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Reference Code: 2021/98/5

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SECRET

Telephone Conversation
between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister
on Sunday, 25 February 1996

The conversation proper begins after some unrecorded opening pleasantries

T Keep your head down and keep your eye on the big picture.

PM That's exactly right.

T Yeah.

PM I think that's exactly right. But when you see people whom you know for a long time and know well - as I know Waldergrave and Lyell well and have done for the twenty odd years I've worked with them and I know that one is incapable of dishonesty and the other is a substantive lawyer who could only do what he thought was legally right - to hear them abused and attacked in the way they are now by people who ought to be defending them is pretty depressing frankly.

T Yeah, I'm not so sure that it touches the public. I don't know obviously what the British public really thinks but I have a feeling that a lot of that passes over the heads of the public. The media may make a big fuss of it but when that fuss is cleared away, I'm not so sure that the public ...

PM Well, take the case of our old friend [Vernon?] the other day. The only thing that was wrong with him - I mean that he wasn't selected for another seat - was because the local constituency thought he was no good and didn't want him. But on that basis, he erects all sorts of other things in order to suppress his own embarrassment. You're familiar with all of this?

T Yes, we've been in that situation ourselves in the '80's. I know what it's like - taking people overboard one by one like that. But I think you just have to draw a line in the sand and say where you are standing and that's it.

PM That's right. But if you can't carry votes in the House of Commons, the sand mounds all have the same accord.

T I don't know. I think your own honesty is so patently clear that I think that you think strongly you can rely on your own resources at the end of the day.

PM Well, I will try. Anyway, I don't mean to burden you.

T No, no. I mean I think about it a lot. I don't always talk to you about it when I'm talking to you but I think you should have courage.

PM Well, I've certainly seen it. It's just fairly depressing. I'm sorry, John. It's more...

T No problem. To more immediate matters - well not more immediate matters - but more relevant.

PM Where would you like to start?

T Paddy has given me a report on the conversation he had with John.

PM Yes. He ran through the draft Framework Document?

T Yes.

PM The first thing I should say about that is that that's still in draft stage. Presumably Paddy is listening to this conversation?

T Yes, he is.

PM But nobody else?

T Nobody else.

PM Well, I'll say one or two things to you that I will not want put in the note. So if you can not put what I am about to say in the note Paddy, I would be grateful.

T Okay.

PM I've got a meeting of the Northern Ireland Committee tomorrow morning. That's about half the Cabinet - the half of the Cabinet that one way or

another have a relevance to Northern Ireland. I cannot honestly know how that Committee meeting is going to go. For much of this process, Paddy and I have carried it - Paddy Mayhew and I - have carried it forward without - what I think Ted would have called - 'full-hearted support'.

T Yes.

PM I just do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. I must enter that caveat before we get any further. I hope I am going to get my own way tomorrow but I better not mislead you by saying that I am certain of it.

T Yes.

PM So, if I could just say that privately. We can now go back on the record, Paddy.

T Okay.

PM Shall we start on the Framework Document?

T Yes, on the Communiqué?

PM Well whichever.

T I don't mind. Yes, go ahead. You choose whichever you think.

PM Shall we start on the Communiqué?

T Yes.

PM Starting on it would show up the problems on the Framework Document.

T Yes.

PM Okay.

T Fine.

PM Have you got the draft?

T I have, yes. I have indeed.

PM Let me just detach this from other papers that are still on my lap. Right. Got it. Yes John. Let's just run through it.

T Okay. I'll tell you where my...

PM I'm not interested in tidy drafts just at the moment. Basically, they can be sorted out later.

T Yes, okay. Well really we have one very big point here and it is this. In relation to the election - it's in Paragraph 12 anyway but it's the second paragraph of 12 [where] it says: 'The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister express confidence that the Stormont consultations will secure agreement on a direct and straightforward route, through a broadly acceptable elective process, to all party negotiations. On this basis, they will accept the 14th of June as the starting date for all party negotiations'. Now basically, we believe that taken in conjunction with the paper that you have given us the outline of today, that that amounts to something that is so conditional - in words like 'express confidence' that we 'will secure agreement' which, you know, are the usual political problems that are brought forward...

PM I quite understand your point.

T ... that that will simply not have the effect we want which is to get the IRA to stop their killing. I seriously believe that. Alternatively, if we don't put up something firm enough for reasonable opinion that we can, with the full public support, do whatever is necessary to extinguish the IRA... Now, I have to substantiate that! If I am to take a hard line with the IRA - if their campaign continues and we're thinking hard line orally but if we are to take a harder line in any other way - we have got to have public opinion conditioned and believing that a reasonable offer was on the table - that we're not going, Sinn Féin and all - that we're not going to be stalled anymore from getting into talks which has been a real moment of truth for them. And I believe that taking Paragraph 12 of the Communiqué which I have just read to you; combined with the references in the other paper to establishing a Forum which could be seen as a sort of a way of almost preventing the negotiations working because you would have somebody looking and shouting over the shoulders of the negotiators all the time; taking also the fact that the negotiating teams would have to accept Paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration

and the Mitchell Principles and the arguments that would go on about whether the Sinn Féin negotiating team have accepted Paragraph 10 and the Mitchell principles to the satisfaction of everybody else or not; plus the doubts that are expressed as, I say, in Paragraph 12 but [also] whether we will actually ever get to the negotiating table, then as such I think that the two taken together would just not achieve the objective that we are setting out to achieve. I think we have to be specific about the date. And I think that will represent a huge challenge to the IRA and Sinn Féin or rather to Sinn Féin to put it up to the IRA. But the date, if conditional, won't have that affect.

