



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

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he might disagree
7-10-91
I agree with Mr. Gallagher's "feelings" about
the Butler meeting. The other conclusions are
13/12/90
A view of possible trends in British political
thinking on the North
x highly speculative.

1. The following very personal views on possible developing trends in British thinking on the North at official level are largely based on an assessment of remarks made - as well as the mood and atmosphere - at last Friday's Nally-Butler dinner in London and also, to some degree, on a brief private conversation recently with John Chilcot, the new Permanent Secretary at the NIO.
2. One is clearly hesitant to hypothesise on the basis of fairly slender evidence; however, the lack of urgency with which the Brooke initiative is being conducted at present, allied to Chilcot's apparently considered remarks on Friday suggesting they would be talking to us within weeks about a "solution", seem to point towards some significant rethinking being under way on the British side. In the circumstances, it would seem prudent to try to anticipate the direction in which British thinking may be moving, so as to ensure that we are not taken by surprise by any unexpected moves on their part.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

3. The British would appear to have carried out an assessment of the Agreement and to have concluded that it has seriously failed to live up to expectations, either for London or Dublin. They, I suspect, no longer see the Agreement as offering a framework for progress on either the political or the security fronts. They may also feel that, with Mrs. Thatcher's departure, they have now wider autonomy within which they can explore options outside the Agreement - including considering whether any new initiative might

embrace the two groupings excluded from the 1985 Agreement, the Unionists and the Provisionals.

Security

4. If Friday night's meeting left me with one over-riding message, it was of a deep British anxiety about security, both in the immediate future and in a general on-going sense. The depth of this anxiety was such that one wondered if they were anticipating an upsurge of violence in Britain itself rather than (or as well as) an intensified pre-Christmas campaign in the North.
5. The British clearly take the view that the Provisionals can continue their campaign of violence indefinitely at the present, or even at an increased, level. This has horrendous implications for their security forces and also for the protection of public persons in Britain. The Leader of the House, John MacGregor, privately emphasised to the Minister on Monday how shaken the Conservative Party had been - and still is - by Ian Gow's murder. In the Secretariat last week, the Chief Constable emphasised the scale of the security problem - as he put it, five thousand troops could be swallowed up in any one area of the border.
6. The British, I suspect, also realise that the Provisionals have the capacity, in the absence of draconian security measures, to bring down any new political structures in the North which exclude them.

British Position Paper

7. The temptation for London at present may be therefore to consider putting forward relatively radical political proposals which might either enable:

- (a) the Provisionals to be brought on board the political process; or
 - (b) even if the IRA were to reject such proposals, the package might be sufficiently attractive to nationalists (in the British assessment) as to facilitate the type of security measures which would enable the IRA's campaign of violence to be defeated.
8. As regards (a) above, Archbishop Daly said to me recently (in strict confidence) that the British seem at present to be preparing a position paper on whether to talk to the IRA (through the Chaplains' initiative). As an alternative to this, they may be looking at the possibility of talks with Sinn Fein (through the Hume/Reid/Adams route). If they do decide to talk to the Provisionals, it may well be through someone who is nominally a third party (John Blelloch, Chilcot's predecessor, may offer one possible option).
9. If such a British position paper is indeed being prepared, it will presumably address the question of how such talks could be integrated into, or merged with, the Brooke initiative. One possible way that occurs to us might be for the Brooke talks to open and, once having moved into the North-South stage, to adjourn to give the nationalist community in the island the opportunity to consider in depth its approach to this major development (i.e. all-island talks). This would involve the establishment of what might be called a Forum Mark II; such a development might - on the basis of private understandings between the two Governments and signals from the British to the Provisionals - enable the latter to announce a cessation of violence and opt into the political process. The biggest challenge in such a scenario of course would be to keep the Unionists on board while facilitating an involvement by Sinn Fein (with IRA endorsement); the risk must be very high that signals

which went far enough to bring the IRA into the process would, almost by definition, be too much for the Unionists to swallow.

10. Another possibility is that the British may have at this stage effectively given up on the Brooke initiative and are simply keeping the ball in play while planning their strategy for the aftermath of breakdown. It is not to be excluded, for instance, that the NIO is already working on a set of ideas or proposals which the Secretary of State might present on his own behalf at such time as he publicly acknowledges that the initiative in its present form has run its course. These ideas might be presented simply in the form of a speech; more ambitiously, the British may even be contemplating something on the lines of a Green Paper which could lead subsequently, following a period of consultation, to a White Paper.
11. Irrespective of what (if anything) the British have in mind, the possibility is that we may get relatively little notice of what might be in prospect. In addition, and while there may well be attractive elements from our viewpoint in any new set of proposals, inevitably there would also be some highly sensitive and possibly unpalatable elements on the security side in particular. More importantly, whatever the nature and balance of any package of proposals, one must question the desirability of allowing ourselves to be pushed into a reactive posture, with British ideas setting the agenda for the subsequent debate. There may therefore be merit, especially if there are further pointers which confirm our sense that the British may be developing some new proposals, in beginning work on our own set of ideas which could be tabled at short notice if circumstances seemed to warrant this.

Taoiseach's Meeting with the Prime Minister

12. John Major's accession to power can be seen as an important opportunity from our viewpoint. The indications are that, as of now, Major has no fixed views or indeed little knowledge about Northern Ireland. At the same time, by instinct and temperament, the new Prime Minister is likely to find the Unionist posture essentially anachronistic. Unionist rhetoric - which at least at times struck a chord with Margaret Thatcher - will sit uneasily with his pragmatism. To the extent that the nationalist case can be couched in terms of logic and common sense, there may be a real possibility of enlisting Major's sympathy and support.
13. British official advice is that we should not "rush" Major and they probably have a point. The extent to which evolving British thinking at official level may have filtered upwards at this stage is also unclear. In the circumstances, it would seem advisable in initial contacts with the new Prime Minister to concentrate in a general way on the need for a joint approach - the importance of the two Governments setting out together to resolve this last remaining legacy of Anglo-Irish relations; this would suggest the two Governments working intensively together to decide on a framework for talks, and the direction in which they would envisage a solution lying and towards which they would orchestrate the process.
14. At the same time we will obviously wish to continue at official level probing British intentions. If indeed they are edging towards a new strategy, as conjectured above, this would of necessity involve the frankest discussions between London and Dublin on the involvement of the Provisionals in the process, the signals the British might give privately to the Provisionals to opt into the talks (e.g. would they, to quote Dick Spring's speech to the IPB

on Monday, move "from disinterest to a positive statement of interest" in a united Ireland), how far they would push the Unionists in this direction, and how the European Community dimension - and this could be of increasing importance - can be brought to bear actively to help make any new scenario happen.

DAT
Dermot Gallagher,
12 December, 1990.

cc: PST; PSM; Mr. ~~Nally~~; PSS; Ms. Anderson