



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2016/52/65
Creation Dates:	19 February 1986
Extent and medium:	17 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

SECRET & PERSONALMeeting between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister,
Mrs Thatcher, in Downing Street, on 19th February, 1986

The meeting began at approximately 5.15 and finished after 6.30 pm. It was attended by the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary Armstrong and Private Secretary Powell and, on the Irish side, by the Taoiseach, Ambassador Dorr and the undersigned. The meeting was one of the most vigorous, if not the most vigorous, I have attended. What follows is, for ease of reference, in the form of direct speech. The note does not, however, purport to be verbatim.

After some preliminary remarks the Taoiseach opened with a reference to his announcement earlier in the day that the Government intended to sign the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. We had been trying to be helpful to the Prime Minister in anticipation of her meeting with the Unionist parties next week.

Prime Minister:

I notice you made the statement in the Westminster Press Gallery. There was T.V. there. This is without precedent. Did you organise it?

Taoiseach:

No. That was entirely a matter for the Press Gallery. It was simply that the occasion gave me a suitable opportunity to make the announcement.

Prime Minister:

When will you be signing?

Taoiseach:

Next week - possibly before you meet the Unionists.

Prime Minister:

We are in for a very, very difficult time. All things could crack. According to what happens then, the whole thing could break.

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Taoiseach:

I appreciate your worries. Today in my meetings I found some encouragement. At one of my meetings I was told of a long letter from Martin Smith in reply to an invitation to him to put his name to a Commons motion. The letter said that though he would not be putting his name to the present motion he had hoped to be back in Parliament before long....

Powell:

Enoch is the only one who comes to the Commons now.

Taoiseach:

There is some evidence of division between the Unionist parties on the issue of withdrawing from the chairmanship of Assembly committees.

Prime Minister:

I am not sure it is true that there is division. Jim Molyneux will follow Paisley. I am going to have an acutely difficult time on Tuesday. I must meet these two. I want to put some points to you, not necessarily in any order of priority. I feel deeply about these things and I want you to know it.

First, some Ministers in the South are giving expression to the view that the Agreement gives more power than it really does.

Next, the SDLP are doing nothing whatsoever to support the Agreement. They are not indicating support for the security forces. They are not getting themselves into discussions on devolution.

We are suffering very costly attacks on the security forces. John Hume is not here. I have looked at his statements in the Commons and elsewhere. What is he doing to live up to them? They said before the Agreement that they wanted devolution but now they are nowhere to be seen. They are not living up to their words. They are not doing anything.

Thirdly, we are suffering colossal attacks in the border areas. We have 400 people there on surveillance/intelligence duties. I am told that you have 10/15 Gardai on your side. We have got to have better surveillance on your side. I am getting complaints, very considerable complaints that not enough is being done there. We want some really big action on security. There are areas in the South where gunmen are living - in Louth, in Dundalk - and in Newry. There are people on the other side of the border from Londonderry.

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We will have to have some structure of consultation with the Unionists on the Conference. When I see the Unionists I must be able to explore this with them. And we must have better security.

Taoiseach:

Taking your points in order, I don't understand the first of them at all. I am not aware that any Minister in the South has ever said what you have attributed to them. Can you produce evidence of any statements of the sort you complain about?

Prime Minister:

I have met bishops, farmers, businessmen - all here. They tell me that this is what is being said in the South.

Taoiseach:

In a phone-in recently, I took calls from a large number of people in Belfast and in the North generally. Nobody accused an Irish Minister of what you are saying.

Prime Minister:

You said soon after the signing that the Agreement was the nearest thing we could get to joint authority. That was alright. Perhaps Minister Barry is saying too much.

Taoiseach:

We have been punctilious in what we say about the Agreement. We have no reason to make that sort of claim. They are only damaging. I personally would not tolerate any Minister in the South saying the sort of thing you seem to imagine they are saying. Can you give me any instance of what it is that you are objecting to?