PM Well, let me recap on a few points. As you know, I would like to have a published and agreed paper with effect after having had consultations with the parties. It is perfectly apparent I cannot publish an agreed paper because there is no agreement. If I unilaterally decide one way or another on the basis of our discussions, one or other of the parties is going to refuse to take part in the election. I think that is silly if they do that but that is, in practice, what the present position is. And it isn't just the intransigence of the Leaders.

T Just one second, John. My daughter has come into the room. Hold on. Hello, sorry about that.

PM You're lucky. My daughter would come in and shout at me. Basically, it's patently apparent that I haven't got an agreement between them and I can't get one. If I decide to just publish one or the other one way or another - either the List system or 18 by 5 whichever option - one or other of the parties is going to decline, skippedly in my view, to take part. Now I don't think their opposition to taking part can withstand public scrutiny once this is published. I think they will look too silly. But in trying in the midst of 'we're being misled by the British Government or whatever' - if I just decide one way or another - they will all scream bad faith - either John Hume will or David Trimble will. And I judge that one or other of them will walk away from these elections. That is the problem I face. The other problem about this is that if you take a look dispassionately at their personal preference on the two options you can make a case for both. The case for 18 by 5 is that it will get a really good trawl of Alliance people there which is good news. It might get the Loyalists there - one but not certain - but it might which would also be very helpful. And it would be seven weeks quicker. If we went on the List system, it would take us an extra seven weeks.

T Where did that seven weeks come from?

PM Well because we have no experience of running that system. We don't know how to run it. We may need more legislation according to the Law Office. There is some different legislation involved whereas an 18 times 5 is broadly down on existing legislation and we know what the practicalities of it are. I am having a further paper drawn up on that to find out exactly why and I'll let you have details of that but that is the advice I have got. And it will take an extra seven weeks if we went on the List system. On the other hand, if we went on a List system, we could perhaps have a smaller electorate, we would have less people hanging around in the Forum and we would have for the first time in recorded history an unique alliance between John Hume and Ian Paisley. So I think once you expose the electoral difficulty, I don't think public opinion will let it hold up the process.

T Yes.

PM But with a straight List system, I fear that it will.

T I don't think that. Well, put it this way...

PM If I ask the Northern Ireland Committee to decide tomorrow, they would go for the single transferable vote system. I don't think that they would go for the other system because they don't like it, they are not familiar with it, they want the Alliance on board and em... that's what they do [think]. That's very difficult for John Hume if that happens.

T John Hume has been...

PM I don't understand why he is so [derogatory] about it but I accept that he is. And that's a real fact we have to face.

T Yes. I think - to be very simple about it - I couldn't recommend this package to anybody for two reasons but the first reason is far more important than the second. The first reason is that it doesn't contain a specific date for all party talks and the second, which is not moveable, is that it contains a Forum which will undermine the talks if they start or run the risk of undermining the talks if they start. I think the arguments about the type of electoral system are sort of 'third order' problems. The

first order problem is a date. The second order problem is whether or not we have a Forum. And the third order problem is, as I say, these arguments about an electoral system. Now I think that if we could fix on one and two, we might just to have accept or make a decision on three (on the third one) or, alternatively, construct some sort of a hybrid of the two systems which is not unlike what the Germans do where they elect some people off a List and they elect some people on a constituency basis. You could have that but not I am not volunteering that. But, I mean, if we're getting into electoral systems, there is an infinite variety of electoral systems.

PM I have spent hours going through this with colleagues and with officials to look at what the options are. I think when you do it, they are not very attractive - the other options I mean. I thought also of having a basis of the two. I thought also we could do that - an election of 36 or 54 by STV and the balance by whatever. But I think I would be laughed out of the House of Commons, even I could get it by the Northern Ireland Committee.

T The fact of the matter is... Well look, we have all accepted it. You have accepted it in your speech in the House of Commons that the electoral approach must have widespread agreement.

PM Sure.

T Now you have widespread agreement for a List based system insofar as you have the DUP, the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

PM Well, I also have widespread agreement with STV - with the Alliance Party who were at least as impressed as the Ulster Unionists.

T But you have majority support for a List system. If you tot it up, by any standard the SDLP, the DUP and Sinn Féin, you have a majority for the List system.

PM Even if that were carriable John, and I don't know whether it might be, it might be after more consultation and exposure to public opinion. But even if that were carriable, I certainly couldn't set a date remotely like the 14th of June on the basis of the advice I've got. We would be talking about the 14th of August or the 7th of August.

