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Reference Code: 2021/97/7

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5 September 1955

DRAFT

SECRET

The following is a summary record of a telephone conversation between the Taoiseach, Mr. John Bruton, T.D. and the British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, M.P., at 12.10 p.m. on 5 September. The conversation lasted for about 35 minutes. (Note that this is a summary not a verbatim record).

P.M. You've had a long morning with your colleague.

T. I have been considering overnight our position following my conversation with you. We have just had a Cabinet discussion. Of the two options that I talked about last night, basically, we have decided to try to reach agreement with you as soon as possible. That is the way we have decided to go and not the other way. To enable me to go that way, there are some changes which are absolutely required in the Joint Communiqué to be issued following our meeting. This is necessary to make sure that the approach which I now propose to take is politically viable here. Last night, I explained

the difficulties to you in some detail. I will come back to the changes needed in the Communiqué in a moment. The reason I am seeking your agreement for a postponement of tomorrow's meeting is that I want to bring the maximum number of people with us when we go that route. I must also be seen to have done everything possible to keep Sinn Féin in the process. To fail to be seen to do so would leave me open to the accusation that I am acting recklessly and throwing away peace at a time when the difference between me and Sinn Féin might perhaps be bridgeable. This view has been expressed to me by Cabinet colleagues this morning. I am conscious, of course, of your view that post-poning the Summit gives an impression of crisis and of caving in to Sinn Féin. Obviously, that type of presentation would adversely affect attitudes in unionist circles but I am not looking for a long postponement. A short one would enable us to be seen to do everything possible to keep the process intact. One thing is absolutely essential. We must have it in public. You have already conceded it privately yesterday when Mayhew indicated to Sinn Féin that the third Washington condition would not be included in the initial mandate to be given to the International Commission.

P.M. Paddy told Adams yesterday that we had moved away from a third Washington condition?

T. What I am asking is that you include a formula in the Communiqué to overcome the gesture problem. There is no point in not doing so if you have said in private that the third Washington condition is off the table at least for now. I am asking that you add the following words to the Communiqué paragraphs already agreed. (The Prime Minister was somewhat confused as to which version of the Communiqué the Taoiseach was referring to. He said that he only had in front of him the draft which had been faxed over last evening). I am suggesting the following words for the purpose of putting Sinn Féin in a position where they are seen to be unreasonable if following their rejection of the Communiqué the peace process came to an end:

"The Commission will not in this phase be required to consider the matter of a gesture involving the physical decommissioning of arms. The Commission's purpose in this phase will be to build the trust necessary for talks to start at the planned time with the maximum prospect of a successful outcome".

P.M. I will have to discuss it with Paddy. I am sorry I don't have the relevant documents here but I am upstairs in the flat. No. 10 is being rewired. I'll look into it and come back to you. Whatever we say in the Communiqué, we would have to make it clear that we hadn't moved from the third Washington condition. No talks can take place until that condition is met. I could not remotely do anything to depart from that position. If asked, I would have to make it clear. I will, over the next few hours, look with an open mind at what you are proposing. But you must have no doubt about...

T. If you say that, it would completely devalue what I am asking you to include in the Communiqué. The idea of a gesture has no genuine viability. It simply will not happen. If you insist on it, effectively the IRA will say no to talks.

P.M. The converse is equally true. Without the gesture, there won't be any talks. Our position goes right back to the Downing Street Joint Declaration. It is the only way we are ever going to get the unionists to sit down with everybody else.

T. I don't agree.

P.M. If I were to move away from the third Washington condition, my position would not be sustainable. I can't say that we have dropped something which I have been committed to for many months.

T. I am asking you to accept a certain formulation not to announce that you have changed your position. If you continue to hold to the position that there must be a gesture on decommissioning before round table talks, then there will never be round table talks.

P.M. It is not politically credible to move. Nobody would ever believe me again. Not even Archbishop Eames would believe me again on anything. Adams has no doubt about where we stand. But to more immediate matters - how are you going to seek to bring people with you? when are you going to do it? I see an advantage in it but it is difficult to bring people with you without discussing things in detail. Is that wise? How are you going to do it? Postponing the Summit will lead to immense speculation and that will lead to a immense

pressure on all of us. Everybody will be pressurising everyone else.

There will be pressure on you from Sinn Féin, and on me from the unionists. What reason do we give for the postponement and how, in the available time, do you expect to get people on side?

