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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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Review of Northern Ireland Policy, August, 1981.

NOTE:

At the Taoiseach's request, the enclosed two papers are being circulated to the Tánaiste and the Minister Designate for Foreign Affairs, but not to the other participants at the review meeting.

The paper called Evolution of policy on Northern Ireland contains references to a series of related documents which were appended to the original copy. These documents are not being circulated with the paper and the reference numbers in it should therefore be ignored.

* see Annex attached

21st AUGUST, 1981.

Formation of Government policy on Northern
Ireland, December, 1979 - May, 1981.

Taoiseach,

In connection with the forthcoming review of policy on Northern Ireland, you expressed an interest several times in seeing a report of what you thought was the previous basic review when Ambassadors Donlon and Kennedy came home in January, 1980. I have now obtained a report of the meeting with the then Taoiseach on that occasion and it is included in the attached folder of papers. You will see that the meeting was scarcely a general review.

More generally, I would comment that your predecessor did not have a fully developed plan of campaign from the outset. I would liken his approach to that of a judge giving judgement in a case where constitutional issues have been raised who, in giving judgement goes only so far as he must for the purposes of that particular case and reserves other points for the future. Policy evolved primarily through informal discussion with the SDLP and with a group comprising the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Messrs. Nally, O'Rourke, Ó hAnnraocháin, Neligan and Kirwan, without secretariat or formal decisions. The Government were informed of the principal developments or orientations from time to time.

The basic idea from which your predecessor developed policy was that any attempt at a solution solely in a Northern Ireland context was doomed to failure and consequently that the Irish Government would have to settle the matter initially with the British Government - or at least go a long way in determining the pattern of such a settlement or of the stages of progress towards it. The preference for direct dealings with the British stemmed primarily from a view that they would not want, left to their own devices, to have anything to do with any Dublin Government that carried any hint of constitutional or political evolution and hence that circumstances must be created, through steps to be taken by the two sovereign Governments, where they would be forced to recognise that this rejection or intransigence was a luxury they could no longer afford, in the light of basic changes in British policy - the latter, of course, still to be brought about. It was this view, rather than recognition of any

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personal lack of political credit with unionists, that predominated.

W. KIRWAN
Assistant Secretary

17 August, 1981.

Evolution of policy on Northern Ireland

December, 1979 - May, 1981

1. This note attempts to outline the development of the central political thread of Northern Ireland policy during the period from the assumption of the office of Taoiseach by Deputy Haughey to the dissolution of the Dáil in May, 1981. It also seeks to put in their context the attached folder of papers illustrating the evolution of policy. References to the Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs are to Deputies Haughey and Lenihan.

2. Indent (3) in Tab 1, a note of a phone conversation between the Taoiseach and Ambassador Donlon contains the first directions on the central thread. Tab 2 is a report of a meeting on 23 January, 1980, attended by the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassadors Kennedy and Donlon and Messrs. Nally and Neligan. It is necessary to stress the exploratory nature of this meeting. Essentially, it was an initial exploration by the Taoiseach of how the ideas he brought with him into Government, apparently flowing in part from Fianna Fáil policy as represented by the 1975 policy document, could be applied in the actual circumstances of early 1980. The central idea was that no attempt at a solution solely within a Northern Ireland framework would work. In view of the presence of the Ambassadors, the projection of Irish policy in Britain and especially in the U.S. took up perhaps a disproportionate share of the meeting.

3. Further consideration in the period leading up to the 1980 Fianna Fáil Árd Fheis on 16 February led to the idea of direct dealings with the British on the matter. In the Árd Fheis speech, the main points on the central political issue were:-

- * - Northern Ireland was an artificial entity, artificially sustained
- it had failed as a political entity
- it was consequently necessary for the two sovereign Governments to work together to raise the situation to a new inter-governmental plane and to find a formula that would bring permanent peace and stability

- a declaration by the British Government of their interest in encouraging the unity of Ireland, by agreement and in peace, would open the way forward
- a generalised assurance that in any discussion or negotiation, the safety and welfare of Protestants in Northern Ireland would have special priority.

4. To these ideas was added in the following weeks the suggestion that if progress was to be made, attention should be focussed not only ^{on} as in the Atkins Conference, then continuing unproductively - relations between the two communities in the North but also on relations between North and South in Ireland and between Britain and Ireland. This reflected, at least in part, Mr. John Hume's successful insistence on the parallel conference with Mr. Atkins on issues going beyond those set as an agenda for the other conference by the White Paper of November, 1979. This aspect of three dimensions, the idea of the British Government declaring their interest in Irish unity as a desirable objective and the idea of mechanisms for parallel (to the Atkins Conference) inter-governmental talks or a conference were premised on Mr. Atkins when he was met by the Taoiseach and Minister in Dublin on 15 April, 1980. His reaction was that he could not promote Irish unity although the British would not stand in the way of it, if content were forthcoming; that even in Irish interests there was a need for a new political body in the North to whom we could talk (this was a recurring theme with the British up to October, 1980); and that it must be for the people of Northern Ireland to decide their future.

