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MEETING OF ANGLO-IRISH CONFERENCE  
DUBLIN, 28 JANUARY 1994

Restricted Discussion of Political Matters

Present on the Irish side were the Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs; the Minister for Justice; Mr Noel Dorr, Mr Tim Dalton, Mr Sean O hUiginn, Mr David Donoghue, Mr Fergus Finlay and, from the Secretariat, Mr Declan O' Donovan.

Present on the British side were the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; Minister of State Michael Ancram M. P.; Minister of State Sir John Wheeler; Sir John Chilcot, Mr David Fell, Ambassador Blatherwick, Mr Quentin Thomas, Jonathan Stevens and, from the Secretariat, Mr Martin Williams.

The discussion commenced at 11.20 am and continued until 1 pm, when there was a break for internal consultations. The full Plenary met from approx. 2 pm to approx. 3 pm to consider the other items on the Conference's agenda.\* The restricted session reconvened very briefly at 4.30 pm, essentially to agree the terms of the communique.

The following account of the discussion is in the form of direct speech and is based on detailed notes taken during the meeting. It does not, however, purport to be a verbatim record nor is it exhaustive of all the exchanges.

\* Minutes to be forwarded by Secretariat

Tanaiste:

Welcome. This is a good opportunity to review what has happened since 15 December and to get an overview from both sides of the reactions to the Declaration as well as an assessment of where we go from here.

We had an opportunity during the tete-a-tete discussion to cover some of that ground. We can go over it again very briefly.

We should not lose sight of the positives in the present situation. There has been overwhelming support for the Declaration both here, in the UK and among a majority of people in Northern Ireland. We should emphasize the number of people of goodwill who have expressed support for the efforts of the two Governments.

We should consider whether we are at ease with all aspects of the presentation of the Declaration. We had some concerns about the Prime Minister's initial presentation. We must strive for balance. We need to hold our various audiences at all times. We are trying, after all, to persuade those who have chosen violence hitherto to choose the peaceful path in future.

Your own TCD speech, Secretary of State, was very welcome and I would like to compliment you on it. Its focus was very accurate. It is important that all spokespersons should preserve that balance. The media like to focus on the negative aspects.

We should look at the question of clarification. This issue has a propaganda value. We agree (and we have placed this on record) that there can be no question of renegotiation or of some drastic reinterpretation of the Declaration. It should

be possible, however, to distinguish between something which is unacceptable and clarification in the proper sense of that word. It is obviously important for both Governments to make our position clear and to be seen to do so on any point of genuine perplexity or doubt. This will only strengthen our hand in relation to any unacceptable demands which go beyond that.

We should focus also on the Unionists' reactions - in the light of Michael Ancram's contacts. The DUP response has been all too predictable. Dr Paisley's European Parliament election campaign is clearly underway.

The reaction of Mr Molyneaux and his colleagues, on the other hand, has been very encouraging. Their support has been cautious but they have, of course, their political backs to watch. They are playing a generally positive and helpful role.

Good confidence has been built up with the Irish Government over the past twelve months and this can only be a good thing.

Mr Molyneaux has, of course, permitted himself the odd broadside against the Irish Government. We had some difficulty in understanding what he was getting at. But we chose not to respond.

O hUiginn:

He accused the Government of reneging on the Declaration by being ready to engage in discussions with Sinn Fein.

Tanaiste:

We chose to ignore it.

We should focus also on the Sinn Fein reaction. It has been evasive and negative on some aspects. But as yet there has been no formal response.

The Taoiseach has received a letter from Gerry Adams and this is under consideration at present.

An intense debate is evidently taking place within Sinn Fein, North and South. The Taoiseach and I feel that we must give them some time to absorb what is happening. They have, after all, a major adjustment to make. Patience is required to understand the psychology of what is happening. We would not want to give Sinn Fein a reason to say that we are trying to stifle (?) their debate.

I am not sure that they have a problem with isolation as such. On the contrary, all their systems are geared to cope with that and it tends to solidify their base in the ghettos.

The Declaration attempts to do something very ambitious. We are seeking, in language which Sinn Fein can relate to, to refute the reasons which are being offered for the armed struggle and to show that there is a sincere attempt to build a meaningful political alternative. We should not allow them to turn the blame back on either Government.

