



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/97/36

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.

27

SECRET

**Northern Ireland Strategy Meeting,
Thursday, 7 September, 1995.**

1. Following is a summary of the main points arising at this meeting. A list of those present is attached.

Proposal for Some Form of Interdependent Segmented
Approach to the Parallel Talks and Decommissioning Process.

2. Mr. O hUiginn indicated that the Tánaiste had reservations about this proposal and that he could not agree to its being forwarded to the British side, as proposed, without the Tánaiste's approval.
3. In the ensuing discussion, the following difficulties with the proposal were identified by participants at the meeting:
 - * that it would leave us in a worse position than we were in at present - the British would agree to it but Sinn Féin would reject it as a form of creeping decommissioning.
 - * as a related point, that it would represent a U turn on the part of the Government - having sought a postponement of the Summit, in part, over the question of a gesture, we would, if we proceeded

with the proposal, be throwing our weight behind the idea of a gesture.

- * that the fact that it came close to Mr. Ken Maginnis' idea of benchmarking would make it difficult to sell to Sinn Féin.
- * that it was extremely complex - and that it was unlikely that the Chairman of the Commission would be willing to become involved in the kind of micro-management which it envisaged.
- * that it involved a very undesirable trade-off between weapons and democracy - every stage of movement on the political etc. track would in effect be hostage to Sinn Féin/IRA.
- * that, from Sinn Féin's point of view, it would seem that there were now not just one, but four or five preconditions (for talks on constitutional issues).
- * that it envisaged the possible isolation of Sinn Féin.
- * that in this, it involved substituting a totally new policy for the policy which had underpinned the peace process to date.

The Alternative

4. Key points under this heading were:

- * that we should tackle the British head on on the gesture, on the basis that a protracted stalemate on this issue would lead to a breakdown in the peace process.
 - * that we should seek agreement by the British that a positive report by the Commission on the first two Washington tests would clear the way for Sinn Féin entry into substantive talks.
 - * that in the event of failure by the British to agree to this (and assuming that the peace process would break down as a result), we would need to address the question as to how we lined up again with the British Government (this could not be on the basis of a shared position on the gesture).
 - * that we should put it up to the British to come up with their own ideas for moving out of the current impasse.
 - * that, at the same time, there was obviously a need to find a credible substitute for Washington three - perhaps a "no first strike" agreement.
5. The prospects for getting the British to agree to move away from Washington three were discussed. It was acknowledged that this might not in the event be possible (in which case the peace process would break down) but that it was worth trying (and of course, had to be tried).

6. The possibility of a voluntary move on decommissioning at some stage by Sinn Féin/IRA was adverted to this could only happen if the spotlight was turned away.

7. It was agreed that,
 - subject to approval at political level, we should seek to persuade the British side of the need to move away from Washington three in some shape or form,

 - we should suggest that the British side should constitute an official level group similar to that of the Irish side.

S. Hare

Attendance

Mr. Paddy Teahon, Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. Frank Murray, Secretary to the Government

Mr. Seán Donlon, Special Adviser to the Taoiseach

Mr. Tim Dalton, Secretary, Department of Justice

Mr. Seán O hUiginn, Second Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Simon Hare, Principal Officer, Department of the Taoiseach