



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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FROM: PSSG.  
Messrs. Murray, Teahon,  
Mansergh & Dalton;  
Ambassadors London &  
Washington: Joint Secretary;  
Counsellors A-I

**Confidential**

**Preparation for Talks In London: Meetings on 22 January 1998**  
**Summary Report**

1. There was a meeting of the Liaison Group in Dublin yesterday morning to discuss the preparation of papers for discussion by the parties at next week's meeting in London. Subsequently, yesterday evening, a group of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs met an SDLP group, led by John Hume and Séamus Mallon, near Dundalk.

**Liaison Group**

2. We had prepared a draft Strand Two paper, which, while couched in tentative question and answer form, essentially reproduced the main elements of the Framework Document, in some cases relabelled or repackaged to meet likely unionist difficulties. It quickly became clear, however, that the British had political instructions, presumably formulated in response to UUP pressure, to go for a paper setting out a range of options "within the tramlines of the Propositions". In addition, and again seemingly following pressure from the UUP, they also insisted that papers on East-West issues must be tabled simultaneously.

**Danger of Options approach**

3. We pointed out that, in setting out options, there is a clear danger that the positions in the Framework Document, which already represent a compromise, would appear to stand at one extreme and would be whittled down. If there were to be an options paper, options upstream from the Framework as well as downstream would need to be tabled (i.e. leaving the Framework Document as the compromise in the centre). However, options of this kind might well tend to polarise opinion.
4. The British made clear that they remained happy to state their own commitment to the positions in the Framework Document, but also emphasised their view that the key question was what could be agreed between unionists and nationalists. To base a paper solely on the Framework Document would guarantee unionist rejection and would be seen as peremptory. This seemed to be their primary concern, and not the reaction of the SDLP and Sinn Féin to any paper. They indicated that, if agreement could not be reached, they would be prepared to contemplate presenting a paper of their own.
5. Attempts to bridge the gap by drafting on the basis of our paper made little headway. At the end of the meeting, the British agreed to prepare a draft of their own. This was received yesterday evening, but did not depart materially from their earlier position. It was a far remove from the Framework Document. Any such paper, if jointly tabled, would lead to an immediate crisis with both the SDLP and Sinn Féin. We are now drafting a revised paper, for passing to the British.

**SDLP Meeting**

6. The meeting had been planned as the latest in a series to review the preparation of papers for the Talks. However, most of our discussion concerned preparation for London, in particular in the light of the meeting of the Liaison Group.

7. We briefed the group on the state of play as it had emerged from the Liaison Group. It was the strong and unanimous SDLP view that
- (a) failure to table a paper, while a setback, would be better than tabling the wrong paper, especially in light of the continuing controversy over the Propositions paper;
  - (b) for the two Governments to table an options paper, even one setting out a full range of choices, would be seen as a retreat from the Framework Document and would cast doubt on the view that the Propositions paper essentially reflected it;
  - (c) it would be disastrous, in terms of the overall management of the process, for unilateral papers to be submitted by either Government;
  - (d) it should be up to the parties themselves, especially the UUP, to put forward specific options if they were not prepared to negotiate on the basis of the Framework Document, or some variant of it.
  - (e) as a far from fully satisfactory fallback, there might be some merit in the two Governments restating their commitment to the Propositions and the Framework Document, recalling that both had been presented for discussion, and simply inviting the parties' detailed views.

John Hume, who had to leave early, said he hoped to speak to the Prime Minister in a telephone conversation today. He also indicated that the Secretary of State had indicated to him that there would be an announcement on Bloody Sunday next Monday.

Rory Montgomery  
23 January 1998