



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/99/3

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Report of Meeting in No. 10 Downing Street, on Thursday, 3 July, 1997

1. When the Irish Government party arrived at Downing Street at 3pm, the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Blair went aside for a tête-à-tête meeting which lasted until about 4pm. They were accompanied by Mr John Holmes, Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister and Mr Paddy Teahon, Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, who is to prepare a separate note on the limited meeting. In parallel, the remainder of the Irish and British sides discussed a range of issues until they were joined by the Taoiseach, Prime Minister and accompanying officials and the plenary meeting then continued until 4.30pm. This note records both the parallel and plenary meetings.

2. Those present at the parallel meeting were:

Irish Side

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ray Burke, T.D.
 Ambassador to London, Mr Ted Barrington
 Mr Seán Ó hUiginn, Second Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs
 Dr Martin Mansergh, Special Adviser to the Taoiseach
 Mr Walter Kirwan, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach
 Mr Joe Lennon, Government Press Secretary

British Side

Ms Majorie (Mo) Mowlam, M.P., Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
 Sir Robin Butler, Cabinet Secretary
 Mr John Chilcot, Permanent Under Secretary, Northern Ireland Office
 Mr Quintin Thomas, Deputy Under Secretary, Northern Ireland Office
 Mr Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff, Prime Minister's Office
 Ms Veronica Sutherland, Ambassador to Dublin.

3. This report is put in the form of direct speech but it is neither verbatim nor absolutely exhaustive, particularly as, at some points, two discussions were proceeding across the table, in parallel and the undersigned could hear only that nearest to him. However, the note gives a close report of all the essential elements of the meeting.
4. Secretary of State
 What shall we talk about?

Minister for Foreign Affairs

There is a timetable for the talks worked out in conjunction with the Independent Chairmen (this was a reference to a draft timetable for the period to 29 July worked out at the talks on 2 July).

Secretary of State

Sunday (ie Drumcree) will greatly affect the whole scene in regard to the talks. The comments by yourself and Bertie did not help things, although I realise that, vis-à-vis your constituency, you probably had to make them.

Mr Ó hUiginn

Any signs of sense breaking out?

Secretary of State

There is nothing very hopeful. We are, however, continuing our efforts. I shall try again when I go back to Northern Ireland after this. We met the Orange yesterday but, after Bertie's comments, the meeting just broke up. I'm afraid those comments had an impact on the Orange last night. I'm afraid we lost the Orange last night.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Both the Taoiseach and I were at pains to praise and commend your own best efforts.

Secretary of State

So, your comments were well-bedded. But, still, because of them, we lost the Orange last night.

Mr Chilcot

Mary Holland wrote well about it all in today's Irish Times. She tried to separate the two things (ie the Drumcree/parades issue and the large question of pursuing a settlement).

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Yes. We need to get over this next ten days.

Secretary of State

Yes - but whatever we do, there will be effects on the ground.

Mr Ó hUiginn

There are differences between the short-term and the long-term. There will be problems in the short-term. One way or the other, but, if one takes account of the longer terms, a decision based on sound principles will pay dividends.

Secretary of State

I agree, Seán, that you are expressing correctly the way nationalists see it. But the Orange have a right to march. The issue is how they use it. Whichever way you jump, you'll get into trouble and appear to some to deny their rights.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

It's not only a question of Drumcree next Sunday. The situation is complicated by the wider situation in Portadown, where Orangemen, in effect, march every Friday in summer and where residents of the Garvaghy Road area don't feel safe going down town. There are also rights to shop or to go into the centre of town.

Secretary of State

Absolutely.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Its a question of being able to live without intimidation.

Secretary of State

Portadown is a microcosm of Northern Ireland.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Yes, in a way and no, in another way in the sense that there the nationalists are more in a minority than they are overall.

Secretary of State

Breandán (Mac Cionnaith) has been a problem. He refuses to consider anything. I won't say so publicly but he is a big problem.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

You have had to work extremely hard and you have certainly done so.

