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SECRET

DRAFT

c.c. Attorney General
Mr. P. Teahon
For additions & amendments please.

Mr. F. Murray
Mr. Seán Ó hUiginn (for D/FA circulation)
Mr. Tim Dalton
For information. Please note that other
participants may have additions and
amendments.

Meeting with Ulster Unionist Party delegation

The Taoiseach met with a delegation consisting of Mr. David Trimble, MP, Leader of the Party; Mr. John Taylor, MP; Mr. Ken Maginnis, MP and Mr. [

], Press Officer in Government Buildings on 2 October, 1995. The

Taoiseach was accompanied by Mr. D. Gleeson, S.C., Attorney General; Mr. P. Teahon, Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach and Mr. Seán Donlon, Special Advisor. The meeting lasted for 45 minutes and was followed by lunch in the Taoiseach's Dining Room. In all, the visit lasted for about 1½ hours.

The Taoiseach began by welcoming Mr. Trimble and his colleagues. It was important that the unionist point of view should be heard everywhere and that it

should be given the best possible hearing. In the absence of direct contact with unionist politicians others, including the Taoiseach himself, sought to articulate unionist concerns but obviously this was no substitute for face to face meetings. The origins of the meeting lay in an invitation which had been issued by the Taoiseach in May and this had suggested an open agenda with nothing imposed. The Taoiseach said he had no intention of prescribing an agenda and invited Mr. Trimble to discuss whatever he wanted.

In reply, Mr. Trimble thanked the Taoiseach for his welcome. He wished to touch base with as many people as possible at the outset of his leadership. It was also important that he do so at this phase in the peace process. People needed to understand the unionist position and be aware of what might be achievable. There was a possibility that wrong assumptions were being made about the unionist position and this could have serious consequences. Unionists had given support to the Downing Street Declaration but had done so particularly because of what they understood paragraph 10 meant. Decommissioning before talks was a logical interpretation of that paragraph. He and his colleagues had serious doubts about the position of the Irish Government. Were they committed to decommissioning or not?

Mr. Maginnis said that the position of the Irish Government seemed to have changed. Unionists including himself were kept generally informed of what was happening in the lead up to the Downing Street Declaration. They were absolutely satisfied that it meant decommissioning before talks. Now there seemed to be an ambivalence in the Irish Government's position. Albert Reynolds was saying that decommissioning was never discussed but that was obviously not the case. Mr. Maginnis invited the Taoiseach to comment on three points:

1. It was always his understanding that disarmament was an integral part of the Downing Street Declaration. Did the Taoiseach disagree?
2. The Tánaiste appeared to have changed his position. His remarks at the UN last week were in marked contrast to his earlier statements.
3. Unionists were concerned about the aborted Summit. During the meeting between Irish officials and Adams/McGuinness, something had happened. It seemed that a threat had been made and the Government had backed off. It was most unhelpful that the Government had pulled out of the Summit. In doing so, they had let Sinn Féin off the hook.

The Taoiseach replied that the position of the Irish Government was clear. It wanted all arms out of commission and it wanted it done as soon as possible. Ideally, it should happen immediately. He personally did not like the idea of gestures or instalments. The fact that the IRA had guns in his jurisdiction was unacceptable. The only consolation was that they were not being used. The decision to cease violence had been a difficult one for the IRA. It had not been reached overnight. It involved a careful and slow process. Things did not happen overnight with the IRA. Things might be done in the future that were not now possible. The IRA wanted to come to their own position on decommissioning. As far as the Irish Government was concerned, decommissioning was an important and vital part of the process. They were fully committed to paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration. The Taoiseach went on to say that he had no detailed information which would enable him to comment on what his predecessor had done or had not done, had agreed or had not agreed. It was possible that there was some revisionism but the Taoiseach did not know that for a fact. It was also possible that because the Irish Government at the time was not in direct communication with Sinn Féin, misunderstandings might have arisen. Intermediaries were not always reliable.

Mr. Trimble intervened to say that decommissioning had certainly been discussed at the time of the Downing Street Declaration and he recalled that the word

"verification" had definitely been used. It was certainly possible that some preliminary dialogue would take place in advance of decommissioning but serious negotiations could take place only after the event.

Mr. Taylor said that there was now a clear perception that Dublin had backtracked. Revisionism was not confined to Albert Reynolds. Dick Spring's position had clearly shifted. The public record was there for all to see. He had shifted from his earlier demands that arms should be handed up.

The Taoiseach referred to his own speech on the day the cessation of violence was declared. It was now the view of the Irish Government that the IRA were neither able nor willing to buy their ticket to all party talks by making a decommissioning gesture. He and his Government had tried to secure this but had failed. Their judgement at this time was that they could not succeed in persuading the IRA to change its position.

