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PRIME MINISTER/MR BRUTON - PRESS CONFERENCE - LONDON -
28 NOVEMBER 1995
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FROM FOX FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

Mr. Githin
C.H. 8.12.95

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN MAJOR,
AND THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER, MR JOHN BRUTON,
IN LONDON
ON TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 1995

PRIME MINISTER:

Can I first welcome you all here this evening. I am sorry this press conference is so late, but having reached the agreement we thought it prudent, before odd bits of it appeared out in public, to let you see the full text of the agreement we have reached and to answer any questions you may have.

Can I first this evening thank the Taoiseach and his colleagues for coming over here, at such short notice, to launch the twin track initiative. If I can say so to the Taoiseach, I think it typifies his personal and, in my judgment, very courageous commitment to the success of the peace process.

The Taoiseach and I first discussed the ideas which led to this initiative at Cannes towards the end of June. Work on it was carried forward by the Tanasté, Dick Spring; by Paddy Mayhew at the Northern Ireland Office, by officials of their departments and also by the Department of Justice in Dublin.

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13-11-95 01:32

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I think as most of you know, reaching this agreement has been neither easy nor quick. In fact it has been an extremely difficult agreement to reach. But for both of us, I think John would agree with me about this, the most important thing has been to reach the right agreement, an agreement that in our judgment is going to generate further momentum in the peace process and help us address some of the difficult issues that lie ahead. That, we think, is the way to take us closer to negotiations on a lasting settlement involving all the political parties.

The communique, which I hope by now you have seen, speaks for itself. I would just like to make a very few points about it.

First, launching this initiative has been a truly joint exercise between our two governments, two governments whose work together has been a vital ingredient of the dramatic improvement of life in Northern Ireland over the last 18 months or so.

Secondly, we intend to go on working together in that joint belief, and in the spirit of friendship which has carried us through a number of difficult negotiations throughout the last three years.

The next point I want to make is simply this. In preparing this initiative we have both consulted very widely. This initiative does not represent the view of any one party, it is founded on the principles of the Downing Street Declaration and it does not cut

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across any of those positions of principle. We hope that this agreement we have reached will attract the widest possible cooperation on the part of everyone who genuinely wishes to consolidate peace in Northern Ireland.

Let me also say that we appreciate the support that we have received from other governments. It is our two governments - the British and the Irish government - that carry the responsibility for this initiative and it is we who will have to make the decisions on the recommendations of the international body in due course.

The international body will have three members. They will serve in their personal capacity, not as representatives of the government of their country, and their recommendations to the Taoiseach and to me will be advisory recommendations. I am extremely grateful to Senator George Mitchell who has agreed to chair the committee, and also to the government of the United States for supporting his nomination. We are approaching through their governments two other eminent people from other countries to serve with Senator Mitchell and we hope to be able to announce their names very shortly indeed.

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It is now almost 18 months since the first of the two ceasefires in Northern Ireland. A great deal of progress has been made. But there are still very many problems to be resolved in Northern Ireland. Guns and explosives thankfully are not being used, but they have not yet been finally put away. There are almost daily episodes of violence and intimidation by paramilitary organisations which are far from the exclusively peaceful methods that we are seeking to engender in a truly democratic society. There is a great deal yet to be done to establish the level of accountability and responsibility which Northern Ireland would normally expect in running its own affairs.

But we are now approaching a second successful peaceful Christmas throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. And it is I think beyond question that life in Northern Ireland has been transformed and that the people of Northern Ireland want both a just and a permanent peace. What they seek is a peace in which all parties and all people, irrespective of their denomination, can play a proper part.

This initiative that we are launching this evening is about generating the confidence which will help us to achieve that lasting peace, the confidence that every party is committed exclusively to peaceful means and that the threat of violence can be relegated to the past, the confidence that the political parties can begin to find a way of working together and a basis which all of them can accept for constitutional negotiations.

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No-one, no-one, is being asked to abandon a principle. But if we are to reach agreement and carry this process further forward, everyone will need courage to take risks in the search for peace and I hope that they will be prepared to do so.

The twin track initiative will undoubtedly test their readiness to do so. The Taoiseach and I will do all that we can to lead it to success, but achieving its goals will depend ultimately not only upon us but upon the parties and the organisations to whom it is addressed. I very much hope that they will respond to it and that they will receive the support of their communities in doing so.