T I believe that the reaction of broad Nationalist opinion in Northern Ireland to that argument about the seven weeks delay would be one of disbelief. Now, I don't believe and I don't disbelieve that you have received the legal advice that you have received but...

PM It isn't legal advice. It's official advice.

T Yes. But I have no doubt that if one wanted to doubt this - like if life or death depended on it - we could do it a lot quicker. I think that eventually the ideal approach would be for the Governments to settle - for you to settle on an electoral system having consulted with myself, that we would announce what the electoral system is going to be, announce a specific date for all party talks that is not moveable and, you know, just get on it. Because I think...

PM We have negotiated this for hour after hour after hour after hour with people over the last two weeks and we haven't reached anything that I could recommend safely to colleagues. I certainly haven't reached anything that colleagues would accept.

T You won't like... You see, I won't recommend what you're putting forward now. There are no circumstances in which I can or will do it because it won't achieve the objective which I regard as important - which is to actually get everybody talking to one another with a reasonable chance that the IRA will stop their bombing. And if they are not going to stop with public opinion strongly against them, I think that the package that you have put forward to me is so centred around with conditions ... And remember that there is a lot of distrust, which I don't share, in Nationalist opinion of the British Government's intentions. But that will just be exploited to the full to hold up what you're putting forward.

PM There is just as much distrust in the Unionist mind about the intentions of the Government and I mean my Government - not yours.

T I know.

PM The fact of the matter is already what I am proposing. I am sticking my neck out further than any of my colleagues will. And I mean if we really aren't able to proceed on the basis of a British paper, which you don't

wholly agree with (which gives us another fortnight for public opinion to move on it), I will try. But I don't think I can move any further, John. I don't think I will have any agreement to move any further no matter much I may want to. But I don't think I can.

T I think that if the two Governments can agree, we can move. You can move and I can move quite a distance. But the fact of the matter is that if everything is put forward conditionally, you provide an opportunity for opponents to pick away at what you are trying to do.

PM I do understand that very well but, at the moment, the atmosphere in the House of Commons is that nothing is going to work and it is about time we toughened up the security measures, started sorting out the IRA, and stop playing patsy and talking to people who are setting off bombs in London. That is the atmosphere. If I go and make a statement of the sort that would follow from the discussions we are having, I would not have an easy time on Wednesday as it is. If I move even further in a way - away from the House of Commons instincts - I simply do not think it would be acceptable. I don't say that with any pleasure but I believe it to be the case and I think I will find that out tomorrow morning.

T Well, the people who will bury the IRA are Irish nationalist opinion. They're saying that this is the best chance now you are ever going to get - to get Irish nationalist opinion to either give us the talks to solve the problem or alternatively to turn on the IRA and put them out of business.

PM But looking ahead. You say a firm date without any determination of what is going to be the behaviour before the firm date - when you come to the Mitchell principles or at least to the first item.

T That would expose the IRA for what they are then if they can't accept that. I think you have got to get them into the talks and then you can...

PM That's what I'm trying to do here.

T Then they will be manifestly seen for what they are in those circumstances. They have been going around the country looking for Peace Talks Now, Peace Talks Now. When they are got into the talks and you stuck your neck out and the Irish Government have gone along and pressured the SDLP to agree to a system of elections to get there and

if having got the talks, they then don't play ball on the Mitchell principles, I mean they are at that stage completely exposed as a sham.

PM Well, that's why I am trying to put that into the first item on the agenda.

T Well, not as a condition to starting the negotiations though, I hope. I mean, I took it that the Mitchell...

PM No one is going to sit down until it is agreed that that's the first item on the agenda.

T I accept that. No, we're agreed on that. I may have misinterpreted what was said to Paddy Teahon by John Holmes. I thought that the Mitchell principles and Downing Street Declaration were going to actually be a thing that had to be signed up to before they even sat down.

PM Well, I think that's still an open question either way. I would like it to be the first item on the agenda.

T Well, if it's the first item on the agenda, there is no problem.

PM I don't know whether that is going to attract people into and through the elections. I mean, I'm sure you can imagine what the feeling is like over this side of the water at the moment - that we wait for the next bomb.

T I think the best chance of there not being another bomb is if we can set a specific date - in other words, if you can redraft your paragraph 12 to be in the same terms and be the same length as our paragraph 12. We sent you over paragraph 10 for the Communiqué which said that the Prime Minister and I that 'early agreement of such a scheme followed by rapid progress of the necessary legislation would assist towards the commencement of all party negotiations on the 15th of May. Both Governments are agreed that all party negotiations would commence not later than one week after the conclusion of any agreed elective process and in any event no later than the 15th of May 1996'. A specific date like that. If we can get that...

PM On that basis? If there isn't an agreement on the electoral situation...

T We/you decide what the electoral system is going to be at that stage.

PM What happens if we/I decide, as my Cabinet would certainly wish to, on 18 times 5?

T I think that...

PM And they will do that if the advice on the seven weeks is confirmed and on the basis that that is a system they are familiar with.