Mr. Trimble suggested that the Taoiseach should impress on Sinn Féin/IRA that unionists see the beginning of decommissioning as an essential precondition to sitting down at the table with republicans. Talks would never happen unless some decommissioning had taken place. He emphasised that the British Government could not deliver the Ulster Unionist Party. They would speak for themselves.

They were not going to change their position. Indeed, they dare not move until there was some decommissioning. This view must be forcibly conveyed to Sinn Féin/IRA. What was important for unionists was that Sinn Féin/IRA was seen to change its position. Only action would deal with the situation. Words would not be enough. Action would show commitment.

The Taoiseach pointed out that there were rational arguments against that position. What difference did the decommissioning of a load of weapons or a box of semtex make? Why elevate this demand for a token gesture to something which was blocking all progress?

Mr. Trimble replied that it was crucial that there be visible evidence of the IRA's commitment to exclusively democratic methods. Their verbal commitments would have to be matched by action. He went on to refer to the recent experience of Irish officials in West Belfast where threats of force had obviously been delivered. Intentions had to be matched by actions.

Mr. Maginnis said that in the history of Northern Ireland, there had been many ceasefires, some of them of long duration. The IRA had been quiet for up to fourteen years. What was now needed was evidence that the war was over once and for all. There had to be a signal to IRA operatives that it was over. He knew

and fully understood that the IRA could rearm in the future but at this point what was needed was a signal that the war was over. The only way to do this was to have disarmament. The unionist community was not asking the IRA to surrender and had shown discipline in not making this demand. Mr. Taylor intervened to say that he was upset with Dick Spring's recent remarks on surrender. No-one in the unionist community was talking about IRA surrender. The IRA had not been beaten. There was a stalemate situation. The gesture was needed before unionists could sit down.

Mr. Trimble said that the word gesture needed to be handled with care. What was needed were actions to match verbal commitments given.

Mr. Taylor went on to say that Britain could not deliver the unionists. They would decide for themselves what steps to take and when those steps should be taken.

The Attorney General asked what type of IRA signal might be acceptable. Were there alternatives? What form would meet unionists requirements?

Mr. Trimble responded that he had not closed his mind. He had not thought of any specific alternative to what was being publicly talked about. What was important was to establish the commitment.

The Attorney General probed further and asked how much room did unionists have within the phrase "disarmament at the beginning of the process".

Mr. Trimble replied that there was a lot locked up within that phrase. It was best to leave the detail open. He referred to the 1916 precedent where UVF weapons were handed over years in advance of a settlement.

Mr. Maginnis suggested that the decommissioning item should not be hacked to death. There were other matters for discussion. What about the Belfast meeting with Irish officials? What was meant by the Attorney General's reference to alternative signals? Did he have something specific in mind?

The Attorney General responded that he had nothing specific in mind. He was seeking to establish that there was room for creative thinking.

Mr. Trimble commented that Sinn Féin/IRA now seemed to be in a prescriptive mode. They were telling everybody else what to do. They had lost a major opportunity by not co-operating in efforts to decommission.

Mr. Maginnis said that they had put their decommissioning ideas on paper for the British Government. They had suggested that a decommissioning body should be given status by making it international. In doing so, the unionists thought that they were giving Sinn Féin room for manoeuvre but Sinn Féin did not appear to grasp the opportunity.

The Taoiseach said that Sinn Féin was a slow moving organisation. They did not always immediately answer the questions they were asked and the process by which they prepared answers to questions was by any standards slow. In regard to the Belfast meeting with officials, Adams and Maginnis were reacting to what they thought would happen the following week. The Taoiseach added that it was not his approach to put anybody on the spot or in a corner. He could have gone ahead with the Summit but to do so would have provoked a crisis with unpredictable consequences. It was always better not to behave in this way. In the days before the proposed Summit, it was becoming clear that the British were not prepared to invest an international decommissioning body with sufficient room for manoeuvre. In effect what they were planning to do was to create an elaborate machine whose outcome could be ignored by the British Government if they did not like it. There was no change in the principled position adopted by the Irish Government. The decision to postpone the Summit was based on two pragmatic judgements. first, there would be no instalment as a precondition to talks and second, it would not be

wise to provoke a crisis with unpredictable consequences. The Irish Government had in those circumstances decided to withdraw to facilitate a regrouping.

Mr. Trimble said that he understood the point about not provoking a crisis with unpredictable consequences. It is obvious that more time was needed. But in regard to a decommissioning instalment, it would not be possible for unionists to sit down with Sinn Féin/IRA unless there was absolutely clear evidence of the beginning of a process involving exclusively peaceful methods. It was his clear impression that the British Government would not fudge on the third Washington condition.

