

Round Table Meeting 21st November 2002

Present: Secretary of State, Brian Cowan, British and Irish Officials, Kieran McCarthy, David Ford, Monica McWilliams, Jane Morrice, Billy Hutchinson, David Ervine, Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Mark Durkan, Alex Attwood, Reg Empey, Michael McGimpsey

SOS - apologised for the delay in starting. Sense of deja vu etc. Sent all the parties a letter, stating this was to be a review under paragraph 7 of the GFA. The GFA is not for renegotiation, and the full implementation is needed. We need a commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means. May election. Tour de table.

Cowan - There is a deficit of trust that needs to be resolved. There is a transition needed by those with links with paramilitaries; this is part of the collective responsibility of all of us, to enable that situation come about. We all want this to work, and need to fully implement the GFA. These are real issues - need to have a dialogue, to get back the confidence. We all need to be convinced that there will be a permanent commitment by everyone to make this work. No more stop-start incrementalism. There needs to be acts of completion, and then address the residual aspects. This attitude needs to be generated around the table. We need mutually respectful dialogue.

Ford - This should not be a place for recriminations, although undoubtedly there will be. There is a necessity to deal with the problems now, rather than fudge things and have it break down down the line. Existing problems include why the Implementation Group hasn't met, why the sub groups on victims/BoR/community relations haven't taken place, why the Ceasefire monitor hasn't been appointed. Then there are other matters arising from Weston Park - OTRs. Policing proposals need to be looked at. Fundamental problems are the result of a breakdown of trust. Re a commitment to the Mitchell Principles, look at decommissioning, and the activity on the streets - ask David and Gerry what they are going to do about it. Then there is teh stability of the institutions. We are disgusted with the UUP leader (interjection by UUP) for not coming. What are they doing to stabilise things? They keep threatening collapse. Regarding the protection of the GFA, I would look to the Chair and the SDLP for not using the exclusion mechanism -when will the use of this be relevant if not now? This should have been a paragraph 8 > para 7 review, and I hope it will be a de facto comprehensive review as problems will arise after may. The voting procedure still needs to be addressed, a year on, and the validity of D'Hondt. Are we genuinely seeking to promote pluralism? Welcome that the election is to be in May. This must be an inclusive process: if too much is done with bi-laterals, or sidedeals, it won't work - we need inclusivity to deal with this.

Monica - Welcomed SOS. Spoke of Victims conference, the interface meetings and the Springfield Rd project - community dialogue principles in operation and working, diffusing tensions. We should be implementing them. These talks should be taken seriously, we need to keep working and motivating. Civil society needs to be shown that we are dedicated to making the GFA work. Breaches of security, by Special Branch, the Garda, IRA - these circumstances prevent dialogue. Discussion must be comprehensive, not just bilaterals. This staccato approach of the IRA looks like tactical manoeuvring rather than conflict resolution. Gerry said that the ceasefires moved the IRA out of the picture. We have to keep building on that strategy. Policing - joining the Board would be a huge step by republicans, and unionists need to see it as such. We all need to communicate that. Commend the leadership of the PUP for remaining pro-GFA in what have been very difficult times for their constituency. The loyalist community is complex, and a more supportive message is needed from around this table, given the conflicts at interfaces. There needs to be support and solidarity. To the UVF, as they have always stated that their existence is in reaction to the IRA, they need to think about what would happen if the IRA were "stood down".

Domestic abuse analogy. Quantum leap needed, both remorse and responsibility - the deeds hereon in need to be new. This is a constitutional conundrum, and we can do the technicalities, including voting - agree with a lot of what Ford said - but the onus is not to renegotiate it. We need to rebuild confidence in the institutions, the PSNI, the NIA. The bottom line should be here - no more rubberstamping, bargaining, we need to share the information. Glad re May elections. People have to be serious, and we can't walk away.

Ervine - "Collective responsibility" heard it all before. There needs to be some appreciation for our constituency - unless we are clear during the dialogue what side deals are going on, we are going to sign nothing. We haven't protected each other: we do a deal, then we all go and sell it differently, and rubbish the other peoples' perspective. That is what we did. Republicans sold Plan B to the media and their constituency. Plan A was collective. Within 13 days, there were rumours that it would be 10-20 years until we were in a United Ireland. This encouraged Unionists to believe that republicans weren't serious. If we are serious about conflict resolution, the first issue should be to afford your enemy's position legitimacy. There is no sign of that happening. I have no doubt that substantial elements of Loyalism are capable and willing in the right conditions to make real contributions. There is great potential for positivity. Re policing: my community would be happy if republicans were to cleanse themselves and join the Board - would it be tolerated if they joined the Board without cleansing itself? No. Could it happen today? No. We still see a desire within the Republican movement for Plan B - the air around plan B needs to be shut off. There is some evidence that the unionist community, although afraid of betrayal and getting pathetic leadership, acquiesced to the GFA. We will need more than this this time. Gerry and I should not be expected to deliver, merely to ASSIST in

