



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with President Clinton.

White House, 17 December 1996

1. The Taoiseach and Tánaiste met with President Clinton at the White House on 17 December. The US delegation also included the Vice-President, Secretary of State Christopher, National Security Adviser Tony Lake, Chief of Staff Leon Panetta, Nancy Soderberg, and Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith. Also present were Secretary Murray, Secretary MacKernan, and Ambassador Gallagher, the Government Press Secretary and the under-signed.
2. The President began by asking where matters stood at present. The Taoiseach said this remained a moment of opportunity in the peace process, although this was not fully realized by Republicans. This was tactically the right time for the IRA to call a ceasefire, before the British general elections. An early ceasefire announcement would allow Sinn Féin to take advantage of the forthcoming Christmas break, and would put them in a strong position going into the election campaign.
3. The Taoiseach said that a ceasefire would change the whole dynamics of the situation, making Sinn Féin masters rather than subjects of the process. He believed that in the event of a ceasefire, Sinn Féin would be allowed into the talks. There were also important advantages in terms of domestic British politics in

securing a ceasefire before the election. If Sinn Féin are admitted to the talks while Major is still in office, this becomes established Tory Party policy even if they move into opposition. If the matter is not resolved before the election, there is a much greater risk that the Tories will harden their position, and make it difficult for the Labour Government to move on the issue. While Major now feels that he has no room for manoeuvre (although this is not necessarily the view of officials), the situation would be changed entirely by a ceasefire, not least because Major would then be under pressure from a variety of sources to admit Sinn Féin to the talks.

4. The Taoiseach said that the content of an IRA ceasefire statement required attention. If drafted generously, including, for example, an acknowledgment of the British identity of the Unionist Community, it could help significantly in building confidence. While IRA behaviour post-ceasefire was also important, the suggestion that it should be monitored and evaluated by British Intelligence was clearly a non-starter.
  
5. Noting the significant gains that have been made over the past two years - the opening of talks, the agreement on ground rules, the appointment of Senator

Mitchell, etc - the Taoiseach observed that Sinn Féin were often inclined to focus on what is lacking, rather than taking full advantage of the important gains which were now in place.

6. President Clinton indicated that he very much agreed with the Taoiseach's point on the value of securing a ceasefire in advance of the British elections. He felt that Prime Minister Major had been helped by Blair's support, but felt that the situation would be more difficult if the roles were reversed. The Taoiseach noted that Blair had been careful not to deviate from the line set by the British Government. When they met Blair recently in Dublin, he explained this on the basis that he wished to give Major maximum room for manoeuvre, although no doubt there were also domestic political factors at play. The Taoiseach suggested that the very fact that Major had few obvious successes to point to might also make him more likely to respond to a ceasefire declaration. The Taoiseach noted that the likelihood of a positive British response was greatly strengthened by the fact that both the Irish and US Governments would be urging the British Government to allow Sinn Féin into the talks.

7. In response to a question from the President as to how else the US could be of

assistance, the Táoiseach said that the US could use its influence to persuade Sinn Féin that this was indeed a moment of maximum opportunity. The Tánaiste agreed that a strong message from Washington could play a key role in persuading Sinn Féin of the significance of an early ceasefire announcement. Ambassador Gallagher added that in terms of the election campaign, Gerry Adams fully realized that a ceasefire would be to Sinn Féin's advantage.

8. The National Security Adviser indicated that they would shortly be in touch with Sinn Féin. If the US were to indicate to Sinn Féin that the British would respond positively to a ceasefire, it was important that this be true. In those circumstances, US credibility would be on the line. President Clinton remarked that there was not much "downside" in seeking a positive British response. Lake agreed fully, noting that the downside lay entirely in not ensuring a helpful British response.
9. Picking up the Taoiseach's point about how Major stood to benefit electorally from progress in the peace process, the President, who felt that Major was an honorable man, observed that the Conservative Party had been in office for a long time. Faced with a popular mood for change, despite the strong economic situation, Major's only chance was to present himself as a "man of tomorrow"

rather than the failed politician of the past. This should incline Major to seize an opportunity if one presented itself. The Taoiseach added that, for the remainder of his term, Major would hopefully be influenced by the desire to secure his place in history.

