



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2018/68/50
<b>Creation Dates:</b>	22 April 1988
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	3 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
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No. 5

by [unclear]  
26.4.88  
Taoiseach saw [unclear]  
and [unclear] [unclear]  
to follow [unclear] 26/4

Confidential

Call by British Ambassador, Nicholas Fenn - 22 April 1988

The British Ambassador, Nicholas Fenn called to see me this evening at his request in order to discuss the speech delivered by the Taoiseach at a Fianna Fail dinner in New York last night.

He began by referring to a speech to be delivered this evening in Derbyshire by Sir Geoffrey Howe, a copy of which he had sent me an hour previously. He said that this speech was a conscious attempt by Howe to "steady" things. Howe feels it right once or twice a year to make a speech of this kind which he hopes will be helpful. He had, for other reasons, deferred making such a speech a few weeks ago. He had decided to do so today however when he read the Taoiseach's speech of last night in New York. It was a deliberate effort to hold the line and ensure that there would not be an over-reaction on the British side..

Fenn went on to express very considerable concern about what the Taoiseach had said and what he had not said. He said that he had been instructed by both Tom King and Geoffrey Howe to invite us, in his call on me, to say how the speech should be read. It seemed in London to represent a "pretty fundamental reversion" to a different approach to policy and possibly a change in relation to the working of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Furthermore there was "not a word about the condemnation of terrorism or Noraid". In addition, he noted, there was the (simplistic) reference to "three Irish people" having been shot in Gibraltar (ie omitting any reference to who they were or what they were there for); and there was a reference to "a shoot to kill policy" which ignored statements that there had not been any such policy.

We on the Irish side had talked of "sensitivities" in recent months. But we should be aware, Fenn said, that all of these things amounted to "a rough trampling on our (ie British) sensitivities" - or at least that is how they would be seen in London "unless you help us to interpret them otherwise". It is true that in the speech to be delivered later this evening to the Kennedy School of Government in Harvard, (a copy of which he had received from GIS), there is a single sentence on violence ("Violence must first cease as it can have no place in the building of the Ireland of the future that we desire"). But even this is ambiguous since it could mean simply a truce. Overall, Fenn said, they were "saddened" and worried and very anxious to be told how they should understand all of this.

I replied at some length to this presentation. I said first, that the Taoiseach is making several speeches in the USA, two to party



functions, the speech at Harvard and the speech tonight at the Kennedy Library. He would also be answering questions from the press. It would be right to look at all of these together to understand what he is saying.

Second, I said that I thought it would be wrong to read these speeches as signalling a basic change of Government policy. If there were to be a question about such a change of policy, there are plenty of very good and structured channels through the meetings of the Conference, meetings with the Taoiseach, and otherwise, to establish this clearly.

Thirdly, I said that the elements of the Taoiseach's and the Government's approach had always been clear and they are contained again in the speech.

One element is his basic belief, anchored firmly in the Forum Report, that the best hope for the Unionist community of finding, on a lasting basis, the assurance they seek, would be to sit down together with the other main political tradition in Ireland to work out new structures in this island which would contain solid guarantees for all. He looks to the day when they will see the sense of this and he would want to encourage them to do so.

A second element is that, on coming into Government and since, the Taoiseach has always made it clear that he accepts the Anglo-Irish Agreement as an obligation entered into by an Irish Government which must be accepted as a commitment by another Irish Government - unless and until it is changed.

A third element is that he has said clearly that his Government would work the Agreement and use it in every way possible to achieve political progress and improve the situation of the nationalist minority. Indeed he has said that it would be morally wrong to neglect to use any available means to bring about progress in the present situation.

Furthermore, the Taoiseach and his Government have actually worked the Agreement, faithfully and well as they said they would for these purposes.

All of these elements are quite consistent and compatible with each other and together form a coherent approach. The Taoiseach has stated them many times. He did so again in his speech last night - and in the other US speeches. There may of course be differences of emphasis as between the particular elements in any one statement, depending on context, but this question of what emphasis to give is obviously a matter for political judgement at any particular time and I thought they should understand this.

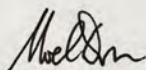
As to violence, I said that surely they must be aware from everything that the Taoiseach and his Government have said and done since coming into office more than a year ago how much they



abhor it and act against it. There could be no possible doubt about that. I hoped that they would also look to the whole thrust of this and other speeches in the US which are intended to assert clearly and firmly to all who have a sympathetic interest in Ireland that there is a democratically elected Irish Government; that that Government speaks for Irish nationalism; and that, if the wide Irish diaspora wish to help, as we hope they will, they should look for direction to the policies put forward by that democratic Irish Government. I hoped that the British side would see clearly from the texts that this is the overriding message of the Taoiseach's speeches - not only on the issue of Northern Ireland but also on the economy and on other issues. The whole point is to give a positive message to focus the goodwill of well-wishers in Irish America. This is the best way to ensure that those who try to play on their sympathy to gain support for violence will not succeed.

We talked around these issues at some further length. Fenn said that the account I had given had been helpful and he would report what I had said to London, where, he had to say, there is very considerable concern. He was still very worried about how the absence of any condemnation of violence in yesterday's speech and the one sentence reference in today's Harvard speech would be read - especially by the Prime Minister, with whom, in particular, the Taoiseach wished to maintain a relationship of goodwill. He accepted what I said about the Taoiseach's strong position on violence but asked if it might be at all possible to convey to him "a suggestion that would cause him to say explicitly in another speech while he is still in America what we know he believes".

I said I would pass on this message but I thought that there would probably be very little opportunity at this stage to take account of it, since it was probable that the Harvard speech would be made very shortly and only the Kennedy Library speech tonight - a rather "social" speech - remained to be delivered.



Noel Dorr  
Secretary DFA  
22 April 1988

cc Mr Nally, Mr. Matthews, A/I Division DFA

PST, <sup>Embassy</sup> London, A/I Secretariat.