



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr Nolan  
hwh  
2. 4. 97

Mr. [Signature]  
(16)  
2/4/97

Note of Telephone Conversation between the Taoiseach, Mr John Bruton, T.D., and the British Prime Minister, Mr John Major at 5pm on Thursday, 13 March, 1997



1. The conversation lasted about 25 minutes. The atmosphere was cordial. Mr Major was responsive, broadly, but cautious on several points. He sounded relaxed and serene. The rest of this note is put in direct speech but it does not purport to be verbatim or fully exhaustive.
  
2. Taoiseach  
I shall be going to the United States for St Patrick's Day. It will be a high profile situation. I shall be meeting President Clinton and so on. It will be useful to be able to indicate that you and I have spoken today about the Northern Ireland situation.
  
3. On that, I have been accentuating the progress that was made, early on, at least. The talks have got stuck for some time, on the decommissioning issue. The imminence of the Westminster election has not disposed participants to compromise. It is best if the two Governments were to use the gap in a constructive way, so that the talks could move forward more quickly after the resumption. It would be important, from the confidence standpoint, that the two Governments would be seen to be pro-active. That would be good, domestically, for me and, I imagine, for you, within the limits you must observe. I would like to put some proposals to you: we can consider later how far what we discuss or agree should be made public.
  
4. Between now and the resumption, officials should look again at a basis - still based squarely on the International Body's Report - for resolving the decommissioning impasse. We should also task our officials with drawing up proposals for a timeframe and calendar that participants might possibly be able to agree to. Thirdly, we should agree privately that we would hold a summit meeting at some period after the resumption of the talks, that if they have not moved forward, we would meet to take stock: we would also meet, if progress was made but in that case simply to note it. In the less favourable case, it would be to see how the Governments would give a lead to the process. Finally, while we cannot commence Strand Three talks, apart from the other two strands, we could have our officials during the break, start talks about Strand 3, about how to handle the Strand Three talks. Those are my proposals. If

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we acted on them, it would demonstrate to our publics that we were involved in active preparation to move the talks forward, and not just sitting on our hands.

5. Prime Minister

How public would all this be?

6. Taoiseach

We can agree between us how far it should be public. I understand your position. I would hope that you would be able to say a little now and, perhaps, a bit more later, when you are no longer reliant on other parties.

7. Prime Minister

I'm not really relying on them now. The problem is not votes in the House, with the unionists, it is more policy agreement behind me. I have to call the election here very soon. Labour are not going to put down any more confidence motions. To do so and not to succeed only makes them look foolish. So I have not been relying on other parties for the last 10 days. What would officials discuss? I had not envisaged that but I would be open to considering it. What would become public?

8. Taoiseach

The important thing is to have agreement between us, not so much what is public. Even the fact of having had this conversation with me will be useful as I go across to talk to Clinton.

9. Prime Minister

To take your proposals in reverse order, I have no problem in our officials talking about Strand 3, none at all. As regards our holding a meeting after the talks resume, I would welcome it. I do not at all need to be pressed on that one.

10. Taoiseach

I do not have in mind immediately on the resumption of the talks but rather after some work had been done in them, so, say at the end of June.

11. Prime Minister

If we go for a big Summit meeting, with all the officials and hundreds of press people hanging about, there will be an expectation that

we will set out in a communiqué how the whole thing is to be solved. It may be better to think about a meeting at Chequers or such like, where people would not expect us to issue a communiqué with a set way forward.

12. As to the idea of a timeframe or calendar, that makes me a bit queasy. It is not that I don't want to make progress, but once you have a fixed timetable, the worry is that you put yourself at the mercy of the awkward squad, whether unionists or republicans, who will say you are missing your deadlines. I would need to consider that proposal and discuss it with Paddy.

13. Taoiseach

I am not saying that we should agree now that there will be a timeframe or calendar settled but rather that officials will talk about the matter.