T Well, I think the only chance you have of selling that and I think it...

PM I could be just doing that to lock John Hume into that position - he being the person they know - if we decide on the 15th of May. Yet again, I am finding myself in the position that if I try and face down the position of the people at the moment who don't agree with me, I get clobbered by the people who do agree with me and by trying to act in good faith, I'm accused of acting in bad faith.

T I think that the ultimate... The answer to your question is that I don't know what would happen. But I think that I do know what happens if we don't set a fixed date and the IRA campaign continues.

PM It can't be a fixed date come what may, John.

T It can because at the end of the day...

PM It can't be a fixed date unless you're planning that we go ahead without Sinn Féin in the talks at the outset - at the start.

T Of course we would have to go ahead without Sinn Féin.

PM And do you think the SDLP will do that?

T Well, if the bombs are still going off, we have no choice but to go ahead without Sinn Féin.

PM And the SDLP?

T Well, I don't think the SDLP would have any grounds of staying out in those circumstances.

PM Well, I am less sure of that. I am less sure of that. I think that they would find ground for staying out.

T I don't think so. I mean, if I can get an agreement with you, I am willing to put it to the Dáil and I am suggesting that you should put it to the House of Commons. I think that it would be very difficult to see the SDLP staying out of such a situation.

PM You see...

T I think the main thing you have got to get rid of... As I said, I identified my objectives in descending order of importance. The first one of manifest overriding importance is that the date must be certain for talks to start. The second is that there shouldn't be a Forum, there should just be negotiators selected - electoral college from which negotiators can be selected. And thirdly, then there is the electoral system. It is important but if the other two are in place, I think we can make a decision. At the end of the day, you can make the decision on an electoral system having pragmatically listened to everybody in whatever scheme of discussions one has. If you are going to go on that basis, if you can't decide.... I mean, the ideal system would be, from our point of view, if we could agree on everything including the electoral system between now and Wednesday. I go into the Dáil on Wednesday and say: 'That is the deal. I am asking the Dáil's approval for it'. You go into the House of Commons and you get, as I expect you would, an overwhelming majority of the House of Commons in voting for this package. And I hope to get the same. I think it would be very difficult for people to stay out of any package where the two Governments had acted so decisively. I think that that would also do no harm to your position in the House of Commons either that you had been able to put something together that commanded that sort of widespread support. But I think you have got to be willing to accept that you are going to have to walk on some if not some but not all of David Trimble's toes in the process.

PM Well, I am treading on a lot of toes and the price is very high, John.

T Well, you've got Paisley. Haven't you?

PM I can't rely on that.

- T** Well, I don't think so. I don't understand John Hume - now we're talking politics - I don't understand John Hume's attitude because I think that Irish parliamentarians down the years and in the last century have always been willing to vote wherever the country's best interests were served. So I have conveyed my views about that matter indirectly to the SDLP.
- PM** It's not just a question of mandates.
- T** It's a question of next week and the week after and the week after again. I think that you have alternatives.
- PM** What you are suggesting is on what we might try and agree by Wednesday. It's almost impossible to agree that by Wednesday.
- T** Why?
- PM** A date certain. I would love a date certain but a date certain as far as the electoral system is concerned. Then suppose I chose an electoral system, if I chose an electoral system by Wednesday, it couldn't be the one John Hume wants. I have had nobody on my side giving it to John. Nobody. And if I pick the one John wants, we will then have, as John Hume said... *interruptions...* at the SDLP ... *interruptions*. Secondly,... *interruptions* ... Is that your phone ringing or mine?
- T** Yours, I think.
- PM** John is here with the Press Association...*laughter*. Secondly, the idea of there being no Forum at all. No powers I agree; no administration I agree; a fixed life I agree. But if there is nothing there at all, I am ignoring all of it - all of them.
- T** Well, could they not agree- just talking here or speculating here rather than [anything else] - could they not agree that they would need to elect their negotiators (an electoral college) and the negotiations would start but they [the college] wouldn't have any further meetings, say, for six months and then they would come together after that maybe?
- PM** They would walk away John. I've spent hours and hours and hours and hours trying to get as far as I've got, and everybody is telling me what they won't accept rather than what they will. That is true of all the parties except the Alliance. The Alliance are much more

accommodating. If I could sit down with John Alderdice - you, I and John Alderdice - could do a deal on the thing in a day. Let everybody else, pressed from behind by their own supporters... Now I happen to know - it would neither be fair nor reasonable for me to tell you how- I happen to know some of the background pressures that are on the leaders of the two Unionist parties from behind them. They don't know that I know them. They are not just being bloody minded. I don't know what the background pressures are on John Hume. I know there are quite a considerable number of disputes between John and his colleagues, not only particularly over the electoral system - I think Seamus certainly agrees with him on that - but on other issues. Now we can try and redraft paragraph 12 but we can't have it done on Wednesday for a waft of reasons. I just have to say to you they would not be able to proceed, they just wouldn't. That is why I'm trying to publish something that would enable public opinion to get to work on them. Believe you me, if I thought I could publish something that would go ahead, I would do so. I mean, we have other problems too, don't we - on the Building Blocks paper? If you look through that