As I mentioned to you on the phone yesterday, you will have noted what the Taoiseach said last Wednesday (which I repeated yesterday), i. e., that a point could come after the process of explanation is exhausted, and if a positive response shows no sign of coming, when the two Governments would have no choice but to pursue alternative avenues of political progress. That is our guideline.

We can compare notes about the prospects for political talks in the light of what Michael Ancram has to say.



Secretary of State:

Thank you. I agree with the need to emphasize the positive character of the Declaration. We must continue to emphasize its balance and fair character. I took the opportunity to say that this morning.

I see what you say about the initial way in which it was presented. Each of us was anxious that it should not be distorted by those likely to be hostile to it. We were anxious about the Unionists and therefore the Prime Minister stressed what it did not say. Similarly, there were some concerns here of a similar character - and these were entirely reasonable.

Since then, the positive side has been emphasized and the balance has been worked for. I am grateful for your remarks about my TCD speech. As I indicated earlier, it would be helpful if we could cross-refer to each other's speeches.

Clarification is really a bore. Each of us recognizes that the Declaration is free-standing and has to be taken as it is. It is very easy, for example, to imagine Unionists saying: "If that is what the Declaration means, then we're off". But it makes sense to continue to point out what it does say and, where appropriate, to point out what it does not say. There is a balance to be achieved.

I agree that it is important to build on the confidence which has been built up between yourselves and the Unionists. This is, however, a fragile plant. We must allay the increasing jumpiness which the (Ulster) Unionists are showing under the influence of the DUP and with the continuing non-resolution of the question of whether or not Sinn Fein will accept the Declaration.

I agree that we must be sensible about the psychology of those in Sinn Fein who want to end the violence. I accept that more time is required rather than less.

That leads us to the question of a "deadline".

We all know that the lock won't be changed by the two Governments - and that the key will continue to be held by PIRA. If, say, they come to us in September, we will not tell them that the key doesn't turn the lock any more.

But there is a potential difficulty in the concept of showing patience. This gives rise inevitably to the expectation that something will happen when the patience is exhausted.

I therefore have difficulty with the notion of "alternative avenues of progress". We have always said that the Declaration is not in competition with the Talks process. We should emphasize that the Talks process is not waiting for them; they can join it but they cannot stop it. That may have an encouraging effect on them.

As for Sinn Fein not being afraid of isolation, I accept that they have been used to isolation for many years. But a loss of credibility among former sympathisers is a problem for them. I believe that the Declaration has caused problems for them in this respect, notably in the United States. We must avoid collecting the blame for Sinn Fein standing outside.

A point which the media should pick up is that there is no instance we know of where Adams has identified a passage which needs clarification. His letter to the Prime Minister amounts to a request for renegotiation. If you agree, it would be helpful if, in a speech or otherwise, you could ask him to put the questions to us. That would flush him out.

The exploratory talks within three months are already on offer to him.

Michael Ancram has an idea for a joint Irish/British presentation on the Declaration in some Irish-American forum in the United States. Perhaps you and I might do it? Or it might be done at another level? It would have enormous persuasive effect.

Tanaiste:

We can assess in the light of Michael's report where we go to from here and what we need to do collectively in order to take the process forward.

Minister Ancram:

My assessment is based on my recent meetings with each of the three parties but also on earlier indications.

We met each other once in the New Year; the Prime Minister met the party leaders at Hillsborough and in Downing Street before Christmas.

I agreed with my contacts that details of our discussions would remain confidential.

First, all three parties remain committed to the three-stranded Talls process on the basis set out in the statement of 26 March 1991 - but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The statements issued after each meeting showed that each envisaged the next stage of the process in terms of the three-stranded approach.

Second, all of them said that they were not yet ready to come



back to round-table talks. For different reasons, each felt that this would be a pointless exercise. My judgment, however, is that this could change if we were to begin to make progress with the three strands.

Third, all recognized a danger of allowing Sinn Fein apparently to dictate the agenda by remaining silent. The two (Ulster) Unionist representatives said strongly that they feared a political vacuum arising in Northern Ireland because there appeared to be a hiatus; that this would play into the hands of the hardliners on both sides; and that those who had given their support to the Declaration were now beginning to come under immense pressure. The Unionists feel at the very least a need to show their electorate that forward progress is being made. Alliance and the SDLP also underlined the dangers of a hiatus.

