



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/48/187

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting between Taoiseach and British Prime Minister
London, 20th December 1994

OVERVIEW NOTE

1. The meeting is essentially an introductory one, and will enable the Taoiseach and Prime Minister to establish a personal rapport. Both sides will want a broad overall stocktaking of the peace process and Anglo-Irish relations.
2. Given that the meeting is an introductory one, the British side are unlikely to go into details of the Framework Document or to press for any far-reaching new decisions on this occasion.
3. They will however be anxious to assess how far the Government intends to build on the work of its predecessor, and whether there will be any fundamental changes in approach. The Taoiseach and Tanaiste will wish to emphasise the high priority which the Government gives to consolidation of the peace process, building on what has already been achieved.
4. They will wish to reaffirm their commitment to continuing work on the Joint Declaration. They will seek confirmation that the British are still committed to the earliest possible publication of a Framework Document. If so, it will be useful to agree a programme of future work at official and ultimately Ministerial level to finalise the text.

5. One possible approach might be to fix privately a target date for a further Summit (say end January ?), setting up the necessary pattern of official and Ministerial meetings to complete the Framework Document for that date.
6. The Taoiseach and Tanaiste will also wish to assess whether the Parliamentary arithmetic at Westminster has in any way diminished Prime Minister Major's room for manoeuvre or commitment to an early launch of the Document.
7. The meeting should also enable the Irish side to have an update from the British on recent developments, in particular their assessment of the peace process and their contacts with Sinn Fein and the Loyalist paramilitaries.

SUGGESTED SPEAKING POINTS

- I am grateful for this opportunity of a very early meeting.
- I have already made clear the over-riding priority which the Government attach to the consolidation of the peace process.
- The breakthrough which has been achieved with the two ceasefires must be reinforced and built upon in every way possible.
- Our Programme for Government also spells out our commitment to securing a deep and lasting political accommodation between all traditions in Ireland.
- My colleagues and I look forward to a close partnership with the British Government in the pursuit of each of these objectives.

Peace Process

- There is an onus on the two Governments to use all the resources at our disposal to ensure that the peace process is irreversible.

- There will be many challenges and sensitive issues which need to be addressed over the months ahead.

- A crucial issue is clearly that of the disposal of weaponry and explosives. Another is the question of prisoners.

- On disposal of weaponry, everyone, including Sinn Fein, agree on the target of removing all weapons.

- We must work steadily to that goal, progressively building confidence on all sides so that it can become a reality.

- Realistically we must accept that it is unlikely to come on a unilateral basis or "upfront" in the preliminary stages of dialogue. We must not get impaled on it as a rigid precondition.

- The prisons issue also needs sensitive handling. It is absolutely crucial to the perception of the peace process in the republican core constituency.

- I hope that, by working closely together, we will be able to find satisfactory solutions to these problems and to steer the process resolutely towards collective political engagement.

We would see peace being consolidated at three levels:

- Sensitive security arrangements on the ground in Northern Ireland, and in particular avoidance of harassment or any provocative security engagement with the public.
- Secondly, measures to show the economic benefit of the peace, including in relation to inward investment, etc.
- Thirdly, and crucially, the launching of comprehensive negotiations with a view to working out a balanced accommodation and new institutional arrangements.

Framework Document

In relation to political dialogue, we believe the Framework Document should be agreed and launched as soon as possible.

The new Government has reviewed the work done, and is happy to build on it.

Its purpose will be to point the parties towards a balanced package across the totality of our relationships, which would enable the principles set out in the Declaration to be given practical effect.

I think it is essential to the success of future talks that the two Governments should give a clear lead and set out our joint understanding of what might be an agreed outcome.

It is also essential that our joint position should reflect the same careful balance which characterised the Joint Declaration.

The Irish Government is happy to build on what has been achieved between our two sides so far and to take the latest draft as the point of departure for our further work.

There are, of course, a number of very important and sensitive issues which still need to be resolved and which require careful consideration on both sides.

