



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

Reference Code: 2021/44/4

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

Meeting between Minister Collins and
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
London 13 July 1990

1. The Minister was accompanied by Secretary Dorr, Ambassador O'Rourke, Mr Gallagher, Mr O'Donovan and Ms Anderson. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Mr Blelloch, Ambassador Fenn, Mr Thomas and Mr Leech. The meeting began at 10 a.m. and finished at 4.30 p.m. - this included an initial tete-a-tete, lunch, a lengthy adjournment in mid-morning (over an hour) at the British request as well as two short adjournments at the request of the Irish side.

Mr Brooke's Statement of 5 July

2. The Secretary of State said his telephone conversation with the Minister on the morning of 5 July had been 'helpful and significant'; the Taoiseach's statement in the Dail on the same day, as well as his further "very generous remarks" in Donegal at the weekend, had also been thoroughly helpful. The Unionists had, on balance, taken a reasonably positive line in their reactions. There are obviously, however, continuing problems. He (Mr Brooke) has said publicly that if we cannot reach agreement before the Commons recess, then we will "sadly have given all involved a sense that we cannot move forward". He had not made this comment lightly - he was conscious of the complication of artificial deadlines - but he believed it was a realistic statement.
3. The Minister said that the intervention of the direct rule debate in the talks process was unfortunate; it demonstrated the danger of an artificial deadline. With the best will in the world, we could not possibly have

responded within 24 hours to a twelve paragraph highly sensitive text. In the event, the joint damage limitation exercise had proved effective; there was inevitably a sense of delay and setback, but not an air of crisis. The task now was to find a way round the remaining obstacles; it served no one's interest to let matters drift.

4. The Minister said that during the tete-a-tete he had handed over an informal analysis paper (text at Annex A) - prepared at Mr Brooke's request - which set out our difficulties with the original draft of Mr Brooke's speech. We hoped this paper would be helpful; the core problem, as the paper made clear, is the question of conditionality in the start of North-South talks. The Minister emphasised the extent to which we had moved on the timeframe issue since 19 April; it is not acceptable that the Unionists should now be allowed introduce a fourth pre-condition of "substantial progress" in the internal talks before North/South talks get underway; we needed an assurance - as opposed to an expression of hope or likelihood - that the North/South talks would be held during the timeframe of the gap.
5. The Minister added that, while we were extremely sceptical about Unionist suggestions that the SDLP would not involve themselves fully in the internal talks in advance of North/South talks getting underway, we had nevertheless tried to find a way of counteracting these fears. In an effort to be helpful, we had sought to redraft the crucial passages dealing with the timeframe in the Secretary of State's speech in a way which would retain as much as possible of the original text while adding language intended to reassure the Unionists (text

at Annex B was circulated). This revised text represented a very fair effort on our part to move matters forward.

6. The Minister went on to say that our preference would be for a public announcement on the lines of our draft. However, if the Unionists were unable to accept a public announcement of a firm timeframe for North-South talks, we would consider a firm private assurance from Mr Brooke that the North-South talks would begin by a certain date, say three weeks after the internal talks. This assurance could take the form of a private exchange of letters between the Minister and Mr Brooke. Obviously, Mr Brooke could only convey such an assurance to us if he had the authority of all the parties to do so. This was absolutely our bottom line - we were not playing brinkmanship.

Adjournment

7. At the request of the British side there was an adjournment - which in the event lasted more than an hour - for them to consider our draft text. During the adjournment, the British side sought confirmation that if Mr Brooke put our language (Annex B) on the public record, this would not need to be underpinned by a private exchange of letters. The Irish side confirmed that this was so - all that would be required would be an oral assurance from Mr Brooke that the term "within weeks" (in the final sentence of our draft) in practice would mean within three or four weeks.

Resumed discussion on Timeframe

8. When the discussion resumed, Mr Brooke commented that the length of the adjournment was an index of the seriousness with which they had addressed our text but also "an index of the difficulty of what still lies between us". He said it had emerged during the past week, with greater clarity than before, that the Unionists are looking to the gap period as the "interval within which everything has to be done". He had misgivings himself as to whether this would prove possible; however this is the firm Unionist approach and it is obviously relevant to the discussion on the timeframe.

