



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/96/40

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

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

If I am not satisfied, I will do as I have done in the past. I will just say "no" to change which would harm Britain. But I hope I will be able to secure an agreement that we can accept - that is in the best interests of Britain.

Across the world the last four years have been turbulent. The years ahead may be turbulent too.

We will be cautious, pragmatic and safe.

But the world remains uncertain and unstable. If anything, the end of the Cold War has made regional wars more likely, and not less. We cannot assume it is a safe world. Only this week we have seen how quickly a crisis can blow up in the Middle East. And who better to act for Britain than our Foreign Secretary?

Mr President, we have interests the world over. Isolationism is a luxury Britain simply cannot afford.

And there is a growing need for regional peacekeeping. We are very good at it. The defence of British interests does not always lie on British soil. So we will continue to play a leading role, as we have always done through the UN.

Mr President, the main point is clear - while we have Conservative Government, Britain will have a sure and stable defence - the best equipment, the best weapons, the best trained troops we can provide.

Last week showed again how distinctive we are.

In Opposition it doesn't matter that Labour voted to scrap Trident. In Government it would.

In Opposition it doesn't matter that the first place Labour would look for cuts would be another defence review. In Government it would.

So let me mark out the clear ground so that no one serving our country in uniform is in any doubt.

Three months ago, we confirmed our front line would have an extra 3,000 troops and placed £5000 million of orders and tenders for modern and effective equipment for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.

That made implicit what I will now make explicit. The big upheavals in our armed forces are over. They deserve the very best from us and they will get it.

Northern Ireland

Let me say something about Northern Ireland and the momentous events through which we are living.

For the past 25 years Northern Ireland has faced the daily horror of murder and brutality. Knee-capping and beatings. Organised racketeering and viciousness to fund terrorism for political ends.

No morning has dawned that might not contain an atrocity. A father who did not return home. A woman or child indiscriminately bombed. A policeman or soldier killed by a hidden sniper.

This evil has spread from time to time to mainland Britain. The Brighton bomb, ten years ago this very day, that some of you will be remembering so vividly and painfully. We still miss those who died and think of those who were injured. It was intended to murder a Cabinet but ended up hardening the resolve of an indomitable Prime Minister.

The murders of Airey Neave and Ian Gow. The bombs in the City and at Downing Street. The agony of Warrington and the heartrending pictures of Tim Parry and Jonathan Ball, who will never know the future that should have been theirs. What did those little boys know of political disputes?

In all this time the extraordinary people of Northern Ireland have carried on with their lives. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. They need to know that a search for the solution to their problems is right at the top of the British Government's agenda and I give them that promise.

We have made progress.

It was the Downing Street Declaration that set out the principles that will continue to guide us. It helped isolate the IRA and pushed them to their ceasefire.

As Jim Molyneux put it:

"It was significant when the IRA started to murder pensioners, children, mothers and fathers and so it was bound to be significant when it stopped. The most significant aspect of all has been the victory of ordinary people over the terrorists."

And yesterday the loyalist paramilitaries announced that they, too, were stopping violence. Another victory for ordinary people.

Today, for the first time in 25 years, the people of Ulster have woken up to peace. Our determination must be to make that peace permanent.

To fasten down what is unfolding needs clear reasoning and cold calculation.

Many people will urge me to hurry. I understand their enthusiasm. I will not tarry one day longer than necessary.

But I will take it in my own time. The responsibility for Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the British Government.

I am used to being urged to hurry. I have had such advice daily since the Downing Street Declaration.

But if I had listened, we would not today be where we are with the guns stilled and the bombs stopped and Northern Ireland on its way to a better future.

So other people can call for speed. But I must ask the hard questions. I must make the right judgement at the right time. And I will.

Things are changing.

The profile of street security has lessened on military advice. Men and women are not searched when they enter hotels and large stores.

But let me give this assurance. For as long as is necessary, as many policemen and troops as are necessary will stay on duty in Northern Ireland to protect all the people of Northern Ireland.

We have made a beginning, but not yet an end. Every day the violence is absent brings more hope.

Progress may not be easy. There will be setbacks. There may be disappointments. People who are suspicious. Who block progress. All this lies ahead.

But there is, I am sure, a way through. If you will something, you can make it happen. And the will for peace is very strong.

So Paddy Mayhew and his team, who have done so well, will press ahead with the political talks with the constitutional parties.

We intend to complete a Framework Document with the Irish Government.

We hope to restore local accountability and local democracy to Northern Ireland.

To seek an agreement that is acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland. And we shall test their view in a referendum as a cast iron safeguard of our intentions.

I know the size of the task ahead. I have no illusions about its difficulty or the past record of many of the people we are dealing with.

But we cannot let history freeze us into inaction. There is a chance. A window for peace. We will enter it if we can do so with honour and with consent.

In the words of the Old Testament which is common to both traditions in Northern Ireland:

"There is a time to love and a time to hate, a time of war and a time of peace."

The people of Northern Ireland are sick of war. It is for them that we must build a time of peace.

Conclusion

Mr President, it is a cliché today that every leader must have the "vision thing". We are told he must map out, in dramatic form, "new directions".

I do not disparage the "vision thing".

But alongside the vision thing, I must tell you that I remain rather attached to the "action thing".

To the "practical" thing.

To the "how on earth do you deliver these promises" thing.

By all means listen to a politician when he tells you what he plans - but ask him, too, how will you do it. Take it from me. The very devil can be in the detail.

I don't disparage the mapping of direction or - sometimes - new direction. I hope I have sketched out some today. But I must tell you - there is sometimes merit in the old direction.

Change for the sake of change should never appeal to any Conservative. In a world of bewildering change, this Party must stand for continuity and stability, for home and health.

And we must build this for the long term. For our children and grandchildren. It is the young people out there who will make the world in which we grow old. They will make the decisions; they may strike out along new pathways - but it is for us in our time to build for them a stronger foundation.

And today my message to you is that Britain is growing stronger.

We are now beginning to see the fruit of all the things we've battled and striven for these last four years.

You know, running a country isn't like walking down a road. You have to hold fast to your core beliefs whatever the short-term pressures. See the right things through to their finish, whatever the risks.

To govern is to be engaged in a hundred themes, a thousand routes, and the everyday visions, sometimes conflicting, of millions of people.

No windy rhetoric, no facile phrases, no pious cliché, no shallow simplification, no mock-honest, mock-familiar, ad-man's speak can conceal the infinite complexity of Government.

Take care nobody tries to conceal that from you. Take care not to confuse travesty with truth. Never assume, because an idea is easily communicated, that it's right.

Take care not to confuse oratory with practical concern. Look for the achievements of Government not always in bold plans or crude conflicts, but sometimes in mended fences, too; and sometimes in the accretion of small steps whose pattern takes time to become clear.

In this difficult world, our interests are daily at stake. The time is ripe for grown-up politics.

The glib phrases, the sound bites, the ritual conflicts - all these may be the daily stuff of life for the upper one thousand of politics. But to 50 million other people in this country, they are utterly irrelevant. My interest is with them.

It's said that actions speak louder than words. I hope so. For, in the end, and when it comes to a choice, I shall bend my energies always to work, not talk.

My trade has never been in adjectives. I shall be patient. I shall be realistic. I shall ask for patience and realism in others. And I shall put my trust in results.