T Well, I haven't got it. I have only a note of what John says. I mean, the problem that we have there is: you have these sub-committees and the thing just going away into diverse discussion rather than focused negotiation. I believe that that paper really shouldn't be published until we have an agreement. I think that the publication of that paper could actually be quite inflammatory in its present form because it would be seen as basically one sided - of the Unionists just being given their way. And unfortunately we're dealing with a situation where people are looking at this in a zero sum game approach. And they would see the publication of a paper, along the lines as John outlined to Paddy, as just giving a signal that Trimble has won his case. And I think that, without being dramatic about it, the effects would be felt immediately in your capital city and unfortunately it's a disastrous situation to have to be making that reference, but unfortunately it's the case.

PM If I express that in my Cabinet, and I don't propose to, but if I express that to my Cabinet, even as my view, their response

T They would go the other way?

PM would be: 'Well, we are not going to negotiate under that sort of duress from the IRA...

- T** I know.
- PM** ... That's the end of the matter. We'll go back to where we were before'. They had no faith at all after the breakdown of the ceasefire...
- T** I think the best way to stand up to the IRA
- PM** ... the 'I told you so' [people] who were saying 'I told you so' right from the beginning.
- T** But look, you can't really afford... If you are to beat the IRA, - you can't afford - we can't afford to see the two Governments going in different directions.
- PM** I don't want the Governments to.
- T** And so, I think the Committee that you are meeting tomorrow must understand that it is essential that we get the Governments on the same lines and the two Parliaments adopting similar proposals. And the key to this is a specific date followed by the other points, after which negotiators be appointed.
- PM** Let me come to the basis of participation in the negotiations which are also very important. Now, negotiations will be conducted by negotiators drawn from the two Governments - sorry, drawn from the political parties in Northern Ireland- and clearly as appropriate to Strand 1 by us; Strand 2 by an Independent; and Strand 3 by British or Irish Government alternatively. The negotiations conducted - the basis of conducting them? Now the negotiations would be conducted, as John said to Paddy, on the basis that the parties entering them accept paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration. There shouldn't be any difficulty with that.
- T** Well, I'm sure about that now. Sinn Féin have never accepted that.
- PM** Have they not?
- T** I don't think so. I think that they would see this as that the Mitchell principles are a different issue. I mean, they have the fantasy of being a 'miracle holiarette' and I think the Mitchell principles are a sounder
- PM** They haven't accepted the Mitchell principles either.

- T** I know. But I think you'd have less difficulty making them accept the Mitchell principles than you would have making them accept anything else. I think that would put them . . . Rather than overload your wagon by putting in Downing Street Declaration and the Mitchell principles, you'd be better off just to go for the Mitchell principles. And if you're exacting enough
- PM** [Sinn Féin to] *inaudible* to go for the Mitchell principles and give views on the Downing Street Declaration in parallel referenda, if that is possible?
- T** It is, but I
- PM** If you set down the principles of peace and democracy set out in the Mitchell Report, two things are going to follow. First, there is no agreement to what that means. Does that mean paragraph 30 or paragraph 30 and 34? That's a huge semantic argument to get into. The second thing is: If in the course of the negotiations - on the basis of what we have tentatively drafted - representatives of any party who demonstrably failed to adhere to those principles would be denied participation. Now what that means in practice is that if Sinn Féin goes for the elections and says 'Yes, we agree to the principles', - they sit down and start talking - is that at the first punishment beatings they are excluded.
- T** Yes.
- PM** You're happy with that?
- T** I think so.
- PM** Well, we may be able to get our way through that then.
- T** I think we have to be quite severe with them. I think it is better to fly on the Mitchell banner than any other banner.
- PM** Yes. But that might depend on whether we have the referenda as well. I know that the Mitchell banner is better from the Nationalist point of view because it is difficult to argue with George Mitchell. The Downing Street Declaration has wicked British hands on it. So therefore it is much more suspect. I quite see that from the point of view of Sinn Féin.

T Yes.

PM I don't think there is any problem with the Downing Street Declaration from John Hume's point of view. But if you have a [caveat] from either Government's point of view.... So, we're basically leaving it out to let Sinn Féin in. Now that's a very difficult point.

T Well, you're the only one who knows that argument which is in your draft. I mean, the public are not conscious of that really and your Sub-Committee hasn't seen it yet either, you know. I think the Mitchell principles are a better thing to lean on or the Mitchell Report is a better thing to lean on and I think

PM Actually my colleagues - and by that I don't just mean my Cabinet colleagues, I mean the House of Commons - will be stacking up ways in which Sinn Féin have to show good faith. And there will not be, I tell John, a single Tory client newspaper [editor], insofar as they exist these days, who will remotely support me on the direction in which we are talking. I don't know that there'd be even one. The editors are very strongly the other way round and will take it. It will be another example of me giving way, yet again, to violence - proof that the IRA bombs work.

