



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr Gillin  
S.H

27

Room 209  
Iveagh House  
Stephens Green  
Dublin 2

Wednesday 23 August, 1995

An Taoiseach  
John Bruton TD

Dear Taoiseach,

I understand from the Tánaiste that I am to respond to you in relation to the paper and the letter from the British PM, both of which were passed to me this afternoon. I will be forwarding a copy of these thoughts to the Tánaiste also.

If I may refer first to the letter from Mr Major, it seems to me to reflect the following:

- a) an over-sanguine assessment of the stability of the peace process;
- b) a failure to understand the difficult position you are in (compounded by a complete failure to appreciate the possibility that we could make a breakthrough);
- c) an almost contemptuous "taking for granted" of helpful suggestions made.

The letter in my view needs a blunt response, and quickly. I believe you may have to consider communicating a view that you would prefer to hold no Summit rather than a Summit that would de-stabilise the peace process. I have taken the liberty of attaching a draft reply to Mr Major to this note, for your consideration.

If I may explain why I feel so strongly.

We have tried, at recent meetings with the British, to convey the view that the stability of the peace process is delicate, and may even be in a dangerous condition. We have not done so for the sake of gaining advantage, but because we believe it to be the case. At such discussions, the British have always dismissed our concern, and have effectively portrayed themselves as totally convinced that the war is over, and that the Provos have nowhere to go.

Nobody knows which analysis is correct - we do know, and have said so, that if the British are wrong, it will be too late to do anything about it the day we discover it.

Apart from what they say, there is reason to believe from their actions that they are excessively blasé about the situation. One has only to look at the cack-handed timing of the Clegg decision, and at the gratuitously insensitive and bureaucratic approach to prisoner issues, to realise that whatever is motivating British tactics, it is not concern for a delicately-balanced peace process.

It is possible that both our analysis and the British is wrong in some degree. I have already passed on to the Tánaiste information which has come into my possession, from a person I know reasonably well, who claims to be close to members of the IRA Army Council. This information would not constitute hard intelligence, in my view, but does represent a possible "third scenario". I make no claims as to its accuracy, though I do believe in its plausibility, and would argue that it could be treated as a working hypothesis.

It is this.

The IRA Army Council has never held a Convention to declare the cease-fire permanent. Until they do, Adams cannot use the word permanent. But a decision to make it permanent requires a two-third majority, and Adams, although confident of a simple majority, does not know if he can bank on two-thirds. And he would want even more than that in order to avoid a split.

That means that a rump on the Army Council which has never given its consent holds a disproportionate influence. They have been pressing for a Convention, or at least a full "review" meeting, and will not brook any talk of decommissioning. Their attitude to Adams is "you promised us round-table talks, with no strings attached - when are you going to deliver?".

~~This group is not agitating for an immediate resumption of violence. They are pressing for a harder political line, in the form of a three-month or six-month deadline. Adams knows that any such ultimatum would immediately mean the end of negotiations - in other words, violence might as well resume immediately, since no-one will touch Sinn Fein in the face of such a threat. He is continually trying to head it off, by persuading and cajoling the recalcitrants not to push him into a review. Some believe that if his hand is forced, he will side with the hard-liners rather than allow a split. So far, he has persuaded them not to call the relevant meeting, but he is seen in some quarters as running out of time.~~

As I say, I have no way of knowing if this is an entirely accurate picture. But if it is, or if any sort of similar situation exists within the IRA, the important point is this:

- it means that the issue of decommissioning is not some "macho" test between Sinn Fein and the British, but rather a test of wills between different elements of the IRA. In any such test, we have to help Adams to win.

That in turn means two things. It means that, unpalatable as it may seem, there is at this point an identity of interest between the Irish Government - and all who want to develop the peace - and Gerry Adams (that identity of interest has existed, of course, since the day of the cease-fire). It also means that progress towards all-Party, inclusive political dialogue must be the first priority, as that is the only way that Adams can win through.

In other words, the exercise we are engaged in now cannot be about putting pressure on Sinn Fein to give the Unionists the sense of victory they seem to want, and that the British seem to want to give them. It must be about easing pressure on all those who need to talk.

The British don't seem to understand any of this (and their lack of understanding is bolstered by the belief that violence is no longer an option for the IRA anyway). In addition, they can never seem to shake off their need to always come back for another slice when they are negotiating.

They seek always, almost as a reflex, to divide and conquer, either by setting up a myriad of relationships on the other side, so that they can pick and choose who they deal with, or else by continually confusing the issues.

I remember, for example, after months of negotiation on the content of the Downing Street Declaration, the British introduced an entirely new draft right at the very end. This led to the famous row in Dublin Castle at which the Irish side demanded that the new draft be taken off the table and that discussion resume on the existing draft only. This stance was taken, as I recall, on the strong advice of Mr Nally, who emphasised again and again the need for a totally coherent and determined approach in any negotiation with the British.

What is happening now is not quite as bad as it was on that occasion. But Mr Major's letter introduces two new elements.

Firstly, as I understand it, and certainly in any discussion of the subject with the British in which I have participated, the question of transferring the Summit to London arose only in one particular context. We were demonstrating an understanding of the difficulty that Mr Major might face if he were to agree to propositions that would give the political talks element of the package a much higher profile, and were to do so in Dublin. In other words, we accepted the difficulty of asking the Unionists to be present in Dublin for the announcement, and on that basis indicated a willingness to transfer to London.

In that context, it is audacious, to put it mildly, for Mr Major to "pocket" the offer of a London Summit in one breath, and reject any idea of a higher profile for the political talks element in the next.

