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Meeting between the Secretary of State
and the Minister for Foreign Affairs
London, 21st February, 1990

Attendance

1. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Ian Burns, Nicholas Fenn, Oliver Miles and Quentin Thomas; the Minister by Noel Dorr, Andrew O' Rourke, Declan O' Donovan and Dermot Gallagher.
2. The Meeting between the Secretary of State and the Minister began with a tete-a-tete, during the course of which officials on both sides met separately (see annexed report).

Discussions with Unionists and SDLP

3. The Secretary of State opened the meeting by saying that he would like to bring the Minister up to date on developments since Adare. He thought he now detected signs of movement and fluidity which had not been present before. A central indication of this was the increasing acceptance that the North/South and East/West dimensions needed to be addressed at the same time as the internal Northern Ireland issue. He added that he was consciously using the expression at the same time as he did not want any hang-ups over the use of terms such as concurrent or consecutive. The reality, which both the SDLP and Unionists accepted, was that there was no way in which they could put their thumbprints on internal arrangements unless they knew where they stood on the other two dimensions.
4. In general, he had found, in his discussions on Monday and Tuesday, that both the SDLP and the Unionists showed an "understandable reluctance" to be precise about their positions; they wished to keep these for the negotiating

table and not have them discussed in advance. He added that the British Government's commitment to the Agreement was as he had set it out at Adare - it was a rock which had served us well in the past (and, by implication, would continue to do so).

5. Turning to the mutually exclusive positions of the Unionists and the SDLP on the opening of negotiations, the Secretary of State said the SDLP were not prepared to contemplate suspension and on this were showing "common cause with us". The Unionists had their three pre-conditions - which Molyneaux had tried to increase to four in public remarks (i.e. to the effect that both Governments should sketch out what they saw an alternative Agreement containing) but the DUP had knocked this down quickly. In effect, the Unionists wanted to be able to end up with an Agreement which would be different from the present one; and they wanted Conference meetings to cease and the Secretariat to stop operating while talks were taking place.

Possible Format for Talks

6. The question now was how to reconcile Unionist demands with the SDLP's position. Brooke went on to answer his own question by saying the British would envisage putting forward a proposal along the following lines to respond to the Unionist conditions on the Conference and Secretariat: At a future Conference, the two Co-Chairmen would announce the dates for a number of subsequent Conference meetings; it would be evident from this announcement that there would be a sufficient gap between two future Conferences for talks to be held. The third pre-condition - the Secretariat - was however the major obstacle to be overcome. The Secretary of State said he was not in the business of suspending the Secretariat but he "would not jump up and down" if the Unionists were to say at the time that, as the

Conference was not meeting, the Secretariat had nothing to do.

7. His overall view was that the odds were less than even that the Unionists would be prepared to accept the above formula. As to the seriousness of Unionist intentions, he believed that they had an incentive to try and make the talks work as, if they failed, their position would be weaker. Their criticism to date was that they had not been allowed play any part in the negotiation of the Agreement; in the aftermath of failed talks, they could no longer use this argument, as they would have been given an opportunity by the Governments to influence an alternative arrangement. The Minister cautioned against being too sanguine in this regard as, if talks failed, Molyneux and Paisley were politically astute enough to find reasons for placing the blame elsewhere.
8. The Secretary of State at this stage referred again to the North/South and East/West dimensions and said that a crucial planning step for the two Governments was to decide on the format in which these parts of the talks would be discussed. He believed there should be discussions between officials as to what these arrangements might be.

Minister's Response

9. The Minister said that he was unclear about what it was hoped to achieve and how it was intended to achieve it. We were perhaps focussing too much on pre-conditions rather than on the substance of talks. He was all for political progress but he was worried about taking a leap in the dark. There were many uncertainties and dangers in moving down this road and they would have to be very conscious of the serious risks involved. It was essential that everything

possible be done to safeguard the Agreement - the IRA for one would be glad to see the two Governments faltering.

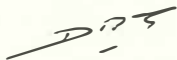
10. The Minister added that there was also a lack of clarity about the positions of the Unionists. It was evident that Molyneaux and Paisley had different positions, Molyneaux being an integrationalist, and Paisley in favour of devolution but opposed to power-sharing. It was also unfortunate that the press interviews given by Paisley and Molyneaux after Monday's meeting had tended to set the tone for the public perception of that meeting. Their presentation was that the meeting was encouraging, that they had stuck to their pre-conditions and that the Secretary of State might be amenable to these pre-conditions but had to consult the SDLP and Dublin about them. Like us, Hume had clearly been irritated at this presentation and had set out the SDLP position very forcefully and very strongly after Tuesday's meeting.
11. The Minister went on to agree that, if officials could clarify the present situation, including the options that might be open to us and how these might be addressed, this would be a helpful step.
12. The Secretary of State said that he had told the Unionists clearly on Monday that he saw no possibility of their pre-conditions being met. He did discuss with them what they would say outside and had told them it would be difficult for them to make concessions later if they were to impale themselves on more rigid language than was necessary. In the circumstances, however, they went ahead and ignored his advice.

