

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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TOP SECRET

28 APR 2000

Paddy Teahon
Dermot Gallagher
Martin Mansergh.

While I become more convinced, by the day, that detailed reports on certain meetings (and certainly the faxing of these reports - whether by "secure" fax or otherwise) is unwise, I felt I should do a short note on a meeting I had last evening. I see no case for circulating it beyond the few who need to know about it.

J.D

Meeting with Joe Pilling (JP) PUS, NIO

1. **JP** came to meet me in Dublin last evening. It was, I felt, an interesting and useful meeting. I'm including a few of the salient points in this note. We can talk in more detail when we meet.

2. We discussed three related issues i.e.

   (1) restoration of institutions
   (2) demilitarisation
   (3) decommissioning

Institutions

3. On institutions, **JP** said that not everybody is convinced that the IRA's belief in the efficacy of violence (and in its justification) has been displaced by a "conversion" to the democratic approach. I said I would prefer to see people refraining from violence (even if their motives were suspicious or "tactical") rather than see them engaged in violence (for whatever motives). Many democracies were born in violence - if we do not allow those who may once have engaged in politically motivated violence to "practice" democracy, they will never become democrats. Exclusion from politics is the ideal way to ensure that violence survives.

4. The institutions must therefore be reestablished quickly - **JP** made it clear that this is the British view also. According to **JP**, suspension would have been less likely had the IRA come forward with their final position at an earlier stage - **SOS** could probably have employed the "post-dated cheque" argument to persuade Trimble to hold off on his resignation threat. (The "post-dated" cheque would not, of course, have met the SF requirement that Trimble should not set a new deadline).

Demilitarisation

5. On demilitarisation, **JP** made it clear that the Army effectively "calls the shots" in S. Armagh. He has personally put to the Army the case we regularly make for demilitarisation (and he summarised our arguments very accurately for me) but, in essence, the Army position is that ... "Its a matter for the British Government to decide whether we should leave S. Armagh. But, while we are here, we have a duty to protect the lives of our troops and it is our judgment that we need military installations for that purpose." **JP** accepts that while the argument may well be flawed, it is nevertheless difficult to prove the Army wrong when they attribute the reduction in military deaths in S. Armagh to the introduction and continued use of towers etc. Soldiers are not politicans and are not as impressed as others by the notion that removal of army "furniture", now, would also reduce the threat - the recent attempt at Ballykelly, fortifies their conviction that any dropping of the guard can be fatal. It had to be acknowledged that much had been achieved to date on demilitarisation. It gets more and more difficult to proceed from here.

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6. Overall, I felt that a more targeted and specific approach towards demilitarisation, on our side, would stand a better chance of success than a blanket approach (per **JP**... "I suppose a cluster of three or four towers would look better, from your point of view, than seven"). He favoured - and I agree - the setting up of small group of officials from both sides who would go through the demilitarisation argument on a tower by tower and patrol by patrol basis. However, for this to succeed in advancing demilitarisation, the Army would need some significant reassurance about Irish Government intentions, should violence resume.

7. While putting it forward as a purely personal thought, he felt that the remainder of the demilitarisation iceberg might begin slowly to melt if, for example, the Taoiseach were to say something to the effect that, in the event of any further republican attack on security forces, the Irish Government would take whatever steps were necessary to put the group responsible "out of business". I said that the Taoiseach and other Ministers had made statements to this effect in the past and we could certainly look at the merits of doing so again if there was clarity (from the British side) on the likely result of such a statement, in terms of demilitarisation. We would of course need to be mindful of the fact that Government actions in this area which did not meet normal evidence requirements (internment) could have as many drawbacks as advantages - and we would need to take account of the fact that internment could no longer be applied in N. Irleand. We would also need to be mindful that extremists tend to thrive on threats (as a means of galvanising their troops). That said, however, if a reassuring Irish Government statement would produce demilitarisation progress - and we knew what that progress was - it was certainly something that we could examine.

8. Finally I made the point that it would greatly help if discussions with NIO people led us to believe that they are anxious to deal with the issue of demilitarisation - we tend to be left with the impression that their approach is negative. We recognise that there are difficulties, but we can work together through these, once we have the sense that all routes out of the forest are not being closed off before we start. We have no difficulty with the idea that the NIO should maximise the significance of particular demilitarisation achievements - thats understandable - the important point is that there should be an equal willingness on both sides to produce these achievements.

Decommissioning

9. **JP** fully acknowledged that many in the security services do not believe that decommissioning in itself would make any real difference in terms of reducing the security threat - its a political rather than a security issue. We talked for a time about ways of decommissioning. I mentioned the value of an approach which would see the relevant organisations formally put violence behind them as a means of addressing their grievances. In other words, we should perhaps focus on "decommissioning mindsets" first and allow the rest to follow. **JP** wondered "how would we know for sure that mindsets had changed" but he is certainly not opposed to the idea of looking at various options. He didn't disagree with my suggestion that the basic idea should be to ensure that the paramilitary intention is to abandon violence permanently, and then having that intent backed up by arrangements which would, in practice, mean that the material was beyond use or reach - even if not destroyed. I requested that their people would reflect on the opportunities for more imaginative approaches to decommissioning generally and we agreed that we would return to the point.

Other matters

10. There were a few other matters of general interest - we can talk about these.

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