10. Vice President Gore said that he had pressed Major to be as flexible as possible when they met recently in Lisbon. While he had been given a negative response on the date issue, he felt that Major remained interested in moving the process forward to the extent that he could. The Vice President had no doubt that if Sinn Féin called a ceasefire, they would quickly be admitted to talks. The Taoiseach commented that the closer we got to the British election the greater would be Major's room for manoeuvre, if only because there would be fewer opportunities for the Unionists to seek to bring Major down. Tony Lake commented that the dynamics of a ceasefire situation would also make it harder for Trimble to walk out of the talks. The Taoiseach responded that even if Trimble did walk out, the fact that the talks were in recess would deprive him of an opportunity to stage a grand exit. However, there was a risk that during the election campaign, Trimble would commit his party to non-participation in the talks; although even if he were to do so, this would leave Sinn Féin on the moral high ground.

11. As the meeting drew to a close, the Taoiseach again thanked the President for making himself available for a second time during his visit. The fact that he had done so at a time when there was no dramatic news to report was itself an indication of the seriousness of his interest. The President again said that his Administration would do anything it could to be of assistance, and that there would be a "sustained commitment" to the peace process throughout his second Administration.
  
12. The Tánaiste expressed appreciation to Warren Christopher for his cooperation during our Presidency. He also conveyed sincere appreciation to Tony Lake for his close and continuing support during his period as National Security Adviser.
  
13. The President added that his daughter Chelsea, who had made only a brief stop-over at Shannon, has expressed an interest in visiting Ireland. She apparently commented to her father that if she could visit Bangladesh, he could surely agree to a trip for her to Ireland. The Taoiseach said that we would be delighted to welcome her, and indeed perhaps she could join her father for the promised game of golf.

14. Finally, Secretary Christopher mentioned that he greatly enjoyed his visits to Shannon, where he had stopped 32 times during his tenure, and would be recommending to Madeleine Albright that she maintain this excellent practice.

P Hennessy  
18 December 1996  
Washington

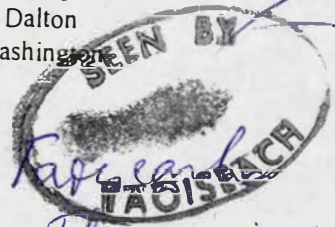


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*by Alan  
13.12.96*

*This is simply  
to note that  
we have the  
records of  
the remarks  
and briefing  
after your  
meeting at the  
White House.  
20/12/96*

17 December, 1996

To: Press Section

From: Washington

For: Dan Mulhall

From: Adrian O'Neill

C/C: James McIntyre (A-I Division)

**Re: Meeting in Oval Office**

1. Attached for your information is a transcript of the comments made today in the Oval Office by President Clinton and the Taoiseach prior to their bilateral meeting. Also attached is an extract from the transcript of today's White House press briefing which, inter alia, covered the aforementioned meeting.
2. The following are the major points arising from the President's comments:
  - In his opening remarks, the President reiterated his call for an IRA cease-fire "in words as well as deeds". In such an event, the President was "convinced" that SF would be invited to participate in the talks; he "believed" that substantive and inclusive talks were the only way to resolve the problem;
  - The British and Irish Governments had made "enormous efforts" but could not succeed unless there was "a cease-fire, an end to violence, and we ultimately have inclusive talks. And I'm convinced that will happen if there is a cease-fire";
  - The President later said that "inclusive talks are the only way to make peace";

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- In response to a question as to whether SF would - in the event of an IRA cease-fire - get immediate and automatic access to the talks, the President replied that he believed they would be "invited to participate in the talks fairly soon thereafter".
  - The President confirmed that NI would remain a foreign policy priority during his second term; and
  - Finally, referring to the current impasse in the Belfast talks, the President said we could not "afford pessimism". He referred to what had been achieved over the last 3 years compared to the previous 25 and that the overall direction was still encouraging.
3. The subsequent White House press briefing reinforced many of the points made by the President. NSC press spokesman Dave Johnson said that the "inclusion and timing of that inclusion" of SF in the talks was a matter for the Governments involved. He added, however, that the re-establishment of the cease-fire would "accomplish the condition precedent" for SF inclusion in the talks.
  4. Referring to the difference of opinion between the Irish and British Governments on the timing of SF inclusion, one questioner asked had the "President no view at all on the timing?". In response, Johnson said that the Administration "found it best to give our advice to the parties and to confer with them, and not to try to give advice publicly on issues such as this".
  5. At this somewhat vulnerable juncture, Mike McCurry deftly changed the subject by telling an amusing story about Secretary Christopher's alcohol and caffeine free "Irish coffees" at Shannon.