9. Mr Brooke said that he could not say whether Unionist agreement to the new text (i.e. the Irish redraft) could be delivered; there was no way he could commit them in advance. The Unionist concerns are twofold: (a) mistrust of SDLP willingness to participate actively in the internal talks and (b) a concern that Unionists, in entering the North/South talks, should have "sufficient status" - as a result of progress made in the internal talks - to give them some standing in the conversations with Dublin; this would require some idea of what the pattern of internal relationships in Northern Ireland might be. An additional problem, Mr Brooke said, was that since the Unionists had seen the earlier draft of the 5 July statement, it would be clear to them that they are now being asked to agree a modification; he was approaching the conversation with the Unionists therefore with "not the easiest of hands to play" In the circumstances, it might be helpful - and he sought the Minister's authority to do this - if he could emphasise

to the Unionists (by drawing on but not showing them the 19 April text) how much Dublin has moved in this process.

10. The Minister indicated that he did not see a problem with an indication by the Secretary of State to the Unionists that Dublin had made concessions. Mr Brooke said that it had to be understood that, when he went back to the Unionists, it would be a "negotiating conversation". He would be putting the redraft to them but it had to be possible that they would seek adaptations. The Minister said that it was essential that Unionists should understand that this was as far as Dublin could go.

Textual discussion

11. Turning to the second paragraph of our text, Mr Brooke expressed appreciation for the care that went into its construction; "it seeks to express in neutral language what is a reasonably common position among the parties as to how the interval should be used". He had two suggested amendments and a comment

- he proposed that the words "and substantial" might be added in the fifth line [the phrase would then read "in order to seek to achieve rapid and substantial progress"]. While the word itself was "otiose", he felt its addition would be helpful to Unionists.

- he was prepared to try to persuade the Unionists to accept the final sentence of the second paragraph as it stood; however it was "conceivable" that the Unionists would seek some linkage with the previous sentence. He therefore proposed, as a fall-back position if this proved necessary, the addition of the phrase "on this

basis" at the beginning of the final sentence. [The sentence would then read "On this basis, it is further agreed by all participants that, so as to reach a conclusion within the timeframe envisaged, it will be necessary, as I have just indicated, to launch the three strands of discussion within weeks of each other"].

- as to the phrase "within weeks" in the final sentence, (a) he believed that the Unionists accepted that the North/South talks would have begun before half way through the gap and (b) he had Paisley's personal view that we would be into the North/South talks within three weeks. He therefore had "a moral suasion" he could place on everyone as well as "a personal prediction from Paisley".

12. The Minister responded that the suggestion to introduce the phrase "on this basis" at the beginning of the final sentence would be completely unacceptable to him. It brought back conditionality and could be a way of delaying the start of North/South talks. Mr Thomas said it was important to note that the phrase would refer back to the intention of all parties to participate actively (and not to the actual achievement of rapid progress). The Minister reiterated that he could not go along with the phrase.
13. On the other hand, the Minister said that he could accept the addition of the words "and substantial" as proposed by Mr Brooke; he suggested that, with this single amendment, the Secretary of State should put this text to the Unionists - as he had indicated he was prepared to do - and we would see where we go from there. He was also satisfied with the Secretary of State's private assurance

that "within weeks" meant within the first half of the gap.