I am sure we both agree that an effort should be made to have these points resolved as soon as possible.

We might perhaps issue fresh political instructions to our officials in order to enable work to be resumed in the Liaison Group.

We might set a target date (for our own internal purposes) for its completion.

[If the British go into detail on the Framework Document:

I am impressed by the extent of change offered in relation to Articles 2 and 3: I think it is very close to the limits of what the previous Taoiseach could have sold to his party.

I think it delivers the essentials and to go any further would risk going beyond the limit of what is saleable generally in a referendum.

On your side, the principle of an amendment of the Government of Ireland Act is agreed. We might explore in more detail the broad features of what might be included in new legislation in Westminster.

- On the European issue, the last meeting between the Secretary of State and the Tanaiste was a useful one. With goodwill and imagination that gap should be bridgeable.

- On institutions, I know that you are reflecting on the proposals made and preparing a paper of your own on possible competences of a North-South body. We await it with interest. It is vital that this body should have real power and impact.

- Some further work is also necessary on the default mechanism, but again I believe the gap can be bridged.

- I would hope that we could narrow the distance between us on these few outstanding issues if we work intensively over the next weeks.

- We might envisage a full-scale Summit relatively early in the New Year to launch the Document and decide the details of the follow-up.

- If we privately set a broad target date (say the end of January ?), we might ask officials and Ministers to do their utmost to finalise the Document for that date.

Meeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister
Decommissioning of Arms

Speaking Points

- We are in complete agreement that the paramilitary arsenals must be dismantled.

- Our objective should be to ensure that this can be achieved comprehensively and in the shortest possible time, consistent with maintaining the momentum of the peace process.

- I fully agree therefore with the need to address the issue at an early stage in the discussions, as you are now doing.

- However, we know from the attitude adopted by Republican and Loyalist groups alike that the arms issue cannot be resolved in isolation. It would simply be unrealistic to ignore this central point, as the RUC Chief Constable himself recently acknowledged.

- We need to take a step-by-step approach, building confidence and trust, and, above all, ensuring that the ceasefires continue to hold.

- I attach the greatest importance to our two Governments adopting a coordinated approach on this issue.

- The report of the Dalton/Chilcot Group will be key in this respect and we will doubtless wish to consult closely once this becomes available.

- I suggest that in the meantime we stay in close touch on this issue.

Meeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister
Downing St. 20 December 1994
Decommissioning of Arms

1. The planting of an explosive device in the Enniskillen area over the week-end has re-focused attention on the issue of paramilitary arms and munitions. The issue was already prominent in the light of remarks by Prime Minister Major during his visit to Belfast last week, and comments by the former Taoiseach and Gerry Adams. While the Provisional IRA have denied responsibility for the Enniskillen device (and the British have suggested that Republican Sinn Féin may be responsible) recent events will serve to keep the issue centre stage.

2. We have taken the view that the arms issue should be dealt with as an urgent component of the process of dialogue, and have not sought to make it a precondition for talks (e.g. governing Sinn Fein's participation in the Forum). It has been pointed out that it is unrealistic to expect progress in relation to one set of paramilitaries in isolation, and that Loyalist and Republican weapons stocks must be dealt with in tandem. The indications are that this is understood by the British side. In an interview on 19 December the Taoiseach said that the arms issue must be negotiated vigorously, but in parallel with other issues.

Dalton/Chilcot Group

3. At their meeting in Chequers on 24 October the former Taoiseach and the Prime Minister instructed the Dalton/Chilcot Group, led by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and the Permanent Under-Secretary of the NIO, to prepare proposals on the arms issue and to report back. At the Chequers meeting the two leaders were agreed:

- the early dismantling of arms stockpiles is a key objective of both Governments, and is necessary to maintain political momentum.

- it is essential that the two governments cooperate closely on this issue, and avoid any effort to divide them

- it will be unrealistic in the short-term to expect all illegally-held weapons to be given up. The first objective should be to get the process underway, with the immediate aim of decommissioning significant quantity of arms.