T If you look at the *Economist*, for example, I would have thought they were Conservatively inclined anyway.

PM Good God, I don't think so. Think of the huntsman on the first day of the hunt.

T *Laughs*

PM On the line, do you have a political correspondent here? *Laugh*

T I don't obviously.

PM No. *Laughs*. I won't continue just in case somebody does bug this call. Put it this way, he's not a 'paid up' Major Conservative.

T I see. Basically, I think we should talk again as soon as possible. Because I think that you and I can perhaps do business if we can narrow the thing down. But I am in the difficulty that I only have a

Communiqué. I don't have the Building Blocks paper for the reasons that you're saying to me. So I'm at a considerable disadvantage

PM I very neurotic about the Building Blocks paper.

T I'm not questioning your reasons for that either but

PM I'm very happy for that John [but you go] more slowly than Paddy . . .

T What about faxing it to me?

PM Sorry?

T What about faxing it to my home?

PM Your home address?

T To my home fax. I have a fax here at home. I'm out in the country now. I'm not in Government Buildings.

PM On the basis of eat before reading?

T Okay. I'll put it in the fire.

PM The only reason I hesitate is that, John - it is not that I don't trust you in any way because I trust you implicitly - I will tell you why: If I am asked by my colleagues if I have given this to you, or if I'm asked by any of the other political parties whether I have done a deal with you over this beforehand, and I can't say no, then I

T Yes, I know, I understand that. I understand that. Maybe it's better to go to

PM ... am in much difficulty ... *inaudible*

T Okay, Okay. We'll do it that way then. I just see that the time is short. I think if we all go off to Bangkok, Korea and wherever else you're going in the Far East on

PM I'm still hoping for a meeting on Wednesday.

T Pardon?

PM I'm still hopeful for a meeting on Wednesday. You're contemplating a Statement in the Dáil after we've had our meeting. Aren't you?

T For the very practical reason that if there's anything in this that isn't liked by the SDLP and Sinn Féin, I'd prefer to have the Dáil backing it. But I think it would better also from the point of view of the other side of the affair that Labour and Liberal Democrats would have backed it in the House of Commons.

PM When I make a Statement on Wednesday evening, it's not the way we normally conduct this, but given that I'm doing an international meeting where our markets will be scooped up by the French and the Germans if I'm not there, I could make a Statement on Wednesday evening. I don't know if you could do that in the Dáil?

T Oh, I could, yes. But I think that we are. . . .

PM ... think it a little late for Bangkok?

T Yes. But we are very far apart at the moment on the fundamentals. The fundamental thing for me in first order of importance is having the date specific with no conditions attached.

PM When you say 'no conditions', I mean implicitly the condition that there be no bombs.

T If there are bombs, Sinn Féin just don't take part. I mean, there has to be a cessation of violence.

PM If Sinn Féin aren't taking part, we can sit down next week.

T Well that's exactly it. That's very true. Yes.

PM And the election if Sinn Féin aren't taking part?

T Well, if Sinn Féin don't

PM ...there's no need for an election to have Hume sit down with Paisley. We can do that tomorrow.

T Yes. No, I agree with that.

PM Excluding Sinn Féin? I mean, I'm going through this whole bloody charade to get Sinn Féin sitting down at the table.

T I think there's actually a misunderstanding here between us. I'll tell you my misunderstanding in terms not of a disagreement. I believe a certain date will get the IRA to stop. I believe that if the IRA don't stop, having been offered a certain date, they would have no standing with the Nationalist community and will be undermined. I believe, therefore, we set a certain date, we determine ourselves and we will go ahead regardless on that date whether the IRA have stopped. If they have stopped, we will take them in. If they haven't stopped, we won't take them in.

PM Well, if that is the case, we can certainly announce a date for elections. And if can't agree on what the electoral system is and we don't have an election and Sinn Féin can't get there, we go ahead without Sinn Féin. I mean, we can certainly publish a paper on Thursday which says we are going to consult for the next fortnight or whatever on a date for the electoral system. If we can't reach an agreement, the British Government will propose one and if people can't take part, they can't take part. If we can't have elections, we go ahead without Sinn Féin. I mean, on that basis, I don't see any difficulty.

T Well, you must have a date certain for talks. And I have to say to you must not have a Forum. It must be negotiated at your end.

PM Well, there'll be no Unionists then, John.

T I don't believe that. I think that they want to negotiate a secure future for themselves. Their electorate want that.

PM I want that description - a 'Forum'. That is the mirror of the Peace Forum you have in Dublin which is what we're getting. What on earth could anyone object to in that?

T Well...

PM You're concerned that they're going to interfere with the negotiations? I'm proposing to make sure they can't interfere in the negotiations. But

for me to say to this side of the argument over in Britain, and the Unionists in Northern Ireland, that we're not going to have in the North the equivalent of the Peace Forum that you have in the South which, as you know, Paisley pressed for at the same time, the question will be: Why not?

T Why do you need an election for a Forum anyway? You could have a Forum tomorrow morning.

