

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with Sinn Fein Leader, Gerry Adams
(U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein

Notetakers: Peter Huggins, Anthony
Campanella, Robert Ford, Karen Harris, and
Lawrence Butler

DATE, TIME April 10, 1998, 00:52 - 1:14 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Residence

The President: Gerry? (U)

Mr. Adams: Mr. President, how are you? (U)

The President: Fine. How are you? Are you well? (U)

Mr. Adams: We've been up all night like everyone else. (U)

The President: Where are you? (U)

Mr. Adams: Well, I think the Strand I stuff has been mostly taken care of, except in the equality area -- in terms of institutions. There is still some work on the implementation bodies and Strand II. As much as can be, has been done. The British and the Irish governments have failed to agree on some issues. We're concentrating on a number of the crunch issues.

On the prisoners, we've asked the British Prime Minister that they be let out in one year. There is a need for a number of independent commissions; the criminal justice system here is corrupt. The Irish language -- it needs strengthening. The issue of parity of symbols needs work. I asked him (Blair) to look at the Irish and British statutes. I think we're looking at, all-in-all, five or six big issues that affect the people in

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their daily lives. I came out of a meeting with Mo and the Taoiseach. We'll meet with Mr. Blair. (C)

The President: Tell me again about the problems with Strand I. (C)

Mr. Adams: Strand I, with the exception of equality -- no, (pause) as I reflect on it, these issues are Strand I issues. We would like equality. The symbols are a problem as there is no parity on a statutory basis. On the prisoners, I think the British are in the ballpark of eighteen months; but once they've been released, the prisoners will become agents for the agreement. (C)

The President: I've been talking to them over the past several hours, I've talked to them two or three times. (C)

Mr. Adams: This is to Trimble? (C)

The President: No. I spoke with Tony, and the last time both he and Bertie were there. Their last formal offer was three years. I think they're in the ballpark. (C)

Mr. Adams: But they've always been in the ballpark. (C)

The President: Well, let me tell you what I think. I believe he can be persuaded to go to a year, but here's his worry. He's worried about you accepting the agreement, but not endorsing it. This is the only thing that he is likely to get crap about at home, particularly from the right wing press, and he needs you to endorse it. I think he can do the one year prisoner release, but he needs to work on the language with you. His worst nightmare is that he does this, and that Sinn Fein would grudgingly accept the agreement, but then say that it does not mean peace. I believe he'll give you what you ask, if you give him reassurance on the others. He and Bertie will work out implementing the other bugs, knowing you'll embrace it. He's afraid he'll get accused of giving away a lot and getting nothing in return. (C)

Mr. Adams: Okay. Well, first of all, let me just say up front I have felt all along that he will move to a year. I told him that three days ago. I told him I thought he would move to this and it would come to closure. Here's my reason for this: when wars end, prisoners go home. This is the history of war throughout humanity.

For him to pull this off -- the people in Britain would be ecstatic for the Prime Minister to have pulled this off, it would just be seen as a tremendous achievement. If it screws up because he hasn't done enough, then people will be...

Here's my position: we're in this for an agreement. We want an agreement. We'll indicate our attitude. So I'll go back to our Executive, that might be useful. If we embrace it too much, it will give Trimble difficulties. We understand we need space to bring the others on board. I understand Trimble's dilemma.

About my position in relation to these matters: in all dealings with your Administration and with the Irish going back to Bruton, never have I not acted in good faith, and have let the people know. (C)

The President: I know. You've shot straight with me. But what he's worried about is you taking this back to a vote. There's never been a time since I gave you the first visa that you've done something different than you said you would. He'll think, what if we do this and it's all conditional. Your group says no; it won't oppose it, but you won't embrace it. This undermines his credibility. In his mind, peace means the embracing of the agreement by Sinn Fein. He's worried about the headlines. I understand how he feels. There's got to be a way to work this out, to couch the words. (C)

Mr. Adams: Well, we have said to both him and Bertie that we could not endorse it on what we have now; we cannot. (C)

I never did business with the British government during daylight hours. It's not daylight now. I am dealing with an important agenda. What affects people in their daily life? Police. What affects people in their daily life? Prisoners. What affects people in their daily lives? Criminal justice system, symbols, and equality. (C)

