

Confidential

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PST <u>21</u>
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Meetings with British Government

1. We had bilateral meetings with Michael Ancram and British officials this morning and again this evening.
2. Ancram reported on meetings he had had this morning with Alliance and the UUP (Maginnis and Empey).

The UUP were concerned that acceptance of the ground-rules could be portrayed as acceptance of everything mentioned in it (such as the Framework Document). Ancram thought that they could be taken to a point where they would live with the ground-rules on the basis he had indicated last night, i.e., the ground-rules would be left intact but there would be a separate document containing rules of procedure for the conduct of the negotiations which would in practice cover the content of the ground-rules.

3. O hUiginn underlined the need for a coherent and logical approach to the various issues in dispute. It was necessary to satisfy three contradictory requirements: (a) that the ground-rules paper continued in force; (b) that the Unionists could say that they had not formally accepted it; and (c) that the Chairmen should have clarity about the basis of their operation.

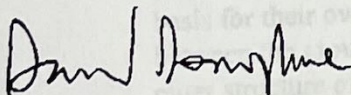
He floated the following proposal on an exploratory basis, making clear that it had yet to be discussed with our Ministers.

It was essential that the two Governments remain explicitly committed to the ground-rules as a basic charter. It might, however, be helpful to establish a distinction between the overall basis for the negotiations and the rules required to regulate their conduct once people had entered them. A limited number of elements which were clearly procedural might be transposed from the ground-rules into the rules of procedure. Two of these would be the provision for all issues to be on the table and the "nothing is agreed" rule. The participation in each strand might also be included, if the Unionists wished. The procedural rules would cover the internal conduct of the talks while the ground-rules would address the wider external dimension (which would include issues such as participation in the talks). Where cases of conflicting claims arose, the Chairman might be empowered to remit these to the two Governments, as the custodians of the ground-rules, for resolution.

4. The British side found this a constructive approach. In the course of the day, we developed with them a revised version of the procedural paper to reflect it. At a meeting this evening, it was agreed that the paper would be shown (but not given) to the UUP in the hope that this might influence a positive attitude. We stressed that this was without political clearance on our side and would in any event be the outside limit of what could be done to get the UUP out of the hole which they had dug for

themselves. An essential condition was that the lines of demarcation would be clear on every front and that there would be no attempt to import into the rules of procedure the wider "macro" provisions of the ground-rules.

5. It was agreed that, if soundings with the UUP and the SDLP in the interim had been productive, the Chairman might indicate at the outset of the resumed conferring session on Monday morning that, on the basis of informal consultations, he was proposing to circulate a redraft of the procedural paper and to adjourn until delegations had had time to consider it.
 6. On last night's exchanges about the status of the ground-rules, Ancram told us that the document did not have statutory effect but was the "document of referral". The point he had made in the Parliamentary exchange mentioned by Robinson was that the Government was not trying to bind itself statutorily.
 7. In a discussion of the agenda and the position of decommissioning on it, O hUiginn emphasised that, while we would try to be helpful to Trimble, there were extreme limits to what we could do. The SDLP, in particular Seamus Mallon, were deeply concerned about the political damage which they would suffer within the nationalist community from perceptions of a talks process from which Sinn Fein were absent and which involved entirely one-sided assistance to Trimble (against the background of last week's very discouraging omens).
- Ancram reiterated his commitment to an "anchor line" which would facilitate an exit from the decommissioning discussion through the establishment of a sub-committee to run in parallel with the main talks.
8. We received from the British side a slightly revised draft agenda, which Ancram intended to discuss with Trimble.



David Donoghue
20 June 1996