PM I know we could have a Forum tomorrow morning without an election. I'm only going through an election because I feel better to have Sinn Féin on it.

T The problem is that an . . . Yes. Could I ask you another question?

PM If I don't need Sinn Féin, I don't need an election and we don't need a Forum. That's fine. I mean, I'm getting sliced into pieces all over the place to try and get Adams and the McGuinness into the discussions. It is a touch aggravating to have myself beset on all sides on behalf of Adams and McGuinness. But that's actually what I'm doing.

T Yes. Could I ask you a question in regard to the Building Blocks paper?

PM Sure. Of course.

T Your position is that you are going to put this to your Cabinet Sub-Committee tomorrow.

PM That's correct.

T And is it your position that you're not going to take, really, any input from us after that on that paper because that's, in your view, an internal matter? If that's the case, we're really in trouble, you know.

PM If you mean: Am I going to discuss it privately with you and try and take your points on board as far as I can, the answer is Yes. If you mean: Am I going to publish this and then change it formally as a result of representations from the Irish Government, then that is more difficult.

T But if you go to have your Cabinet tomorrow with the particular paper, we then get it after that - in the afternoon?

PM Yes, that's right. Before Wednesday.

T And we have a lot of proposals/suggestions to make to radically alter that. And is that going to cause a problem for you if we persuade you that you should accept some of these?

PM It would depend on what the changes were, really. I mean on some of them it would probably not cause any difficulty and on others it might.

T Yes.

PM But I mean this is supposed to be, eh, it's supposed to be a British paper when we publish it - one on which I would consult.

T But the truth of the matter is that this is a British paper which is a leader for the three stranded negotiations and we have an intimate involvement in the three strands. And if the mechanism that you're selecting isn't, in our judgement, going to deliver the sort of negotiations that we believe is necessary... Our view is pretty crucial!

PM Yes, I'm not trying to bypass your view. Neither am I trying to impose something unpleasant upon you for my own domestic reasons.

T But in practice, if you go to your Cabinet tomorrow, half your Cabinet tomorrow, and get something approved and you're saying to me that you can only make comparatively minor changes in light of our representations about a document which we haven't see...

PM No no, I 'm not saying that.

T ... we're really in a bad situation

PM If they are large changes that are really material, I would have to go back to my colleagues. At the moment John - and I don't want Paddy to minute this next point - at the moment I'm not sure I'm going to get agreement from my colleagues to do absolutely anything at all with the way they feel.

T Yes?

PM And that is the flavour. Well, it isn't the flavour particularly in the Unionist parties but it is the flavour on the part of the House of Commons. And at the moment I haven't had a chance to meet my colleagues, or we haven't met in the Committee since the three bombs, and I was way ahead of where they were before. I don't know how far further I may be way ahead now. I just at this moment don't know. But of course I'll come back to you afterwards and I'm not going to say that there can be no changes. That's not the way we've worked in the past. It's not the way I wish to work in the future.

T I just feel that we're. . . I would ask you to reflect very carefully on the points I'm making, have been making, and perhaps we could talk again even before you talk to your Committee and after Paddy has been briefed more fully on the paper. But I would suggest to you that there must be. . . We have no problem with decommissioning type issues being at the top of the agenda. We don't. We, however, don't want any suggestion that people can't get into the negotiations other than on a date that is certain. What happens after that is another matter.

PM Let me put a point to you then. Suppose I were able to agree that we publish the paper on Wednesday with the two electoral options for negotiation for another fortnight, and then said at the end of that fortnight - if there is no agreement - I will intend to announce the way I would think we should proceed. And we would then proceed on that basis whatever it may be for a date on a fixed basis and negotiations beginning on a further fixed date. Now it is possible that when I say that we're going to do A or B that somebody will drop off their perch. But from the point of view that there be a fixed date, the option for a fixed date is certainly going to be there unless somebody opts out. What I'm doing is having another fortnight to try and reach a consensus - maybe even a mixture schemes rather than just predetermining something on Wednesday which will be very provocative to both sides.

T When you say 'on a fixed date', you will not actually be giving that fixed date?

PM I would give the fixed date. Yes. Of course I would.

T I see.

PM Of course I would give the fixed date.

T I'd like to reflect on that. It is possible that we could reach an agreement around something in that zone.

PM I'm trying to find a way through. That may be it. I don't know.

T Yes.

PM I don't know. That still leaves the other two points. The way in which the Forum would operate, where there are varying levels of ambition, but the thought of it doing nothing would not run. It would sort of operating just like the Dutch[Dublin?] Peace Forum. I think that is alright.

T Yeah?

PM And the other thing is: We will need to find out, with more clarity, why a List system takes longer. I don't know the answer. I was asking John if he knew the answer 20 minutes before we spoke and he's putting files in hand. But I don't have the backing papers to justify it. I may have later on today.

T Yes.

PM But at the moment I honestly can't give you a very satisfactory answer to that - at the moment.

T Yes. When would you be . .? You wouldn't be publishing the paper until Wednesday? . . .

