

SECRET
of the SDLP,

Mr. Keenan.
To read the attached
from Wally Keenan.
30/10
TAOISEACH

A week report.

Seamus

29/10.

Mr B. Nolan
WV
31-10-96

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against a background where Mr. Trimble now apparently saw decommissioning as more academic. I indicated that in this context there were intensive contacts underway between the Irish and British Governments. I referred to recent meetings and summarised the exchanges earlier that day when the Taoiseach had met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, at the Taoiseach's home at Dunboyne.

- 3. I set out the British ideas as most recently known at the time - that an allegedly unequivocal restoration would need to be dependable, that time would be needed to establish this, that it could not be established in less than three months and that during that period, the actions, inactions and all the circumstances, including for example, in regard to targeting, testing of weapons would have to be consistent with a credible ceasefire. I indicated our understanding that the British Cabinet Sub-Committee had set down very tight guidelines, that the Secretary of State had little room for manoeuvre but appeared, himself, to be possibly open to some ideas to manage matters towards a shorter period, for example, by allowing for the Christmas/New Year break in the talks but that he had indicated that any modification of the decided British position would only come following a telephone call to the Prime Minister which he had strongly encouraged the Taoiseach to make. I referred to the positions that had been taken publicly by the Taoiseach, including in PQ replies that had been sent to Mr. Mallon, including that the Taoiseach had resisted calls to specify a time-lag before Sinn Féin entry into the talks. I referred to the assessment by Irish officials best qualified to judge that three months would be too long a time frame and, if set down, would run the risk that a possibly attainable restoration might never happen. I indicated that the Taoiseach would value having his views as someone closely involved in the talks and as a democrat, noted for his consistent opposition to Republican violence and as having a very healthy scepticism as to Sinn Féin bona fides and intentions.

SECRET

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Meeting with Seamus Mallon, Deputy Leader of the SDLP,
Friday, 25 October, 1996.

1. The Taoiseach asked me to establish the views of Seamus Mallon on the conditions for the entry of Sinn Féin into the multi-party talks, in the event of a restoration of the IRA ceasefire, with particular reference to ideas in that regard being advanced on behalf of the British Government. Following initial telephone contact with Mr. Mallon, from which it emerged that he was travelling next day to the U.S.A. for a week, I travelled to his home in Markethill, Co. Armagh and discussed the matter with him.
2. Being unaware how far he was aware of dealings between his Party Leader, John Hume and the British Government - of which I had only very slight knowledge myself - I situated our discussion in the context of the search for an exit from the address to decommissioning in the Opening Plenary of the talks. I linked this to the recent emphasis by David Trimble, following the Lisburn bombing, on the conditions to apply to Sinn Féin's entry to the talks in the event of a restoration of the ceasefire, against a background where Mr. Trimble now apparently saw decommissioning as more academic. I indicated that in this context there were intensive contacts underway between the Irish and British Governments. I referred to recent meetings and summarised the exchanges earlier that day when the Taoiseach had met the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, at the Taoiseach's home at Dunboyne.
3. I set out the British ideas as most recently known at the time - that an allegedly unequivocal restoration would need to be dependable, that time would be needed to establish this, that it could not be established in less than three months and that during that period, the actions, inactions and all the circumstances, including for example, in regard to targeting, testing of weapons would have to be consistent with a credible ceasefire. I indicated our understanding that the British Cabinet Sub-Committee had set down very tight guidelines, that the Secretary of State had little room for manoeuvre but appeared, himself, to be possibly open to some ideas to manage matters towards a shorter period, for example, by allowing for the Christmas/New Year break in the talks but that he had indicated that any modification of the decided British position would only come following a telephone call to the Prime Minister which he had strongly encouraged the Taoiseach to make. I referred to the positions that had been taken publicly by the Taoiseach, including in PQ replies that had been sent to Mr. Mallon, including that the Taoiseach had resisted calls to specify a time-lag before Sinn Féin entry into the talks. I referred to the assessment by Irish officials best qualified to judge that three months would be too long a time frame and, if set down, would run the risk that a possibly attainable restoration might never happen. I indicated that the Taoiseach would value having his views as someone closely involved in the talks and as a democrat, noted for his consistent opposition to Republican violence and as having a very healthy scepticism as to Sinn Féin bona fides and intentions.

