



## **An Chartlann Náisiúnta** **National Archives**

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2020/17/55
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Objectives in Bringing About Talks

1. The policy objective of devolving powers on a basis that would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community in Northern Ireland is a long standing objective of the United Kingdom Government, endorsed by the Irish Government.
2. The principal objective in seeking to bring about talks between the political parties in Northern Ireland would be to develop the current signs of increased flexibility and willingness to talk into substantive agreement on ways of devolving powers to local elected representatives on a widely acceptable basis.
3. It is clear, however, from the positions adopted by all the Northern Ireland parties, that negotiations about the internal arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland could not be completed unless agreement is also reached on the "external" implications, including the relationships between Belfast and Dublin, and Dublin and London. This is the stated position of the SDLP; and of the two Unionist parties. It seems clear therefore that for each of the main Northern Ireland parties a "political settlement" in order to be acceptable to all of them, would need to encompass:
  - (a) internal arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland;
  - (b) the relationship between any new devolved Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government;
  - (c) the implications for the relationship between the British and Irish Governments.

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4. It is not the objective of either Government to seek changes to the Agreement, but both Governments have indicated willingness to consider the implications for the Agreement.

5. If talks cannot be taken to the point where full agreement is reached, they would conclude on the basis of whatever lesser progress had been agreed by the parties to be satisfactory to them.

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UNIONIST "PRECONDITIONS"

1. The first Unionist "pre-condition" is that both Governments should declare their willingness to consider an alternative to the present Agreement. Both governments have already made their position clear:

"In practice, any agreement between the constitutional political parties on new arrangements for exercising political power in Northern Ireland would have substantial implications for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and both Governments would, I believe, be bound to consider those implications seriously and sympathetically." (Mr Brooke, Bangor, 9 January 1990).

"If ... a new and more broadly-based agreement can be reached by direct discussions and negotiations between all the parties involved, the Irish Government would be prepared to contemplate, in agreement with the British Government, a new and better structure, agreement or arrangement, to transcend the existing one." (Mr Haughey, statement, 22 January 1990).

It seems unnecessary to say anything more.

2. The second "pre-condition" is that the Conference should be "non operative" for a period. Both Governments have already indicated their willingness to see a natural gap between Conference meetings (as has occurred in the past, and could occur in the future) to be used for political talks. On this basis, it would be possible for the two Governments to agree the dates of a sequence of Conference meetings to announce those dates (including, crucially, the date of the meeting at the end of the gap). To indicate the Governments' expectation that the

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Northern Ireland parties should make use of the gap, it could be explained that the dates had been arranged to assist the orderly planning and conduct of Conference business and that the two Governments have also had in mind the opportunity that the interval before the [second] meeting may provide for political progress within Northern Ireland.

3. The third "pre-condition" is the "non-operation" of the Secretariat. There is no question of any significant change in the Secretariat or its operation. But the Unionists would probably take comfort in the argument that the Secretariat would not be serving as a secretariat to the Conference during a period when there were no Conference meetings (although in practice its work would need to continue as normal). It might also be helpful for the British Government to make clear its expectation that the head of the British side of the Secretariat, who is also responsible for the Political Affairs Division in Belfast, would be actively engaged in any political talks which might take place.

4. In adopting such an approach to the Unionist "pre-conditions", the two Governments would be signalling their concern to promote political dialogue in Northern Ireland, without suggesting any weakening of their position on the Agreement.

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FORMAT

1. The main Northern Ireland parties (SDLP and Unionist) expect that any overall settlement would need to have regard to the internal arrangements for the government of Northern Ireland; the relationship between any new devolved Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government; and the implications of them for the relationship between the British and Irish Governments.
  2. There could similarly be three major strands in any talks (perhaps even three sets of talks eventually). Both Governments would clearly have a major role, but the starting-point for establishing any talks is clearly the political parties themselves. Agreement would be needed at the outset that each of the three strands must be addressed.
  3. The first strand (internal arrangements) would be a matter for the parties themselves with probably the Chairmanship of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In addition, a mechanism would be needed to ensure that due weight was given to any views and proposals put forward by the Irish Government on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland, insofar as they relate to the interests of the minority community.
  4. The second strand in talks - that is to say the question of the relationship between any new Northern Ireland administration and the Irish Government - would probably not start until initial progress <sup>had been made</sup> on the first strand: it would involve the Irish Government in direct discussion with the Northern Ireland parties and the British Government.
- The two governments would keep in close touch throughout the process.
5. / The third element in talks - the implications of the first two strands for the Anglo-Irish relationship - would involve matters for decision by the two sovereign governments acting

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and would therefore most probably be addressed directly between the two Governments, although they would wish to give due weight to any views put forward by the Northern Ireland parties, and perhaps to involve them at a suitable stage.

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