



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2020/17/56
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Secret

Ministers' Meeting with the Secretary of State  
Dublin 27 June 1990

1. Minister Collins was accompanied by Secretary Dorr, Mr. Gallagher, Mr. O'Donovan and Ms. Anderson. The Secretary of State was accompanied by Mr. Burns, Ambassador Fenn, Mr. Alston, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Leech. The meeting (including an initial half hour tete-a-tete and a short adjournment) lasted about four hours.
2. At the outset, Mr. Brooke referred to the widespread media expectation that he would make a major statement in the House of Commons on 5 July. He had not himself made any commitment in this regard and he did not regard the date as "sacred". However, the Commons debate on the renewal of direct rule did seem an apposite moment for a major statement and he would very much hope to be able to say something substantive and positive. He would provide us in advance (on Monday 2 July) with key passages of his text and would also expect to brief the Opposition parties in Westminster in advance.

Timeframe

3. The Minister said that three areas require attention: the timeframe for talks, the Secretariat, and the Liaison Group. More recently, the proposed format of North/South talks had also become a matter of concern. The timeframe was an issue that presented very serious problems; our difficulties in this regard had been clearly spelled out in London on 11 June. As matters stood, there was a real risk that the entire gap might elapse without North/South talks taking place. Indeed, an attempt is now being made to introduce a qualifying phase - "depending on progress being made (in the internal talks)" - to govern the opening of North/South talks. It is simply not acceptable that the Unionists

should be allowed dictate when we - who are parents of the Agreement - would become involved in the talks process.

4. The Minister recalled the understanding reached at the conclusion of the London meeting (it had been agreed that, following Mr. Brooke's meeting with the SDLP, British officials were to meet the Unionists, and, if matters could not be resolved at that level, Mr. Brooke would himself meet the Unionist leaders) and asked for an update on developments.
5. Mr. Brooke said he had had a series of meeting with the SDLP and his officials had met with the Unionists. While the Unionists understand our concern, and that of the SDLP, on the timetable issue, they are reluctant to agree to a fixed date for the opening of North/South talks - "and this is a position from which I do not think they can be moved". Mr. Brooke added that, for his own part, he could understand Unionist reluctance on this issue. However, Unionists envisage that, when talks start, they will be conducted with "great intensiveness" involving meetings on a daily basis. It follows therefore that they would expect to move to the next phase (North-South talks) at a fairly early stage in the process.
6. The Minister said that the language currently on offer in relation to the timetable is of no great value - there is nothing concrete, no commitment by Unionists. As regards the SDLP position, he had seen John Hume's letter to Brooke of 21 June which expressed the SDLP view very clearly. There had been particularly serious slippage on this issue since 19 April; he would have to go back to Government and indicate the extent of that slippage.
7. Mr. Brooke responded that it is surely of value that there is now general agreement that the three sets of talks must come to a conclusion at the same time. "What is decided in

one part forms a contingency on which to base a judgement on the other part." The talks cannot end without embracing all three dimensions; motivations may vary, but there is an interest on the part of all involved to cover all three dimensions. There is no way in which the Agreement can be altered "one jot" without the Unionists sitting across the table from the Irish Government.

[Documents were then exchanged. The Irish side passed over a note - Annex 1 - on the degree of slippage since 19 April and the British side circulated a revised draft - Annex 2 - of a text for inclusion in Mr. Brooke's speech in the House of Commons. (Note: we had seen earlier versions of this text on 28 May and 11 June. The second paragraph added on 11 June had since been deleted since it was found by us and by the SDLP to be unhelpful)]

#### Format

8. In an exchange on the format of North/South talks, the Minister said it had been envisaged from the outset that the Government and the Northern Ireland parties would be the major players, with Mr. Brooke as a "facilitator". We now seemed to be talking about two varieties of East/West talks rather than North/South talks in the full sense. Mr. Burns said while the Unionists want to be part of a U.K. team, "they expect to do most of the talking".

#### Slippage since 19 April

9. Returning to the overall package on offer, the Minister reiterated that he had sought and received Government approval on the basis of the 19 April text and certain members of the Government had been briefed following the 11 June meeting. The problem now is that, in effect, the agreement of 19 April is gone and indeed the understanding

of 11 June - that Mr. Brooke would himself go back to the Unionists - is also gone.