I have effectively completed whatever exploration I could do. We have discussed the various areas arising in Strand One. It is now clear that we cannot go further on that basis. The indications I have are that they would now like to begin to negotiate.

As regards a structure for our further activity, there is general agreement that round-table talks would be inappropriate. There was a general discussion about widening the bilateral system, e.g., by having bilaterals between yourselves and a given party, or between ourselves and a given party, or party-to-party, and so on. We must go forward with a structure which gives more focus than the one we have had up to now - a structure which is wide and broad enough to allow for general negotiations in the three strands.

My view is that, in order to keep the momentum going and not to leave the field to Sinn Fein, we need to get a process off the ground as soon as possible.

I appreciate the point about not doing anything to close the door on Sinn Fein (or the DUP) coming into talks. What we need is a train moving fast enough to reassure those who are on board but not so fast that others who are outside cannot board it.

The DUP have again refused to see me. The excuse this time is that they won't accept the Declaration - the fifth different excuse that they have used! My judgment is that, if we are seen to be making progress, the DUP will wish to become involved at some point in the future.

We must avoid a damaging vacuum which could lead to the unravelling of the Declaration.

Tanaiste:

Nobody wants a vacuum to be created. There should be no veto either for Sinn Fein or for the DUP. There have obviously been some encouraging signs from the three parties you dealt with. But clearly you feel that no further movement is possible at the level of exploratory contacts. Incidentally, I assume that, if the DUP's problem is the Declaration, they now accept the Anglo-Irish Agreement!

The Declaration is a courageous attempt to address the heart of the problem. We want to ensure that any follow-up should keep the focus in the same deep area that we reached with the Declaration.

We would have concerns about some of the UUP statements. Mr Molyneaux's apparently minimalist approach is unhelpful in terms of the potential in the Declaration; it would effectively mean the loss of the Declaration's momentum in relation to a deep and lasting solution.

You know our views about an "internal approach": it will not work. We must address all three relationships and genuinely create a "new beginning". I would like to feel that the UUP would be ready to enter into deeper talks. As for the DUP, as you say, hopefully they will join us later if they see progress being made.

The UUP have been more constructive but I would like to feel that Mr Molyneaux would have the capacity and the courage to accept that we need a wider and deeper approach, not a minimalist one.

The European Parliament elections will, of course, bring their own tensions.

As for the SDLP, my impression is that John Hume would be slow to enter talks which he felt had an unbalanced concentration on Strand One arrangements.

It is a question of trying to keep the balance.

I was asked this morning whether Sinn Fein have a veto. I replied that nobody has a veto over the efforts of the two Governments to bring peace. That is the clear message which must go out.

Originally the end of December was a notional deadline; then it became the end of January. The media have been jumping to conclusions there. We must try to walk down the middle line together.

Minister Ancram:

John Hume wants to be certain that it is a three-stranded process and he wants to know where the British Government is

coming from on certain issues. Equally, others are saying the same about the Irish Government. There is, therefore, a lack of confidence within the parties about where the Governments are. A wider, more focussed process would allow those considerations to be met.

The (Ulster) Unionists are restless and under pressure. David Trimble's remarks this morning illustrate that. Strand One is of greatest interest to them during an election campaign. But I have met the UUP's three authorised negotiators and they have agreed to proceed on the basis of the three strands. I want to get talks onto a more organised basis in order to prevent the Unionists moving away from that position.

It would be helpful, therefore, if we could decide this morning on how to achieve that.

Tanaiste:

As regards Trimble's remarks, I would be worried if the approach he outlined (i. e., "the Declaration hasn't worked so let's try the next trick") was to become the direction of the UUP's thinking at this stage.

Minister Ancram:

He doesn't, of course, represent his party on this.

Secretary of State:

The three parties want the talks to take on a new momentum and character. They want "roughage added to the diet" now. Without it, they will not come back. They will have great suspicions if it looks as if the two Governments are allowing the Declaration to supplant the continuation of talks.



Talks have, in fact, been underway since last September. A demand in the Unionist camp now is that the talks take on new momentum and get into some substance. It would be very dangerous if it seemed that we were ready to put them on hold. The Taoiseach spoke on 10 January about his interest in an "early restart" to talks.