Mr Chilcot

Is the McKenna thing about the ban on the festival getting legs (he went on to explain some alleged distortion of the position about this but it was hard to hear and did not give rise to any worthwhile discussion).

Secretary of State

(reverting to the calendar/gameplan issue raised by the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the very outset). Are we okay on the gameplan for the talks?

Mr Thomas

There seems to be a common view between the two Governments.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

We need to be as one as regards the reply to the letter David Trimble sent you. The same applies to the letter from Martin McGuinness. We think the reply to it should deal with the broad themes and issues, accentuating the positive, not go meticulously through every paragraph in his letter.

Mr Thomas

We would value Irish advice as to the best way to reply. You may have a better feel for this.

Dr Mansergh

If at all possible, try to get a reply to this second letter to them within a week. They may also have hoped for an acknowledgement on a response to Gerry Adam's earlier letter to Mr Blair but they will now settle for a reply to the second letter.

Mr Chilcot

Your judgement is that the middle of next week will be OK?

Dr Mansergh

That is to give you the necessary time. We know you have to assemble the various pieces together.

Mr Chilcot

You think having a piece of paper from Her Majesty's Government is important?

Dr Mansergh

Yes.

Secretary of State

Can we decide how we handle these (letters)?

Mr Thomas

We wanted to take your mind, Secretary of State, but we had thought of having a meeting in Castle Buildings next week, in the wings of the talks. On the issue of Sinn Féin etc, I hear what is being said. But I wonder is it 'plausible' that we will get a ceasefire until well after the Twelfth.

Dr Mansergh

They (referring to Republicans) have a process they have to go through.

Mr Chilcot

Is the fourth week of August not more likely to be the earliest?

Ambassador Sutherland

The third anniversary (of the first ceasefire) may have some significance.

Dr Mansergh

I have noted the view of Senator Mitchell that if the talks could once get past their present phase, they might well be able to make progress.

Ambassador Barrington

How do you assess what way Trimble will go?

Secretary of State

He was at the talks last Tuesday. He does not seem to be too bad. We need to help him vis-à-vis the DUP and the UKUP.

I was late coming in for this meeting, because Molyneaux and some others are developing efforts to help in regard to next Sunday. He is talking of coming across.

We have got to do all we can to boost Trimble.

Sinn Féin's call is as important as Trimble's. If only they have the sense to realise that they have now got a good position.

I agree that the handling of the reply to Trimble is going to be important too, because we are going to have to say "no" to a lot of things in it.

Secretary of State

Do we want to talk about Bloody Sunday? I have seen the families together, over lunch today. With all the meetings and demands to do with the parades issue, I have not had much time to plough through your dossier - but I am getting there. I am hopeful we'll get through it soon. It will take another two weeks or so, if I don't have to spend too much time rushing about in a flak jacket, if we have a lot of civil disobedience in those weeks.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Paddy Hill is in court today - and may face the possibility of a fine for non-payment of rent. This is a question of the Compensation Tribunal moving too slowly. It is not in your bailiwick but it would help a lot if you could use your good offices to have it moved on, if you could take an interest, with this in view.

Secretary of State

I shall take pleasure in taking it up.

Mr Chilcot

I know you have concerns about prisoners issues but what exactly is your point?

Minister for Foreign Affairs

We prefer to hold the discussion of prisoner issues over until the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister join us. Plastic bullets and their use are other sensitive issues that require attention.

Mr Ó hUiginn

All the more sensitive in view of the revelations about the defective batch

Secretary of State

All I can say is that we brought this into the public domain as soon as possible. As far as we can say now, there are now no defective rounds left in the hands of the Army - or the RUC.

Sir John Chilcot

Use of the term "defective batch" may give a distorted impression. It was not a wholly defective batch. It was more a question of some within a batch deviating, at the margin, from the manufacturers' specification.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

We don't want to make a meal about this question of some plastic bullets being defective - the issue is more restricting their use.

Secretary of State

As regards those who had PBRs fired at them in 1994, we will look at their cases individually, where they struck the upper body.