10. Mr. Brooke responded that he took personal responsibility for the extent to which the scenario had changed since 19 April - "When we had our conversation on 19 April I was over-confident as to what Unionists would accept". The Minister said that the Unionists are being helped along the way in this process but they have to understand that there are obligations on them also. Robinson and others have talked about the three sets of relationships; they have to follow through on this. He asked if Mr. Brooke had personally talked to the Unionists.
11. Mr. Brooke said that he had undertaken to talk to the Unionists "if they wanted to come back to me" (and they had not). He added that he will make the subject of the timetable part of the agenda of the first plenary meeting (in the internal talks). He finds it increasingly difficult to continue on a bilateral basis without the parties impacting on each other; indeed a meeting at this stage between the SDLP and the Unionists would be useful and he has said this to the SDLP.

Possible Joint Statement by Co-Chairman

12. The Secretary of State then touched on a suggestion which had emerged in his meeting with Hume the previous day - it was unclear as to precisely whose idea it was - that at the beginning of the gap there would be a joint statement by the two Co-Chairmen of the Conference which would address the three relationships and set out elements of the programme for the gap. (This suggestion was referred to again later in the meeting and the Minister said he did not rule out the idea).

SDLP Position

13. Referring to the latest British text - Annex 2 - Mr. Thomas said it was surely of interest that the final sentence of this text was acceptable to Hume. In response, the Minister read the relevant passage of Hume's letter of 21 June - "it is vital, therefore, from our party's perspective that we have some precision on the timing of the opening of North/South talks" - and said that this was the SDLP position as we understood it. Mr. Thomas said that Hume's agreement to the final sentence of the British text had come subsequently. The Minister said that if Hume had done a complete U - turn, then there was obviously a need for us to talk with him; in any event, irrespective of Hume's position, the language was unacceptable to us.

[At Mr. Brooke's suggestion there was a short break at this stage. Following the break, the British side came back with a further reformulation of their text - see Annex 3 - which they saw as more helpful from our viewpoint. There was little subsequent discussion of this text.]

Request for further British paper

14. Mr. Dorr pointed out the difficulties for the Irish side in forming a clear picture of the proposed scenario on the basis of brief extracts from a draft speech. From a procedural viewpoint, he felt it would be helpful to have a short operational document - analogous to and updating the 19 April text - which would set out succinctly precisely how the British envisaged the scenario unfolding. The British side were resistant to this suggestions (various grounds were advanced: shortage of time, "the document might be taken out of context", the Irish document - at Annex 1 - already summarised the situation). (At a later stage of the meeting, in the light of the British refusal to provide the

paper requested, and in an effort to clarify how exactly they saw matters developing, Mr. Dorr summarised our understanding of the scenario as envisaged by the British).

Proposed House of Commons Statement

15. The discussion reverted to the Secretary of States' proposed speech on 5 July. Mr. Brooke stressed that there is "unquestionably a cost involved" if he did not proceed with this statement. The process could be "put into cold storage for six months" but he was not sure if it could subsequently be "defrosted". The Minister said that the Government faces the same sort of difficulties in the Dáil and has not allowed itself to be pressurised into comment.

Resumed Discussion on Timetable/Format

16. In further exchanges on the timetables issue, Mr. Burns (referring to the final sentence of the proposed British text) said that "weeks means weeks and not months". There would be strong pressures on all parties to get to the North/South phase. In terms of weeks, the Unionists "must logically be talking in single figures" - however, they will not put this on paper. By way of explaining Unionist intransigence on this point, Mr. Brooke said that Unionists are afraid that - if they agree a date now for the opening of North/South talks - the SDLP might sit silently through the initial weeks of internal talks. "There have been occasions in the past when the SDLP has sat around a table for three weeks and not said a word", Mr. Dorr suggested that, since the North/South talks in fact embrace all participants in the process, the opening session to launch the talks process might be on a North/South basis; Mr. Brooke responded he could not deliver on this - he had tried it on the Unionists and they would not agree.



17. On the question of format, the Minister drew attention to the fourth paragraph of the 19 April text and commented on the slippage. To describe the Northern parties as members of the UK delegation would "put the SDLP on the rack". Mr. Brooke said the Unionists would be part of the UK delegation but speaking to their own brief; Mr. Burns said the existence of the UK delegation is merely a 'facility'; the SDLP "would be there standing on their own feet" and the British accept that.