On the SDLP's attitude to devolution, you know what John Hume said in his Commons speech on the signing of the Agreement. His concern is not with devolution itself which he wants but on what is the best timing. Any proposals or indications of agreement that he puts forward now would be swept aside. His concern is to find the best way forward. Perhaps an initiative in the area might best come from you?

Prime Minister:

The Assembly is there. They should go for it in that body. They are not in the Assembly. Anyway where is John Hume these days? He is just not about.

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Taoiseach:

Yes. He has been in the Philippines. Could you take the initiative at your meeting with the Unionists to call all parties in Northern Ireland together? You are more than likely to get the immediate support for such a move from John Hume and John Cushnahan. Both are agreed that it would be a disaster to go into an Assembly before agreement on devolution. All the old arguments would start again. Their concerns are with how and when to get devolution talks started. The problem is to get the parties together to discuss how they can take everything out of the area of the Conference - as under the Agreement.

Prime Minister:

I would be happy if he would do more about the security forces. There were some horrible murders recently. He did not go to the funerals. He did not make any expressions of regret. They are not acting in any different way from the way they acted before the Agreement.

Taoiseach:

There are difficulties about SDLP people attending funerals of members of the security forces. There could be trouble if they did so publicly. I know myself of cases where they have gone to the homes of the families and expressed regret. The families themselves appreciate that it could be very upsetting if trouble arose because of SDLP attendance at funerals.

Prime Minister:

We might as well not have had the Agreement. There is very little visible improvement on the border. We have 400 people on our side on surveillance duty. There is a great deal of crime going on around the border but when we try to catch the people responsible, we can't get at them.

Taoiseach:

That is absolute nonsense. Largely because of the Northern troubles we have doubled the size of the Army. We have increased the police force by $\frac{2}{3}$ rds....

Prime Minister:

But the Army is not directly involved. Do you use them for surveillance?

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Taoiseach:

They are involved in a very significant way. I am not sure of what the precise figures are for numbers of police on the border but I am convinced that there are well over 1,000 police in the immediate border areas. We use different methods of policing from you because the atmosphere in the South is very different. I am not saying that we cannot improve things but you must appreciate the very considerable efforts we are making and you must appreciate that different conditions obtain North and South. We have a police force that is acceptable to the local population.

Prime Minister:

I am getting great complaints about what is happening in Louth, Monaghan and Donegal.

Taoiseach:

Why don't these complaints come to us? We have groups from the two police forces working together. Our people have spoken to your people again and again. If there are specific complaints why do they not go to the people who can deal directly with them? At one of these meetings recently, a high official in the RUC said that the Agreement was the best thing that had ever happened for security co-operation. Surveillance methods are being discussed in that forum.

Prime Minister:

We were told that there would be a special Task Force. We are getting our attacks in the border areas. The only way is continual surveillance of the houses where the terrorists are living.

Taoiseach:

Intelligence gathering in the two communities can be done by very different ways.

Prime Minister:

That is working well.

Taoiseach:

They get a totally different feed-back from the local population. In the North things are different.

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6.

Prime Minister:

In view of the attacks in the border areas can you move more Gardai there?

Taoiseach:

I will have to get figures for the resources we are putting into the border. I appreciate the difference in policing methods on both sides. You can't run checkpoints.

Prime Minister:

But the terrorists don't come across where there are checkpoints.

Taoiseach:

We have very few stationary checkpoints - obviously what you say is true. We have different methods of patrolling.

Prime Minister:

The key is to watch, observe, patrol, and collate.

Taoiseach:

Our methods may be less sophisticated but they are no less effective. Because of the Agreement and the contacts which followed it trust and confidence between the two forces are growing. That is a very important element in security. On surveillance, there is discussion going on but the methods on both sides will never be quite the same. There are totally different situations on both sides of the border.

Armstrong:

We are ready to help with training and equipment if that should be found necessary.

Taoiseach:

If this is a problem, it should start at the level of the problem, not at Prime Ministerial level.

Prime Minister:

What about my meeting next Tuesday? - (to Powell) When am I meeting John Hume?

