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SECRET

Reflections on the Dublin Castle Summit

My primary worry is that the Irish Government will become, or is already becoming, a hostage to Sinn Féin's line on the shape of the political/talks process. Sinn Féin/IRA hold all the cards and the Government holds none. Sinn Féin/IRA can switch violence on at any time, with little concern for public opinion. Unpopularity never bothered the IRA before, and the wave of condemnation that would follow a resumption of violence would have little lasting effect. 100 activists can maintain the IRA campaign, and they do not need the support of the media or the electorate to do so. The length of the ceasefire is no barrier to the resumption of violence.

Of course, Sinn Féin/IRA could reach agreement with the British Government, involving some form of gesture on arms. If this possibility exists, the Irish Government must avoid finding itself in a position of saying that a gesture was impossible, only to find that Sinn Féin/IRA themselves accepted it at the end of the day.

On the other hand, this Government is becoming a hostage to the peace process. It has been put to me that "if the peace process fails,

that is probably the end of the Government". This view, which I do not share, has some force because unlike the IRA, we do need public opinion behind us, hence the inequality of our negotiating position vis a vis Sinn Féin.

Any statement by me, intentional or otherwise, that Sinn Féin could interpret as a departure from the "agreed line" between them, the SDLP and the Government, could be used by Sinn Féin to say that the Irish Government was being "unhelpful to the peace process". If the IRA resumed violence shortly afterwards, this "unhelpful" comment would then be harked back to by Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and their friends in the media as "the beginning of the end of the peace process".

The fact that Fianna Fáil, not the present Government, had started the peace process would then be used to bolster this line of argument. "They were never really committed to it all along", "they did not really understand the agony of Northern Nationalists" would be phrases that would trip easily off the tongues of commentators.

The fact that Gerry Adams would also have a lot to lose from the failure of the process would not help the Government. Mr. Adams is a political hostage to the IRA anyway. A sovereign Government should never be in such a position. John Hume has taken a big

gamble on the Hume/Adams process. He is coming towards the end of his career. He will be seen as justified in taking the risk for peace even if it fails. John Major would not lose much, that is not already virtually lost. In any event, he has not compromised his freedom of action in relation to Sinn Féin/IRA in the way that this Government might, at some future point, risk doing if it has not fully thought through in advance how it would react to a breakdown in the peace process.

What is the Sinn Féin line, which the Irish Government could be compromised into supporting, by the implicit threat of resumed IRA violence?

The answer to this question became very clear at the meeting with Gerry Adams and John Hume in Dublin Castle last Friday. Mr. Adams demands that both British and Irish Governments together convene an all-party conference - not bilateral talks. Mr. Adams rejected bilaterals quite explicitly as meeting the "all-party talks" requirement. The conference he wants is to be convened, it seems, without any binding or formal engagement by Sinn Féin in regard to the decommissioning of arms. Even if we leave aside the issue of a gesture or demonstration, we have yet to agree with Sinn Féin a formal mechanism under which they would discuss and develop a decommissioning process. We must avoid unambiguously supporting

the Sinn Féin position until we have a formal agreement with them, that is satisfactory to us, on how they will deal with the decommissioning issue.

What is the Sinn Féin view of the purpose of the "all" party conference or talks?

Gerry Adams made it clear on Friday that he believes that the Unionists must be "put through a crisis". That is what he wants us to get the British to do, by convening the talks without any formal move on decommissioning by Sinn Féin.

His analysis is that, after this "crisis", the Unionists will come into the conference - just as they eventually met Bruce Morrison and John Hume, and attended the Washington Conference despite threats to the contrary. This analysis is faulty. These meetings were only public relations gestures by the Unionists; entering a formal negotiating conference, which they had earlier decided to boycott, would represent a public surrender by Unionists to a nationalist process. If this happened, it would be something Unionists have never done at any time in the past 100 years.

The Sinn Féin analysis, which the Irish Government is being dragged towards by events and by John Hume, fails to understand that

Unionists must, at the very least, have joint ownership of any serious negotiating process from the very beginning. That will not be the case if we succeed in getting the British to convene the sort of conference Mr. Adams wants. We must recognise the risk that anything that has been called for by the four "nationalist" leaders at Dublin Castle could be damaged as a solution because Unionists will have difficulty buying into something with that provenance.