Preparation of Position Paper

13. The Minister repeated that it would be helpful if a paper could be drawn up between officials on both sides and, if possible, concluded by Monday evening. He would then be in a position to report back to Government and discuss the position. This paper should, as he said, look at where we were at present, the possible options open to us, and the negotiating structures which would reflect those options.
14. The Secretary of State agreed that the paper should look at these issues and specifically referred again to giving consideration to the manner in which the second and third dimensions (North/South and East/West) could be discussed. He added that the first element (i.e. internal Northern Ireland arrangements) could not be concluded until we knew where we were on the other issues.

Letterkenny Airport

15. The Secretary of State at the end raised the question of Letterkenny Airport and said that he understood that consideration was being given by the Government to the project. This was a matter which had relevance to the North/West Study, which would probably come up for discussion at next week's Conference. He very much hoped that no decision on the airport would be taken before the two Co-Chairmen had an opportunity to discuss the matter at the Conference.


Dermot Gallagher,
22 February, 1990.

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Discussions with Unionists and SDLP

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Secretariat, might be enough to satisfy the Unionists; it might in effect provide a basis for negotiations.

4. As regards the meeting with the SDLP, they appeared gloomy when they came to the meeting. The discussion with them had only advanced the situation minimally. Hume, for instance, was unable to respond to their request to produce an annotated agenda for talks. After the meeting Hume - as he had indicated to them he would - "took the gloves off" when he saw the press and challenged Molyneux and Paisley to say where they stood on the substance of talks. It was useful that Hume blew his top in this (controlled) way. There may well be a Unionist back-lash to what he said but this has not happened yet. Paradoxically, Hume's public remarks were the most constructive thing to emerge from the meeting, as they had sharpened the focus for debate.
4. In reply to our question as to whether the British were not moving ahead too quickly - we mentioned that even Ken Maginnis was not thinking in terms of talks before September - Burns said he thought that spring was probably the right timing for any talks (without offering any explanation for this thinking).

Different Emphasis in recent British briefings

5. In response to further questioning about the different emphases in the Dublin and Adare meetings, as against last Friday's Minister's meeting in London, Burns said that the meeting in Dublin was merely to open a file with us on British thinking. He admitted, however, that he "did consciously load his remarks differently" last Friday as we had shown concern in Dublin and Adare about whether the British were not in danger of wilfully damaging the Agreement. The Secretary of State was like the Taoiseach in that he was prepared to take a better Agreement if it were

on offer, but he did not want to desert what we have. His approach was one of safety first. Asked whether the talks would focus on Article 4 or would be about a new Agreement, he said that they might produce something between Article 4 and a new Agreement. Whether this would mean re-writing Articles 1-11 of the Agreement he did not know. It might, for instance, be possible to supplement the present Agreement with one dealing with North/South issues. He emphasised, however, that he saw the thrust of what the British were doing as being entirely in accord with the thrust of the Agreement.

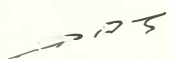
Agenda and Prospects for Talks

6. Burns said that it was strange that the Unionists had in a sense accepted the SDLP agenda for talks. These would deal not just with devolved government, both also with the North/South and East/West relationships. This meant that Unionists would have to talk to Dublin. On the East/West link, the relationship which the Unionists seemed to envisage was strikingly similar to that existing between the two Governments through the Agreement. He added that, if the talks raised questions about the framework of the Agreement, this was a matter for the two Governments and only for the two Governments.
7. The British thought there was a chance of constructive policy development but things were still in the realm of being possible rather than probable. They knew what the price of failure was; if they set the fence too high, people could fall heavily and this could damage the political situation and have a positive knock-on effect for terrorists. The Government would not be let pay that price as long as they were listening to their advisers! There was a possibility of progress and they were duty-bound to explore it but as he had said earlier, only on a safety

first basis; he repeated that, if anyone put a proposal to them for the modification of the Agreement, the only people they would discuss it with would be Dublin.

Our Response

8. For our part, we concentrated largely on critical questioning of aspects of the British presentation; we reiterated our concerns about the need for extreme caution in taking any steps that might put the Agreement at risk and we emphasised the difficulty of making any progress while Unionist thinking is as deeply divided as at present. We underlined our scepticism about the seriousness of purpose of the Unionist leadership and, as indicated earlier, we expressed our doubts as to whether positions were ripe for an initiative - with all its inherent risks - to be attempted in the immediate future.


Dermot Gallagher,
22 February, 1990.