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S E C R E T

Informal Meeting between the Taoiseach and the British  
Prime Minister, Downing Street,  
Saturday, 19 February 1994, at 10.30 a.m.

The Taoiseach, Mr. Albert Reynolds, was accompanied by the Tánaiste, Mr. Dick Spring. The Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, was accompanied by the Secretary of State Sir Patrick Mayhew. Mr. Rod Lyne, Diplomatic Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Quentin Thomas of the NIO, and Mr. Jonathan Stevens, Mayhew's Private Secretary, attended on the British side. Mr. Noel Dorr, Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Seán O hUiginn, Assistant Secretary, and the undersigned attended on the Irish side.

The Prime Minister began with a review of the situation since 15 December. The Joint Declaration had got off to a very good start, and its impact had been very positive. Sinn Féin could not throw it overboard, but there had been a nibbling away at it with demands for clarification, to become persuaders, and the trip to America by Adams, which needed to be countered. The response kept being pushed back. He suspected the Republicans were split, and that Adams was buying more time, either in order to deliver or because with the passage of time it becomes easier to say no.

The time for a response had been pushed from Christmas to the end of January, to the Ard Fheis, now to March. How much longer would the elastic stretch? The patience of Conservative backbench members was close to snapping, and some wanted to push the Declaration to one side. He was astounded he had not been under greater attack. They could not be certain what Adams' motives were. Perhaps he was trying to push the whole process into the long grass. However, lack of a response did not undermine the advice. The Declaration was still a foundation stone. They were not going to snatch it away or tear it up.

But they were no longer optimistic.

The Taoiseach agreed the whole process had started exceptionally well. The British Government perhaps felt an obligation initially to bed down the Unionists, and that had been done very successfully. On the other hand, was there a perception of coming from two different directions? He mentioned the strength of support in the opinion polls, 97% in the South, 87% among Nationalists in the North, with solid cross-community support. Republicans were not in a position to reject it. The dispute about clarification was a distraction. Mayhew's clarifications had put pressure on them, and they had attempted to make the British Government a scapegoat. Everyone was a persuader for agreement. Self-determination and consent were bigger problems. With regard to Sinn Féin meetings in the South, they were mostly positive towards the Declaration. A couple of areas in the North were very hardline, for example, the open meeting in East Tyrone. In the same area there had recently been a closed meeting, where Adams had taken control. They may find some convoluted way, a formula, while not rejecting the Declaration, and using the Forum as a bridge. He did not think exploratory talks with the British on political matters would happen early on. It was a question of building up a big enough platform for a cessation of violence. There was a majority in favour as of today. But unless there were a large enough majority, they could end up with a split.

Mayhew said they were nudging ahead. The trouble was the longer they delayed more would topple off the British end. There was not indefinite time. They did not want to say the Declaration was dead and buried.

The Taoiseach said the party conference would not provide a response. Obviously, the Governments could not wait indefinitely, but a deadline would play into Sinn Féin's hands.

In reply to a question about the overnight fire bombs, the Taoiseach said there was an element on each end of the paramilitary organisations who would have to be dealt with, who

did not want peace to work. The Prime Minister doubted if it could simply be put down to renegade factors. The Taoiseach responded that all units remained active till told to stop, and that their organisation was cellular and independent. The Tánaiste drew attention to the need to keep these developments in the context of very close security cooperation.

The Prime Minister then asked, what are our options?

- Both Governments felt Sinn Féin need more time to get aboard.
- Their consistent position was that no-one should have a veto, DUP or Sinn Féin.
- They were both committed to Three Strand Talks.

The British needed a response to the framework document, and to tell the world that they proposed to make progress. Why had it taken so long to get a response?

The Taoiseach responded that first of all they were engaged in a process that had a very good foundation. They were not in favour of a one-strand minimalist approach. It need not take officials too long to work on a framework. There was of course a danger in deflecting attention from the Joint Declaration. He pointed out that the Irish Government were in a somewhat different position. What we put forward could be regarded as a basis on which we would be prepared to change the Constitution. Thus, it was extremely political. If any impression got around that it was not a deep process, it would change the Declaration. It had to be a deep document. He agreed officials should have talks. The Joint Declaration was the foundation, and the starting-point.