END.

PAGES (10)

**THE WHITE HOUSE****Office of the Press Secretary**

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**For Immediate Release****December 17, 1996****REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
IN PHOTO OPPORTUNITY WITH  
PRIME MINISTER JOHN BRUTON OF IRELAND****10:05 A.M. EST**

**THE PRESIDENT:** Let me say I'm delighted to have Prime Minister Bruton here again today, along with the members of his government, and we're going to talk about Northern Ireland today. And I want to reiterate my call for the IRA to institute a cease-fire in words as well as deeds. If they do that, I am convinced that Sinn Fein will be invited to participate in the talks, and we believe that substantive and inclusive peace talks are the only way to resolve this.

Meanwhile, the talks go on. Senator Mitchell is doing a terrific job. And I want to say also a word of appreciation to the Loyalists for holding the cease-fire. I think that's a very good thing. We can't make peace until we end violence, and that's what we're going to talk about today, how we can keep working on that.

**Q** Do they await the British elections, I mean, the question of movement and progress?

**THE PRESIDENT:** Maybe the Prime Minister ought to answer that.

**PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:** I would like to say that I

completely endorse what the President just said. On the contrary, I think an immediate cease-fire would have advantages that a postponed cease-fire wouldn't necessarily carry. I think it would set a policy position in regard to Sinn Fein's participation in talks in place before an election, which would carry through into the next British Parliament in a much more durable way, whereas a postponed cease-fire after the election would go into the term of office of a new government, with perhaps a new opposition, and there would be much less certainty about the response.

So I agree entirely with what the President has said. I think from every point of view, the point of view of their own movement, from the point of view of maximum opportunity, from the point of view of maximum durability of inclusive talks -- a cease-fire now is the right choice for the Republican movement to make. And I'm very, very heartened that the President has said that again in such clear terms.

**THE PRESIDENT:** The British and the Irish governments have made enormous efforts here, but we can't succeed -- or they can't succeed unless there is a cease-fire, an end to the violence, and we ultimately have inclusive talks. And I'm convinced that will happen if there is a cease-fire.

**Q** Mr. President, let me ask you about a domestic issue, sir. Is Charles Trie, a friend of yours, and do you agree with the decision to return the money he attempted to deliver to your legal defense fund?

**THE PRESIDENT:** Yes, and yes.

**Q** Were you aware he was raising money for your legal defense fund?

**THE PRESIDENT:** Not till it came in. But I supported the decision. I was aware of the decision to return the money because -- and I think in all these fund-raising endeavors, the rules should be that all the checks should be checked to make sure that not only the fact but any, even, appearance of impropriety should be removed. And Mr. Cardozo was interested in the appearance of that, so was I, and that's why the decision was made. That's what our campaign did, and as the Democratic Party's people have said, that's what they should have done. But the campaign did it, the Legal Defense Fund did it, and I think it was handled appropriately.

**Q** Is he a close friend of yours?

**THE PRESIDENT:** I've known him a long time. I knew him when he and his family came over and started a little restaurant about a mile from my home 20 years ago. And I saw them start with nothing and build up their family enterprise. They've worked very hard in this country, and they've done well.

Q Now we'll get a real story, when the Irish press comes in.

THE PRESIDENT: This will be like a jesuitical examination. (Laughter.)

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Q When you meet with Mr. Bruton today, do you think -- there has been a lot of discussion over just what Sinn Fein has to do in order to get to the table, but is there anything else that Britain can also do to encourage Sinn Fein to get to the table at this point?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, that's what -- we're going to discuss all of that. I just want to say again that first I appreciate what the Irish and British governments have done to date. Secondly, I still believe the IRA should immediately call a cease-fire, in words as well as deeds. I'm convinced that Sinn Fein will be invited to participate in the talks if that happens. And I think inclusive talks are the only way to make peace.

