

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

| | |
|---|---|
| **Reference Code:** | 2023/154/56 |
| **Creator(s):** | Department of the Taoiseach |
| **Accession Conditions:** | Open |
| **Copyright:** | National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives. |

5's noted & filed

28 APR 2000

25B 3

Secret

***Meeting of the Implementation Group on the Good Friday Agreement, 3 April 2000***

***Overview***

1. The second meeting of the above Group was held in Downing St on 3 April. The Irish side comprised Paddy Teahon, Dermot Gallagher, Tim Dalton, Ambassador Barrington, Martin Mansergh and Tim O'Connor. The British side comprised Jonathan Powell, John Sawers, Bill Jeffrey, David Watkins, Jonathan Stephens and Susan Scholefield. Prime Minister Blair dropped by for a short time during the meeting.

2. Both sides agreed on the urgency of the Easter timeframe in terms of achieving a breakthrough. As regards the shape of an eventual package, we are edging closer to the same ball-park, although further intensive work will be needed in regard to a number of differences which still remain.

3. Subject to further work at official level, and overall clearance at political level on both sides, what is now emerging is a sequence along the following lines - (a) a joint statement by the two Governments proposing a process for resolving the present impasse on the basis of an implementation package for the Good Friday Agreement, with timeframes, including a date for the restoration of the institutions; (b) a statement by the IRA committing itself, in the context of the implementation of the package, to peaceful politics and to putting its arms beyond use; (c) a statement by the British Government, noting the clear reduction in the level of threat as a result of the IRA statement and stating that it is now satisfied to act on the implementation package; (d) endorsement of this approach by all the pro-Agreement parties (including the UUP, following



©TSCH/2023/154/56

acceptance by the Ulster Unionist Council). Early drafts of possible statements of (a), (b), and (c) above are attached - they remain to be worked on further at official level on both sides, before being submitted for clearance at political level.

4. In terms of the crunch issues, the British side identified three things which they believed were priorities for Trimble in getting any package through the UUC - a timeframe for decommissioning; an early gesture of some kind by the IRA related to the arms issue; and a credible back-stop if all failed. The Irish side made clear that there was no chance of an early gesture on arms by the IRA, though we felt that the IRA would be prepared to say that, in the interim period before decommissioning, their arms would be silent and secure. On the back-stop, the most sensible approach was the use of the formal Review provisions of the Agreement. This left the question of a timeframe for decommissioning. The British side said that this was the top priority for Trimble, and emphasised that securing a satisfactory outcome to it was one of the keys to a breakthrough. In the circumstances, the Irish side felt that, while it would be very difficult, there was scope for exploration on the issue.

5. During his drop-by, Prime Minister Blair laid immediate stress on the issue of Patten - "it is crunching down the room for manoeuvre that Trimble has". (Note: it remains the strong view of our side that any softening on Patten - eg on symbols - would be disastrous and probably fatal for the process). The Prime Minister also pointed to the need for something incremental from the IRA on decommissioning, together with an appropriate back-stop in the event of default. He reiterated that, if it were a matter for the two Governments, agreement would be easily reached - the difficulty was that we were once again involved in third party negotiations.



©TSCH/2023/154/56

6. On demilitarisation, there was a brief discussion between officials on the draft paper we had conveyed to the British side overnight (attached). The British, by way of preliminary comment, suggested that the paper was "pretty ambitious", but would engage with us on it. Our sense was that, in the context of an appropriate statement by the IRA, and a clear willingness by the two Governments to respond strongly to any dissident threat, they were prepared to make a significant move on demilitarisation. It was also clear, however, that the discussion on the detail will be difficult. Current thinking is that the demilitarisation package would not be published, but would be signed off on by the two Governments and sold privately to Sinn Féin.

7. In terms of the process for the period immediately ahead, it was agreed that the Government Spokespersons on each side would indicate that the outcome of the Group's meeting was being considered by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State on the British side, and by the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State on our side, that the Taoiseach and Prime Minister would speak by telephone probably on Wednesday, and that the Governments would meet at an early date with the parties in Belfast, most likely in the course of next week. Meanwhile, the Implementation Group would meet again in Dublin later this week - probably Thursday or Friday. It was agreed that a more intensive personal involvement by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister would only happen at the point at which it was clear that a deal was in sight.

***Detail of Meeting***

8. In the course of the meeting, there were detailed discussions on the overall way forward and on various elements of the proposed sequence outlined in para 3



©TSCH/2023/154/56

above. The remainder of this note provides a more detailed flavour of the exchanges on these issues.

*Collective Understanding of Way Forward*

9. At the outset, there was a brief discussion on the draft papers that had been exchanged between the two sides over the weekend. Much of the early exchanges, however, centred on the need for a clear collective understanding about where we were going and how we proposed to get there.

10. Teahon stressed the need to concentrate on what was achievable and to learn from what went wrong in February. The reality was that we now had an opportunity to achieve an outcome where IRA arms would be put beyond use. If we attempted to achieve more than this (eg by an insistence on something on arms up front), there was a real prospect that the net outcome would be a return to violence. Our focus, therefore, had to be on the unprecedented potential that was now there for putting arms beyond use. The IICD would have to be satisfied along the way that we were on track. In the event that the IICD were to report at any point that this was not the case, the Governments would institute a formal Review under the terms of the Agreement. The institutions would be kept in being while the Review was being held, and it would be up to the Governments and the parties in that Review to decide how to proceed from there.

