



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

**Reference Code:** 2021/98/2

**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.

AMBASÁID NA HÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,  
SW1X 7HR

Telephone: 0171-235 2171

Direct Line: 0171-201 2

Fax: 0171-245 6961

Handwritten initials 'JH' circled in red.

1 May 1996

Mr. Sean O hUiginn  
Second Secretary  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin 2

COPY TO: 46  
PST 2/5  
MR. P TEAHON  
MR. S. DONLON  
MR. T. DALTON

Dear Secretary

Discussion with the American Ambassador

The American Ambassador, William Crowe, came to lunch at the Embassy yesterday. I have discussed the peace process with the Ambassador on several occasions and found him to be a man of quite fixed views, heavily influenced by the British position, and generally pessimistic about the prospects of real progress or of a lasting settlement. I invited him yesterday to brief him on recent developments from our perspective. The conversation was friendly and open and lasted two hours. The discussion on Northern Ireland was punctuated by digressions on American history, in particular the opening up of the West, in which the Ambassador, who is originally from Oklahoma, has a particular interest; the American Civil War; and the Presidential election campaign. The main points are below.

Decommissioning: I went over the history of the issue and emphasised to Crowe the central importance of finding a mechanism to deal with it in advance of the opening of all party talks. For two reasons, first to try to ensure that the talks are genuinely inclusive by involving Sinn Fein, and second to prevent the talks stalling or breaking down on the arms issue on the first day. Crowe took both points but was non-committal on our idea for a parallel stream of negotiations. He did however feel that, if both Governments decided to go down the road of a fourth stream, de Chastelain, whom he knows and admires, would be a good choice to lead the discussions.

Chairmanship of Strand Two: I outlined the case for Senator Mitchell. Crowe told me that the Americans have no difficulty with it but that they are not lobbying for Mitchell with the British. He is aware of reservations about the Senator within the British Government and amongst the Unionists but said that he has difficulty in judging the degree of opposition. In discussions with the US Embassy one side tends to hide behind the reservations of the other. British officials and Ministers say that the problem is with the Unionists and vice versa.

**Restoration of the Ceasefire:** Crowe said that nothing he has heard or seen since 9 February gives him confidence that the ceasefire can be restored. This assessment is in line with this general pessimism about the process. He holds particularly strong views about terrorist organisations bombing their way to the table and then holding their weapons as a threat over the negotiations. He wondered aloud whether the process was worth the moral compromises involved. I accepted that the peace process in Northern Ireland, like peace processes elsewhere, faced all involved with moral dilemmas, but various approaches had been tried and had failed over 25 years. What was new about the current efforts was the attempt to bring the men of violence into the political process. I felt it was morally incumbent on the political leadership on all sides to explore all avenues that might lead to peace and a settlement. The situation in Northern Ireland was not static, and a policy of benign neglect was neither morally justified nor politically workable. This was another reason why the arms question needed careful and detailed handling in advance of the talks.

**IRA's London Campaign:** At several points in the discussion Crowe speculated about the possibility of another large bomb in London and the likely consequences for the negotiations. His own view is that another spectacular involving loss of life, widespread destruction to property, and severe disruption to life in London would make it politically impossible for the Government and the Unionists to contemplate sitting down with Sinn Fein even if they subsequently restored the ceasefire. He hoped that Sinn Fein understood this and intimated that we should be getting this message across to them.

**Sinn Fein:** The Ambassador's antipathy to Sinn Fein and the IRA is clear. He feels that the United States and the President have been let down by Gerry Adams and that the US Government should take a tougher line with him. He asked me about my views on this. Aware of the negative reaction in the White House to the reports in last week's British media of a toughening in the US position (reportedly on the basis of a briefing given by Crowe) I said that we appreciated the President's handling of the issue. It needed a sensitive balance. It was important to send a clear and tough message to Sinn Fein about our rejection of violence but at the same time to encourage the Republican Movement back to the political approach. To Crowe's scepticism about the likelihood of this I replied that it had been done before in 1994 against the odds.

**Unionists:** He finds the Unionists (which he refers to as "the Ulster people") difficult and inflexible but admires their bluntness and plain talking. He feels that they have been for too long neglected by the US and is pleased that this has been redressed in the past year. It is clear that he sees himself as having played an important role in this. I said that we welcomed and encouraged dialogue with the Unionist side; an understanding of Unionism was essential to the process and an engagement between Unionism and Nationalism was a central element. At the same time no side should be allowed to construct a veto to the process by pressing what they knew to be unrealizable demands. The Unionists should be encouraged to show flexibility.

**Major:** Crowe is an admirer of the Prime Minister whom he sees as being surrounded by people of lesser quality and courage. He feels that Major's room for manoeuvre is increasingly constrained on most issues of policy, including on Northern Ireland and said that there are a number of Ministers who have consistently advised the Prime Minister not to take the process further. I said that this was not a real option repeating the argument that benign

neglect or indifferent management was extremely dangerous and would not work. This was one of the lessons of the past year.

Clinton: The Ambassador was unsure how much time the President personally devoted to Northern Ireland issues. On the other hand he commented that the National Security Adviser was deeply involved in all aspects of the problems and probably saw it as his major contribution to history. Clinton was clearly interested but had many other issues to deal with, including getting himself re-elected in November. When I suggested that there might be a link between the two Crowe said that in his view the strength of the Irish vote in the United States was exaggerated. Of the 40 million Americans of Irish descent ( he himself has Irish blood) he believes that no more than 7 or 8 million take an interest in the President's handling of the issue. He did however concede that policy is made in the White House and admitted that he no longer bothers to deal with the State Department on Northern Ireland questions.

Yours sincerely



Ted Barrington  
Ambassador