MR BRUTON:

I am very pleased that we are able this evening to launch the twin track process. This is a process designed to lead, by the end of February, to all-party negotiations in Northern Ireland. And the aim of those all-party negotiations is to reach an agreement which would involve the support of all the people in Northern Ireland, an agreement which will underpin the peace that people enjoy on a daily basis now in Northern Ireland.

It is quite clear that there is a tremendous well of generosity amongst the people of Northern Ireland in the way that they relate to one another in their daily lives. Equally there is a tremendous generosity of spirit felt between north and south and between Britain and Ireland.

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What we need now is to move towards political structures that will give political expression to the feelings of the people, feelings which are expressed in terms of a yearning for peace, a yearning for reconciliation and a yearning for a way of life that entrenches mutual respect, that creates conditions in which both traditions within Northern Ireland will feel equally at home in their place of living and with one another.

The very important message from this evening's announcement is that we are now taking the steps necessary to restore momentum in the peace process. We are setting out on a road which is designed to overcome the difficulties that have prevented us up to now from setting a date by which we will be aiming to commence all-party discussions.

Neither government, nor any of the parties, are being asked or expected at this point to move away from sincerely held views. What we are, however, doing is agreeing on a basis upon which we can move to resolve such difficulties as may have stood in the way of progress in the past. I would like to stress in particular, in regard to the international body, that it will, as paragraph 5 of the communique makes clear, be making an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue. It will furthermore be consulting very widely on the matter and it will be receiving submissions from all of the relevant parties. And no limit has been set on the subject matter of those submissions.

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Of course the governments in the final analysis will be the bodies that will be making the decisions, but we are very grateful for the fact that we have been enabled to enlist such distinguished international assistance in overcoming problems that are there.

Furthermore, I want to stress that the political track has, in the words of the communique, a very detailed and pro-active mandate. There is an open agenda, there will be detailed discussions with the parties in the fashion described to set in detail the preparations in place for the talks which it is our aim to be able to start by the end of February.

I wish, in conclusion, to express my thanks to the Prime Minister, to John Major, for the enormous amount of time that he has devoted to overcoming these difficulties, difficulties which we identified at Cannes and towards the resolution of which we have been working resolutely ever since.

I would like also, if I may, at a personal level to express my thanks to all of those who have assisted us in our work - the Tanaste, to the officials on the Irish and British sides, who have worked many long hours and spent very many sleepless nights overcoming the difficulties which have now been overcome and which have enabled us to have this important ~~announcement~~ today.

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QUESTION (FT):

Prime Minister, where do we stand on Washington Three? Is it an absolute pre-condition for Sinn Fein's entry into all-party talks that the IRA makes a first physical handover of weapons?

PRIME MINISTER:

Yes, we haven't changed our position on Washington Three. Let me try and make the point clear so there is no misunderstanding. We won't be asking the international body, the decommissioning body, to question our position on the Washington Three criterion. The international body was not established for that purpose, it wasn't established to make recommendations on when decommissioning should start. That is properly a matter for discussion in the preparatory talks and for a government decision, as the communique says. But the British government's position on Washington Three has not changed. It is not a matter of anything other than practicalities. The end product of what we seek to do is to provide a mechanism by which we can move into all-party talks in due course. Until we are able to re-engage the confidence of people to do so, as set out in paragraph 10 of the Downing Street Declaration when we started upon this long road some time ago, we can't actually move into those talks. And we see no other way, other than the physical beginning of decommissioning by Sinn Fein - that was our position and it remains our position.

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QUESTION:

Taoiseach, are you confident you have the support of Sinn Féin for this agreement and how does it differ from the agreement which seemed to be so near to signing in September which they appeared unable to accept?

MR BRUTON:

The agreement here is much more detailed. First of all it makes very clear that insofar as the decommissioning issue is concerned that the international body will be making a thoroughly independent assessment of this matter. And I want to emphasise that the body will be independent in the way in which it will assess this matter, it will be independent in the procedures that it will follow, and furthermore I particularly welcome the fact that both governments have agreed that they will consider constructively any practicable suggestion that could help bring all parties into negotiations on the basis of the Downing Street Declaration. I think that is a very important statement.