T. I will start with the SDLP. I am meeting them later on today. If I could tell them that there is now agreement on the opening date for all-party talks and that the demand for a gesture is off the table...

P.M. Not from us it isn't.

T. As long as you maintain your position in that form.

P.M. The Labour Party, Tony Blair, has made the very same point this morning in Ireland. He is with us.

T. The negative symbolism of the gesture must surely outweigh any military advantage that you might hope to gain from it. If you put it upfront in lights the way you are now doing, Sinn Féin won't even come to the gates for the race. It might be possible to ask for a

gesture, say, at a the third hurdle. I don't agree with the Hume formula either, particularly the sentence at the end which has the reverse of preconditions. It can be read as meaning that nothing serious happens on decommissioning until there is a political settlement that the IRA are happy with.

P.M. The unionists won't sit down without the gesture. The Labour Party supports me fully in that.

T. That's not the case with the unionists. If Sinn Féin co-operate in reaching and passing some benchmarks, it is my understanding, particularly from Ken Maginnis, that that will be sufficient to get unionists to the table. Ken Maginnis has set out some of the benchmarks such as acceptance of the principle of decommissioning, modalities, move to prepare inventories and so on.

P.M. Ken Maginnis is undoubtedly the most amiable of the unionists. But he is in a league on his own and is not representative. I can't and won't say what the problem might look like in three months time but if by then, there has been no fighting, people just might find it

acceptable to look at it again. But I can't take it off the table simply in return for Sinn Féin having a chat with George Mitchell for a few minutes and hoping that on the basis of his report, the unionists will then come into talks. It would be a flat negation of everything I have said so far. The only thing holding the situation together is consistency. I have to be consistent in something like this. When I saw Jim Molyneaux in a relaxed atmosphere over lunch on the day of his retirement, he said maintaining the Washington third condition was a *sine qua non*. It might be possible to fudge it in a Communiqué but I could not if asked the question say anything other than that my position is unchanged. You have no grounds for and you cannot say that we are taking it off the table. Let's clear the ground now. What will we say about the postponement?

On our side, we haven't had a great deal left to do. We are ready to go. How do you deal with a postponement on your side?

- T. We are working on a Joint Communiqué which would announce a postponement. Its aim is to have the maximum prospect of bringing

the maximum number of people with us as we move through this difficulty.

P.M. Are we going to be able to say that both Governments have reached an agreement on the way ahead, that a little more work remains to be done and that we expect to meet soon? There is a danger that unless we can something like that, there will be huge speculation which will be damaging. If we can't have a Joint Communiqué, then we are going to have to say that we are ready to go but that you have some work to do on your side and that you are working hard to try to bring it about. That way, we wouldn't have to admit that we are in conflict. We could say something like the two Governments have broadly reached agreement. The Irish Government need a few more days to clarify some aspects. We would agree that London would not answer any questions because if we did, they might differ from answers that you would give and that wouldn't be very attractive. We would make it clear that you asked us for a postponement and that we agreed. That way we are not being asked to answer questions that might put us at logger-heads. We would say that we are happy with the likely outcome of the Summit and are prepared to go off the

airways until you are ready to come. Why don't you fax over your changes to the existing Communiqué and the text of the postponement announcement. We are going to have to decide quickly on these things. They will probably be OK but I have to consult a few people.

Let's summarise what we have to do:

1. I have to look at your proposed changes in the Communiqué.
2. I have to look at your proposed postponement announcement.
3. We need to work out a Q & A for difficult questions. We should probably announce the postponement late this afternoon.

T. Should we announce the new date for our meeting?

P.M. Yes, if possible, but there may be diary problems. Monday and Tuesday of next week, I am out of London in the North and the Midlands.

T. I have an 8 day visit to Canada starting on Friday, but I could always cancel that entirely. What about Saturday? If that were a possibility, I could then go on to do Ottawa and maybe Washington.

P.M. I am in Balmoral with the Queen for the weekend starting, I think, at lunch-time.

T. What about Thursday or Friday?

P.M. We'd hardly be ready. It wouldn't give you enough time. I am in Scotland, I think, on Friday and my plan was to go on to Balmoral. I could always come back down to London but that might leave us a bit short for time. I would have to be back up in Balmoral in time for lunch. Let's keep in touch.

T. OK, I'll communicate the changes to you and we'll talk later.