delivering. So you can go for the quick kick at loyalism - if you want to create an underclass, have a go. It is capable of positivism, but needs assistance. Orde's dealing with criminality is helping. Serious leaderships need assistance, help, support. Do the opposite and they won't come. Not because they don't want to hear it but because they won't be able to sell it. Finally, it is foolish to concentrate on the paramilitarism: sectarianism existed before paramilitaries did, and it is a denial of how sectarian the society is. If only the bad people would go away...

Adams - Welcome remarks that the GFA will not be renegotiated. We believe that there is no reason for the institutions to be suspended - GB stepped outside the GFA 4 times now. To ignore this is to ignore a route out of the problems. There will be problems - this is conflict resolution! If any party exercises a veto within the institutions, then here we are on groundhog day. GB needs to get rid of the legislative means to suspend, and not do it again. This is the deepest crisis since the GFA was signed. But it is a political crisis - look at the Middle East, where the process has just broken down completely. We need a collective reaffirmation of the GFA. there is no SF list: the GFA is our list, we signed up to it. Justice, Human Rights, Foras na Geilge, demil and armed groups are outstanding. All parties, not just "David and Gerry" have a responsibility. We need a vehicle to resolve the issues, or I'd be pessimistic about sorting out the problems this time. The notion of collectivity, and the lack of Impl. meetings. The assembly works well. But this summer was very difficult, especially at the interfaces - people were killed. Each side believes that the other side is totally to blame. We need to apply ourselves collectively. I don't know who the demonising loyalism remarks are aimed at: we have offered to talk to all sections of loyalism. Gerry Kelly and Billy are doing good work, coming from different backgrounds to talk, and really listen - it is easier for republicans to do this, as there is no organised political opposition within our community to this, unlike within loyalism. The State is also fundamentally sectarian. We have concerns about the Equality and NIHRCS - major concerns at the lack of progress on a Bill of Rights. We need an international outside in to help. Neither governments have delivered on staffing levels or budgets for FnG. There HAS been a decision taken by SF on policing: we are not getting involved while it is inadequate. At Weston Park, we were told there would be no legislation, but here there is legislation going through. We will go to our Ard Fheis and argue for the police. We have shifted our position, but won't buy into something that is unsustainable in the long term. Devolution of justice, policing should take place. This is positive. We don't like the governments being the facilitators: do a tour de table, and GB and RoI don't say here is what we are doing about ABCDEFG. Face up to your responsibilities - this should be a meeting of equals. You took this away, we need you to make this work. Blair said the Nats had been treated unfairly, and that parts of the GFA hadn't yet been implemented - what are you going to do about it, and when?

Durkan - There are a lot of issues that factor into the confidence crisis. There has been cumulative doubt, and we have to deal with it. We cannot be selective, it has to be a comprehensive and inclusive process. If we cut corners, we will repeat the mistakes of the process to date, and that has been the main problem since the beginning. Look at the opinion polls - people are upset, but at the process rather than the GFA. They weren't sold it. Seems like serial concessions and tradeoffs to those threatening crises. The governments are involved in this as well. There are hard questions to face and hard answers needed. We need to remember that we are the Pro-GFA axis, and people don't believe that we can deliver the GFA in its entirety. We need to produce an outcome from this review, one piece of paper committing all of us to deliver what's outstanding.

I'm not going to rehearse all the issues again - the Bill of Rights, all-Ireland charter, demilitarisation - much more needs to be done. There is a new and better premise for demil, through the transfer of bases, whereby we can all be stakeholders into normalisation. We don't have to be ghettoised into issues. If we all identify what we see as outstanding, it will show our common ground. Show the public that we are all on for the GFA. The pro-GFA public don't believe that we are all pro-GFA. If we come out with one outcome, good. Factor in justice and policing as devolved - don't want those on the long finger. Re police, instead of getting bogged down, we should focus on the middle distance. If policing and justice come to the NIA, it would be a huge statement of confidence in the institutions and the participants. This would create confidence, rather than the ephemeral measures that won't.