Just as the British government have not changed their view on Washington Three, the Irish government has not changed its view either. It is, as I said in my opening remarks, a situation in which we have a different view on this matter. And what we have set in place here is a process by which we can move forward. I am not asking the Prime Minister on this occasion to change his opinion, nor is he asking me to change mine. What we have agreed upon, however, is a process whereby we can move forward and listen to all the views that are expressed.

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And what we have further both agreed together is that we will consider constructively any practicable suggestions that may be made, in any context, that will help to bring the parties together. This is a process aimed at solving a problem, overcoming and transcending an impasse and I believe if it is to work it must be approached in that way, as a process, not as something whereby all answers to all questions can be answered before the process has even started.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT A, CONTINUED ON TRANSCRIPT B)

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29-11-1995 03:02

JAMES LEE

**TRANSCRIPT B - PRIME MINISTER/IRISH PRIME MINISTER -
JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE - LONDON - 28 NOVEMBER 1995**

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FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

**TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY
THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN MAJOR AND THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER,
MR. JOHN BRUTON
IN LONDON
ON TUESDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 1995**

TRANSCRIPT B - (CONTINUED FROM TRANSCRIPT A)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (CONTD)

ROBIN OAKLEY (BBC):

Could I ask the Taoiseach if the British Government continues to maintain its belief in "Washington Three", does he see any prospect of Sinn Fein being involved in those substantive all-party talks for which the target is the end of February?

MR. BRUTON:

As you can see, the purpose of the international body is to examine in an independent way the decommissioning issue, which is one of the issues that has obviously, as we know, been a problem but equally, we are agreed upon an intensive preparatory talks phase which will run in parallel with the work of the international body.

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It is our hope that all of the parties participating in the preparatory phase will recognise first of all that it is in their best interests that there be a process that anchors the peace that they now enjoy through making political progress and that furthermore the parties themselves will see in the preparatory talks phase an opportunity to offer comfort and reassurance to other parties who may be fearful of their intentions. Unless there is that spirit of generosity in the approach to both of these tracks by all of the parties, the processes that the Governments have put in place will not achieve their potential.

What the Governments can and are doing is putting in place a sophisticated, carefully worked-out twin-track approach which allows a framework within which the parties can offer one another the sort of assurance that is needed for the ultimate talks process to be a success but unless there is that willingness on the part of the parties themselves to ~~operate~~ operate this opportunity in a generous way, the Governments will not be able to achieve the progress that they wish to achieve with the agreement of the parties concerned.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, do you expect the actual process of decommissioning to have started in the period between the body submitting its report in mid-January and the end of February target date by which you want to see all-party talks launched?

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PRIME MINISTER:

The position has always been the same from the moment that we launched the Downing Street Declaration. The reality that we face is that there is not going to be sufficient confidence for all the parties to sit down and talk together in our judgement unless there is a beginning to the process of decommissioning. That has not changed as a position.

Nobody is in a position to compel any of the democratic political parties to attend these talks; they will make their own decisions and it is perfectly clear to us that they will not all be attending these talks unless there is that process at the beginning of decommissioning unless something wholly unexpected happens. We have not found another way of building that confidence but that confidence needs to be built. No-one has yet found an alternative method of building it other than the physical start of decommissioning so that is why we regard it as a practical necessity. It is not a question of boxing anyone into a corner, it is a question of a practical necessity if we wish this process to continue.

As the Taoiseach indicated a moment ago, what we are doing is creating a momentum and this is a very finely-balanced series of decisions that are being taken in this communique that the Taoiseach and I have reached with the commission - the international body - on the one hand looking at whether there is a will to decommission and how physically to decommission and then a

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range of political talks in the preparatory political track process but before the process proper can start we have set a target date and whether that target date can be met depends on the parties as much as us. We will do what we can to meet that date but it cannot be met unless a sufficient momentum and a sufficient confidence is built up for all the parties to be prepared to come and sit down together.

MR. BRUTON:

I would like to add that, as the Prime Minister stated his position and the position of his Government very clearly, it is the position of my Government that a physical gesture of decommissioning of arms in advance of talks while undoubtedly desirable is not an attainable objective.

That is our position at this stage. However, like the British Government, we are willing to listen constructively to what is said by all in both of the tracks of the discussion. We are willing to listen to what is said.

