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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

NORTHERN IRELAND

Note of a conversation between the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at 10 Downing Street on 23 August 1979 at 12 noon

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland called on the Prime Minister, at her request, at No. 10 on 23 August at 12 noon, accompanied by Mr. K.R. Stowe.

The Prime Minister told Mr. Atkins that there could be no question of talking to Governor Carey about Northern Ireland. Mr. Atkins said that he agreed, at this stage. The Prime Minister said that Governor Carey could come to the UK if he wished to do so: but Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and she herself would not think of discussing with President Carter, for example, US policy towards their black population. The Prime Minister said that she wished to set the record straight publicly, in view of misleading reports which had appeared in the Press.

Mr. Atkins said that he had already made it clear to the Press, in his own statement early in the month, that he had no intention of meeting Governor Carey. The Prime Minister said that the point had not been got across sufficiently. Mr. Atkins said that he did not totally exclude the possibility of meeting Governor Carey at some stage, along with other leading Irish Americans. Governor Carey was not a complete villain; he had, for example, condemned the IRA and terrorism, bracketing the IRA with the PLO and other terrorist groups. Governor Carey's position had helped to reduce the flow of supplies of money from the US to the IRA. The Prime Minister said that there could nevertheless be no question of discussing the future of Northern Ireland in the US.

Mr. Atkins asked the Prime Minister to reflect on what we really wished the US to do. The first objective should be to make the Americans realise that the more they talked the more difficulties

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they created for is in Northern Ireland. Our second objective should be to reduce still further the flow of money and sympathy from the US to the IRA. The Prime Minister commented that this was all too complicated. She was not in the habit of discussing the internal problems of the US with the Americans and they should not attempt to do so with us. The Americans must be made to realise that for so long as they continued to finance terrorism, they would be responsible for the deaths of US citizens (as had happened in the Hilton Hotel explosion in Belfast) as well as others. They must realise that while this went on, the British Government would attack and condemn them. The UK should not be perpetually on the defensive; Governor Carey had already got away with a great deal so far as UK public opinion was concerned. The Americans must be brought to face the consequences of their actions.

Mr. Atkins conceded that this was one way of approaching the problem: there was another, which was to try to talk to the American people, who were basically friendly to the UK, and to reason with them about the consequences of their actions. The Prime Minister said that we should not always turn the other cheek. Mr. Atkins said that it was true that, in refusing to continue the supply of weapons to the RUC, the US was interfering in the internal affairs of another country. The Prime Minister said that she did not agree: this did not constitute interference, since the right to supply arms or to withhold them was sovereign to any Government.

Mr. Atkins told the Prime Minister that he wished to bring Mr. O'Kennedy to accept the view that the IRA was a terrorist organisation, posing as much of a threat to the Irish Republic as to the UK * ~~~~~ *

The Prime Minister said that she did not believe this - there was no evidence of hostility between the Irish Republic on the one hand and the IRA on the other. The only way of changing Dublin's attitude towards the IRA would be to deprive Irishmen in the UK of the vote and to bring them fully within the UK's immigration laws. The fact that both countries were members of the EEC was, however, a complicating factor in exerting pressure on Ireland.

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In further discussion, it was agreed that a Press Statement should be put out from No. 10 later in the day to the effect that there was no truth in reports that the Prime Minister intended to visit the US in the context of the Northern Ireland problem; that there was no truth in reports that Mr. Atkins intended to discuss Ulster with Governor Carey; and that the UK assumed that the US, along with other democratic nations, was totally opposed to terrorism and to violence as a means of achieving political ends. It was also agreed that Mr. Atkins should reply later in the day to Governor Carey's letter of 6 August and that the substance of his reply should be released to the Press.

In a discussion of the US decision to withhold export licences for the supply of arms to the RUC, the Prime Minister said that the UK should make her own weapons and be independent of external sources of supply. Mr. Atkins pointed out that this would be very expensive and that it would be a long time before actual deliveries could be made. The Prime Minister asked that the possibility should nevertheless be investigated.

At the end of the discussion, Mr. Atkins told the Prime Minister that he would telephone Mr. O'Kennedy that afternoon in order to forewarn him of the nature of his reply to Governor Carey. In response to a question from Mr. Atkins, the Prime Minister agreed that the reply need not permanently exclude the possibility of a discussion about Northern Ireland with the Governor.

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23 August 1979

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