The Taoiseach said that since the beginning of September, things had developed somewhat. It might be that Sinn Féin would now accept and work with an international commission in return for a public commitment to a target date for all party round table talks. The British Government were currently committed to the third Washington condition but if they could give an international commission an appropriate mandate and made it clear that a gesture was not the only way forward, some movement might be possible.

Mr. Trimble said that the setting of a target date for talks was simply erecting a buffer which would be crashed into later on.

Mr. Maginnis said that while he understood that the IRA needed some confidence building measures, the unionist tradition and the wider community in Northern Ireland also needed confidence building measures. An international body with George Mitchell helped out by an Irish and a British observer would not come remotely near to providing the confidence that unionists were looking for. If an international body was to be serious, it needed technical experts, at least four others in addition to the three people already mentioned. He said that David Trimble was struggling with how to move the situation forward and thought that potentially there was support for his elected assembly initiative from within the Sinn Féin community.

The Taoiseach said that there was no mystery about the twin track approach. It had already been discussed extensively though informally in public. A commission would be set up and it would be asked to report say after two months. Meanwhile during those two months, extensive bilateral and trilateral talks would take place involving all the parties. Both Governments might be involved in some of the talks. At the end of the two months, the commission would produce a report which would hopefully convince people that the IRA were seriously committed to decommissioning and would also deal with the British Government's concern about the third Washington condition.

Mr. Taylor intervened to say that the IRA were very slow to move. But they had created the wall which all the parties now had to climb over. It was obvious that talks involving all the parties could not take place this year. He said that the formula put forward by the Taoiseach was simply not acceptable. It was not a runner.

Mr. Trimble added that no formula which tried to fudge the issue was on. It would be seen by people as a way of enabling both Governments to abandon commitments which they had already entered into.

Mr. Taylor asked again about the meeting which officials had had with Sinn Féin and about the recent Sinn Féin conference.

Mr. Teahon replied that the IRA's statement issued on the day of the Sinn Féin conference had indicated that the IRA would give up weapons as part of a negotiated settlement. He went on to describe the West Belfast meeting. Neither Adams or Maginnis had made references to "bodies on the street", or anything like it. There was, however, a third person, Fr. Alex Reid, present who had made remarks that might be constituted as a threat though he had not used the "bodies on the street" phrase. He had criticised Seán Ó hUiginn and himself for having the

temerity to second guess John Hume and Gerry Adams and had suggested that they would have the consequences of their actions on their conscience. Mr. Teahon emphasised that neither Adams nor Maginnis had uttered that or any other threat. Nor did they seem to stand over what Fr. Alex Reid had said.

At this point, the meeting adjourned for lunch.

Among the points raised over lunch were:

- Mr. Trimble said that the Irish Government had done nothing since the Downing Street Declaration to give assurance to unionists. He and his colleagues mentioned rejoining the commonwealth and restoring parity with Sterling as two possibilities. The Taoiseach asked about the unionists joining the British-Irish parliamentary body but they made it clear that this would not be possible other than the context of an overall settlement.
- The Taoiseach referred to the need to put some focus in the Anglo-Irish relationship on the east-west access. He said that the Prime Minister and himself had had some preliminary discussions on this and that some progress might be expected shortly.

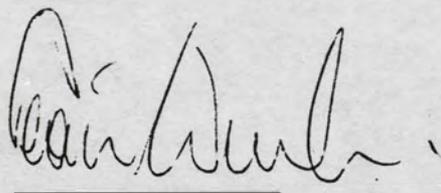
There was a good deal of discussion about the need for the unionists to have serious and extensive face to face discussions with the SDLP. Mr. Trimble outlined the difficulties which unionists had faced over the years in communicating with the SDLP, in particular with Mr. Hume. He was aloof and arrogant and did not seem to want to hear the unionist case.

- Mr. Trimble referred to newspaper reports about possible changes in Articles 2 & 3 of the Constitution in the context of an overall political package. If the changes leaked last January were all that was on offer, it was important that the Irish Government should know that these would be of absolutely no value. At the same time, there had been leaks about extensive changes in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920 which unionists found alarming. The Taoiseach said that since the formation of his Government, there had been no discussion of changes in Article 2 & 3 either internally or with the British Government. Anything that had appeared in newspapers related to the previous Government.

- The unionist delegation initiated a short discussion on north/south co-operation. Mr. Taylor, in particular, said that the feeling in his community was that Dublin was interested only in north/south co-operation which had Constitutional implications. There were many obvious and

practical areas of north/south co-operation which Dublin ignored. Why, for example, could Donegal not buy its electricity from Northern Ireland instead of setting up an elaborate and expensive transmission system to get electricity from areas south of the border.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on what should be said to the media.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Seán Donlon', written over a horizontal line.

Seán Donlon

3 October, 1995.