While their report has yet to be presented to the two Heads of Government, it is understood that the issues addressed by the Group include a possible amnesty in both jurisdictions, which by virtue of its public character might be helpful in countering claims of "secret deals" etc; the extent to which the hand-over of arms could facilitate significant changes in the profile of the security forces and security legislation; the need to ensure that heavy weapons are handed over and the pace at which the overall exercise must proceed. It is, of course, recognised that decisions in this area are a matter for the Heads of Government. It will obviously be necessary for the two police forces to consider the modalities of decommissioning quantities of arms, but the indications are that the British side appreciate the need for flexibility in this regard.

Public stance of British Government

The official British position has been that the arms issue must be resolved before Sinn Féin can move beyond the present explanatory talks phase. This is explained on the basis that the constitutional parties would otherwise be unwilling to enter talks involving Sinn

Féin. There are indications however that the Prime Minister is keen to avoid embracing an unduly dogmatic position in this regard. Interviewed at Aldergrove Airport on 14 December, and having referred to the issue of the disposal of arms as "central to the success of the explanatory discussions", he spoke of the need to make "huge progress" on the arms issue; he also talked of "dealing with very tricky questions like weapons, semtex, explosives, detonators".

6. The Former Taoiseach in an interview on BBC Radio Ulster on 17 December said that it would be "foolish" and "unrealistic" to make the dumping of arms a precondition for the entry of Sinn Féin into full political talks. Shortly afterwards Gerry Adams emphatically rejected any idea of a precondition, and called for a speedy move to all-party talks "where the process of demilitarisation can be fully addressed".

7. In a BBC interview on 14 December the Prime Minister dealt with the issue of how weapons should be taken out of circulation. This has a particular sensitivity for the IRA which insists that the 31 August ceasefire was not a surrender:

"PM: I've always referred to decommissioning rather than necessarily handing them in. What concerns me is that the weapons are not there to be used, they will need to be decommissioned and it'll need to be verified. Now those are the things we have to discuss in the preliminary talks and they will be very high on the agenda.

Interviewer: So they don't actually have to hand them in?

PM: They've got to be destroyed; they've got to be decommissioned. I don't mind whether they're handed in or whether they're destroyed. What concerns me is that they're not available to be used.

Interviewer: And that has to be verified?

PM: Of course it would need to be verified.

RUC View

8. It is worth noting that reports of a recent off-the-record press briefing by the RUC Chief Constable (and private comments by other senior RUC officers) suggest a pragmatic approach in this area. The Chief Constable was quoted to the effect that the key issue was not so much weapon stocks - given that the IRA has a significant capacity to manufacture home-made armaments - but the intent of the Provisional IRA to uphold the ceasefire. Sir Hugh Annesley was reported on the same occasion to have stated that the ceasefire has a 60% chance of holding until Easter (British official briefing has recently highlighted Easter as a critical date in the peace process. The suggestion of deadlines creates unease and is likely to be counterproductive).

Enniskillen Bomb

9. The IRA have denied responsibility for last night's explosive device at Enniskillen. Briefing by British security sources has accepted this denial, while pointing to the possibility of involvement by splinter Republican groups (as earlier indicated reference has been made to Republican Sinn Féin). Preliminary reports in any event suggest that aspects of its construction (quantity of semtex used, type of timer and use of more than one detonator) point to a source other than the Provisional IRA.

10. In remarks following the second round of discussions with Sinn Féin on 19 December, Minister Ancram expressed concern at the unwillingness of Sinn Féin to condemn the attack. Given Sinn Féin's publicly-stated unwillingness to join what they have referred to as "the politics of condemnation" their response is not surprising. While there may be some understanding of British impatience on

this point, it is suggested that the-overriding priority is to ensure continuing and complete adherence by Sinn Féin/IRA to the ceasefire decision. It is suggested the British be told, if the issue arises, that we will continue to emphasise this central point.

Anglo-Irish Division
19 December, 1994

A5048