Powell:

On 5th March, Prime Minister.

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Prime Minister:

That is after my meeting with the Unionists. The Unionists are getting even more reactive. They don't seem to be getting anywhere. I'm going to be in acute difficulties with the Agreement if present trends continue. Of course the Agreement continues.

Taoiseach:

Could we get back to the idea of devolution?

Prime Minister:

Is John Hume serious?

Taoiseach:

That is one of the most upsetting things - this persistent attempt to say that he isn't.

Prime Minister:

He hasn't been in the House for a long time after the signing of the Agreement. That is some leadership! His deputy comes into the House and is left there by himself. John Hume is halfway across the world. Is he really serious about the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Taoiseach:

I would prefer that he should have been there.....

Prime Minister:

Enoch is the only one of them in the House at the moment.

Powell:

Other Irish members just are not there.

Taoiseach:

What about the question of an initiative by you?

Prime Minister:

I shouldn't be played first. I have to see all the Leaders. We have to find a way forward. We have to find a form of consultation involving the Unionists.

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8.

Taoiseach:

The process will take time. We have to erode IRA support among the local population. We need to get the Code of Conduct for the RUC etc. The general phrasing of that, so far as we were concerned, was discussed last October and we went along with it.

Prime Minister:

That is in Jack Hermon's ambit.

Taoiseach:

Wait - we are being told different things by different people. I met Jack Hermon in Dublin on Saturday. He told me that he had the draft on his desk. On Monday our people in the Secretariat are told that it had not reached him yet. We are being misled. The longer this problem is left the greater it will be.

Prime Minister:

Once you say that there is trouble. We make the decisions on government in Northern Ireland. The Code of Conduct is our business.

Taoiseach:

That is hardly the issue. Your people suggested a phraseology last October. We said that it was very good. There does not seem to be any reason now why there should be further delay. This is what is causing the trouble.

Similarly, we were told about moves to have the RUC accompany UDR patrols.

Prime Minister:

Yes, we did that. Within a few days there was a very bad murder....

Taoiseach:

We were promised information on the numbers of patrols accompanied by RUC men. We were given statistics relating to August and November. When we asked what the up-to-date position was, after the Agreement, we were told that the statistics don't exist. What we have got now relates only to November - when the Agreement was signed.

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Prime Minister:

I can see now why they are getting alarmed. The Unionists say that I have to report to Dublin about everything. That just is not good enough.

Taoiseach:

On the ground there is no perception of change under the Agreement. When the issue of having the RUC accompany the UDR was raised, it drew people's attention to it. They are probably noticing now more the fact that the UDR patrols are not being accompanied.

Prime Minister:

Yes - they are murdering the RUC on the border as fast as they can go.....

Taoiseach:

These were fundamental things in the Agreement - the Code of Conduct and the patrols.

Prime Minister:

Yes - and security across the border.

Taoiseach:

The process is not being worked. Promises are not being kept. We accepted the proposals on the Code four months ago. Nothing has happened since, publicly. The purpose of the Agreement was to change the attitudes of the minority and through that to affect majority attitudes - so as to achieve a reconciliation and respect for the institutions of Government.

Dorr:

The fact that intelligence on our side is good may require that a different attitude apply to surveillance.

Prime Minister:

Some of the big things you have done are on intelligence from us.

Taoiseach:

And vice versa.

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10.

Prime Minister:

Surveillance is vital. SDLP attitudes and cross border security are critical things. If you start to say that we have to submit everything to you for approval

Armstrong:

We told Dermot Nally and the negotiating group what was going into the Code of Conduct and they said that the passage we showed them was o.k. It is now for Jack Hermon to produce the Code as soon as he can.

Taoiseach:

We should be much further down the road. We can't lose momentum now. On the signing of the Agreement the SDLP got a 25% increase in their vote - largely at the expense of Sinn Fein. But we must get more if that process is to be continued. We are not making the progress we should be making.