PM No, certainly not. And it doesn't have to be published on Wednesday. I mean it would be cleaner to publish it on Wednesday but [it's] not essential. We could say we are going to publish a paper, not quite ready, during another day or so. That's much less satisfactory because it looks less clearly as though we've got an agreement on how to proceed but it is certainly do-able. I mean Wednesday is a problem because we're both going away for a period of days. I'm away for six days and you're probably away until the beginning of the following week.

T Yes, that's right. In the two weeks that would be there for discussions, you're essentially thinking that public opinions will work on

PM that was my hope.

T You've presumably assumed on the SDLP to accept an 18 by 5 approach . . . ?

PM Or the other way round.

T Or the other way round?

PM Or the other way round, yes. I mean I can't say I'm wildly hopeful

T But you don't actually think that the parties will move their positions voluntarily; it will because of pressure of opinion?

PM Well, I just think that public opinion sees the option of moving to a fixed date... To have a bunch of politicians squabbling about which way you elect people in order to determine how you get into negotiations will seem very much a second or third order problem. I simply don't understand why they both like referring to it as a second [problem for] myself.

T I have to tell you that John Hume was

PM I can see no credible reason why felt strongly about this.

T I think the reason has something to do with

PM the fact that David Trimble suggested it?

T . . . something to do with a personal thing that he would be standing against Martin McGuinness in Derry or something like that. I mean Adams wants a popularity test between himself [Hume] and Martin McGuinness in Derry. I don't know whether that's

PM Ah, I hadn't thought of that. Maybe. He certainly hasn't advanced the thought.

T Well, he wouldn't advance that and he didn't advance it to me either but I think it could be something in that area. But, I mean, the reasons are not terribly relevant. He is deeply deeply sceptical. Could we . . . Is there any possibility that you would, in addition to saying that there are

options about the electoral system, could you say specifically that there are options about the functions of the sort of a Forum? Could you make that optional for the two weeks as well? If you entered the electoral system as an option and the role of a Forum as an option, perhaps you could get agreement.

PM We haven't got to the options unfortunately, except no forum or...
inaudible.

T I think if you could then give more things with which they might be able to trade in the course of the two weeks, then you might actually get them to agree. Otherwise one side has to wait. I mean if you have two . . .

PM I'm not sure of the point you're getting at.

T If you said, for example - let's take it that Trimble might persuade Hume to buy the 18 by 5 in return for having no Forum, or vice versa.

PM Yes?

T Then Trimble might buy the List system in return for getting a Forum.

PM Yes. Now I see the point you're getting at.

T But if you can put The more carrots you have to play around with, the better chance you have.

PM I will look to see if we can find something that will enable an obvious middle way for the Mitchell Report to appear. I see that.

T I'm urged - I must say - by what you said a few moments ago - that you see the possibility of having a fixed date. And I think that's the crucial thing as far as we're concerned.

PM I always wanted a fixed date. I'm not in any personal difficulty about having a fixed date. That is exactly what I want if I can deliver it.

T Yes. Well I think we might be able to do business alright. If we can From what you've said just now, I think we might be able to get close enough but

PM Well, you might want to have a word with Paddy and I'll have a word with John about it. In about an hour, I'm going to be getting in my car - going up to London. I'll be in London after 8 o'clock I should think and em . . .

T We might talk again?

PM Sure, if you wish to.

T Yes. I think it would be better for us if our officials could meet you tomorrow anyway - I mean, meet your people tomorrow afternoon anyway.

PM Sir Robin Butler. Paddy Teahon...?

T Yes. That man.

PM Well, I'm perfectly happy with that. It'll need to be after Lunch.

T Yes. After lunch, of course. Yes.

PM We'll feed him what happened?

T Absolutely, yes.

PM I mean, whatever happens, I can see some advantage in that discussion taking place.

T I think so. Look, that's grand. I'll get Paddy to talk to John now - in the next half an hour.

PM Okay. I'll get John to ring Paddy because I want a word with him first over some of the things we talked about.

T Of course, yes.

PM And then I will get John to ring Paddy. And now, if I could just take your time for a few moments more.

T Yes.

PM Looking at the Framework or call it what you will - the Building Blocks negotiations paper - most of the paragraphs present no difficulty. Present no difficulty to either of us.

T I haven't seen this document.

PM No. I'm just saying that. The paragraphs that would need looking at are: paragraph 7 which is the electoral options, paragraph 15 on negotiations, paragraph 18 on the basis for participation in the negotiations. There are other minor things elsewhere but I think those are the big ones. No, hang on! And 29 and 30 on decommissioning.

T Yes. I'm saying this now without having seen them. So, I mean, I take that those... You are reflecting on what I've said in the way you've identified those.

PM I say that on the basis of our conversation.

T Yes, yes.

PM So right. Well

T Okay.

PM I think it would be quite intolerable if you and I were to give Paddy and John an easy time. Fortunately, there seems little chance of that. Good job they're both so highly paid

T Paid more than us. Okay.

PM Okay.

T Bye bye, John. Thanks.

PM Bye bye.