I also would like to express the hope that the work that will be done before the commission in regard to identifying a suitable and acceptable method for full and verifiable decommissioning and also the indication that will be given to the commission by the parties associated with those who have held arms that they will work constructively to achieve a full decommissioning of arms, that that process will in itself help increase the level of confidence

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that is felt by those who were previously threatened by those arms in a way that will overcome this impasse.

We have not come here today to pretend that there are no differences between us or between the parties. What we have come here to do is most emphatically to launch a process with the firm momentum and backing of both Governments which is designed to overcome those difficulties. I see no purpose whatsoever in trying to pretend that difficulties and differences do not exist; they do exist, they exist even between the Prime Minister and myself in our assessment of one particular small part of this problem but what is much more important is that in regard to the much more important issue, which is getting all-party talks started, intensively working to prepare for those talks, seeking in a confidence-building way to overcome the remaining obstacles to the participation of all the parties in those talks, on those more important matters we are entirely united.

PRIME MINISTER:

Indeed, if it were not for those difficulties and those differences, no doubt we would have cracked this problem some years ago.

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JOHN BIRRELL (BBC):
In your fundamental view on this question, are you not adopting
explicitly contradictory interpretations of the part of the
commission in that Prime Minister Major takes the view it is
part of the work of that commission to consider whether by the
beginning of decommissioning there should be a pre-condition for
political talks and the Taoiseach holds the view that that need
not be a stumbling block? Whose interpretation should Sinn Fein
believe?

PRIME MINISTER:
I think you are misinterpreting what the Taoiseach said.

MR. BRITON:
Could I offer you an answer to your question the text of the
document. I would invite you to read paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 and
you will see there very clearly an answer and I would like to
start with paragraph 5.

Paragraph 5 says that the two Governments have agreed to establish
an international body to provide an independent assessment of the
decommissioning issue. That is the governing paragraph that sets
out clearly the issue. It is absolutely plain that the commission
will establish its own procedures, that people making submissions
to the commission will be able to make submissions on any matter
that is relevant in their view but equally, the Prime Minister has
made the position of his Government in regard to one aspect of the

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matter quite clear. I have made my position clear. What this process is about is problem-solving. We haven't solved the problem. Now we are putting in place a process the aim of which is to solve the problem.

PRIME MINISTER:

And paragraph 7 is quite explicit as well, John, if you read it.

JOHN REID (RTÉ):

Taoiseach, Garry Adams said on RTÉ tonight that he was not briefed on the contents of the joint communique. Is that the case and are you worried that he might say no?

MR. BRITON:

The position is that this is an agreement between the Irish and British Governments. We have been negotiating very intensively on this matter up until the time that we reached final agreement which was I think at approximately 8 o'clock and obviously while we have been consulting the Irish Government has been consulting with all of the parties in varying degrees of intensity including consulting with Sinn Féin. The only people with whom we have been consulting in full in terms of every aspect of the matter has of course been the people with whom we are reaching the agreement, namely the British Government.

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PRIME MINISTER:

I made the point earlier that everyone is going to have to have some courage if we are going to be able to move forward. That includes Mr. Adams, I hope he will show it.

DON McINTYRE:

Prime Minister and Taoiseach, given the timing of this announcement and the fact that it has not looked throughout the last few days as though you would reach this conclusion today, has the US Administration been involved in any way in using its good offices to achieve an agreement?

PRIME MINISTER:

I can tell you we have had no pressure whatsoever from the United States Administration to reach an agreement, none whatsoever.

DON McINTYRE:

If I might respectfully say so, that doesn't quite answer my question. Have they been involved in discussions, for example, with the Irish Government or leaders of nationalist opinion in Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER:

Not with us.

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MR. BRUTON:

I might say that I did have a conversation with President Clinton last week. Personally, I would wish to express my appreciation of the interest that the US Administration has shown in the peace process generally but I would also stress that this is an agreement that has been reached between our two Governments.

JOHN SMITH (UK NEWS):

May I ask the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach if neither Government has changed its position fundamentally and if the United States Administration has had really little bearing on the outcome of your talks today and over recent weeks, why is it that you feel it possible to publish this communique tonight when you weren't able to publish it yesterday? What has changed?

PRIME MINISTER:

We agreed it today. It is quite difficult to publish before you have agreed it.

