

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Ms Griffiths for file 11.2.2000

W. Kirwan

SEEN BY TAOISEACH

17 JAN 2000

25B, SA, AP, BA, AC

cc PSTC PSOS, Mr Taoiseach, Mr Ahern, Mr Burke, PSOT, Mr Walsh, Eid for Cabinet

12 January 2000

Taoiseach
The conclusion at the end seems very plausible and fits with other indications we have seen.
17/1/2000

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Secretary,

Meeting with Joe Pilling, Permanent Under Secretary, NIO

I had lunch with Joe Pilling today. The main points of our conversation are outlined below.

Decommissioning

Pilling said that the NIO were preparing for the "crisis" which he expected would occur early next month if there were no progress, or insufficient progress, on decommissioning. Adams's message to Mandelson on Monday had been uncompromising on the question of weapons handover at an early stage (end January/early February), and seemed to echo the position communicated to you at your meeting with Sinn Féin last week. Pilling said that a failure to move on decommissioning would put enormous pressure on David Trimble and on the prospects for a successful outcome of the UUC meeting. In regard to the latter he said that Trimble was being coy about a specific date; and if he had a date in mind he has chosen not to reveal it to the NIO or to NIO Ministers.

I asked him about the nature of their crisis preparations. He replied that their immediate focus was on finding a way of communicating the seriousness of

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Trimble's dilemma to Adams. While both Governments could, and did, explain to Adams the problems that the Sinn Féin position created, he felt that a direct meeting between the two party leaders would be necessary to get across to Adams the seriousness of the situation, the real risk of a collapse of the Executive and a consequent return to direct rule. One of the difficulties created by the ending of the Review and departure of Mitchell was that there was no longer a framework for easy contact or a facilitator who could bring them together.

Pilling appeared doubtful about de Chastelain's ability to rescue the situation. He wondered whether, in the absence of product by the end of the month, de Chastelain could find creative language or a helpful way of presenting his report. Pilling said that de Chastelain was more of a General than a politician and he felt that, out of a sense of his own integrity and the integrity of the decommissioning process, he might not be as willing to play with language or to fudge things as the Governments would wish.

Pilling said that the NIO team would be meeting the Secretary of State this afternoon to review the overall situation - the first such meeting since the Christmas break.

Patten and the Security Review

I emphasised the need for continued consultation on the implementation of Patten, as well as on the Security Review, stressing our desire and ability to be helpful. In this context I pointed out that the cooperation between the two Governments at the time of the publication of Patten had helped enormously in launching the report; in contrast we considered that the presentation of the normalisation paper had not gone well and had not been properly handled because of the lack of adequate consultation. Pilling noted this, but, I have to say did not respond in a way that would give me confidence in a whole hearted commitment to full consultation on both issues.

He said that the Secretary of State's reports to Parliament on Patten could be as early as next week; but when queried on whether this gave sufficient time for the necessary consultation he backtracked saying that the timing was still under consideration.

On the details of Patten he said nothing that would suggest that the Government

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were not going to implement the Report in full, in particular in relation to contentious areas like names and symbols. But neither did he categorically say that they were preparing to implement the Report in its entirety. He did, however, say that he expected that there would be "howls of anguish" from the Unionist side when Mandelson presented his conclusions and he speculated that this would in fact help Sinn Féin. In this respect he said that the NIO were giving some further thought on how to recognise the contribution of the RUC and the sacrifices of RUC officers and their families over the years. (This incidentally was a major theme of the RUC Federation when they met me at the Embassy this morning, on which Mr. Ó Floinn is reporting.). For example he threw out speculatively the idea of attaching the George Cross to the Force's new name, but quickly added that this would be inconsistent with Patten's vision of "A New Beginning". I agreed. Another idea which, he said, had been mooted by Ronnie Flanagan was to use a plot of ground near RUC Headquarters as a kind of garden of remembrance with a form of the George Cross laid out in some way as a permanent memorial. A third idea, which will be necessary anyway, was a ceremonial occasion during which the George Cross would be presented to the Force. One of the dilemmas in all this, he said, was to find ways to mark the contribution of the RUC without at the same time damaging Patten's key idea of a fresh start to policing in Northern Ireland.

But perhaps his most interesting comments were in relation to implementation of Patten and the Security Review. He drew a distinction between the two. In relation to Patten the British Government were acutely conscious that they really had only one chance to get it right. The announcement, whenever it came, would set the course for the legislation over the Summer and for a reform process that would last for a very long time. In this sense Patten was a structural issue; once the measures were announced there would be very little opportunity to adjust them. Security measures on the other hand could be modulated in the light of circumstances on the ground. If the outcome of the Security Review at this stage was less than nationalists hoped, because, for example decommissioning had not taken place, or because of a continuing threat from dissidents, we knew that the measures could always be adjusted at a later date when the situation improved. In this connection he intimated that some of the opposition to a more radical approach to security normalisation was coming from the military.

I outlined to Pilling the feelings on the ground in South Armagh as described in the report of Gary Ansbro's recent visit, and emphasised the significance of

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progress on security for the Republican Movement, for decommissioning, and for ensuring that the Movement can contain any temptation by members to move to the dissident wing.

On the legislative front Pilling said that the legislation to implement Patten would need to be introduced at the latest by the end of February if it were to have any chance of passage by July. In parentheses, he said that the NIO had become so accustomed to emergency legislation that he had a job persuading colleagues that the Bill would need to be taken through the normal legislative process, and could not be rushed.

The conclusion I came away with was that consideration is being given to some kind of balance between the proposals on implementing Patten and the outcome of the Security Review (i.e. moving ahead on Patten but holding back on security) - for both technical and political reasons. Technical, because of the security advice on the continued level of threat, the absence of full decommissioning, and, probably, difficulties with the military; political because of the need, in advance of the UUC meeting, not to overload the negative elements - a kind of double whammy - from a Unionist point of view.

Yours sincerely,

Ted Barrington

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

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