The talks will go on. Senator Mitchell, I think is doing a fine job, though Loyalists should be commanded for holding the cease-fire. But peace will not come in the presence of violence; it must come with the absence of violence. I'm convinced of that. That's what we're going to talk about today.

Q Mr. President, in the event of an Irish cease-fire, do you believe -- personally believe that Sinn Fein should get immediate and automatic access to the talks process?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I believe that Sinn Fein would be invited to participate in the talks fairly soon thereafter. That's what I believe. But we have to talk about the details, you know. The Prime Minister has to keep me educated here. The texture of the Irish peace struggle is rather complex.

Q Mr. President, with all your foreign policy challenges in the second term, will Ireland still be a priority as it was in the first term?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Mr. President, what was your reaction to this attempt to smear Martha Pope in some of the British newspapers?

THE PRESIDENT: She's a fine woman and a friend of mine. And I understand that the charge has been retracted. And if that's true, that's good. It should have been. We ought to have more false charges retracted in this world, and I'm pleased by that.

**Q** Do you know anything about a possible cease-fire that would inject new life into the peace talks?

**THE PRESIDENT:** I know nothing more than you do probably about that. We're going to talk about it. I know we're working for it, and we'll keep working for it.

**Q** Mr. President, there is a perception that the talks in Northern Ireland are going nowhere at the moment, that an agreement on decommissioning which looked close this week is not now likely in the immediate term. Are you as pessimistic as some people are in Northern Ireland?

**THE PRESIDENT:** No, we can't afford pessimism. I mean, after all, if you just look at the whole sweep of events in the last three years or so and compare that to the previous 25 years, I still think that things are moving right along here. We're in a rough patch, but if we just keep at it I think it will come out all right.

**PRIME MINISTER BRUTON:** Exactly.

**THE PRESS:** Thank you.

**END** 10:15 A.M. EST

Message Sent To: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE WHITE HOUSE****Office of the Press Secretary****For Immediate Release****December 17, 1996****PRESS BRIEFING  
BY MIKE MCCURRY  
AND DAVID JOHNSON, DEPUTY WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY  
AND NSC SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS****The Briefing Room****1:33 P.M. EST**

**MR. MCCURRY:** Let me start with David Johnson. David would like to do a read out on the good bilateral meeting that the President had with Prime Minister John Bruton, the Taoiseach. Why don't you take it away, we'll do any questions you have on that first.

**MR. JOHNSON:** Thank you. I think the Prime Minister gave quite a good readout to most of you who were gathered out front today. The President had a meeting that lasted about a half an hour, including the opportunity he had to talk with all of you, with the Prime Minister of Ireland today. As many of you already know, he was here yesterday in his capacity as President in Office of the European Union. And today he came in to talk for a bit about bilateral topics, the discussion was exclusively about the work that the government of Ireland and the government of the United Kingdom and the parties are doing to try to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister gave the President a briefing on how the situation stood. There was clear agreement between them, between

the Prime Minister and the President, of the need to reestablish immediately the IRA cease-fire for the good of the people of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and also because it would give an opportunity for inclusive all party talks to get underway where the substantive issues could be addressed.

As the President said in his remarks I think for you, we salute the Loyalists for maintaining their cease-fire and contributing to the restarting of the peace process that way. And the President also underscored to the Prime Minister, as I believe he did to you, the continued United States engagement and trying to do what we can to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

Finally, one note of color. Before the meeting concluded the Secretary of State thanked the Prime Minister of Ireland for his hospitality during the Secretary's 32 visits to Ireland during his term of office, and how much he appreciated the warm welcome of the people at Shannon Airport. (Laughter.)

Q He never was asleep during that.

MR. JOHNSON: He always got off the plane.

And he said that he would pass on this marvelous opportunity of Irish hospitality to his successor in office, Secretary-designate Albright.

Any questions?

Q Has the President ever been in touch with the IRA to try to prod them directly? Recently, I mean, in any --

MR. JOHNSON: The President's advisors have maintained a rather constant dialogue with all the parties -- with Sinn Fein and with others. This is an ongoing thing, it takes place rather frequently. And that dialogue has continued.

