

THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with David Trimble (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James Steinberg, Deputy to the President
for National Security Affairs
Lawrence Butler, Director for European
Affairs, NSC Staff, Notetaker

David Trimble, First Minister, Northern
Ireland
Anne Smith, UUP Washington Representative

DATE, TIME December 8, 1998, 6:50-7:30p.m.
AND PLACE: Mr. Berger's Office, West Wing

The President: It is great to see you. How is it going for you? (U)

Mr. Trimble: We hit a bad patch last Thursday, mainly because the nationalists were too greedy, not able to prioritize their objectives (on implementation bodies). Sinn Fein seeks one for the Irish language, while SDLP doesn't want that. And the Irish government is wavering. From our point of view, we seek a list that is balanced, not just a Nationalist wishlist. Wednesday night I thought everything was OK on both fronts (Executive Council and implementation bodies). But Seamus Mallon thought he had been promised four bodies, while I believed I had agreed to three; Blair hadn't mentioned four to me. My Assembly Party didn't like, and I decided to stay quiet. Out of 28, 10 were against; I've reduced that to three but I need all 28 to keep my majority on North-South schemes. If only one or two were adrift, one or two DUPs or independent unionists might not vote against. (Ø)

Going into details, I agreed to a body or trade, which was outside the accord. I also shifted my position on the number of

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(Executive Council) departments. I was asked what I had gotten in return. I hope that things will move forward. On the republican front, there are indications, vague hope. But I cannot tell UUP members to accept this on the basis of hope. John Taylor is being helpful with my managerial problem; the basic issue is that we are "x" months into the process, with nothing from the republicans on decommissioning. (S)

The President: Is your strategy to get the institutions of governance up and ready to go? In order to put more pressure on the republicans? (S)

Mr. Trimble: Yes. The timetable is still achievable. We had hoped for a transfer of functions in February, but we are late. We need two months to get the necessary orders and subordinate legislation. That is now difficult for February, but we could get it by the end of the month. If this gets sorted out, the pressure will be on Sinn Fein. I have to manage my own party and SDLP has to be grudging...I was half hoping Taylor would have fixed this while I was here. (S)

The President: Perhaps the aura of the Nobel Prize will help you? (U)

Mr. Trimble: I was hoping Taylor would stretch himself to claim this prize at home; I talked to him after his meeting with Prime Minister Blair. (S)

The President: What can we do to help, to get the republicans to move along? (S)

Mr. Trimble: The paramilitary beatings had stopped; but recently Loyalists -- UVF/Ervine -- have resumed low level violence; beatings, and shootings. The absence of terrorism makes this more visible. I think Ervine's people are defending turf and racketeering. (S)

Mr. Steinberg: They are controlled by Ervine? (S)

Mr. Trimble: I don't know. We need to keep violence down, show progress on decommissioning. Policing will be a big issue in the spring; we need to keep tensions down. I will try to repackage the cross-border schemes to get them past my people. But I am worried that I went a bit too far on trade Wednesday night; there was one area of benefit, agriculture and animal health. (S)

The President: Phyto-sanitary issues? (S)

Mr. Trimble: It will undermine Northern Ireland's meat packers' cartel, lead to an increase in trade. But overall, the balance of trade is against us. This is due to the strong sterling, which reflect the impact of EMU. Money is moving into non-EMU countries, and the gap between sterling and the punt is growing. Outside of Ireland, we are competitors. Trade wasn't in the agreement because we opposed it in April. I said yes in December and have some problems. But with a fair wind. (S)

Mr. Steinberg: Can we help with ballast? (S)

Mr. Trimble: Jonathan Powell is looking at those issues. We need higher levels of confidence. (S)

Mr. Steinberg: You can help keep us strong, which helps your argument. (S)

Mr. Trimble: And helpful for Blair and Ahern on decommissioning. (S)

The President: Are the republicans being difficult because they fear giving up their last leverage, or is it because it is so much a part of their theology? (S)

Mr. Trimble: They are trying to squeeze the most out from us; there won't be anything before February -- and then there will be policing. (S)

The President: What about Omagh? (S)

Mr. Trimble: There have been arrests, but without forensics, nothing will come of them. There are reports of CIRA bombs on the move. (S)

Mr. Butler: There was an arrest last week where they found a Kalashnikov, and some bomb components -- time power units. (S)

Mr. Trimble: There are people who believe that (the) Canary Wharf (bomb) caused John Major to shift his position on decommissioning. (S)

The President: You have come too far to go back now; we will keep plugging along. It is quicker to end the negotiations over the political structures in order to move on to end decommissioning. You offer Adams a pretty picture with that,

and the price of admission is... The other thing is how to deal with the feeling that more is expected of you than that they -- continue the process and get a fair deal. I argue that what they want is not against your interest if there is decommissioning. We need to get their toes into the water, see how it feels. If Sinn Fein accepted this and the reaction was good...we don't need a stick, if the level of confidence is high enough. This changes the calculus on how to get something out of them. (C)

You've been dressing better since the Nobel; you shine right up.
(U)

Mr. Trimble: My campaign advisor, Jane Wells, picked this suit out. (U)

The agreement is not a magic bullet, but the Northern Ireland Agreement will not fail on our part. We hope to achieve peace; not armed, but real. There is no place for those with private armies. The whole community is behind peace -- peace and democracy through joint efforts. (C)

-- End of Conversation --