5. The Taoiseach urged that the British Government approach the matter in a broad historical context. He emphasised that in any discussions, there would be nothing restrictive or inhibited in the Irish approach. Mr. Atkins advised against rushing things, referring to the Council of Ireland.

6. Over the following weeks, consideration at official level led to the development of ideas in the direction of

- (1) a possible modification of the "British guarantee", combining the declaration of interest in Irish

unity with a continuing power for consent and matched by an appropriate corresponding declaration by the Irish Government - Tab 3 refers;

- (2) the idea, as part of a movement to an ultimate settlement, of a Council, on the lines of the Nordic Council, in which for a transitional period the British would be present, as a vehicle for giving the Unionists the guarantees they would want - if they could be got to take a new direction in their thinking through a British modification of the guarantee.

7. In a letter in mid-May, 1980 from the Minister to Mr. Atkins, there was reference to the need to initiate structured discussions between the two sovereign Governments on the three dimensions of the problem. At that stage the British were wondering where to go following the adjournment of the Atkins Conference in an atmosphere of disagreement. There were signs that some on their side were beginning to take the point of the Irish side but in a more cautious way.

8. The ideas referred to in paragraphs 6 and 7 were reflected in Irish advance drafts of the Communiqué for the meeting at Head of Government level in London on 21 May, 1980. These included a number of drafts of a modified form of the "guarantee"; these remain available. The Irish side also took on board more cautious formulations tending in the same direction drafted in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (F.C.O.). The agreed Communiqué, in its operational sections on this central political aspect, was closer to this British draft. It was acceptable to the Irish side as initiating a process.

9. The next development of policy flowed from a meeting between the Taoiseach and Minister and a full SDLP delegation on 17 July, 1980. Tab 4 summarises the outcome. Re (3) of that note, there was an understanding to establish a liaison group at working level between the Government and the SDLP, to discuss future strategy on Northern Ireland and to prepare proposals for a quadripartite conference when the Atkins process ran its term without result. On reflection, the SDLP felt that to do useful work, the group would require political

guidelines. To obtain these, they sought a private informal meeting between the Taoiseach and Messrs, Hume, Mallon and Currie. This took place in the Taoiseach's residence on 6 September.

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10. In preparation for this meeting, background papers were prepared in the Department of the Taoiseach on the basis of the evolution of policy over preceding months but seeking to isolate questions on which political guidance was necessary. These papers are at Tabs 5 and 6.

11. By this stage, an official-level meeting with the British had been fixed for 11th September to follow up the reference in the May communique to "new and closer political co-operation". At a meeting with officials on 27th August, the Taoiseach went over the ground in preparation for the meetings with the SDLP and the British. Tab 7 is a report of that meeting. Tab 8 is a further note by Mr. Nally setting the scene for the meeting with the SDLP. In these papers the idea of a quadripartite conference was to the fore. At the Taoiseach's private meeting with the SDLP, there was agreement that both would press this idea on the British and it was confirmed that joint papers be prepared on the objectives to be aimed at jointly from such a conference. Tab 9 elaborates on the outcome of the meeting.

12. Tab 10 is the first of papers prepared in the Department of the Taoiseach seeking to define possible positions of the Irish Government for the envisaged conference. The ideas in this paper were not adopted as policy but it is probably fair to see that the joint sovereignty approach informed the subsequent evolution of policy.

13. At the official level meeting in London on 11 September, 1980, the Irish side stressed that the primary matter of mutual interest in the "new and closer co-operation" was the search for enduring peace and stability in Northern Ireland and throughout these islands and to this end for a durable and equitable political settlement. They gave notice that when the Taoiseach met the Prime Minister, he would be proposing a quadripartite conference with a view to reaching agreement on future relations between North and South in Ireland, between Ireland and Britain and between both parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

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The British reaction on that occasion was quite negative to bringing the Irish Government into the negotiating process on Northern Ireland. The Irish position was, however, reiterated at a Ministerial level meeting in London on 15 October, 1980. The British reaction on that occasion was more qualified and, in retrospect, it became clear that they were engaged in a review of policy leading up to the Queen's speech opening Parliament and to the subsequent issue of the second Atkins (White) paper.