Loyalist violence remains a threat. They cannot necessarily be bought off beforehand, by some deal on decommissioning and prisoners. If they were told in advance that their deal was part of a wider one involving the convening of such a conference, they might not agree to the decommissioning/prisoners deal at all. If they were not told of the conference proposal, and it emerged later, they would, in all probability, consider that the Governments had dealt with them in bad faith, and that they were freed of any obligations they had entered into in regard to a decommissioning process.

There are only two ways out of this impasse that I can see.

The first is the one we decided to press on Gerry Adams at Dublin Castle - gradually and imperceptibly to widen out the bilateral exploratory process with Ancram into substantive talks, by gradually dropping the distinction between the two types of talks. For this to

work, we would also need to press it very hard on the British. Such a gradual development would not provoke the "crisis" for the Unionists that Gerry Adams says he believes is inevitable, but it will allow Unionists time to slowly adapt to the new reality. Unionists will not be forced to make a decision on a particular day. They would, on the other hand, be allowed to change their minds gradually, with their dignity and credibility intact.

We need to probe more fully with Mr. Adams his all-party conference approach and this should be taken up next Friday. I did press Adams as to what would happen after his proposed meeting with Mayhew, and it appears to me that he did not envisage any prolonged series of bilaterals with Ancram. It was all-party talks he wanted, and that was it. I believe that when we next meet Adams, we must push him back toward exploiting more comprehensively the bilateral approach.

The second way out of the impasse is my elected negotiating body proposal. I do not believe that this proposal should be canvassed at all outside our own system until we have worked out every detail of it - especially such thorny matters as its working in private sessions, its relationship to the Anglo Irish Conference, its internal procedures, and a guarantee that all three strands are fully dealt with in it.

I recognise that, at the end of the day, Unionists may not be willing to agree to any deal in any forum that will be sufficient, in the eyes of the two Governments, to meet nationalist rights. In that event, the two Governments will have a responsibility to impose a solution, by setting up non-boycottable internal and cross-border institutions. If this point is reached, the two Governments must be seen to retain the moral, as well as the legal, authority to impose their sovereign will.

I believe that the two Governments would not have the moral authority to impose a deal after the failure of an all-party conference, which failure had been made inevitable because it had been boycotted by Unionists because they felt Sinn Féin had not done enough on decommissioning before it started. Unionist resistance to an imposed deal, in these circumstances, would be seen as having been reasonable by many. The only circumstances in which the Governments might have the requisite moral authority, would be if the IRA had actually decommissioned during the term of the Conference. Otherwise, Unionists could argue that the deal was being imposed because of an implicit and continuing threat of resumed IRA violence. That would doom it.

It could be argued that the elected negotiating body strategy has the same weakness. I would counter this by saying simply that the elected negotiating body would be less likely to be boycotted by

Unionists. Therefore, their failure to be reasonable, if that is what happens, would become manifest over the period of work of the body. Once one got them into the body, it would probably be possible to bring some Unionists on board. If they all stay out from the beginning, this is not possible. Unionists can only unite by saying "no". Therefore one must do everything possible to avoid putting them a question, in a referendum or otherwise, to which "no" is the easiest answer.

There is a final aspect of the matter which has to be addressed.

In the next two weeks, there is some expectation that I will be in contact with John Major. I am being urged to take a very tough line with him on three demands

- (1) to start all-party talks at a fixed date
- (2) to release prisoners
- (3) to park the decommissioning issue.

This raises a vital question - what happens if it becomes public knowledge that he has resolutely refused to budge on any or all of these three points ?

Upon return to Dublin, we would probably be forced to say that we believed the peace process was in crisis, and would thereby be implicitly confirming that Mr. Adams was right all along to distrust the British. We are thus at risk of being forced into accepting the logic that the only thing the British really understand is force.

This has the gravest possible consequences for Irish democracy. The Irish Government would thus find itself on the same side, in a direct showdown with the British Government, as the IRA.