Mr Ó hUiginn

The issue of their use is important. It got a charge last year, when there was casual use of them, as could be seen by anybody viewing the TV coverage of the marching season.

Secretary of State

For this year, PBRs are the only form of crowd control that the security forces have. We don't have things other countries have, such as the CS gas they use in France or water cannons. Whatever community goes up after the decision on next Sunday - if there is no accommodation - the security forces will need something. There will be more care in the use of PBRs this year. I made this requirement very clear to the Chief Constable but, to be fair to him, I have to say that he did not need it.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

I want to re-emphasise the need for discipline, and for balance, in handling any situations that may arise, if we are to be able to move forward. We have to keep our eyes focused on that at all times.

Sir John Chilcot

If you don't have something to defend your security forces from close quarters petrol bombing, you would be straight into live rounds, so PBRs are, really, life-saving.

In Germany, water cannons get trapped in streets and the people inside them get petrol bombed.

Secretary of State

On all these, the nationalist community see that they are not heard and are second class citizens. Until we deal with that emotion, rational explanations will never deal with their concerns.

As regards confidence-building, we are working on a whole range of areas. Lord Derry Irvine has been over to look at the restructuring of the judicial system. He has been talking to judges. This is something that was not dealt with in the Joint Framework Document but we are tackling this bastion.

Action on Bloody Sunday would do a lot. That was also my idea in going to see the residents of Garvaghy Road, as in giving lunch today to the Bloody Sunday people, it all helps.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

The families of the Bloody Sunday relatives are different people. They have suffered a lot of pain and they want to put it behind them.

Secretary of State

I agree.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

You have dealt with all in a humane way, as I would expect.

Secretary of State

We will continue to work on the mindset.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

If we could get talks going, if it could filter out that progress was being made, it would be a great help.

Secretary of State

That is part of the spirit we are trying to cultivate.

Mr Ó hUiginn

We should set a date for a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference. The election in London and Dublin held things up.

Sir John Chilcot

I assume we both want to have it before the recess, but not too soon - perhaps towards the end of July.

Secretary of State

Perhaps, we should look at East-West relations and Millennium projects or should we wait for the Heads of Government? Has your Government done anything about Millennium projects?

Dr Mansergh

One project that is being planned is a music conservatoire.

Secretary of State

We are doing the big project at Greenwich and a satellite project at Belfast and aiming at having a computer in every school. This holds the possibility of an all-Ireland dimension.

Ambassador Sutherland

The previous Taoiseach took certain initiatives relevant to that aspect.

Mr Kirwan

As follow-up to that, the Departments of Education met, with a view to taking co-operation forward.

Sir John Chilcot

Was that East-West?

Mr Kirwan

It was but the possibility of a North-South dimension was also specifically considered. The Irish election led to a slight lull but it was intended to take matters up once the two new Governments were in place. It might now be helpful to convene a meeting of the Steering Group early in September.

Secretary of State

Not later than that - there are only 100 weeks to the Millennium.

Ambassador Sutherland

There is also scope for more progress on youth exchanges and the relevant bodies are in close contact. There were also 5 other items covered in a statement at Head of Government level, issued before the Irish election.

Ambassador Barrington

Homelessness among the Irish in Britain was one of these that is being pursued.

Secretary of State

We should take forward the programme previously agreed at Head of government level.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Yes. On European issues, we have a shared view on the mess that the Dutch Presidency made of the Treaty of Amsterdam, as regards the Schengen aspect. We have been tackling them but the Presidency will not change. But our people feel it is best not to give it such a high profile. It may be appropriate for you to make the running, as the main concern of the Spaniards is Gibraltar.

Mr Powell

We are beavering away on this but the Dutch were obdurate and the Luxembourg Presidency is also obdurate. We will push it hard.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

You will not bring it back to Heads of State or Government?

Mr Powell

No.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

As regards enlargement of the EU, we will have to see what comes out of the Commission at the end of July, when they are to issue their Opinions on the various applicants.