Tánaiste:

Certainly we should get our officials to seek a basis on which talks could begin. The ideal outcome would be a deep accommodation. This is very clear in the Declaration.

Let us agree that our officials should discuss the parameters and prepare for us (at our next meeting) what timescale we are talking about and what would be a suitably far-reaching framework which we could try to get accepted. Michael Ancram makes the valid point that nobody will want to sit down at a round table unless they have some idea of the outcome.

There is, however, a potential conflict here, as we want to make clear that we still do not wish to close off the other option. An end to violence, furthermore, would certainly transform the prospects for talks. It is a question of how we structure talks without undermining the other option.

Minister Ancram:

I do not envisage that we would make specific proposals. Rather, what I have in mind is a "shaded structure" which would leave a lot of room for formal negotiation. The basis should not be seen to be in the ownership of just one or two of the participants. Rather, it should be an amalgam of all we have heard over the past year. The structure should be agreed before we decide to move forward on it.



I don't know if it is for the Irish side to have a first stab at designing it? But the matter is urgent. I was asked how soon I could get the talks onto a more substantive basis. When I hummed and hawed and replied "perhaps by mid-February", I was told that that was pushing it, as they would have to be able to tell their people that something would happen now. The timescale is very short, in other words.

Secretary of State:

In our communique today, we should indicate jointly our continued support for talks. We do not see them in conflict with the Declaration. We must demonstrate our very strong and continuing support for the Declaration and also for the talks process - given that three of the four parties are now clamouring for the talks to get on.

Tanaiste:

I don't see a particular difficulty. But, to judge from Michael Ancram's discussions, is there not a danger that talks might start from the "lowest common denominator" and end up with a minimalist approach?

Minister Ancram:

We would have to have complete agreement that the three strands would proceed simultaneously. That would be the best guarantee against a minimalist approach. We should set ambits within which the negotiations would take place. The "shaded structure" means setting an outside ambit and working in towards the middle.

O hUiginn:

What exactly do the UUP want? On the one hand, they refuse to come to the table and Mr Molyneaux turns down private invitations from the Tanaiste for contact. And on the other, they are apparently insisting that talks should begin immediately.

Minister Ancram:

I do not speak for them and can only say what they have told me, which is that, if they are to move forward at the present difficult time (with European Parliament elections approaching etc), they must be able to show progress - within Strand One, I suspect. But they have agreed to take this process forward on the three strands, although they are less enthusiastic about this than, say, the SDLP. Unless there is a three-stranded process to help them to do so, we cannot be sure of keeping them to that position.

O hUiginn:

What would be the mechanism to get into talks?

Minister Ancram:

I am suggesting multiple bilaterals as the most constructive way of taking the process forward.

Secretary of State:

If they jump off this train, they will make no bones at all about pursuing a minimalist internal solution. It is essential that we keep them on the train.

Minister Ancram:

I have in mind managed multiple bilaterals.

Chilcot:

In othe words, we would not necessarily be there the whole time.

Dorr:

Would the fact that Mr Molyneaux has not agreed to a bilateral with you suggest that he envisages such a meeting forming part of a wider structure?

Minister Ancram:

I think that the Unionists would not be prepared to go beyond bilateral meetings with us.

Tanaiste:

There is a lot of work to be done in setting out the framework for "managed multiple bilaterals". I have no difficulty with it.

It would, however, be helpful if Mr Molyneaux showed some willingness to have the kind of meeting we have been looking for (for the purpose of building up trust).

Let us set out at official level to start the work of looking at a structure or framework.

Secretary of State:

Mr Molyneaux is very cautious. He has judged accurately the degree of support in his party, even if there have been some difficult times for him. I will encourage him to meet you (as I have done before). Some in his party have also done

so. His fear is that Paisley would trumpet it around if news (of a meeting) were to get out.

As for the character of the framework, it is urgent to get on with that. I fear putting it off to our next Conference. That does not meet the need we identified.

We put forward our ideas last September. I understand your difficulties in the light of (subsequent) events. But we do not think it is possible to leave this matter to our next meeting.

I therefore suggest that, at official level, we look at what we (i. e., the British Government) have put forward and see if it could be put forward by us, if you cannot support it as a joint document.