Prime Minister:

I have a note here which says - (the Prime Minister then read from her brief a note to the effect that Unionists believe that the SDLP want the Conference to continue and that so long as it continues they have no interest in devolution).

Taoiseach:

That is simply Unionist propoganda. You know what John Hume said in the House in November.

Prime Minister:

That is the last thing I have heard from him on the subject. The Assembly is there. Why doesn't he go into it?

Taoiseach:

What you have read is a classic Unionist statement - entirely without foundation. John Hume would far prefer to go into talks on devolution. Any political party would prefer direct contact with their constituents rather than to have another organisation act for them. That is the sort of story that is being spread quite falsely. John Hume wrote to you to say what he believed about devolution. Why don't you put your questions to him?

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11.

Prime Minister:

We are in real difficulty. I don't know how much difficulty we are in. We have got to get a rival structure. We have got to get improvements on border security. What the bishops and others said I'll take a note of and let you have. They are saying the Republic has joint authority. The requirement in the Agreement to reach agreement on your views and proposals means joint authority.

Taoiseach:

No - that is not so.

Prime Minister:

Your signing of the Convention is a very good thing. I will get through next Tuesday as best I can. Can we bring John Hume nearer by then?

Taoiseach:

You have the unambiguous statement from John Hume. You can say it to the Unionists. I spoke to him on this problem and he promptly wrote to you. It is all there in black and white.

Prime Minister:

Then why does he not come into the Assembly?

Taoiseach:

You know that that has been turned into a propaganda body. Even the Alliance have left it. This meeting has been slightly heated. There may be a distorted view of some things.

Prime Minister:

John Hume in the Philippines and not being there to support Seamus Mallon - that is not distorted. Does he want the Agreement?

Taoiseach:

For Tuesday, you have the Convention and you have the John Hume letter. Get across to them the extent to which the Conference can be removed from them if they establish devolved institutions. Even the Protestants are worried about what is happening. Robinson and McCusker are playing very dangerous games with the para-militaries.

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12.

Prime Minister:

I am holding lunches here for them to make sure they do not feel that they are being left out. I have asked the CBI, farmers' organisations, the churches, etc. They tell me that the overwhelming majority is behind Paisley. I can only say

I am very glad that it was our intelligence that got that cache of arms. They know where to go in Louth, Donegal, etc. but they just can't go there. How is it you are not getting the extra intelligence co-operation?

Taoiseach:

The amount of extra effort on security since August - has been very substantial. Whatever has been necessary has been provided.

Prime Minister:

What about the Special Task Force? How many police are there?

Taoiseach:

About 11,400.

Armstrong:

There are about 7/8,000 in the RUC.

Prime Minister:

I can't see John Hume before Tuesday. I put the argument about the Conference and devolution before and got nowhere.

Taoiseach:

What Robinson and McCusker are saying is with the purpose of appearing reasonable.

Prime Minister:

They are against the Agreement: that is their tactic. They are not talking about power-sharing. They are talking about a conference on power-sharing. Don't fall into that trap.

Taoiseach:

A model could be constructed, putting different people into different departments without necessarily requiring them to act in a collective way. That might get away from the hooks of the past. What Jim Prior was thinking about in 1982 could be a good idea. He went off then, in favour of the Assembly.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

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13.

Prime Minister:

I avoided all the Sunningdale approaches. Power-sharing is anathema to them.

We simply can't go on putting massive resources of money and manpower into the place. Many nationalists would not like it if they were to go into the South. We have practically to give ships away to sell them from Harland and Wolff.

Taoiseach:

Welfare levels are not so different as between North and South now. There is great danger in all this. Many people follow Paisley and Molyneux but a great number of them don't want violence. They don't want strikes, etc.

Prime Minister:

I know about the UVF and the UDA. I can't stand them. I'll really crack down on them if they do anything. They will suffer the same surveillance as the IRA.

Taoiseach:

It is really intolerable that the leader of a democratic party should be seen in processions with hooded men from paramilitary forces. Paisley - well, maybe he is that sort but I cannot understand how Jim Molyneux could do it. You probably know that Robinson and McCusker are involved. Molyneux now, I think, regards his action as a mistake.