4.

I did not refer to Mr. Hume at all or to any involvement on his part. We discussed the matter at some length. Towards the end of our conversation, Mr. Mallon asked was Mr. Hume involved and what was he saying to us (i.e. to the Irish Government). I responded that I was generally aware that Mr. Hume was engaged in efforts to bring about a restoration of the IRA ceasefire but that insofar as he had contact with our Government in that connection, I was not involved. It would be likely that any involvement on our side would be kept to a very small circle. Mr. Mallon appeared to accept this and did not pursue the matter.

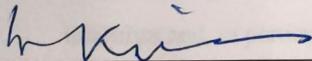
5.

He told me that

- he would regard any three month quarantine period for Sinn Féin as a disaster for the SDLP, including electorally; if Sinn Féin were seen to be excluded from talks, following restoration of the IRA ceasefire, they would enjoy a huge wave of sympathy among Northern nationalists, which they would stoke by doing two or three T.V. interviews every day; the SDLP would suffer the most from any such three month decontamination period;
- Sinn Féin would then be able to go into the Westminster election without having to answer any of the hard questions; he would suspect that there was nothing they would like more than to be excluded from the talks in this way;
- the SDLP, meantime, would be stuck in the talks process, even though no progress could be made there; it would be almost impossible for them (the SDLP) to do serious business in the postulated circumstances - but even this would play into Sinn Féin's hands by appearing to dance to their tune.
- it would be necessary to come up with some contrivance, involving a shorter period and some massaging of this e.g. by beginning the Christmas break as early as possible in December, purportedly to facilitate the Independent Chairmen; it could be represented that Sinn Féin would require a week each, successively, to mend fences with the Irish and British Governments, with the Americans and with the SDLP; he (Mr. Mallon) would be supportive of some such contrivance.
- if Sinn Féin were serious, they too would be prepared to go along with some such contrivance; it would be helpful if a way could be identified in which they could present it to their constituency as serving a purpose for them.
- if Republicans were to let off further bombs, they would be putting themselves out of court altogether.
- he had doubts about explicit reference, in any formula, to specific types of paramilitary behaviour, such as targeting or testing of weapons as it would be very difficult for the Irish Government or the SDLP to verify what they might be told about such forms of behaviour.
- he felt that the Ulster Unionists would stage a walk-out from the talks if Sinn Féin came in but whether they did so would not be affected by the duration of any test period for Sinn Féin; it appeared all too likely, in any case, that the Ulster

Unionists did not wish to do any serious business until after the Westminster election.

6. In the course of discussion about the multi-party talks, the next stage in them and prospects for them, Mr. Mallon asked whether there was any indications as to how to exit from the address to decommissioning. Was there any indication of Ulster Unionist intentions in that regard? I responded that Michael Ancram had reported that in recent contacts, the Unionists had been coy on this issue. I referred again, however, to suggestions that if Mr. Trimble could be satisfied as regards conditions additional to a ceasefire for Sinn Féin entry into talks he might be prepared to 'park' the decommissioning issue, pending any Sinn Féin entry.
7. I mentioned the meeting of the Business Committee fixed for Monday, 27 October, to discuss the single agenda item: would the Committee disband? This came as an unpleasant surprise to Mr. Mallon, whose understanding had been that the Committee was yet to be constituted. The SDLP had not nominated any representative. I explained the chain of circumstances which had led to a firm ruling by Mr. Holkeri that a meeting would be held, to our unhappiness at the decision and to our own differing interpretation of Rules No. 2, so far as it applied to a situation where it was manifestly clear in the plenary that there was no agreement, in the sense of sufficient consensus, for any proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedure.



Walter P. Kirwan
Assistant Secretary
Dept. of the Taoiseach

27 October, 1996.