It is important to point out that this crisis would have no parallel with previous Anglo-Irish disagreements. On all previous occasions, the Irish Government was acting without reference to the IRA. We were taking our own line, and were not in any way compromised by any need to keep the IRA happy.

If we get into a big public stand-off with the British, because of the failure of Major to agree to our three demands, a number of other things could happen.

- (a) the Alliance party could walk out of the Forum
- (b) the Progressive Democrats could attack our attitude as

belligerent and unduly influenced by the IRA.

- (c) The traditionally distinctive position on Northern Ireland of each of the three Government parties would disappear into a Fianna Fáil/SDLP/Sinn Féin consensus, and
- (d) anti-British sentiment, which is one of the most backward-looking aspects of the Irish character, would again come to the surface, with the implicit blessing of the Government

If, following on this stand-off, the British climbed down, this would be seen as a victory for nationalism - not for the Irish Government - and Unionist opinion would be radicalized into obdurate opposition to whatever had been wrung from the British, by threats.

If, on the other hand, the Irish Government climbed down after a public stand-off, we would lose all authority.

It is argued that this risk is worth taking because the British also have a great deal to lose if there was a breach with the Irish Government.

In view of the great satisfaction that many Tories derive from adopting belligerent attitudes towards foreigners in general, I believe

this is naive. Adding "the Irish" to the list of Europeans they are "standing up to" would please many Tory backbenchers. There is, of course, the threat of resumed IRA violence in London, that the British would have to consider. But that can happen whether or not the Irish and British Governments are on good terms. It is not a threat we can even mention, because to mention it, is to justify it.

The overriding concern is that, under the press of events and in a desire to conciliate, we will lose sight of fundamentals and take a course in which we do not believe or which will place us in a false position.

Breakdown Contingency

The objective of this paper is to help chart forward movement in the peace process.

A necessary part of our contingency planning in the present difficult phase must however anticipate the possibility of a breakdown/ divergence or public rift with the U.K. Government, or with Sinn Féin or with both.

It is worthwhile now identifying the grounds upon which any such breakdown could be justified and defended. Some work can now be done to protect our position by putting these prospective grounds on the record with both the U.K. Government and Sinn Féin, so that a reasonable justification of the Government's position can be convincingly proffered in the event of a breakdown.

If a breakdown does occur, it would be helpful if the Government can simultaneously criticise both Sinn Féin and the U.K. thereby impliedly holding the middle ground.

Grounds or justification for breakdown, (in shorthand) include:

With the U.K. side

1. Failure to effect early releases on humanitarian grounds, references to Clegg debacle, failure to follow example set in this jurisdiction.
2. Inflexible insistence on preserving the exploratory/substantive distinction in bilateral talks, rather than allowing the talks to generate their own natural, forward momentum.
3. [Possible] tactically inadequate approach to the vital issue of decommissioning (we agree with them on the principle). [Note:

We must continue to insist on the decommissioning of all illegally- held arms within this jurisdiction as a fundamental principle: Our concern is that the pursuit of the objective has been made more, not less, difficult by the British short term insistence on a gesture. Any breakdown on the decommissioning issue must preserve the position of principle of the Irish Government in demanding the decommissioning of all illegally-held arms within our jurisdiction. There can be no compromise on this principle and any tactical arguments must be subordinated to this position of principle which goes to the heart of the security of this State].

With the Sinn Féin side

1. In a context where Sinn Féin has been granted unprecedented access to the Government, in recognition of their stated commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful methods of political action, there has been no evidence that they have exercised their influence with the IRA to eliminate illegally held arms within this State which are a continuing threat to the security of the State and the lives of our citizens.
2. Refusal to comprehensively exploit the route offered by the bilateral opportunity (particularly with Ancram).

3. Failure to deliver anything (even agreement on process) on the decommissioning issue generally.
4. Failure to deliver on the cessation of punishment beatings.
5. Failure to adequately disassociate themselves from acts of sectarian violence such as the burning of Protestant property.
6. Failure to take adequate account of the complexity of the peace process, and in particular, of the need to bring Unionist opinion along with it and to give Unionists joint ownership of the peace process from the start.

On Both Sides

1. Failure to respond to possible helpful suggestions from the U.S. administration.