It is much worse, however, for him to seek to co-opt the US Administration to a one-sided view of decommissioning, as his letter clearly seeks to do. As I understand our position, we did not put forward the International Commission solely as a way of overcoming Sinn Fein's difficulties with the handing over of weapons. We put it forward as a way of bridging the gap between two irreconcilable positions - Sinn Fein's and the British Government's.

There is no doubt whatever that if Sinn Fein were to see the Commission as a way of leaning on them to achieve British objectives, they would reject it outright. And there is equally no doubt that if the American Government were to see the Commission as anything other than a way of facilitating progress on the decommissioning issue, hand-in-hand with significant progress towards the start of dialogue, they would be mad to have anything to do with it.

In other words, the main purpose of the Commission is to help both sides to begin to deal with de-commissioning in ways that remove it as a pre-condition, after a period of time and voluntary co-operation. Rather than recognise that, Mr Major's letter seems to see the Commission as a cunning trap for the Provos, designed to make them subject to intolerable pressure to meet the pre-condition. The trick is not to let them into the secret until it's too late.

This is mad - but in addition, it serves no interest of the Irish Government, and it could fatally undermine the peace by proving the point of the hard men.

The Irish Government's paramount interest is to see the peace preserved and developed - and it is ironic that while there may be no political "up-side" in working towards that end, the "down-side" of being associated with failure would be catastrophic in political terms.

None of this is intended to counter the view that it is equally crucial, as your own paper says, that Unionist co-operation with the political process would be forthcoming. Any boycott, especially an enduring one, would be fatal to the hope of a political settlement.

In this context, it is interesting to note that British officials have said several times at Liaison Group meetings that they can envisage a situation where the Unionists would be willing to attend meetings with the two Governments - they are more likely to agree to do so, according to the British view, than to attend a meeting with the Irish Government alone.

It may also be of interest to note that at least one of the smaller loyalist Parties has now agreed, through an intermediary, to send an official delegation to Dublin in September to meet yourself and the Tánaiste. I am trying to firm up this commitment, and would hope to be able to do so in the next few days.

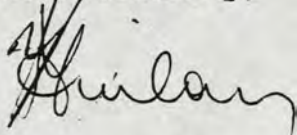
The big imponderable, of course, is whether Sinn Fein will reject the Commission. There is no doubt they are "playing hard to get" - I believe that it because it is sound, from their perspective, to wait to seek to get as much as they can from the "package" before making a final decision.

But they already know, from your earlier letter and from media coverage, that we are not putting on the pressure for an all-Party Conference, and are instead seeking to develop a "triangular" approach as the next phase, and as the precursor of all-Party talks. And there has been no major outcry from them - at least not yet.

Having regard to all of the above, I strongly believe that the wisest and only course for us now is to demonstrate - to the British as well as to Sinn Fein - that our policy is both coherent and consistent, in its development and in its execution. We must demand the strongest possible profile for the political element of the package, and we cannot allow ourselves to be trapped into being co-opted, along with the US, as a stick with which to beat Sinn Fein. The step-by-step approach that we have been following, designed as it is to slowly draw everyone into dialogue, without asking anyone to compromise their ideology before they get to the table, remains the only viable way forward.

You will recognise, I know, that I do not put forward these views as a friend or ally of Sinn Fein - far from it! - but rather because I believe absolutely that the peace was won by accepting the principles of parity of esteem and inclusiveness, and can only be lost by losing sight of them. It is with that in mind that I respectfully suggest the attached draft for consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Fergus Finlay  
Special Adviser to the Tánaiste

DRAFT

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of August 21st, which arrived here on the 23rd. I too valued the contact we had in France. I hope, however, that no misunderstandings have arisen as a result of that and any other discussions.

For example, I had hoped that the suggestion of transferring the Summit to London would be of help to you in considering how substantial a profile we could give to the announcement of a new phase of political dialogue, and it was in that context that the suggestion was made. I must emphasise the importance I attach to establishing once and for all, and in the most visible way possible, that in the next round of political dialogue, all Parties can expect to be treated on a basis of full parity of esteem and in the most inclusive way possible.

I have to say that I am disappointed that the suggestion of moving the Summit to London appears to have been of no help to you in that regard at all. In the circumstances, I suggest that if the Summit does proceed on schedule, we should revert to the original, and more normal, arrangement.

Secondly, if I have interpreted your letter correctly, you seem to see the International Commission as a way of putting maximum pressure on the paramilitaries, and little else. You will, I'm sure, have received by now the questions supplied to us by the American Government, in which it is clear that the Administration sees close links between the beginning of work on the de-commissioning issue and the commencement of political dialogue. We may not be able to solve the issue of "de-commissioning as a pre-condition" prior to a Summit, but we must be careful not to exacerbate it. For my part, I will be encouraging anyone with whom I have contact to co-operate in the most wholehearted way with the Commission, but I also want to be able to re-assure them that the establishment of the Commission is not a trap, but an honourable way of bridging gaps.

We will need to devote some time to considering these issues. It would also be important, I think, that we consider how we can respond to the American questions on the International Commission in such a way that it is clear that both our Governments are entirely ad idem in relation to the issues raised. That too will require some work.

In all the circumstances, I wonder are we expecting rather a lot in committing ourselves to September 6th? I'm sure you would agree that it is vital that the Summit, which will be carefully watched, be seen to provide a fresh impetus to inclusive dialogue and break through some of the obstacles that exist at present. Getting it right might be more important than doing it fast!

Yours sincerely,