Q The President's remarks about a cease-fire being a sort of a necessary condition for all-party talks and for the membership of Sinn Fein in the same all-party talks -- before the cease-fire fell apart, there were other conditions that the British and the Loyalists were putting forth. Does the President mean to suggest that those now have dissipated somewhat and that, ipso facto, if the cease-fire resumed, Sinn Fein would be guaranteed a berth in the talks? Aren't there other issues at stake there from the British point of view about forswearing violence for all time and all those kinds of things?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, I think these talks were not underway. And as these talks have gotten underway, many of the issues that were yet to be dealt with have been -- in some places found a channel for discussion. And the inclusion and the timing of



that inclusion is going to be something up to the governments involved. But reestablishing that cease-fire would accomplish the condition precedent that needs to be accomplished in order for these talks to include Sinn Fein.

Q What about disarmament, David?

MR. JOHNSON: That's something that's being dealt with in the context of the talks themselves.

Q So they're no longer necessary --

Q So the President's confident that the other parties -- the British, the Loyalists -- would be willing to let that be dealt with in the context of the talks now that the talks are underway and immediately welcome Sinn Fein in if a cease-fire resumes?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, the timing of their coming in I think is something that the governments would have to address.

Q So it's a necessary first step, the President's not trying to supplant today that that's a guarantee that they'll be admitted?

MR. JOHNSON: We think that that's what needs to be done and that's what needs to be done in order for inclusive, all-party talks to take place. That's what the governments themselves have said. I think there is a question of timing that the governments are discussing, but the cease-fire is what needs to be reestablished.

Q Has the President no view at all on the timing? Because there is some disagreement between the two governments about timing, and the IRA -- Sinn Fein -- would prefer the Irish government view that they would get in immediately. I think they want immediately once they fulfill the old conditions. Whereas the British government are now saying that it would be up to British Intelligence to decide when they can say the cease-fire is a genuine one.

MR. JOHNSON: I think on this question, as on many others here, we've found it best to give our advice to the parties and to confer with them, and not to try to give advice publicly on issues such as this.

MR. MCCURRY: Now, can I tell my Christopher story? All right. We did stop many times at Shannon Airport on the way back to the United States. And it used to be the custom of many members of the traveling party to order Irish coffee, a drink that the airport is well-known for there. And Secretary Christopher, in a story that was once said to be apocryphal and later established to be true, used to order an Irish coffee and ask that they make it with decaf and

hold the whiskey, please. (Laughter.) Defeating the purpose. But, of course, Secretary Christopher used to always work on the plane on the way home, too, so not a bad idea.

Other issues? Yes, Todd.

Q Mike, is the report, as I assume it is, of our colleague, Ms. Braver, accurate, that Charlie Trie was a guest at dinner at the White House Friday night; and, if so, can you describe the nature of that dinner and the size approximately?

MR. MCCURRY: My understanding is that it was true. I don't have any reason to dispute the account. There were approximately 250 people present. The President's having a number of holiday dinners this time of year. The guest list for that evening's affair was put together by the Democratic National Committee. My understanding is that Mr. Trie was there shortly and may not have stayed for dinner.

Q Do you happen to know how he might have come to be invited at the time when the legal expense trust and, presumably, the President's Office and the White House Counsel's Office were well aware of this problem with the disputed funds? Was it just that he wasn't somehow flagged on a DNC list and came through --

MR. MCCURRY: I don't know that anything about the briefing that the Legal Expense Trust, that they gave yesterday would have disqualified him from being on an invitation list prepared by the Democratic National Committee.

Q You meant to tell me that Charlie Trie, who has been the subject of all these questions and brought such a cloud over the DNC's fundraising efforts as well as the White House, there would be no reason to exclude him from an invitation list to a social event at the White House?

MR. MCCURRY: I didn't say that. I said that there was not anything there that would have prevented him from being on that invitation list. And, again, the invitation list was put together by the Democratic National Committee. That's my understanding.

Q I mean, it's judgments that people asked for those lists.

Q So just in terms of us trying to figure out what happened -- yesterday, as you know, at the briefing, we were told that the First Lady and Harold Ickes were apprised of what seems a highly irregular attempt to deliver money to the legal defense fund and what we haven't been able to -- at least I haven't been able to determine is what they then did and what Harold, particularly, who was so involved with the DNC and campaign fundraising, did with that information once he got it. Didn't that send some flares up for him and did he alert people to say, hey, we may have a problem with someone who is known to have given money to the party?