Prime Minister:

I know how it is in those border areas. There is sympathy; there is intimidation. The only way is round the clock surveillance of some of the houses. If we can't defeat the men of terror we have failed. No army in the world could be as restrained as ours.

Taoiseach:

The order of preference among nationalists in Northern Ireland, if they have to be stopped, is I am told, first for the British Army, secondly for the RUC and thirdly for the UDR.

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14.

Prime Minister:

But the Army and the police are the targets of murder squads. When the Americans talk about bombing Tunisia because there are terrorist training camps there, I have to say "just be careful". I have to think of what is happening in Dundalk and in Donegal.

Taoiseach:

If one is found we'll deal with it.

Prime Minister:

We are told that there are arms caches there: there is training there. This is what I'll get on Tuesday. I have to hold the situation. I have to get a reaction that people will accept. Even with the paramilitaries, they have been acting in a legal way.

Taoiseach:

How will you hold it?

Prime Minister:

I will have to get a group together to consider that. If I am asked will you abrogate the Agreement, I will say, of course not. The question is how to get a structure for consultation within the Agreement. What type of meeting will it be? Will it be an ultimatum type of meeting or a meeting to discuss things? We must act to put off an ultimatum and put it off again.

Taoiseach:

There is a further question I must raise with you. That is about Sellafield. There have been 18 cases there over a period of years of which 4 have occurred within the last 3½ weeks. We are told now that levels of radiation were 40 times as big as was said to be the case in 1953. People are very concerned about what is happening.

Prime Minister:

I am not going back to 1953. 11,000 people are working there. Look at their health. They are among the healthiest in the country.

Taoiseach:

We are told now that 15 people suffered radiation does - not 2 as had originally been alleged.

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15.

Prime Minister:

We are spending £1.5 billion on the place. Go and see it. What sort of accidents do you get in the construction industry? It is far worse than Sellafield. Would you close that down?

Taoiseach:

The leakages are a serious problem. A scientific paper will be published soon in Paris to show the dosage in our country is abnormally high.

Prime Minister:

Have you looked at the level of radiation from granite in Aberdeen? People play up every simple incident in Sellafield.

The Prime Minister then produced a series of statistics to show that levels would be reduced to 5% of 1979 levels by 1990.

Resuming -

The British nuclear industry as a whole has an unparalleled record of safety. Why are people going back to 1953?

Taoiseach:

Because of the suppression of the facts. How do I convince myself or anybody else that what we are told now is what is happening?

Prime Minister:

Bring groups across to see the place and to see how it works.

Taoiseach:

Some type of monitoring is necessary - by the EEC, perhaps.

Prime Minister:

Euratom (?) looked at it in November/December 1985. They said that further monitoring is not needed. The Irish member on the group accepted this conclusion.

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16.

Taoiseach:

The figures in the Paris report I have mentioned are as follows.

The Taoiseach then read from the report.

Prime Minister:

11,000 people work there. I'll write to you on the facts. I have had more problems with the coal industry and other industries than I have had with the nuclear industry. We never hear about those problems. People keep harping on the nuclear industry.

Taoiseach:

Some kind of monitoring is needed.

Prime Minister:

I'll write to you.

The meeting then discussed the terms of the press briefing to be given on the meeting. The agreed text is attached.



20 February 1985

Copy to:

Tanaiste
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Justice
Minister for Energy (Sellafield extract)
Attorney General
Ambassador Dorr
Messrs Ward, Donlon, Russell
and O Tuathail.

AGREED STATEMENT

The Taoiseach and Prime Minister met for about 1½ hours at No. 10 Downing Street and reviewed the working of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, to which they are both committed.

The Prime Minister expressed satisfaction at the decision of the Irish Government to sign the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

The Taoiseach expressed the concern felt in Ireland about the Sellafield plant. The Prime Minister said that she would let the Taoiseach have a full report.

19th February 1986