



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

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ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA  
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2  
DUBLIN 2

*Mr. J. J. Conboy*  
*huk*  
*5.12.91*

28 November, 1991.

Mr. Dermot Nally,  
Secretary to the Government,  
Government Buildings,  
Merrion Street,  
Dublin 2.

Dear Dermot,

Your Department will no doubt be considering the positions which the Taoiseach might adopt in the Northern Ireland part of the forthcoming summit. The following note, necessarily a somewhat subjective one, attempts to summarise the position as seen from here, as an informal input into that process.

We know from the last meeting of the Nally/Butler group that the British see the agenda as covering (a) political matters and (b) North-South cooperation, including both cross-border security cooperation and economic contacts.

As regards the political part of the agenda, both sides are committed to some general principles. The Anglo-Irish Agreement commits the British to efforts to reconcile the rights of the two major traditions that exist in Ireland, the nationalist one being defined as proponents of "a sovereign united Ireland". The round-table talks process confirmed the support of both sides for a process of political dialogue involving the three key relationships, eclipsing the previous British doctrine that you could secure powersharing, or an "Irish dimension" but not both. There is therefore a measure of common ground on the theoretical level which could be built on.

However the picture is more clouded when one seeks to translate these abstractions in practice. The most immediate question for us is to assess current British policy objectives. We know that at previous meetings with the Taoiseach Mr. Major was forthcoming in tone, (if not in hard substance) and that the official machine - including the Cabinet office - went to some pains to dampen down any optimistic conclusion we might draw from this, either because they genuinely felt it was misplaced, or because they feared a rival approach to that being pursued by the NIO.

The NIO policy as reflected by Mr. Brooke has been to avoid setting a precise objective for the talks (except insofar as the format clearly recognises some Irish role). It may be assumed that they see any new accommodation as securing one important policy objective for them, namely the reintegration of the Unionists into the political process, and that anything else is in some sense a bonus. (It is possible that Mr. Brooke's own vision is a Sunningdale-type Agreement buttressed by removal of Articles 2 and 3, but that is speculation). The combination of a professed British "agnosticism" about the outcome and an insistence on Unionist agreement at each stage of the process is not necessarily the neutral formula it purports to be. It may well shift the balance of the British position some way back towards the Unionists, if indeed it produces any outcome at all.

Mr. Brooke has both a personal and departmental interest in presenting the current prospects for the talks in a rosy light, and is doggedly interpreting the situation in this way, contrary to almost all other observers. It is difficult to assess how far his position is the considered policy of the British Government as a whole. Mr. Major's view is probably a purely managerial one, open to anything generally accepted as helpful ~~but unlikely~~ to take any radical new initiative, given his immediate electoral preoccupations; ~~unless it promises to pay political dividends for~~ him in British terms.

Mr. Hurd's recent Brighton speech, with its wishful dismissal of the nationalist dimension of the problem, was a discouraging pointer to the mindset of the key cabinet adviser Mr. Major might consult. We must allow for the possibility that the British now sense more "give" in nationalist opinion than in the Unionist community on the constitutional issue and are probing the possibility of striking a new balance to reflect this. It is likely therefore that the Taoiseach will have to persuade a reluctant Prime Minister to a radical reappraisal, rather than finding any helpful predisposition to this on the British side.

On the Irish side we have also been reticent about defining the details of our position but I assume we would see the likely path to progress as being through some form of greater neutrality in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as between the two aspirations, a development which might make the situation more readily and perhaps formally acceptable to nationalists in both parts of Ireland. Ideally, it should also create the conditions where most or all the proponents of violence could agree to a cessation, an objective which in some form or another, must be kept in view by everyone. It seems highly unlikely that such an outcome could emerge from the Brooke formula, which is likely, if anything, to point the opposite way.

An alternative to Mr. Brooke's approach is for both Governments to set the broad objectives and use the process of political dialogue to recruit support for them. (Such broad objectives would not be easy to define: they would have to contain substantial reassuring gains for Unionists as well as nationalists since the British would probably regard anything else as carrying the same practical implications for them as a declaration of intent to withdraw).

The objectives of the Summit meeting under the political heading might therefore be twofold (a) the precautionary one of ensuring the British refrain from any policy approach which devalues the nationalist aspiration and (b) setting goals for future action. On this latter point the debate is likely to focus on the alternatives of (i) continuing to press for a convening of talks under the Brooke formula (if only as a holding operation and in spite of diminishing credibility) or (ii) accepting that the experience of these talks show that the lines of a solution cannot be expected to emerge spontaneously from such a process, which will always ultimately be determined by the perception of British intentions and that, on the contrary, it is incumbent on the two Governments to use their greater powers of initiative and greater margins of manoeuvre to guide the process. These alternatives reflect two competing philosophies - a gradualistic one which minimises the constitutional dimension, in the hope that evolutionary changes (population and cultural trends, Europe, etc.) will eventually bring peace and a more activist one which considers that these forces will work for peace only if a symbolic shift is also achieved. Whatever gains may be made in private discussions in persuading the British of the limits of their current approach - and they will themselves know that Mr. Brooke's indomitable optimism has a limited shelf-life - they will clearly be reluctant to disavow the process publicly.' It may be the most realistic objective therefore is to secure a commitment to a serious internal study of other options between the two Governments and to settle for general language in the public presentation.

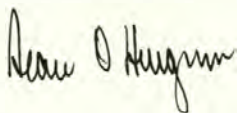
The security input to preparing the meeting will of course be dealt with by the Department of Justice. It is of relevance politically that the British feel themselves very much under pressure on the security front, and view as particularly ominous the appearance of IRA bands 10-20 strong in actions in Monaghan and Armagh in recent months. We have been told that Mr. Major will wish to explore this issue, not, it has been hinted, on a

"shopping list" basis but in terms of some re-thinking of our approach. It is unclear whether this means raising the awareness of risk on the Irish side in a general way, or a more concrete proposal for a new security-led approach, such as internment or some other measure aimed at demonstrating the limits of the militarist approach of the IRA, on grounds that all hopes of a political solution pass through that point.

As regards the economic aspects, you will recall that at the last meeting of the Nally-Butler Group the British advocated a highlighting of this issue in a way which suggested they saw it as a substitute for a political outcome of the discussions. In the interval, the only concrete proposal to emerge is for an announcement on the upgrading of the Dublin/Belfast railway, in which they have a particular interest. (The Northern side are altogether more alert than our technical Departments to the implications of 1992 for the protection and enhancement of their present highly disproportionate share of port traffic). My own view, for what it is worth, is that the economic dimension, while of course very useful in itself, should not be used as a substitute for the political, and that unless the railway is part of some larger package with some symbolic value for us (now unlikely), it would not deserve to be highlighted by itself, as an outcome of Prime Ministerial discussion.

We shall be providing more formal papers on items such as the political talks shortly and draft communique language, once political guidance on the general approach is given.

Yours sincerely,



Seán O hUiginn  
Assistant Secretary

cc. PSN  
PSS