Tanaiste:

I understand the point about the fragility of the UUP and the need to make progress. But we must also be extremely careful not to give any impression that the Declaration is not still there to be played for.

I have no objections if we start work privately among officials to tease out a framework for talks. If Michael were to go back to the parties, it would still give us some room for those who have still to make a decision on the Declaration. It looks as if there will be a significant meeting at the end of February. I do not want them to say at that meeting that the two Governmernts "did not even let us formally consult our party".

We must keep space and we must keep the balance. If we set out on the course which Michael indicated, can we do it without publicity and on a confidential basis?

Minister Ancram:

The content could be kept confidential. However, I am not sure how the practical fact of private bilaterals could be kept confidential.

I take your point about Sinn Fein fully. But all we would be doing is setting out the broad parameters. And of course we hope that Sinn Fein will join the process. We might in fact be creating a greater incentive for Sinn Fein to come on board.

Secretary of State:

We must be able to counter the argument that Sinn Fein are effectively imposing a veto over a three-stranded process which all of us are signed up to.

O hUiginn:

The idea that we could give comfort to the Unionists on Strand One issues within a matter of a few weeks is very optimistic. The UUP are inconsistent: they claim that there is no momentum behind talks yet they are one of the two key obstacles to a resumption of talks.

If the talks are to be very unstructured, that is all the more reason for the two Governments to have the most coherent framework possible. There is an obvious danger that a framework which seemed good would be challenged by the Unionists and would lead back towards Mr Molyneaux's ambitions. The framework between the two Governments would have to be in the deep area to which the Tanaiste has made several references.



Secretary of State:

We have spoken of the need to give "focus and direction" to talks which have gone to the limit of "exploration". What is needed is something to "latch onto" which would help to make talks more structured and orderly - no more than that. To work that out should not be too time-consuming.

Let us look at the "conflict" you referred to. Where exactly does it lie? We have, after all, a talks process which is ongoing. How could it (i.e., a resumption) be represented as a disincentive? How could those who wish it to continue be persuaded that there is no move away from the talks process and, therefore, a de facto veto by Sinn Fein?

Tanaiste:

We are not very far apart. It is a question of keeping the balance. We should be able to find a formula of words. Our concern is to maintain a deeper context for talks and we would be extremely worried if we found ourselves looking at a minimalist position.

Dorr:

A number of steps need to be distinguished:

- (i) Officials would meet to consider a framework for talks and to work on a possible framework document;
- (ii) If there were a cessation of violence in response to the Declaration, that would be followed by a three-month interval before talks involving Sinn Fein could begin;
- (iii) There would be the stage during which the envisaged bilaterals would be held.

As regards the drafting of a document, we (the Irish Government) would be starting from a disadvantage. While you have dealt with these people, we would be coming at it without the degree of knowledge of their thinking which you have obtained. The framework document would have to involve a framework which would make provision for the deeper solution we are talking about.

Secretary of State:

The "deep solution" is provided for by the three strands.

Dorr:

No - the three strands are merely the mechanism.

Secretary of State:

We are committed to the "totality of relationships"...

Dorr:

It is difficult to envisage a purely outline framework document which contains what you have picked up from your contacts with the parties and yet is also suited to the deeper solution which we believe to be necessary.

Minister Ancram:

There are two parts to the structure:

(i) The Strand One matters which I have been discussing with the parties (and which inevitably touch also on Strand Two at some points);

(ii) the wider Strands Two and Three, which my exploratory

contacts have not covered.

If the parties are not ready to move ahead from (i), you effectively do not have a process.

O hUiginn:

There are certain matters which only the Northern Ireland parties can decide. But the greater part of the material - the framework, or "envelope", for the talks - relates to the two Governments. Probably three-quarters of the areas of contention in future talks (e.g., North/South institutions) would be within the competence of the two Governments. There is a slight implication here that these areas might be reached through the filter of the parties. I don't think that that would be acceptable to the Governments.

Instead of the very flexible, loose and broad document which you envisage, could we not envisage a very firm and specific document which would be put to the parties, telling them that "there are certain areas which we have agreed and wish to discuss with you"?

There must be a very clear understanding between the two Governments and I could not see this being achieved in a matter of days.