11. Jeffrey argued that the reality on the Unionist side was that Trimble had to get any package through the UUC. Just as it was our side's assessment as to what was on and not on from an IRA perspective, it was their view that Trimble needed the three elements outlined in paragraph 4 above - ie a timeframe for decommissioning; an early gesture by the IRA related to arms; and a credible



©TSCH/2023/154/56

back-stop if it all failed. Gallagher responded that we needed to look at the potential in the statement by the two Governments. There was scope for valuable "read-across" between this and the IRA statement which might go a long way towards meeting the needs of the situation, including on timing. Thought needed to be given also to a possible role for de Chastelain in bridging the gap between what the UUP required and what the IRA could deliver.

*Demilitarisation*

12. During the exchanges on demilitarisation, Teahon probed on British intentions - could the military installations be taken down by May 2000? Sawers said that they could, if the security situation had normalised. The latter suggested, however, that the dissident Republican threat remained a factor. Gallagher and Mansergh argued that this, in effect, meant giving a veto to McKevitt. Sawers suggested that the IRA were "making space" for the dissidents. Dalton asked how were the IRA supposed to deal with them? He pointed out that we had built conditionality on the security situation into the draft we had given them on normalisation. Jeffrey agreed that no veto could be given to McKevitt. Teahon said that two Governments would have to be able to speak out and take measures in the light of any threat by McKevitt and by the Loyalists.

*Back-stop/Default*

13. On the back-stop issue, Powell asked how a Review would work - would it have a timescale? Mansergh said that a walkout remained Trimble's most potent weapon. Moreover, a formal Review would allow time to examine who was in default and how to proceed. Stephens argued that full implementation of the Agreement could take many years - it could, for instance, take ten years for all of the Patten reforms to work their way through. Where did you draw a line in deciding that implementation of the Agreement had been completed?



©TSCH/2023/154/56

Teahon replied that it was not necessary to await implementation of every detail - what was critical was decisions in principle to proceed with the main elements. Demilitarisation was critical in that regard.

*Steps by the IRA*

14. One of the concerns on the British side about the sequence being proposed was that incremental steps were expected in regard to demilitarisation but, in their view, there was no staging on the IRA side - everything was pushed down to the end. Gallagher argued that the IRA steps would in fact be staged. Firstly, they had to say, up-front, that they will be relying on political means in the context of implementation. Secondly, they had to say that decommissioning will happen. Powell asked what they would be doing in, say, November. Teahon responded that it was a question of whether we wanted to achieve decommissioning or not. We were now in sight of a commitment from the IRA for the first time. That was a huge gain.

15. Sawers asked if there were measures which the IRA could take, such as, for instance, ending targetting. Mansergh said that we had tried to cover targetting before, but it was difficult because there was no independent assessment as to whether it was happening or not. Gallagher pointed out that concrete steps of this kind had been taken before by the Republican side - eg on punishment beatings, which had effectively ended after the institutions had been established. Dalton believed that the question of further, intermediate steps the IRA could take was worth exploring - perhaps jointly by the British side and ourselves with Sinn Féin.

*Timeframe the Priority*

16. Jeffrey felt that we needed to "bid our position up a bit", particularly in regard



©TSCH/2023/154/56

to the timeframe and an early gesture. Dalton reiterated our view that there was some scope on the issue of a timeframe for decommissioning, but none at all on an early gesture by the IRA. Teahon agreed, pointing out that in the discussions at the weekend between the Taoiseach and Trimble, the latter had not mentioned an early gesture at all. Moreover, Adams had made clear to us that a measure such as the early inspection of dumps was completely out of the question; to come back to Sinn Féin, and to press for something on these lines, would be taken as evidence that we were not serious.

17. Gallagher probed further on what the British side saw as the hierarchy of priorities for Trimble. Jeffrey confirmed that the timeframe issue was the most important. Powell wondered on what basis Trimble would be able sell to the UUC an overall package of the kind being proposed. Gallagher said he could emphasise that his position all along had been to bring an end to the conflict and to get a commitment from Sinn Féin to decommission. This would now be on the table, as would a statement from the IRA that, in the meantime, their arms would be silent and secure and would pose no threat to the process. O'Connor agreed and emphasised that Trimble could argue that he now had a coherent plan for actually delivering decommissioning. Trimble was already making much play of the fact that his opponents in the party had no proposal for achieving decommissioning and that, while his approach carried risks, it provided a basis by which the party's objective could be achieved.

*New Drafts*

18. There was a break in the meeting while a number of drafts of the statements in the proposed sequence were prepared, and which sought to take account of the discussions during the meeting. There was some preliminary exchanges on these drafts. The versions as they stood at the end of the meeting are attached.



©TSCH/2023/154/56

It should be stressed that these are not in any sense agreed texts. Further work will be needed on them including, of course, consultation at political level. The drafts will be discussed further at the next meeting of the Implementation Group.

T O'Connor
3 April 2000



©TSCH/2023/154/56