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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

Anglo/Irish Joint Studies

When you saw the Prime Minister this morning, she had a word with you about your minute A03844 of 18 December 1980 about the handling of the Anglo/Irish Joint Studies.

The Prime Minister told you that she was unhappy about the proposed arrangements. She felt that the combination of the Cabinet Office taking the lead at official level and the No. 10 Press Office handling press enquiries would inevitably make it appear that she herself was taking personal charge of the exercise on the UK side. She thought that this would be undesirable. She was content for the Cabinet Office to chair the official group and to take the lead in coordinating the studies. But since we were seeking to set the follow-up to her visit to Dublin firmly in a UK/Republic context, she thought it right that, at Ministerial level, the FCO should be seen clearly to be in the lead. She did not insist, however, on the chair of the Ministerial group being taken by either the Foreign Secretary himself or by the Lord Privy Seal. She was quite ready to see Mr. Hurd chair the group: indeed, there might be considerable advantage in pitching the Ministerial group at Mr. Hurd's level rather than at Cabinet Minister level. If FCO Ministers were in the lead, it would follow that the FCO should handle Parliamentary Questions and Press enquiries.

The Prime Minister would be grateful if you could put these revised arrangements to Lord Carrington. She also agreed that you should have a word before Christmas with the Taoiseach's office to let them know that we have already begun the process of following up the Dublin meeting and that we envisage that the first meeting between British and Irish officials might take place in the second half of January.

C. A. WHITMORE

*December*

23 January 1980

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