#### Liaison Group

18. Questioned on the Liaison Group, Mr. Brooke said the Joint Secretaries would stay in touch and would "incidentally" be involved in the North/South and East/West talks. It would be a private rather than an official group. Mallon had "gone into a song and dance" on the subject of the Liaison Group but Brooke had told him that, in the real world, things would not in any event have happened in such a Group. However, as the talks process unfold there may be a need to create some body similar in function to the Liaison Group as earlier envisaged. Mr. Dorr referred to the "ghostly" existence that the Liaison Group is now assuming.

#### Overall Situation

19. At this point, the Minister described the whole situation being described to us as "crazy, zany, a house of cards." Commenting on the general presentation by the British, Mr. Dorr said that the central problem is that the condition for bringing the Unionists into the talks is to create uncertainty as to when the Irish Government comes in. Mr. Brooke said the real problem is that we have an Agreement which the Unionists resent and we are discussing ways in which the situation can be regularised. "They are in an abnormal situation - that is a fact of life which is a



part of history; it is not entirely their fault". Mr. Dorr said that the Irish government is a co-signator of the Agreement and "cannot back off and make our return dependent on Unionist say-so".

20. Mr. Gallagher said there is a substantive distinction between the Irish and British positions. For our part, we are extremely concerned about any partial approach to the talks process. Our ultimate objective is to marginalise the men of violence; this cannot be achieved on the basis of a partial approach. Both sides had left the meeting on 19 April feeling that not a comma of the agreed text should be changed. What was now being suggested involved a degree of slippage which would be seriously counter-productive.

#### Next Step

21. Returning again to his proposed House of Commons speech, Mr. Brooke said that he is prepared, if necessary, to explain why it is not possible to make progress. However, if he cannot move things forward on 5 July, it will be necessary to put the process into a state of temporary abatement. "It would have to be possible that we are pausing not to resume". It would be very important for him to know the Irish Government position by Friday (29th); if the process was going to come to a halt it would be necessary to have some days to plan damage limitation.
22. The Minister said we would seek to develop our responses further and be in touch by the weekend. If damage limitation proved necessary, we would try to be as helpful as possible in the exercise. Mr. Brooke, said, before reaching our final position, he would want us to be aware that there is a growing realization in Northern Ireland that "these might be the most serious discussions in which people have had to engage since 1922".

23. There were some further exchanges on the likely content of the 5 July speech. Mr. O' Donovan asked if it would not still be worthwhile for Mr. Brooke to discuss the timeframe issue with the Unionist leaders; the Secretary of State said that he would not want us to build hopes on this.

A.A.

A. Anderson  
29 June 1990

c.c. P.S.M., Mr. Nally, P.S.S., Mr. Matthews, Mr. Brosnan,  
Mr. Gallagher, Ambassador London, Joint Secretary,  
Counsellors AI.

W4754

Annex 1

Slippage from the 19th April text

The 19th April text contained seven distinct elements set out in seven paragraphs: the first two of these referred to the Secretary of State's role; the sixth dealt with the Secretariat and the seventh indicated that Mr. Brooke would seek the agreement of the political parties to the various arrangements. The third, fourth and fifth elements provided for the active involvement of the Irish Government in the talks process. The subsequent slippage in relation to each of these three elements is indicated below.

Issue	Agreement of 19th April	Present Suggestion
Timetable for talks	Three sets of talks to begin immediately and in unison. North-South talks to begin a day or two after the commencement of internal talks.	No fixed starting date for North-South talks. To depend on progress being made in internal talks.
Format for North-South talks	North-South talks to be <u>between</u> the Irish Government and the political parties. To be without pre-conditions. Assumed that NIO would also be a party.	Discussions to <u>involve</u> the N I. parties, <u>and the Irish</u> Government. Increasingly prominent role being suggested for the Secretary of State. (Precondition of prior progress in the internal talks also being introduced).
Official Liaison group	Liaison Group would cover the three sets of talks. Dublin to use the group for its input to the internal talks. Two heads of the Secretariat to service N/S and E/W talks. Membership of group would be open to NI political parties.	Group to have no public existence. Membership not open to the NI political parties. Joint Secretaries to have no formal role in servicing talks. In practice Liaison Group to amount to no more than existing liaison arrangements in the Secretariat.

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MRC/5705

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