Secretary of State:

Does that not overestimate the importance of the work which is within the prerogative of the two Governments? As regards North/South institutions, if anyone is "on the outside", it is the British Government.

The basic problem seems to be that you fear that anything which gives a positive signal about talks before the Sinn Fein

Ard-Fheis in late February is a disincentive.

Tánaiste:

I fear giving people a stick to beat us with.

The Declaration took up a lot of our political energies over the past year. It would be very damaging if, after all that work, we could not find a formula conveying the necessary balance which would allow us to take the process forward but without closing off the other option.

I have no problem with saying (as I indicated earlier) that no party has a veto.

Secretary of State:

That is helpful. Like you, we want this (Declaration) to work. A lot of political capital has been invested in it. But there could also be a catastrophic failure if the Unionists were to move away from their position of support because what was said to be an ongoing process had now been put on hold (despite their request for the talks to get into substance now).

O' Donovan:

There is a difference between being generally positive about talks and signalling that, through mechanisms between the two Governments, talks are actually going to go ahead now. Sinn Fein could say "You asked us for our response but the truth is that you are going ahead anyway". That is the stick we would be beaten with.

Minister for Justice:

I strongly support Mr O' Donovan.

We know that various strategic meetings are taking place now. There is a clear three-way split between those who are trying to get support for the Declaration, those who are against it and those in the middle who remain to be convinced. Those who are against are trying to find a reason to get themselves off the hook and none of us should help them to find one.

We should not give any impression today of a major new initiative to get talks going. It is well worth devoting the time between now and when the crucial dates are behind us to putting the pressure back where it belongs.

If structures for talks were now put in place and there was still no cessation of violence, we would still have to deal with the terrorists outside that structure.

We must keep all the pressure on Sinn Fein in the meantime.

Chilcot:

Should we not tackle the problem in an explicit fashion? Let the two Governments state that any progress in the talks will not threaten Sinn Fein with exclusion. We would leave plenty of room for Sinn Fein to play a full part in the search for a political settlement.

O hUiginn:

It would be unfortunate if the talks appeared to be an alternative policy to the Declaration.

But there is also a problem of substance. We are being asked to switch gears. I do not understand the Unionists' position: they are protesting at an apparent vacuum but they



are at the same time refusing to come back to talks. We are being asked to subscribe to a proposition without having a clear understanding of it. The British Government have the key to the entire network of contacts and we are being given an undefined supporting role.

I see, therefore, both presentational and substantive difficulties.

Minister Ancram:

All that I have agreed with the Unionists is that we would explore structures within the three strands. Yes, we are looking to a shifting of gears - because the potential for exploratory talks has run out. We can only take the talks process forward if we have "roughage" on the table to discipline the talks. We all accepted that the talks would at some stage have to move on from exploration to substance.

Tanaiste:

Can we distinguish between what is needed publicly and privately? We will have to indicate to the media today our assessments of the prospects. We are, however, at a certain disadvantage in this respect - which may not be in the case in a few weeks' time if our officials have met in the interim to pursue a framework document.

We have conflicting interests for the moment because we do not want to lose people on either side of the train. It should be possible, however, to make progress.

Minister for Justice:

Shifting gear at this critical juncture entails a very serious risk for all of us. Blame would attach to one or other

Government for up-ending the Declaration too soon.

Secretary of State:

"Shifting gear" is not the accurate analogy. "Focus and direction" - if somewhat tired - is the right one. People are now looking for something which would enable further discussions to bite on certain things. The two Governments would be saying that it looks to us as if this offers the best means of securing agreement across the three strands on the deep solution which we both want.

The Unionists will very probably say that, despite the efforts of the two Governments to get a framework document, the process has come to a halt. And why? Because Sinn Fein have a veto. They would find evidence for this in e.g. the President's "hand-shake" last year and the lifting of Section 31 in the South. //

O hUiginn:

This is from people who will not come to the table or talk to the Tanaiste. It is a bit rich that they should refuse all contact and then protest that dialogue is being held up.

Secretary of State:

It may be a bit rich. But we are dealing here with horses who are actually in the box - and whom we must keep there.

Tanaiste:

Where do the Unionists actually want to go?

Secretary of State:

They say that we are the guardians of the Unionist interest....