You know democracy isn't confined to the White House and the Capitol. Democracy is where the people are at, not in the bureaucracies that don't understand it. Democracy is at the debating chamber. It has to uplift people in their daily life. If we get a change in the status quo, these guys here would get their day in the sun, and the government would hail it as a great breakthrough. (C)

But David Trimble still hasn't spoken to me yet. When Senator Mitchell produced the paper, the first thing the Unionists did

was reject the paper and pick the substance out. They're getting recognition of the partition, the Assembly, which Trimble will control, the British-Irish Council, and changes to the Irish Constitution. All these initiatives were "in your face" and will come about very quickly and at the expense of the Irish, Irish nationalists, and Irish in the United States. (C)

It is now up to the unionists to take difficult decisions. The new Prime Minister moved very quickly and now it's up to the unionists. Of course I'm playing hardball, too. You wouldn't expect me not to. This is needed to make this fly. The RUC are still roaming the streets and there is a danger that we are going to a Palestinian-Israeli-HAMAS situation. It's important that the mainstream IRA is kept intact, then the smaller groups will go away. If we don't, then the small groups will flourish and we will be back to the same place we were 10 years ago. (C)

John Hume told me that he told Tony Blair he has to understand what Adams and McGuinness are trying to do. You know how hard it was to change opinions in your own party, think how difficult it is to bring people away from physical force when there is no other option. Here is the real change. You didn't get a united Ireland, but you did get a level playing field that will allow you to pursue a united Ireland via democratic, constitutional, and legal means. It affects the six counties. (C)

The President: I agree. I can say it's a significant change for you as well. I think he'll go with you on the prisoners and he'll want to know he won't get burned by the whole thing. (C)

Mr. Adams: Well, I have to say on both points I think you're right. I think he's open to all ideas. That's my sense. As I told him, if you were an Irish citizen, you wouldn't be Sinn Fein, but I don't think you would be UUP either. I was surprised how absorbed in the details he is. He wants to do this thing and I want to do it, too. His heart is behind the people who want positive change. (C)

The President: No question. You've got to figure this thing out. Maybe it's a benefit by going back to the Council. Then you need to find a way on prisoners to minimize negative fall out to him and fold it into the larger peace process. You're smart, you can figure this out. Go see him and I think you can figure this out. You're smarter than I am on this. You know your business. (C)

Mr. Adams: Well, okay. Well, that's what we're going to do on both these issues. (C)

The President: Boy, you've come a hell of long way from when you first came over here and I can't bear the thought of losing it now. There are a lot of people working long and hard on this. You can do this if you put your thinking cap on. It's a political problem for him. It's a political necessity for you. There has to be a way you can keep it moving. (C)

Mr. Adams: Okay. You can be assured because this is a life and death meeting we are going back into. We'll make it happen. Ingenious and creative ideas are needed. Once we get the agreement, we can move in that direction. Like you said, it is a political problem for him and a political necessity for us. I do think he's very well absorbed in this and has his own system to contend with. He's a profoundly decent man who wants to do the right thing. There's no doubt he did the right thing on Bloody Sunday. He did the right thing on Roisin McAliskey and he's done a lot in just being here. It has been an education for him. I'll do my best. (C)

The President: Call me back anytime tonight. It's one o'clock here. I'm going to call him back before you meet. (C)

Mr. Adams: When I met with Sandy and Jim I told them your commitment, both intellectual and emotional commitment, puts you in a position to quietly speak to him, and I would ask you to point these out as areas we need to make it happen. (C)

The President: I'll do it. (C)

Mr. Adams: You should say I raised the issues of prisoners, symbols and equality. (C)

The President: I'll do it. The first time I talked to him, I told him this is what you need to give to him. (C)

Mr. Adams: Okay, I'll give you a few minutes then I'll go up and see him. (C)

The President: I'll do all of that. (C)

Mr. Adams: When we get it all sorted out, you'll have your fingerprints all over this. (C)

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The President: The main thing is to get it sorted out.
There'll be plenty of praise to go around. (S)

Mr. Adams: Do let him know that I went that far with him. (S)

The President: Okay. (S)

Mr. Adams: Bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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