This is all the GFA - we have to collectively bring it forward. Problems are with implementation of the GFA. We all provide lists, and lists of confidence issues. It isn't enough to have a fudge ahead of elections. We are boring the public, and losing support for the GFA. Let's air our criticisms here. The issue is not about suspension - do we save the GFA and bring it forward - we need to get our act together. We have a shared constituency. We can't fail those who have taken risks, and we owe this to ourselves.

Empey - The issues are not dissimilar; this is the 4th suspension. The failure of the paramilitaries to honour the GFA, and the failure of the government to punish them, by use of the legitimate mechanism within the legislation.. We are now excluded from government because GB punished everyone - this is unfair and unacceptable. There have been consistent breaches of the Mitchell Principles - Colombia and FARC, gun-running in Miami, the break-in of Castlereagh, punishment beatings on our streets... The GFA promised a new beginning, and the UUP took immense risks. We knew that the parties linked with paramilitaries would have a difficult transition period. Promises have been broken, and our goodwill has been taken for granted. The republicans failed to reform - they have been arrogant. The actions or rather inactions of the GB government has reinforced this. And now we have the spy ring. This is a flagrant breach of trust: there is sufficient evidence that people were spying: on you, on you, on you, on

the GB government, on the Irish government, and on the US government. We have fully participated in the GFA. Promises were broken by the republicans - decommissioning was not finished on time. All parties in the government must be committed to peace. Get rid of the private armies. To the GB Government we say, if Republicans don't change, you must punish them. Parades are an outstanding issue, interface violence, and terrorist activity, shootings and so on. People expected and deserve real peace. There have been real changes to the police, and still people are not satisfied - the Patton. The Irish government have said that they wouldn't share power with SF, and Blair has said that they are inextricably linked to the IRA. Implementation of the GFA will only happen, and politics will only work properly, when the IRA loses its capabilities, to quote Haas. As far as the UUP is concerned, there will be no restoration of devolution until that matter is resolved.

SOS - thanks - break for lunch.

SOS - Called for another tour de table, then he and Cowan would sum up.

Ford - There haven't been a great deal of specifics; Monica raised a lot of issues that we would agree with or have raised previously. Gerry seems to think that he's still on camera, and gave us the SF agenda. If we do not have a position, then Mark's idea of a written list has merit - but we need to have this by tomorrow, so we can have the agenda by next week.

Monica - agree with much of that the round table was useful. Policing is something that needs to be looked at; Agree with Mark, this isn't rocket science, and we can do these lists; but close deadlines, of the outstanding issues asap; and we need the next round of talks asap.

Billy - To respond to Gerry, this is an issue of confidence; Groundhog day wasn't repeated, if you remember, because he started thinking about others rather than himself. Gerry Kelly and I have confidence in each other, rather than trust, but the personal details of members of the PUP have been put in the hands of the IRA - addresses, car registrations, the schools of their children. It is hard to then say to these people that we have to talk to republicans. Agree with Durkan - need to build trust; round table in the next week.

Gerry - Martin's going to speak, but I just want to say to Billy that all the SF councillors from BCC, Michelle Gildernew, and myself have all had serious threats within the last 6 months...

Martin - Obviously, we are all here round the table for a reason; look how far we have come in the last 10 years. Everyone here has contributed to us being where we are today. Reg, Michael, David and Billy have all excelled - have a lot of respect for what they have done. And now we are at a difficulty, because conflict resolution IS difficult. Last year, myself, David, Reg and Mark were at

