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Notes of meeting between An Tanaiste Dick Spring TD and President Clinton, Vice President Gore and Mr Anthony Lake, the White House, Friday Sept. 29 1995.

The meeting commenced at 5.10 pm. Vice President Gore referred to the recent meeting between The Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major at Majorca.

The Tanaiste opened by expressing appreciation of the work being done by the US. government and Mr. Lake to advance the peace process. There was a stand off at present. British insistence on a physical gesture as a precondition for entering political talks was the crux of the problem. The Irish government wanted to secure disarmament as part of the process. The government had strongly pressurised Sinn Fein over the past weeks but concluded that it would be a bridge too far for them at this time.

It was a case of could not rather than would not. The government would not want to isolate them any further. As part of the problem they had to be part of the solution. British insistence on making a precondition of a gesture was not the right approach. It would isolate Sinn Féin and endanger the process. The parallel approach was the proper approach, he said.

Mr Lake said they were offering a price for the perfectly anodyne name for the commission.

The Tanaiste outlined the background to the calling off of the planned summit meeting and the nasty British briefing following the cancellation. The Irish government believed that it had made the correct decision. The meeting between Angram and McGuinness was satisfactory. They seemed to be making snail pace progress but it was in the right direction. The Taoiseach had that day had a meeting with Adams. It had been a good meeting. There had been some exchanges about language but there were some prospects of progress.

It was a question of working together to bring everybody along. Referring to Mr Trimble he said the Irish government would give every encouragement to the US to talk to him. He had the prospects of being a very good leader. The Irish government would encourage all groups here in Washington to meeting him, to do business with him and to encourage him to take advantage of the present opportunity.

The Tanaiste added that the Irish government was offering the legitimisation of Northern Ireland. No Irish government had previously been able to offer that in the past. He said he welcomed the Vice President's invitation to Mr. Trimble.

Mr. Gore said that he planned to see him when he came to Washington and asked what the Tanaiste thought of Trimble's proposal for an elected assembly in Northern Ireland.

The Tanaiste replied that an internal settlement as proposed by Trimble would not be adequate as a solution. One would find more resistance from Nationalist leaders such as John Hume but the proposals had to be taken seriously. The government could not say they were a non-runner. They had to be prepared to discuss the proposals with him. "I don't think there is a great deal of merit in electing some form of forum to negotiate, the parties would want their own mandate. It is a clever move from Trimble's point of view." he said.

Mr O hUiginn said there was also the danger that people might hang themselves on a hardline mandate.

Mr Lake said the British understood that the proposal was not a runner but said they had to discuss them. It was the first sign of the Unionists becoming engaged in the process.

One of the weaknesses was in trying to break down mistrust. The Irish government believed it should give them the encouragement of entertaining it.

Ambassador Gallagher said that Mr. Trimble's proposals were also saying that they would talk to Sinn Féin.

Mr. Gore said that whatever the proposals they should consider them favourably even though they knew they were a non runner. The US government saw the basis for progress in the twin track approach.

Mr Lake said the twin track approach was alive. He said he had told the British they were very happy to be involved in trying to carry this thing over the line. When told they did not want the US to do it they would step back. Angram had said they would consider seriously on its merits the proposals of X or whatever it is called. It should not be difficult to find a name. Their view was that it bought time. Each side would maintain its own position, he said.

Mr Lake added that both side seem to want to find a way out. Adams had indicated that the IRA would be neutral. He seemed to be saying that they would be attending political talks as a political party and not as a military body. They wanted it to be a political project and did not want to get involved with a Commission on when weapons would be handed over. If he ruled out anything, that prevented discussion. We needed to keep the terms of reference very broad.

The second issue Mr Lake referred to was the date for the beginning of all party talks. It was very important for Adams to bring along the IRA. If agreed, the date they were talking about was December 15. The British said that there had been a passing of time, it might be later - after Christmas. But the US had emphasised the need for speed. It was almost down to that and it could be fairly close. The Unionists had a huge problem but Nancy (Soderberg) was thinking of going to London next week, he said.

She said the British thought it would be helpful if she went over to meet Trimble and John Hume. She would see Adams also.

Mr. O hUiginn asked what would happen when the Commission report came out. If it did not contain Washington 3, would the British be free to reject it.

Mr Lake said they had not said in any recent conversation that that would be their position. But if this could be parked in the Commission, then talks could get under way and one could start to build confidence so that decommissioning become less important.

Mr. Lake also said they were convinced it would work. They had been talking to members of the British government who had been very hardline. On a political project and the terms of reference it was

a roll of a dice. They had reserved their position. His judgement was that it would go. Adams had said he needed a guarantee, he needed a fix. But Mr. Lake said No. "You consider it on its merits, the British will do the same." Terms of reference had to be broad - not just a question of how but whether decommissioning would take place.

The Tánaiste said there was still refining to be done. He said this process unravelled when John Major answered a question in the House of Commons. On another analysis they were not very much further on than the situation prior to the postponement of the summit.

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Mr Lake said that it was extraordinarily important that they got it going now. They had a very strong interest in having it going before the President went to Ireland.

The Tánaiste agreed and said that the Irish government did not want to impose any micro-management of the process on the Americans. We appreciated their role as a resource and said we too wanted the visit to be a success.

Mr. Gore asked what it would take, in the Tanaiste's view, to get the OUP and Trimble involved.

The Tanaiste said if they could get the British government and Sinn Féin involved then a large responsibility would lie with the British government to get them around the table. They might have to convince Trimble privately because it was probably not possible to do it publicly.

Mr McKiernan said that privately it might work. The de facto state became the thing and there would be stability. Trimble could deliver that if he grasped the opportunity.

President Clinton joined the meeting at this point. He said he was very excited at the prospect of his visit to Ireland and was really looking forward to it. He added that he hoped to bring his daughter. He also said that they wanted to get over the problem before the visit. President Clinton also said he was very worried about the situation in Ireland.

The Tanaiste said that the legitimisation of Northern Ireland was very important. Articles 2 and 3 were not a problem any more. A change would take place. The reality was that there was now a cessation of violence and it had lasted for 14 months despite some flaky items. It was clear that Sinn Féin wanted to be in democratic politics. The Unionists represented a lot of hurt and anger. We had to recognise and respect that but they could not live in the past.

The Tanaiste also raised the issue of prisoners which he said was a tricky issue for both Nationalists and Loyalists. Early releases and changes in conditions were very important. The British still were taking a hard line. The Irish government would be in a position after November 1, to accept prisoners back and they hoped that the British would cooperate.

It was agreed that Ambassador Gallagher would talk to Mr Lake about the details.

Mr Lake said it was important that the US role remained in the background.

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