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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

19 March 1981

Anglo/Irish Joint Studies

The Prime Minister held a meeting this evening to review progress in the Anglo/Irish Joint Studies. The Home Secretary, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Northern Ireland Secretary, the Lord Privy Seal, Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Wade Gery were also present.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. Wade Gery's report on the latest round in the Anglo/Irish talks (attached to Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to me of 13 March) had caused her some concern. The talks were moving faster than she had originally contemplated. Some of the phraseology which had come up was particularly worrying. She did not like the idea of using the word "Council" to describe whatever institution might be established. It had also to be borne in mind that Mr. Haughey would certainly exaggerate the significance of whatever was achieved.

The Prime Minister said that what she was looking for was an institution which would reflect the particular nature of the relationship between the two countries. It should provide a framework for on-going talks. It would be important to make sufficient progress to ensure that Mr. Haughey did not feel forced to break off the joint studies. But equally we should not go too fast. We should aim to get the new institutional structure set up and to urge Mr. Haughey to rest content with that.

In the subsequent discussion about the title to be attached to any institution, it was agreed that any reference to a "council" or a "conference" should be avoided. A relatively anodyne word such as "committee" might be best. It was agreed that further consideration would be given to the possibility of describing the new institution as the "Standing Committee on Anglo/Irish Co-operation" (SCAIC).

As regards the activities for which the SCAIC might be responsible or which might take place under its aegis, the Prime Minister said that her objective was to break down the barriers between the two countries without giving offence to our people. The latter consideration meant that there should be no "sub-structure" exclusively devoted to North/South Irish relations. But the present

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North/South contacts should continue under the umbrella of the SCAIC.

The SCAIC itself could meet at every level i.e. Head of Government, Ministerial, Junior Ministerial, or official. It could sweep up other existing fora such as the AIEC. Consideration would have to be given as to whether other institutions e.g. an Anglo/Irish Ditchley, should be developed and if so what their relationship would be to the SCAIC. The object of an Anglo/Irish Ditchley, which might meet alternately in this country and in the Republic, would be to enable leading figures in each country to meet regularly and informally.

It was agreed that, for the present, Parliamentary contacts should be developed separately building on the existing Anglo/Irish Parliamentary Group. There was a need to improve the quality of the present participation in the Group.

It was agreed that considerable caution was required in pursuing the security discussions insofar as these touched on questions of international defence. It was noted that Mr. Haughey had been content with the line taken by the Prime Minister in Belfast. It was suggested that Irish willingness to discuss defence issues in the terms described in paragraph 5 of Mr. Wade-Gery's report could be seen as an encouraging development.

As regards the next steps, it was noted that any written comments to be sent to Dublin would have to be cleared with the Ministerial Committee chaired by the Lord Privy Seal. The next major milestone would be the summit between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey due to take place some time in the summer. The Irish would be hoping that the communique of that meeting would announce that it had been agreed in principle to establish the new institution. The communique might also refer to other conclusions of the joint studies. It was not envisaged that detailed reports on the various subjects covered by the joint studies would be made public.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Roy Harrington (Northern Ireland Office), Stephen Gomersall (Lord Privy Seal's Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

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