Weston Park, with people from Israel and Palestine, rather than THE Weston Park that has been gone on about. We all know the shape of the plan for the Middle east - it's going to involve two states. That is blindingly obvious. So it breaks my heart when I turn on the news and see another 10, 20 people killed; why don't people just do their plan, instead of waiting another 5 years, and how many more will have to die needlessly, when the end result will be the same? We have our plan - it's the GFA; plan B doesn't exist. Plan A is the GFA, the peace process. There are bits that I don't like, but we have to implement it all. I believe the majority of people are passionate about this. There is no confusion about the list, it's in the GFA. Justice, Human Rights, demil, FnG, the armed groups; we accept that we have a part to play; if anyone thinks that this isn't a process, then they are living in cloud cuckoo land - and them saying that doesn't help us persuade people. I was at an inquest in Cookstown Court on Tuesday - and justice wasn't being done - the coroner couldn't get anywhere because it was outside Belfast. There is not justice. There are gaps on justice and policing. We do have a position - the full implementation of Patton, and in that event, we will go to our Ard Fheis and say we should join. But we will have a hard time getting republicans to join, that is why the transfer of powers of justice and policing is CRUCIAL. There hasn't been any real opposition on this from Trimble. We want to be in the PSNI, and tell our constituency to join, But we will only do it when we can hold our heads high. It can't be like the old days when nats were in the RUC/UDR/RIR - sneaking off to work, in fear. There has to be a real change. We all have to face up to this: we wonder how the decisions made by the UUC affects the NIA - some of our community believe that members of the UUP like Burnside, not just the Paisley crowd, but some of the UUP, just don't want to share power with catholics. We know that UUs like Michael and Reg are not in that camp. Another thing, is that the vast bulk of violence has been from the UDA and LVF in the last 12 months - 6 catholics have been killed, but the focus is on the IRA, which is holding fire. Not that there aren't issues to be dealt with, but nationalists want to know where this is going? Reg said, unless the IRA disband, there will be no going back to devolution --well, that strategy is going nowhere, it's crazy - has no chance of success. The N-S Ministerial council gets no mention. All these matters have to be dealt with comprehensively. There is a will and an ability to do this, but it will be hard work. There is a huge problem if it doesn't, facinbg the GB government - proving to nationalists that there will be equality; why did two commissioners leave the NIHRC? There is a lack of funding for FnG. At the end of the day, if we don't implement this, we are all in big trouble.

Mark - We still have the GFA, just not the institutions. We can generate an agenda very fast; we don't need to fine-comb the GFA to see what hasn't been implemented; let's do it. In doing that we have to resolve the issues, set out a scheme. The devolution of justice and policing isn't extraneous to the GFA, it was envisaged in it. It has implications for strands 1 and 2 - child protection, drugs in s2. These are major issues, but this is an opportunity. It is not too much

to go for, given everything that has happened, it is better to deal with it. These are implementation problems. Confidence issues ALL have to be addressed. It depends on the context - implementing / renewing commitment in the GFA aren't counter issues. Accept Gerry's point re no "definitive" move by the IRA in people's terms, but deparamilitarisation will happen, not when paramils are saying that we politicians have passed a test, or us saying that they have passed a test. Language is important - not using the disband word for example. There are confidence issues felt by nationalists and republicans as well - the IRA is not the only thing draining confidence from this process, and that is irksome. We all need to list our implementation and confidence building issues - this will actually declutter the agenda. If we come out of this with a common declaration, it will mean that we are all signed on; nationalists' doubts will be answered. That approach gave us the GFA, and will save the GFA.

Reg - To respond to Martin, (read out list again), ongoing terrorist activity... contributed to the fall in support to the GFA. The promise of the GFA will happen when the IRA lose their capability - we can't airbrush them out of the picture. The fall in support is based on experience. Our constituency has topped supporting the GFA, some for genuine reasons and some for less genuine ones. Actions have fuelled the belief that they shouldn't have supported it in the first place. But let's talk about reality here - FnG is an important issue, of course it is, but it isn't the main one. Tony Blair is going around the world with a blue light flashing on his head, this global "Policeman" image, but on his doorstep.. That is where we are. Some people think that they can act like a state within a state, with their own army - they are trying to have their cake and eat it, and we can't airbrush that out. Dublin wouldn't tolerate it. The way to start this process is to stop that - concentrate on the ballot box and leave the rest of us alone. Is it any wonder there is less support?

Michael - We were all working together; my party jumped three years ago - before decommissioning, and that step was bigger for us than decommissioning was for the IRA. We held our party in there with republicans for 3 years; all the time required to fulfill the commitments; they were not fulfilled. Our situation is that there can be no restoration until the matter is resolved, until we have confidence that the matter has been resolved. Colombia, Miami, Castlereagh, spy ring... This was thrown in our faces, and was very difficult for us. There shouldn't have been a suspension. That is not what we signed up to - a deal is a deal, and this has been broken. We are not in the mood for a fudge, we want this settled - (quotes Haas). Unless we can solve this, we are going nowhere. FnG isn't as big a deal as the spy ring. We were working at all these issues together, and it came down because of republicans. Let's get a settlement around the table. The key issue is that peace are committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means - that is the foundation of the process, and it won't happen without it. There is no place in society for what has been going on, and that is the membership of armed groups.