Mr Powell

Amsterdam has cleared the way for progress on enlargement, which is very important.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

I want to refer to the issue of duty-free. I know you have a problem with your Channel ports, with the pubs down there, with people getting drink supplies on ferries. But retention of duty-free must be an important issue for your provincial airports around the UK. It is very important for us and we would like you to row in and support us on pressing for retention.

There is a big potential loss for us, with little potential benefit, since we are an island, with no tunnel.

During our Presidency, we could not get Ken Clarke to even discuss the matter, because of the vanloads of drink being brought back across the channel. But duty-free is a good system, it helps to keep down airfares and provides lots of jobs - up to 400-500 - in our airports.

At this point, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, with accompanying officials, joined the meeting.

Prime Minister

We have been trying to sort out the issues that are important in getting all-inclusive talks and also in regard to the marches. I was emphasising the degree to which we are determined to make the talks inclusive, so long as we do not have to compromise on basic principles. We have gone as far as possible. If there is a genuine ceasefire, they can be in. If they genuinely require clarification, that is OK but we cannot get bogged down in endless clarification. We are at the stage now, where if the talks process does not move forward, it may lose all credibility.

As regards marches and the difficulties to which they give rise, it is important that the two Governments keep close together and have proper dialogue at all times.

Taoiseach

For our part, we believe that the more closely together we act, the better. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State will continue to meet in the talks context.

I was outlining to the Prime Minister our assessment of where matters stand as regards the Republican Movement. I assured the Prime Minister that we are not in the business of dragging out the process but that we felt that clarification would, genuinely, be useful. We want the process to be inclusive, with all on board. For that we need a ceasefire from the IRA, an absolute end of violence. We believe that if a reply is sent to the second letter that has come from Sinn Féin, it may be very important.

There are two important, thorny issues - decommissioning and prisoners and we had a lengthy discussion on these.

I think we are involved in a meaningful process (ie vis-à-vis Republicans) and that there is a real opportunity there but if all goes wrong, we also agree that the two Governments will have to pick up things.

We were worried about the first letter (from Gerry Adams), about its element of throwing in the kitchen sink but the second letter (from Martin McGuinness) offers a better basis for a carefully considered response.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Our conversations were on similar lines. We agreed on the need to maintain tight co-ordination in regard to responses to the letters from Trimble and McGuinness, that there is a major opportunity, potentially, if we can get over the coming days.

We also covered Bloody Sunday, plastic bullets, duty-free, enlargement of the EU, the Schengen aspect of the Treaty, a date for the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference, East-West co-operation and Millennium projects, computers in schools etc.

Secretary of State

I have nothing to add to that.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

We left prisoner issues for discussion when you joined us.

Prime Minister

What are the aspects of prisoner issues that are particularly important for Republicans?

Secretary of State

Prisoner issues are important to Sinn Féin. In aiming to build confidence, we have moved on McNamee, we have moved MacCoitín and others closer to their homes and families. Negotiations are proceeding on a few more transfer cases and on criteria for transfers - but now with much better co-operation from the Home Office.

There is a lot of pressure on the Life Sentence Review Board, which reviews sentences. John Chilcot and I have talked about it, as regards a review leading to changes in regard to it. I think I'll do that (ie put a

review on foot), even though I do not see clearly the way to a better system, so that the review would be open-minded as regards the objective, which is a bit dodgy.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

The classification of prisoners (in Britain) is very important. The classification of prisoners as Category A, Exceptional Risk, has consequences in regard to visits by families. Prisoners so classified may only have closed visits. If they could be brought down one rung of the classification ladder, that would change. There would still be a very tight regime indeed - it would be very far from transfer to an open prison - but it would help on visits. These people come from small communities and the word would quickly spread that Mrs X was having the first visit from her husband for a number of years.

Secretary of State

We will look at the issue.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

There are 14 people involved in this classification issue.

Taoiseach

This is a very important issue. If you look at the names of some of the prisoners involved, the importance of it will be clear to you (this was a reference to Hugh Doherty, brother of Sinn Féin Vice-President, Pat Doherty).

Transfers are also important and here, you have signalled willingness to expedite matters.