14. The next important stage in development was an official-level meeting in Belfast on 17 November, 1980 by which stage agreement had been reached that the next Head of Government meeting would take place in Dublin on 8 December. A report of this meeting is at Tab 11. The following were the main points that emerged:-

- The British side reviewed progress on the devolution talks. Their predominant concern, in whatever was said or done was that -
"We must not make the security position worse,";
- they indicated that there would be no clear statement of future policy before the end of the year. The course had to be worked out, in London, and taking into account the Taoiseach's views. Whatever was done in Northern Ireland, they would have to be sensitive to the totality of all the relationships between the two islands and the parts thereof;
- in the British view, at some point; the transfer of powers of Government back to an elected Assembly would, on all the probabilities, have to be part of the process;
- we must always bear in mind that there was a large body of opinion in Northern Ireland which would resist very forcibly even the idea of imposed new relationships;
- There would be tension in the local communities in Northern Ireland up to next May, when local elections were due to be held. This tension would be exploited to the full in the struggle between Molyneaux and Paisley for whose parties the elections would be a deadly struggle for power;
- there was agreement that what we were concerned with was peace and stability in Ireland, especially Northern Ireland and improving relations between the two islands. This must be the theme of the forthcoming meeting;

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- On the question of a future conference this could take any one of four forms:-
 - (1) there could be an overt and specific reference to a conference;
 - (2) the reference could be to a special meeting in the present series designed to discuss the issues at stake;
 - (3) the meeting could be described as the next meeting in the series, which would be specially devoted to; and
 - (4) the communique could say that "at our next meeting in this series, we will discuss....."; the question of participation by both parts of the community in Northern Ireland would need special consideration. The Unionist community would and could exploit the situation to the detriment of everybody;
 - The substance of the conference could be concerned with political, economic, social, security and other relationships between the different parts of these islands and could be described as being to undertake a fundamental re-examination of these aspects with a view to the progressive weakening of old animosities;
 - it was extremely important in any language not to commit the two leaders to final conclusions by say May or June, or even to a conference which would give rise to final conclusions. Essentially more could be achieved by stages than in any other way;
 - the Conference, however it was described, could be concerned with energy, citizenship, new institutional structures, as well as political and financial relationships: a number of references by the British made it clear that they saw "institutional" as a code-word for "constitutional" or "political".
 - there should be a further meeting, if possible, before the European Council in Luxembourg, at official level to iron out communique wording.

15. Pursuant to the understanding reached in Belfast, a further meeting took place in London on 26 November, 1980, at which both sides tabled and exchanged views on draft language for the summit communique. A report of this meeting with these drafts attached, is at Tab 12. The Irish side had received clearance from the Taoiseach on the language in the Irish draft - which returned to objectives sought but not fully attained the previous May. The main difference to emerge was on the description in the communique of a special inter-governmental encounter to discuss the Northern Ireland problem, with the British on instructions, unable to accept the word "conference".

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16. One may speculate on British motivations in accepting the language of the Dublin ~~communiqué~~. At the summit, the person most active and forthcoming on the British side in the drafting committee was Sir Ken Stowe, civil service head of the Northern Ireland Office, with Michael Alexander, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary for international relations seeking to exercise a restraining influence. When the resumed plenary session in the afternoon came to consider the draft communiqué, Mrs. Thatcher adverted to the phrase "totality of relationships" and asked what it meant. Both Carrington and Stowe gave replies which they almost certainly knew did not correspond to the Irish understanding of the phrase but which presumably they thought would lead her to accept it. It seems possible that she was brought to accept the greater Irish involvement (or what would certainly appear to be this) by exasperation at Unionist non-cooperation with her previous ~~arguments~~ ^{difficulties}, persuasion as to the benefits of security co-operation on the Irish side and suggestions that the process could be presented in terms of the bilateral meetings etc. with France and Germany. Her own attitudes probably emerge fairly faithfully in Tab 13, the transcript of her Press Conference, on her return to London. It seems likely that it became clear to the British in preparations for Dublin that Mrs. Thatcher could not be brought then to share their interpretations of the code language involved.

17. Policy on the Irish side was further developed in a series of meetings in January - March, 1981. Notes were not made of these meetings but the positions decided on were reflected in the positions taken on the Irish side at the meeting of the Joint Steering Group in London on 30 January, 1981 and the initial meetings of the five individual Joint Study Groups in Dublin on 11-13 March, 1981. Reports of these meetings are in the briefs on the studies. Tabs 14, 15 and 16 illustrate the matters given consideration in the lead-up to those meetings and give some indication of the political guidance received by officials.