Cowan - Thanks, this has been a good start; everyone has their own perspective. The GFA is the template, and we haven't achieved the potential of the GFA. Everyone wants to get to the endpoint. Acts of completion are required - we need an end to the incrementalist thinking. The Irish government hasn't lived up to its commitment - hold our hands up, broadcasting bill etc. We were all working on this, but the rate of progress was terrible. We need a fast-forwarding of a quantum leap. Rights are an issue for everyone - it's not about concessions, as the attitudes of some of the UUP describe. They are a guarantee for the future, Unionists think it is a Nationalist grievance mentality. Both governments need to internalise this as well. When you come out of a divided society, a rights based agenda is crucial to give people a commitment that this is permanent. Police - rights are available to all; the various attitudes must be recognised. Post-implementation of the GFA, those rights need to be reinforced. Look at the NIHRC; GB see it as an independent body. We say, that to keep it independent, let's have a review. We can unblock it, resolve it pragmatically - it deals with the issue and shows that we are concerned. We have to make human rights available here.

We have a comprehensive agenda - we want a quantum leap re end of paramilitary activity, but that statement prevents those involved delivering. In response, UUs must stop incrementalism. I believe that Unionism wants to be an accommodating tradition - this is achievable, if the old polarities don't dominate. We shouldn't be minimalist about this - we should show the public that politics is working - investment, jobs, border issues - it used to be that Dundalk hoped Newry would be down, and vice versa, now both of them are up. There have been improvements, although there are some areas of alienation that still need addressed. . There should be pursuit of happiness on both the Shankill and the Falls. We are for real: there is a comprehensive agenda, what went into the GFA - there is no reason why we can't make it - we have to. We are the guarantors of the GFA - GB and I governments. We are committed to doing what is residual, giving others room for playing this part. We have to cop on here: it's within our power, put things on the table, let's deal with it on its merits if it's in the GFA, and it doesn't matter who puts it on the table. Hierarchy of issues...

Empey - Regarding the rights issue: we agreed on a Bill of Rights for NI 11 years ago. (Durkan's comment "A Bill of Rights") The outworking of this is trying to explain to our community about our rights - where is our right to parade? The implications of rights is that they are a double-edged sword, and a guarantee for everyone. Re the hierarchy of issues, we are not suspended because of rights today, FnG, it is because...

Martin - we have raised many issues, not just FnG, and it is disingenuous to continue to focus on one thing. There are many different issues, let's put them on the table..

Cowan - alright, Policing is critical. Getting alienated societies involved is critical. We need people to support and join the Police. After weston Park, there was a great deal of pessimism about policing, but seems to me the Police Board has been a huge success - there should be more confidence.

Legislative; operational change; devolution issue; Everyone sees the benefit of it, and is in favour in principle to normalise society. This is eminently resolvable, if we put our minds to it.

SOS - A great deal has been done - great amount of work the NI Assembly and the executive had put through. I am making sure the Bills are going through Westminster as a result. There is a real difference since I was here three years ago - the changes in policing for a start. We can't despair in terms of what has happened. Everyone around this table is committed to the GFA. That is the important thing - all of us think this is the only way forward. the incremental implementation has been disappointing. I take the points on sectarianism. Des is looking at the interfaces. Equality and Human Rights - more to be done. Irish language is very important, there is still a lot to be done. Normalisation - the devolution of policing and justice is very important. People must be given confidence about the armed groups - these trust and confidence issues need to be addressed. The public don't see people in the Assembly as being able to work together. Myself and the Irish Government see it as an absolute imperative to put right what has gone wrong, I don't want to be a Direct Ruler. We need to address the central issues, and it is the collective business of all of us. I think we should take mark's suggestion of putting on the table all the things that are important to us to get resolved. To echo Brian, all of us must make an effort to resolve this.

Ford - when are we reconvening? Soon?

Jane - before Xmas?

SOS - Definitely asap.

Gerry - Issue of "list". we have done this, heard it all today. It took 6 weeks to get round a table, need to crackdown on the issues. The UUC took a decision, and this needs to go on the record, that they would leave the Police Board if the weston Park commitments were legislated for, and that they would cease to function on the North-South Ministerial Council. We need to get this sorted out urgently, or we'll be laughed at.

Empey - This shouldn't be dealt with by the spin operators in the Hall - we have put our stuff on the table, let's not overkill this. Why were those measures contemplated by my party? Because one side was operating with a private army. Spin on this will provoke a reaction.

SOS - well, the British and Irish can formulate an agenda. Each parties should put in their view, for claification, and agree to meet very soon to discuss this.

Gerry - Let's agree a day - who exactly are we waiting on here?

SOS - line will be that we have agreed in principle to meet next week, with an agenda based on the discussions today.

Meeting ends.