JOHN SMITH:

What has changed?

PRIME MINISTER:

As of last night, we had five or six points outstanding. We reached agreement on those points during the course of the discussions the Taoiseach and I had this morning, this afternoon.

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this evening and in the series of discussions that our officials have had after reference to us throughout the day.

There has been intensive work on this on and off for ten days, very intensive work. Throughout the whole of Friday our officials were meeting with constant reference to us, throughout the whole of Saturday - there was more golf wrecked over the weekend than there normally is on these occasions - and a great many discussions between the Taoiseach and I over the last few days.

MR. BRUTON:

We have done wonders for the revenue of the Taoiseach and British Telecom!

PRIME MINISTER:

We have gradually whittled away the points of difference that existed. There has been a will to reach agreement for a long time. Gradually we have moved towards it. As you get closer to it, a momentum builds and we were keen to build on that momentum and reached an agreement at around 8 o'clock this evening.

ADAM BOULTON (SKY NEWS):

Can I ask you both separately where you place the Irish and British security forces in this political equation of arms silenced by the cease-fire?

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PRIME MINISTER:

They are not these. These are not the arms we are talking about. These are the paramilitary arms that we are talking about in this. The arms of the Irish Government and the British Government are the arms borne by legitimate nation states, they are not subject to negotiation.

MR. BRITON:

That is my position too. We have, however, emphasised in paragraph 8 of the communique that both Irish and British Governments reaffirm their willingness to continue to take responsive measures advised by their respective security authorities as the threat of armed activity from other sources reduces. That draws a clear distinction which I think is very important and one that I have drawn on many occasions in the Dail and elsewhere between the arms held in Ireland by legitimately authorized authorities and other arms.

PRIME MINISTER:

That is an entirely agreed position between us and has been throughout.

If I could just add to that point, over the last year or so, because of the changed security situation in Northern Ireland and as a result of advice from the GOC and the Chief Constable, we have been able to reduce the number of troops in Northern Ireland but that has been solely as a result of the changed security needs

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in Northern Ireland and the military advice that we have received from the Commanding Officer there.

ROBIN OAKLEY (BBC):

Could I ask both the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister whether they think that the agreement they have now reached will succeed in averting the threat of a resumption of violence and their assessment of how close we were to a resumption of violence without it?

MR. BRUTON:

My view is that what we are doing here is setting in place a path towards a political process of negotiation that will solve the underlying problem. This approach on our part has not been motivated by any fear of imminent resumption of violence.

As far as the Irish Government is concerned, we have had solemn statements made by myself and by my predecessor in conjunction with the leader of the SDLP and the leader of Sinn Fein in which Sinn Fein very clearly commits itself to exclusively democratic methods of political action. Those declarations which I have placed my faith in clearly exclude any support on the part of Sinn Fein for a resumption of violence associated with their political objectives.

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It is very important for people to look closely at the text that Gerry Adams signed in conjunction with myself and John Hume on that matter. Those texts clearly exclude any possibility of support on their part for a return to violence and I want to make it clear that we have been proceeding in all that we are doing here and elsewhere on the assumption that those solemn declarations are sincere and mean what they say. If any other assumption were the case, we would not be proceeding as we are proceeding and that is why, because of that assumption, we have put so much effort into getting Sinn Fein into political talks. The whole objective of this process is to create conditions in which all of the parties, including Sinn Fein, can sit around the table and work for their future but that is on the assumption that I have just made about their intentions.

PRIME MINISTER

Neither the Troubadour nor I were affected in the slightest in our discussions and our negotiations by the threat of a return to violence; that was not a motivating factor in any way in the agreement that we reached.

There have been the occasional howled noises made over the last few weeks, it is difficult to determine whether they were genuine or whether they were part of a negotiating pattern but in any event it did not affect the discussions we had or the agreement that we have reached.

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QUESTION:

Prime Minister, isn't it time now to meet Gerry Adams?

PRIME MINISTER:

No.

SAME MAN:

Why not?

PRIME MINISTER:

For the same reason I have given in the past. In due course the time will come. It is not here yet.

When Mr. Adams and Sinn Fein and the IRA begin the decommissioning of their arms, then a different set of circumstances will apply but that hasn't been reached yet. I look forward to the day when it does.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT B AND END OF WHOLE TRANSCRIPT)