our December meeting.

Michael Ancram's contacts

- Can Michael Ancram give us an account of the position he has reached in his bilateral meetings with the parties?
- What is his assessment of the willingness of the parties to resume talks? What is the state of opinion within

the UUP? Are the DUP now willing to engage?

- What degree of agreement has been reached on substance?

Round Table talks: Recent British Contacts

General

1. The outlook for a resumption of round-table political talks is not encouraging.
2. The Secretary of State has indicated that he sees no prospect of round-table talks resuming for the time being. In a Belfast Telegraph interview on 30 September, he said he believed that, if talks were resumed, they would take place in a different format. He added that "..... I think we've moved away from this round-table business" and that "... there's no immediate prospect of sitting round a table in cohort formation, because too much has happened since the talks adjourned last year..."

Michael Ancram's talks with the parties

3. The British Government have been continuing a series of low-key, bilateral meetings with the NI parties. Michael Ancram, the NIO Minister of State responsible for political affairs, has conducted a round of contacts which have focussed mainly on Strand One issues and have endeavoured to identify areas where agreement already exists and areas where agreement would have to be pursued in fresh talks.
4. The SDLP have been active participants. Alliance were initially less enthusiastic but have since "come round". The UUP have shown some reluctance (arising from the Hume/Adams controversy) but have participated nevertheless. Following an initial meeting, the DUP told Ancram that they would henceforth talk only to the Prime Minister (to whom they presented a document); however, they have since made themselves available for a further meeting with Ancram.

5. In the initial round of bilaterals, the UUP and Alliance categorically excluded the SDLP's idea of external commissioners. The SDLP for its part insisted that chairmen of Assembly committees could not act as Ministers. According to the British (who reported to us prior to the exchanges with the DUP), all three parties regarded some kind of Panel and an Assembly with some degree of power as possible and were flexible as to the precise relationship between the Panel and an Assembly. The British believe that the SDLP might be prepared to withdraw the external commissioner proposal if Strand 2 initiatives were fully satisfactory.
6. In relation to Strand 2, all three parties were agreed that there could be North-South institutions. They would not be free-standing but would derive their powers from the two legislatures. Many other matters, notably finance, remained for discussion.
7. On Strand 3 questions, the UUP and Alliance insisted that Articles 2 and 3 must be dealt with. Furthermore the "Mallon security agenda" was unacceptable in its present form, though Alliance were willing to look at the principle involved (Mallon had said that it was not "cast in concrete"). The possibility of a referendum to validate an overall package had not been ruled out; the UUP would prefer elections but could go along with a referendum, subject to negotiation.
8. Ancram initiated a second round of bilateral contacts in mid-October. At the most recent meeting of the Liaison Group (21 October), the British side indicated that a meeting with Alliance on 20 October (including John Alderdice) had gone well. While Alderdice had up to this been inclined to be despondent and a little immoderate in his public comments, the British side's impression was that Ancram had "talked him back into the process".

9. The British side have indicated that the presentation by Minister Ancram to the Conference will be an interim account. Their view is that the process has proved useful, although there have been distractions. While work has not gone as far ahead as might be hoped, the British feel that Ancram is well short of the point where he would judge that no more progress could be made in bilaterals. He goes along with a general view, however, that it would be a mistake to re-enter talks unless the participants felt that a deal could be done there.
10. The British side have indicated that they are open-minded as to the right time for round table talks to resume. Agreement between the Governments might be a trigger inasmuch as it would provide reassurance to all the parties.

Discussions in the Liaison Group

11. Further to the mandate from the 10 September Conference, officials of both Governments have been pursuing discussions in the Liaison Group on a possible "joint framework document" containing elements of a new agreement which might prove acceptable to all participants. Work has been proceeding on a British draft of a joint paper. An Irish counter-draft (modified in the light of the six principles for a peace process which were suggested by the Tánaiste on 27 October) is ready for consideration by the Government and for possible tabling prior to next Wednesday's Conference.
12. The key difficulties encountered in these "Strand Three" discussions have been: (i) the nature, powers and basis of North/South institutions; and (ii) the scope for a shared understanding in the constitutional area.
13. On the former point, the Irish side has proposed that the

two Governments should decide to have certain matters handled on an all-Ireland basis and that the new arrangements should be entrenched by treaty. While acknowledging a helpful advance in the British approach to North-South institutions (which might now have executive powers from the outset), we highlighted the insufficient attention paid in their draft to the mandate for such institutions (which must give full weight to their political and symbolic importance).

14. We have suggested that the role envisaged by the British for the future Intergovernmental Conference should be strengthened by the addition of powers which would enable it to guarantee and monitor the operation of devolved, and possibly also of North/South, institutions (as a "fail-safe" in the event of their collapse or of failure).
15. In the constitutional area, we have suggested that the best approach would be to offer revised definitions of each other's position which each Government could endorse.

Anglo-Irish Section
Department of Foreign Affairs
2 November, 1993

A1222