Description of Unionist participation in North/South talks

14. After lunch, the Minister indicated those issues - other than conditionality - with which we had difficulty. A major problem was the reference to Unionist participation in North-South talks as "members of a UK team". This could be interpreted as changing the nature of these talks from North/South to East-West; there was no way we could accept that. Our suggested alternative (first paragraph of the text at Annex B) would be to refer to "discussions between the Northern Ireland parties, with the Secretary of State, and the Irish Government.
15. The Secretary of State reacted strongly on this point; he felt there was no way the Unionists would come to the table on that basis. He said the Unionists had already come a long way; their initial attitude had been that they would only talk to Dublin if there was a devolved government in place; on this issue, the Unionist leaders are the ones with exposed backs and we all had to have regard to that. It was crucial to the Unionists that they be described as part of the "United Kingdom team"; it was his best judgement that he could not deliver on the formulation proposed by Dublin.
16. The Minister suggested that a reference to "discussions between the Northern Ireland parties, including the Unionists as part of a Northern Ireland delegation led by the Secretary of State, and the Irish Government" might meet the needs of the situation. Following some

discussion, Mr Gallagher put forward a variation of this: "discussions between the Northern Ireland parties, including the Unionists as part of a team led by the Secretary of State, and the Irish Government". The Minister added that this was a neutral form of words; it gave the Unionists all the legitimacy they needed; if they wanted to put their own gloss on this phrase, we would not get into a public debate with them about it.

17. There was further extensive discussion on this phrase, with the British side being doubtful of their ability to sell our formula to the Unionists but, at the same time, being prepared to test Unionist reactions. Mr Dorr then suggested a further variant - "This will require discussions between the Irish Government and representatives of the Northern Ireland parties, including the Unionist parties led by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland"; this was also taken on board by the British for use in their discussions with Unionists.

Formula on the Secretariat

18. The Minister reiterated our difficulties with the formula being proposed on the Secretariat, particularly the reference to "normal role"; Mr Brooke said that it was impossible to shift the Unionists on this - he had taken the issue back to them last week but without success. The Minister responded that in the circumstances, and in order to be as helpful as possible, we were prepared - with difficulty - to live with the proposed formulation.

Duration of the Gap

19. The Minister commented on the reference to "some months" in the Secretary of State's draft; since we were talking about a gap of approximately two months, this seemed too loose a formulation. Mr Brooke said his concern had simply been to avoid being overly precise as the schedule of Conference meetings was a matter to be fixed jointly by the Co-Chairmen of the Conference. It was of course understood that the dates would be fixed by reference to diaries on both sides.

Agenda of talks

20. The Minister said that we felt - as was clear from our analysis paper - that the objective and agenda for the North/South talks was set out in too restrictive terms in the Secretary of State's first draft; a broader approach was required - and indeed the Secretary of State's statement as delivered was a substantial improvement on the earlier draft. Mr Brooke said that he did not envisage having to say much more about this than had already been said on 5 July; as far as possible, he would rest on the public record.

Summing up

21. The Minister summed up the discussion as follows:
- Mr Brooke would take the new text (Annex B) back to the Unionists with two amendments : the revised formulations describing (a) Unionist participation (see paras 16 and 17 above) and (b) the reference to

"rapid and substantial" progress in the second paragraph. The final and key sentence of this paragraph would remain free-standing.

- Mr Brooke had given an oral assurance that "within weeks" meant before the end of the first half of the gap.
- the Irish side was prepared - with difficulty - to live with the formula on the Secretariat.
- the gap period would be defined by reference to diaries on both sides.
- in any further public references, the language used to describe North/South talks would be as open as possible.
- the Irish side would be involved, as early as possible, in seeing the text of the further intervention in the House of Commons which the Secretary of State was planning (the Secretary of State commented that this was "a counsel of perfection").

Next Steps

22. The Secretary was unsure if he would deliver his planned further statement on 19 July, during Northern Ireland Question Time, or on some other date before the recess (he added that there was already a heavy burden of business on the 19th).

23. As the next step, the Secretary of State would seek to arrange further meetings with both the Unionists and the SDLP before resuming the discussion with the Minister en marge of the Conference on 17 July. (He asked the Minister's assessment of whether the approach we had suggested in the new text would be acceptable to the SDLP - the Minister said we had not shown them the text but he was confident they would react positively).

A.A.

Anne Anderson

14 July 1990

c.c. PST, PSM, Mr Nally, PSS, Mr Mathews, Mr Brosnan,
Mr Gallagher, Amb. London, Joint Sec.