14. Prime Minister

I shall reflect on that and talk to Paddy. I shall not go 'snap' on it now.

15. Taoiseach

We can say that we are talking about how it might be done.

16. Prime Minister

I don't want to rule it out.

17. As regards saying that officials will look at how the decommissioning impasse would be broken, I am happy to consider that privately, but I would have worries about saying anything publicly. You know about our contacts with John Hume. That is not known generally. That contact is awkward, politically [comment he clearly meant for himself, within his own party]. We will have to decide, in the next few days what our response is. We are waiting for the questions from John, we have not got them yet. Excuse me, John Holmes is clarifying the position to me here. We know the general drift of the questions but we wanted to get the questions directly from John Hume, with the questions expressed in his own phraseology.

18. Taoiseach

I think he may be reluctant to send you those questions because he is not as sure as he wishes to be that the answers you would give would achieve his object.

19. Prime Minister

What would officials look at re decommissioning? I would be worried if something came out publicly about that and about the dealings with John Hume, at the same time.

20. Taoiseach

If we could move on the other three points, I would not press for anything to be said, publicly, re decommissioning.

21. Prime Minister

Why don't we prepare a page of script, not a formal statement but a common script both sides could draw on, in coming days, for briefing etc.

22. Taoiseach

Agreed. All this brings me to the second main subject. I wanted to raise with you, the possibility - not, as I see it, the probability - of a new IRA ceasefire. This is back to the point we were discussing at Downing Street in December, as regards the resumption of the talks at the end of January. I would propose that you should indicate publicly that if the IRA were to announce a ceasefire now - and stick to it, in actions as well as words, Sinn Féin could be in the talks on their resumption.

23. Prime Minister

If they fulfil the conditions, under our law we have to let them in. A practical problem would arise with what you propose. If we were to say that, it could leave the way open for them to declare a ceasefire on 30 May.

24. Taoiseach

That could easily enough be dealt with. One could refer to the need for the ceasefire to be now or very soon, to a cut-off date.

25. Prime Minister

Perhaps. But I will simply say to you, we have not solved that one in the discussions we have had and Ministers looked at all this very

recently. I would not get colleagues to agree to say anything publicly - unless it emanates from the first set of questions from John, with follow-up questions. I do not wish to trail the carrot publicly, so soon after the murder of Corporal Restorick.

26. Taoiseach

Paddy Teahon and John Holmes could talk further about this, keep in touch with the evolution of this issue.

27. Prime Minister

There is a lot of resistance among colleagues.

28. Taoiseach

We are continuing our work on putting together the dossier about Bloody Sunday. When we have it ready, we shall pass it to you with our assessment but there is nothing I want to raise with you on it now.

29. Prime Minister

We are reviewing the material, with an open mind. There is a difficulty, in that we are facing a case for judicial review.

30. Have you seen the announcement this afternoon about Róisín McAliskey? [Taoiseach indicated he had.] When we spoke last, you asked me to take an interest in that issue. I have done so and you will have seen the various improvements. I hope they help in some small way.

31. Taoiseach

I welcome them, including today's announcement. They help in no small way. They deprive the Provos of a propaganda weapon.

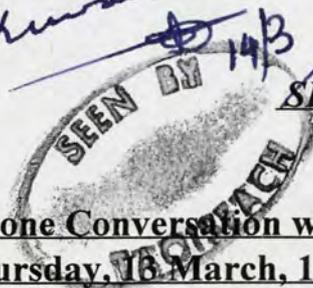
32. Prime Minister

Yes. And I was never convinced that a girl eight months pregnant could overcome her guards from a hospital bed and make good her escape!

33. The conversation concluded at this point.

Ms. B. Nolan  
hnd  
23-3-97

Mr. Keenan



~~SECRET~~

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Speaking Points for Taoiseach's Phone Conversation with  
Prime Minister Major, 4.30 pm., Thursday, 18 March, 1997.