The Tánaiste said we were not talking about the Molyneaux minimalist agenda, to judge from some of his speeches. That was not going to be the problem. Mayhew referred back to the September Conference and their agreement that officials would

draft a joint illustrative working document without commitment. This would complement the bilateral papers. The British contribution had been ready by 24 September. Irish ideas were needed, if the process were to be carried forward. He wished Molyneaux had gone to see the Tánaiste, and he would press him to do that. He did not understand why they had not received the Irish paper, which had been repeatedly promised. Of course, the Tánaiste had met members of the Unionist party. The Molyneaux style was to find surrogates. They need to know how far the Irish Government could go for a limited purpose. When the Taoiseach referred to an agreed Ireland, Mayhew was not sure what he meant.

The Prime Minister said the longer they were not able to discuss a framework document, the more this strengthened the hand of those who only wanted to talk about Strand I. There was a need to make some progress. There might be three grounds for Irish reserve:

- a) It distracts from the peace process. He could see how that view might be taken
- b) An attitude of why bother with the talks process.
- c) Or perhaps in certain areas, we were not sure where to pitch the position.

If it were c), the work could be more tightly constricted. The Taoiseach repeated they had to be 3-Stranded talks, that there could be no minimalist approach, and that they had to be based on the Joint Declaration. The Tánaiste said that achieving progress on the Declaration was our point of departure. He said there was a lot of thinking in formulation.

Mayhew said they had not the slightest difficulty with that. The Joint Declaration contained the fundamental constitutional principles, and a framework for democracy. There was a danger of leaving thing in abeyance, or twiddling thumbs, until Sinn Féin responded. There was a danger of people ditching the



Declaration. They needed to show everything was continuing. Security cooperation was continuing. He requested a meeting of the Joint Liaison Group, as a precursor to a paper, though perhaps that might not be slightly necessary.

The Taoiseach, referring to the American paper, asked where the Declaration fitted in. Paisley had been told that he need not accept the Declaration.

The Prime Minister said there was a danger of being suspicious of each other's motives. There was no question of a purely Strand 1 approach or of ditching the Declaration. Mayhew reiterated that the talks were governed by the 26 March 1991 statement, and that the Declaration was relevant to the talks.

The Prime Minister referred to Adams' visit to the US, and tentatively suggested a joint presentation or perhaps a joint article. He had been struck on his recent visit to Russia by the joint article between Douglas Hurd and Foreign Minister Kozyrev.

The Taoiseach said Adams had been given a very clear message from America. If he didn't back the Peace Declaration, that would be it. He would lose a lot of potential friends in the US and in the Irish-American community. He did not see him getting a visa again. He was now under bigger pressure. The Prime Minister however said the demonstration he faced when he got back at Dublin Airport was very helpful. He stressed the importance of moving together.

The Irish side raised the Boundary Commission report, which looked very suspect in relation to its treatment of South Down/South Armagh, and also referred to the 4/1 imbalance in the Select Committee. The Tánaiste said it might look like a gerrymandering of constituencies.

Mayhew said that select committees usually had a Government majority, and the SDLP took the Labour Party whip. The Boundary

Commission was strictly independent, and the Government could not put in modifications. Nevertheless, their recommendations do sometimes get changed.

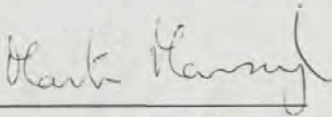
Referring back to what we call the Ancram check-list, Mayhew explained the importance of keeping the Unionists on side.

The Tánaiste said the Joint Declaration had achieved a tremendous amount already, and was a winner for both Governments. There was a new solidarity between them.

Mayhew stressed the importance of officials meeting, and the Ancram paper might not have been necessary.

In response to mention of losing the Unionists, the Tánaiste stressed the problem of getting the Unionists to talk to us.

The meeting concluded with some discussion of statements to be made to the press, and some of the Prime Minister's impressions of his recent visit to Russia and his meeting with President Yeltsin. The length of the meeting was about one and a quarter hours.



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22 February 1994