

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SG Gallagher

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12/9/0 re visit of Pres Clinton to Ireland - December 2000

Confidential

MEETING BETWEEN THE TAOISEACH AND PRESIDENT CLINTON
NEW YORK - 8 SEPTEMBER 2000

Present:

Irish side: Taoiseach, MOS L O'Donnell, Ambassador O'Huiginn, Secretary D Gallagher, Mr Joe Lennon

US side: President Clinton, SOS Albright, Mr Sandy Berger, Ambassador R Holbrooke, Mr Tony Blinken (NSC) and notetaker.

1. After initial courtesies, and while photographers were still present, President Clinton made some general observations on the US electoral scene. The Presidential election would be close but "the momentum and the map are with us". Hilary was doing well in New York. The landscape was good from his political perspective but "the Middle East is maddening". The Taoiseach expressed his understanding at the President's frustration - 'so near and yet so far'.

2. The President concurred. Both sides knew each other intimately at this stage, in contrast to the position earlier, and they knew the agendas each had to meet. The Palestinians were scared of other Arabs. There were four centres of power in the Muslim world, including the Jordanians who were provisional custodians of the Temple Mount, and the Moroccans through the Jerusalem Committee. It was as if Sinn Féin had to deal with Paisley not just as a local politician, but as leader of a world religion. Barak in turn had to deal with enormously complicated factions of Judaism. There was essentially a five week window for progress. If nothing was achieved in those five weeks the Knesset would finish Barak politically, since no element of the deals being pursued could be put on paper. Politicians were paid to win and Barak was no exception. New elections or a national unity Government in

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Israel would in either case mean Arafat would lose his best opportunity and be faced with people who, unlike Barak, did not want to do business.

3. The Taoiseach thanked the President for making valuable time available and briefed him on the current situation in Northern Ireland: Overall the summer was good. There had been some distressing loyalist actions, but the marching season had not been bad, making allowance for the Garvaghy Road situation. Mr Brian Currin would work on that issue over the winter. Republican dissidents or the 'real IRA' continued to be a headache (although fortunately they were making mistakes and being caught). The Taoiseach saw the loyalist feud more as gang warfare than political, and he was hopeful it could be settled. Gary McMichael had clearly lost ground, however.

4. The Taoiseach said the big issue to be resolved was Patten. He recalled the Patten Report had been widely welcomed as a reasonable compromise. It was the one opportunity we would get to persuade young nationalists to join the police service in Northern Ireland, and it would be senseless to lose it. A new police force would enable all nationalist voices, including Dublin, to urge young nationalists to join. A successful police force would remove the necessity for British forces. If the British try to keep the RUC title and other symbols of no change, it will not work because we cannot say Patten is being implemented. He had worked hard to persuade Tony Blair of this, but the reaction had been that they couldn't rub David Trimble's nose in it. No-one should want to see a 'Derry/Londonderry' pattern where each side referred to the police by a different name. If Patten was not implemented no amount of urging would persuade nationalists to join the force which would remain as drastically unbalanced as it currently was.

5. The President asked whether implementing Patten would cause Trimble to fall. The Taoiseach said he did not accept that. We were looking for a third ground which was viable for everyone. He said we were also facing a problem with flags and emblems, due to the same reasoning, but he would not take the President's time with the details

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of this problem at this stage. He wanted to concentrate on Patten. If Patten was not implemented, there was no hope of nationalists joining the force, and all that flowed from that.

6. The President asked how to deal with the susceptibilities of people who felt Patten meant that thirty years work in upholding the law was being negated. The Taoiseach recalled his efforts to ensure that the award of the George Cross was accepted without protest. He emphasised again the importance of a new beginning for policing under a new - not a 'double-barreled' - name. The President said "We're with you on this".

7. Mr Berger said they had argued strongly with Adams and McGuinness against linking the CBM to this issue. He felt Adams understood this point, at least intellectually. The Taoiseach agreed emphatically that he was opposed to such linkage also. There were a limited number of outstanding issues to be resolved, such as flags, OTRs, deportees, but policing was by far the most long-term and strategic issue.

8. At the President's request Mr Blinken recounted a suggestion by Reg Empey of a trade-off between symbolic and structural issues - RUC in title deeds but not as a working name in return for more local overseership. The President said that deal did not sound credible to him. The Taoiseach said that, leaving aside Sinn Féin, even Seamus Mallon could not accept the RUC name. The President said Mallon had told him as much directly. The Taoiseach again urged the vital necessity of implementing Patten and having a clear-cut signal of change. Otherwise the imbalance, and the consequent problems would remain. Sec Gallagher stressed the importance of the prize if Adams and McGuinness could be brought to urge people to join the force. An RUC Foundation could signal respect for the RUC tradition.

9. The President said he was sure Blair would "jam them" if he was sure Trimble was not deposed. Could that be tested? Mr Berger referred to the critical South Antrim by-election. The Taoiseach recalled that Adams also faced great problems from a

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sense among his followers that promises were not being delivered. He felt the violence was essentially over, and that the British and Irish Governments could work out the remaining difficulties, with the exception of Patten.

10. The President asked whether anything constructive could come of another visit by him. The Taoiseach warmly endorsed the proposal and the Minister of State said people were expecting his visit. The Taoiseach said much good work and progress was being made, for example in the North/South meetings. It would be helpful to get investors over. He outlined current US inward investment in Ireland and expressed appreciation for it. In response to a question from the President he said unemployment in the State was now in reality probably down to 30,000 people. The President expressed his admiration for the progress of the economy and said he would apply for the job of greenkeeper in Ballybunion.

11. As the meeting broke up there was some informal private conversation between the Taoiseach and the President. (I understand this included an exchange which suggests the President inclines towards a visit in the latter part of December).

Sean O'Huiginn
Ambassador
9 September 2000

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