Introduction

1. It is suggested that the Taoiseach should concentrate his remarks on the talks and the question of an IRA ceasefire. There is no need to refer to the Roisin McAliskey case, as reasonable progress is being made in this regard. The parades issue was amply covered at yesterday's meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference.
2. The Taoiseach will need to raise with the Prime Minister the question of publicity as regards this phone call - i.e. whether the fact of the call should be made public and, if so, what should be said about its content.

Talks

- ♦ Talks have made some progress, viz:
  - agreement on eminent international Chairmanship
  - agreement on Rules of Procedure
  - agreement on Agenda for remainder of Opening Plenary
  - apparent achievement of wide measure of agreement on issues which will need to be addressed in substantive negotiations.
- ♦ Fact that we succeeded in putting together such a comprehensive talks process; that participants are all still at the table and that they wish to continue with the process represents a considerable achievement in itself.
- ♦ At same time, disappointing that talks have not yet reached point of opening of substantive negotiations in the three Strands - that is certainly the way public opinion sees it - here, in Northern Ireland and, I am sure, in Britain.
- ♦ We want talks on real issues as soon as possible after resumption - further delay of any appreciable length would be likely to be construed as a talks failure and the dangers - and waste of all our efforts - associated with that are all too obvious.

- Hope that, following British General and Northern Ireland Local Elections, participants will be in a better position to resolve the decommissioning issue - this, after all, was the rationale for adjourning the talks.
- At the same time, hopes on this score may prove to be misplaced and given that the stakes are so high, believe that we need to "take out insurance" in advance of talks resumption.
- I propose therefore that:
  - (a) between now and the resumption, our officials should look again at a basis - still based squarely on the International Body's Report - for resolving the decommissioning impasse. Don't do it publicly at this stage
  - (b) we should also task our officials with drawing up proposals for a timeframe and calendar for the negotiations which might be put to participants for their agreement on or shortly after 3 June - you had indicated, in the 28 November statement of British Government policy on the talks, a willingness to bring forward proposals for an agreed indicative timeframe for the conduct of the negotiations, if that would be helpful: I believe that now is the time to move on this. a little queasy - does not rule out
  - (c) we should agree privately that if this fails to secure agreement and if the decommissioning obstacle remains in place after a finite period - I have in mind weeks, not months - we would jointly take stock at a specially convened Summit meeting, with a view to both Governments taking a more pro-active leadership role. / yes
  - (d) we should, as a signal of our determination to inject forward momentum, announce that in addition to the work at (a) and (b), we are requesting our officials to begin preparatory work for the negotiations on Strand Three matters. / yes
- I do not see General Election in the Republic - the timing of which remains open - as necessitating any interval in the talks.

### IRA Ceasefire

- A genuine IRA ceasefire would obviously be a great prize. Both you and I have our doubts about their intentions, even if there still has not been a

full scale resumption of their campaign.

- That said, the current talks break offers an opportunity which could not be easily recreated.
- If there were a ceasefire now or very soon, it would allow more time in which to test a renewed IRA ceasefire than you were originally looking for.
- Believe we should make one last try and go for it.
- <sup>not</sup> Propose that you should indicate publicly that if the IRA were to announce a ceasefire now - and if it were found to be genuine - Sinn Féin could be in the talks on their resumption; our officials could agree a precise formula of words, but certainty would be vital.
- Believe the effort is worth making for all sorts of reasons - not least the ever present prospect of a return to the full horrors of the past - or even worse.
- If they don't take the opportunity, we will have to draw the consequences; we will certainly be prepared to proceed and do real business, without Sinn Féin, if Republicans opt out.
- Believe that we have here, at the very least, a real opportunity to call Sinn Féin's bluff: if Sinn Féin don't take the chance it will be absolutely clear to all that they - and they alone - are responsible for their not being in the talks.

### Publicity as regards Phone Conversation

Need to settle whether and if so how much of our conversation should be made public.

- Well let him have dinner on  
Bloody Sunday