Minister Wheeler:

They are supported also by some right-wing Tories on the back benches.

Tánaiste:

Surely the momentum of the Declaration will take us through what we have to get through over the next few weeks?

Minister Ancram:

It seems to me that the Unionists got away with their acquiescence to the Declaration relatively lightly. There were rumours that some UUP support would shift to Paisley, but that did not happen. However, I am now hearing that they are being told by their supporters that "we gave you only our conditional support for the Declaration" and that the Unionist politicians must be able to demonstrate that there is a credible process underway. They are now saying that they have effectively waited since last December: they signed up to a joint statement and then nothing happened.

Minister for Justice:

What is four weeks in all of this?

Minister Ancram:

A week is a long time. I met them last formally about three or four weeks before the Declaration was signed. I said then that the negotiation of the Declaration was time-consuming. Then Christmas came. Then they came to me and

asked how we intended to take the process forward. They are frustrated by the lack of progress and have put me under severe pressure. The same problem exists with Alliance. It is now two weeks since I saw them. The pressure on them is growing and it could become irresistible.

Tanaiste:

Allowances must be made if we are to achieve the ultimate prize. If Sinn Fein decide to support the Declaration, that number of weeks must have some acceptance with those who want to move the process forward.

We obviously have a difficulty here. Despite their consistent unavailability to us over the past twelve months, the Unionists are now suddenly available for talks. Perhaps they should come to see us in order to discuss a widening of the bilaterals?

Minister Ancram:

I can pass on a message to that effect.

O' Donovan:

That would be constructive pressure on Sinn Fein.

Chilcot:

I don't believe that the Unionists could agree to that in the absence of a framework in this particular phase.

O hUiginn:

Is there an implication there that, for Molyneaux to survive, we need to give him some political comfort in relation to

Strand One?

Minister Ancram:

My job is to keep them on the train.

O hUiginn:

And that means giving them something which excludes contact with the Irish Government?

Chilcot:

Going back to the Tanaiste's distinction between what is to be said publicly and privately, our view is that what was said now must be said soon. Work will go on between officials in private. And perhaps a private signal to the Unionists could be added in?

Tanaiste:

I am not sure that we will make much progress in further discussion here. I thought that the statements by the Taoiseach and myself in the Dail would have made clear that Sinn Fein do not have a veto. Perhaps we can find a formula of words from that in order to give the required subliminal message? Otherwise, we are at an unfortunate impasse.

Secretary of State:

The Financial Times said that the strongest weapon against the IRA is the alliance between the two Governments.

Tanaiste:

There is no difficulty here. The esteem built up by the



Taoiseach and the Prime Minister with the Declaration must not be lost sight of. In the eighties, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a tremendous step forward - and on the world stage also. (The situation in the U.S., for example, has been transformed over the past twenty years). We have now done it again - and we must build on that.

Secretary of State:

But it all comes to nought if Paisley beats Molyneux.

I suggest that we break for ten minutes.

At this point (1 pm), the meeting adjourned to facilitate internal consultations on either side.

It resumed briefly in this restricted format (in the Minister's Dining Room) at approx. 4.30 pm. The following is an account of this final discussion:

Secretary of State

How about the proposal for a joint presentation in the U.S.?

Tanaiste:

I would need to consult my Government colleagues about that.

Our officials might continue working. For the press conference, we might indicate that nobody has a veto, work on political talks is ongoing and both processes are complementary.

Secretary of State:

We need a framework structure.

Tanaiste:

We should share ideas on how to make progress.

Secretary of State:

Should Sean O hUiginn and Quentin Thomas get together by the end of the month?

O hUiginn:

That would require political clearance on our side. We are worried about the broad direction. We would want to ensure that we are not embarking on something which is entirely focussed on the Unionists.

Secretary of State:

The intense contact between officials needs to focus on that.

Tanaiste:

Officials can build on today's work.

Secretary of State:

I will do my best to encourage the Unionists to talk to the Tanaiste.

Minister for Justice:

Howe will we respond to any media suggestion that difficulties arose between us today?

O hUiginn:

We might refer to today's intensive programme of work and very large Conference agenda.

Tanaiste:

We had a lot of information to exchange and share and this warranted spending more time on political matters.

The meeting then adjourned.



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