Prime Minister

Confidence-building is important but it cuts both ways (this was a reference to the IRA).

Secretary of State

(who misunderstood Mr Blair) With the Loyalists, it is harder, as the transfer issue does not arise.

Prime Minister

I had in mind such things as punishment beatings, where there seems to have been no progress.

Secretary of State

Yes. The grim reality is that they have used these to keep their people occupied to keep their hands in. We also have the problem that we have allowed the Loyalist parties to be in and remain in the talks, even though their linked paramilitaries were engaged in punishment beatings all the time.

Taoiseach

I have always taken a strong line against punishment beatings and the like. People in Nationalist areas say there is no policing in those areas and that the paramilitaries play a role in controlling anti-social behaviour. But I certainly do not condone such beatings.

Sir John Chilcot

After the ceasefire, there was a slow outreach of policing into nationalist communities. It is important that both communities do not get hooked on social control by paramilitaries.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Prisoners issues are also important for Loyalists. In meetings with them, they claimed that less of them, proportionately had been reached at Christmas, 1994, following the ceasefires.

Secretary of State

We need to get a ceasefire first; then we can see where we go.

Prime Minister

On Europe, you will have seen that we are already playing a more co-operative role. I think the mood in the country is changing. It was important to come back from Amsterdam with an agreement. My Government wants change in Europe but it is pro-Europe. We must keep in close touch on this. I know Monetary Union is important for you guys.

Taoiseach

What the UK does in that area is very important for us. As regards immediate issues, there seems to be an effort by Waigel to lock currency exchanges rates in the Autumn rather than next Spring. This would affect one Member State more than any other. That Member State is Ireland. We are a small currency in volatile markets. If this comes

across your desk, take account of our concerns. We would have to fix the rate. Why so far in advance? As you will appreciate, I can't say this off the roof-tops.

Prime Minister

We'll carefully log that point.

Mr Lennon

Tietmeyer started it.

Taoiseach

That's right. He did not worry much about us in the past!

Prime Minister

With the French budgetary situation and the emerging German insistence on sticking to a strict interpretation of the criteria, it looks as if they are drifting in different ways.

Taoiseach

There is a lot to happen yet. We do well, when you are prosperous. After your good budget, things should go well.

Minister for Foreign Affairs

And it means you will conform with the criteria.

Prime Minister

We will be in budget balance. The budget was way tighter than most people realise. It will take £5-6 million out of the system this year and £16 billion over three years.

Mr Lennon

Are you not worried that the strong currency will spoil things?

Prime Minister

There are various factors at work there.

Taoiseach

Just for the record, we appreciate the Beaufort Dyke disclosure. Our Minister for the Marine will follow up with his British counterpart.

Secretary of State

Do we need an agreed press line?

Prime Minister

The most helpful thing to say on your side (on parades) would be that you have already stated your position and that you understand it is a very difficult issue. We don't want things you say to become a big issue.

Secretary of State

We were getting there last night with the Orange but when they heard about your statements.....

Taoiseach

Is it factually correct for us to say that the Secretary of State is still trying? I would also intend saying that they Prime Minister has said he will inform us when the decision is taken.

Secretary of State

No decision has been taken. After this, I shall be going back to the folks in Northern Ireland.

Taoiseach

We are very conscious that this is Day 1. To follow, there will be Derry, the Ormeau Road etc. The broader issue is important.

Prime Minister

Had I known that you were going to say what you did say, I would have indicated to you that we had the Orange nearby there.

I have tried to keep you and President Clinton informed. I have had two or three conversations with Bill entirely on Northern Ireland since I took office.

The more Sinn Féin feel that pillars of understanding are taken away, the more there will be pressure on them. We have done what we needed to do on it. Clarification is important but it really is time for them to come in.

Taoiseach

I would stress the importance of the response to their letter (i.e. that from Martin McGuinness).

Prime Minister

I would prefer we say nothing about the letter from Sinn Féin or about a reply in anything we say publicly.

Taoiseach

Agreed.

The meeting concluded at this point.