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To: Eilish O'Sullivan, Eilish O'Sullivan
cc:
From: Eilish O'Sullivan
Date: 15/10/98 17:10:17
Subject: Telephone conversation between Taoiseach & Tony Blair

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cc:
From: Mary Gilton
Date: 15/10/98 13:29:36
Subject: Telephone conversation between Taoiseach & Tony Blair

(16)

Transcript of telephone conversation between Taoiseach & Tony Blair
Wednesday 14th October, 1998.

Taoiseach: Sorry for switching around calls. I'm not in my office, I'm just out doing a function in the North of the City. How was China? Did you like that accommodation, that nice country house that they had.

Prime Minister: (Unable to hear the PM's voice throughout conversation)

Taoiseach: Yes, well I can tell you, I'd say there's bugs everywhere. We had a very funny experience because I couldn't work the TV you see, so we were talking about trying to work this TV. So we went out said nothing to nobody, we came back and this guy was in there helping us to operate the TV.

PM:

Taoiseach: Where are we on this thing Tony?

PM:

Taoiseach: Yes, trying to drive them on. I had a long meeting with Martin McGuinness last week and it was useful to this point that I certainly got it very clear that we are not going to have any decommissioning in the short term. I equally got it very, very clear of their good intentions in the short term, medium term and long term. That was very strong and I have separately been picking that up elsewhere through the republican movement about what they are prepared to

do as we move on. I will give you that fairly directly when I'm talking to you, but they have already, just to put this in the back of your mind, they have already started looking at what they might do a little later on providing we, as they see it, get through this one for them. Now this is the great bloody test you know and really I suppose what the message all around and I was even talking to my own party today about this, there is probably two element to this. One is the resolution of the decommissioning impasse on the basis of really private undertakings by Martin McGuinness and a public report to the two Governments by De Chastelaine and his colleagues and the second bit, the agreement that we move to the Shadow Executive on one side and to the North South Ministerial Council and a British Irish Council on the other side. Now what I have been trying to say to the Republican movement and I think successfully enough, if we try to do this, now I don't know whether it will work because this comes back to Trimble but at least if we can do this we still need to see action on decommissioning before we move from shadow into real. But I think I got the message very clearly from them that there is a huge sense of, without just giving their perspective but its one I agree with, that there is huge feeling that this is a test. They are looking at it as a test on me, a test on you that they feel that they have honoured everything, that they are honouring everything, that they are going to honour more, that they are working seriously with De Chastelaine and they know that they are going to have to move to ??? decommissioning because I told them we can't keep doing everything and they not do that. But, I think if we test them, if we test them at this stage and say no, or if David Trimble says no, then I am not too sure what actually will happen. I feel that at least, we can't totally control David Trimble, we can't control anybody totally but at least we have to make the effort. If it works great but I don't know, Trimble might just tell take a running jump, but at least we have to try it for the good faith of them and thats going to be the hard bit.

PM:

Taoiseach: What I'm doing Tony, I just don't want to say too much about this, but, I'm getting gut feel from good sources that we mightn't have to wait too long and we certainly would be before then, the February date.

PM:

Taoiseach: Yeah, its a lousy position.

PM:

Taoiseach: There are risks and chances. It would have to be kind of what both of us are saying, what McGuinness is saying privately and what De Chastelaine says.

PM:

Taoiseach: Well they will have to shut up, I don't think they'll say anything positive but once they don't say anything negative!

PM:

Taoiseach: But just for your own peace of mind Tony I know that they have moved, they will always move slow, but their thinking has moved a long way further than I thought a week ago.

PM:

Taoiseach: Well this is it. My sense of this Tony is you can only ask them, you can't do a lot more. You can set it up with McGuinness.

PM:

Taoiseach: He has a Conference on the 24th and the Executive on the 31st.

PM:

Taoiseach: I think that De Chastelaine and things that you and I would be saying and that McGuinness would have to be fairly good that he would feel the confidence to do that, I know he can't do it without something. But the sense that I have Tony and I gather from what Paddy and John's conversation, that, the movement on this is kind of between now and maybe he wants to get over his Conference But the movement would be between now and the end of the month. If it goes into November both the SDLP and Republicans and I think the wider public are going to start seeing that the first date has not been reached. Its the first date that appears, there are a whole lot of things in the Agreement but this is the first actual date and I really think the pressure, you see they will all start, as they always do, the headless chicken thing will start and they will also start meeting and the pressures, and the temperatures. Its now when its kind of relaxed that we have this chance you know.

PM:

Taoiseach: Paddy said to me, you are going to have a word with Martin McGuinness. Is that I think that because he is very clear on, now he will not say to you the other bit that I'm saying to you privately but he certainly will be very clear about them honouring the Agreement.

PM:

Taoiseach: He may be under so much pressure but, I think from our handling of it, it has to be him saying that because nobody can accuse us of pushing it to that stage to get an answer. He would be unwise to do it because I think he can achieve an awful lot very quickly, but it is his first real big test in terms of

PM:

Taoiseach: I wouldn't hang him on that, though when I pushed him on that before he did say to me, the conference is the 24th but then I have an Executive on the 31st but I still think if he starts drifting it into November he, I mean in some ways if he could do it before his conference, he'll change the whole agenda. He may not see it that way.

PM:

Taoiseach: Well there is only a line that has to be, it's in the shadow form, I think you know.

PM:

Taoiseach: Well I think he would say that, yeah I think he'd say that, because I mean in the press conference with me the other day, I can get your people the text of what he said, you know the full thing of what he said. He was very clear that they had a political commitment, they signed their names to decommissioning within the two year period and he emphasised Section 4 which is the one that from time to time De Chastelaine would make reports and that he was committed totally to working with De Chastelaine to achieve this. And was meeting him regularly and he was quite, without saying when it would happen, he was making it clear that he was going to do all he could to make sure it happened.

PM:

Taoiseach: No you see the difference between Adams & McGuinness is, McGuinness speaks far straighter where Adams goes around the houses and back you know. So he was being very direct and the way the journalists were left at the end was well, I wonder when it is, nobody was saying will he. Anyone listening to it and our usual secret journalists were listening and they all said well it just really a question of when now.

PM:

Taoiseach: The only thing about that, we understand this and I know its hard for us to get him to understand things. I think the second bit I'm saying to you

privately about the way their minds are moving. They'll stop on that and they will reverse which is the way they always go whereas he could, I know, he has to get from A to B and we have to get him over that but he really has a chance for himself of really seeing it happen. Now I know he'll say that's three months and the way he is hanging in that's no use maybe.

Taoiseach: As I said we can only put it to him Tony and try and convince him, it's no good us trying to guess what he'll say I suppose, but it is an opportunity.

PM:

Taoiseach: I'd like if you get the sense of what he is saying because it's very, while he'll say we can do nothing now, he is quite clear about honouring the Agreement.

PM:

Taoiseach: OK Tony, don't work too hard. See you soon.

ENDS