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Prime Minister

Ref. A04456

MR ALEXANDER

Paul

Anglo-Irish Joint Studies

You will wish to be aware of the salient points which have emerged from the latest round of talks in the Anglo-Irish Joint Studies, as set out in Mr Wade-Gery's attached report. I agree with him that, so far as they go, these developments seem tolerable from our point of view. I do not imagine that we shall want the next summit communique to refer to a conference; so it is welcome news that the Irish have an alternative outcome in mind.

2. I am sending copies of this minute and the attachment to the Private Secretaries to the Lord Privy Seal and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

We must discuss
matter before
communication
with
any further
or further letters
no. RFA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

13 March 1981

Ref: B06148

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONGIreland: Joint Studies

UIC - Irish?

As you know the Anglo-Irish Joint Study Group on Institutional Structures held its first meeting in Dublin yesterday. So did the Joint Study Group on Security; and first meetings of all five Groups will have been completed by the end of the week. But it was clear (see below) that the Structures Group was seen by the Irish as central to the whole exercise. What they principally want out of it is an Anglo-Irish Council to institutionalise Ministerial meetings. They envisage a flexible formula covering different groupings, eg Prime Ministers alone, Prime Ministers accompanied by colleagues, and non-summit meetings involving pairs or larger groups of departmental Ministers. The basic structure would be East-West, ie United Kingdom/Republic. But they also envisage, as did our own brief, a possible sub-structure of North-South meetings involving in present circumstances junior Northern Ireland Office Ministers on our side. They are not clear whether or not legislation would be necessary, or desirable, for the establishment of such a Council. But they do not contemplate a Treaty, at least at present. They do contemplate some kind of joint parliamentary forum, which they think might include members of the House of Lords, the Senate and the European Parliament as well as of the two Houses of Commons. But their approach to this is cautious and gradualist, and they are inclined to build at first on the existing Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Group. They are well aware of both the importance and the difficulty of inducing Northern Protestants to take part.

2. The atmosphere of the meeting was cordial, thoughtful and constructive. There were two occasions on which the Irish had to be firmly slapped down. But these were clearly try-ons, and their failure was accepted with good grace and without protest. The first occurred early. The Irish explained frankly that their eventual objective was a Federal Ireland, achieved on the basis of majority consent both in the Republic and in the North. I said that this was familiar ground. Last May's summit communique recorded the Dublin Government's wish for a united Ireland (as also their acceptance of the principle of no constitutional change in the North without majority consent). But I had to make clear that I could in no way discuss the subject. That was not what this

or any other Joint Study was about. Much later, the Irish tried suggesting that one function of the Council might be to enable us to consult them before taking certain decisions relating to Northern Ireland ("eg certain appointments" not specified). I had to say that I could not discuss, much less approve, any suggestion that the process of governing the Province should be put, even partially, into commission; but this would not of course rule out consideration of some reciprocal arrangement under which decisions relating to one side of the Border (land or sea) but having implications for the other might be the subject of intergovernmental consultation.

careful!

3. The Irish accepted our ideas on procedure. We are to exchange any written comments either side wishes to offer after reflecting on yesterday's meeting; those comments, plus any in-puts from other Studies, will form the basis of our next meeting, in London; that meeting should attempt to settle orally what our joint report (or interim joint report) to the Steering Group might say; ^{and} one side should then be deputed to draft the report, which might be cleared in correspondence or might require a third meeting. They pressed strongly for the second meeting to take place before Easter; and we have agreed to try and arrange the second meetings of all five Groups in a bunch on 13th-14th April. This will leave time in late April for any third meetings needed before the Steering Group meets again in early May.

4. It was noted that both sides continued to attach the highest importance to the confidentiality of the Studies; but that neither excluded the possibility of consulting the other, at some point in the future, about some agreed relaxation of that rule.

5. The Irish team was led by Mr Kirwan, who as you know is Mr Nally's deputy in the Taoiseach's office. He and (at his own request) Mr Nally dined informally with Mr Moriarty of the Northern Ireland Office and me before I caught a late plane home last night. This was a useful occasion for taking a broader look at the whole exercise. It was clear that they bore no grudge over our last-minute postponement of the meeting from 6th March. They were full of gratitude for the public line which the Prime Minister had taken in Belfast: for so firmly rebutting Dr Paisley's alarmism; for standing by the Joint Studies and insisting on the importance of United Kingdom/Republic relations; and for saying all the right things from Mr Haughey's point of view

about "defence". They saw no inconsistency between (i) saying that defence (in the pact or NATO sense) was not under discussion (and not a bilateral matter) and (ii) actually discussing in the "security" Study Group that morning what its Terms of Reference called the "scope for increased co-operation as fellow-members of the Western community over the arrangements made by each of the two countries to ensure their security internationally in modern circumstances". (Under this head, I gather, the Security Group had a useful first discussion of unglamorous things like air-sea rescue). The Dail debate on Irish neutrality was just ending as we met for dinner. They gave me a copy of Mr Haughey's speech and drew attention to the passage (annexed to this minute) on the Joint Studies, which they hoped was helpful; I agreed it was, despite the skilful suggestion-by-juxtaposition that from their point of view the Studies are designed to further the "aspiration of a united Ireland". There was no suggestion that the Dail debate made yesterday a bad day for Joint Study meetings, even one on "security".

6. Mr Nally and Mr Kirwan made quite clear that they regarded Structures as the key Study and an Anglo-Irish Council as the key structure. Everything else was "ancillary". They thought that Mr Haughey would be well content if the next summit communique either announced the conference for which they tried last December or recorded agreement in principle on the establishment of a Council ("agreement that the ship should be built, not that it had been"). This was all on the assumption that the next summit would be after the Dail elections. Mr Nally thought this order both probable and, if we were to avoid "deep trouble", essential. His own guess was that the election campaign would be launched at the postponed Fianna Fail party conference on 10th-11th April; and that polling day would be between mid-May and early June. If that was right, Mr Haughey would not expect the Prime Minister to suggest or agree to a date for the next summit until the Dail elections were over. Mr Nally's clear implication was that if the elections were unexpectedly delayed, we should stall on any suggestion that the summit should be fixed in the meantime. But he seemed to have no doubt that the Irish would want the Joint Studies to continue whoever won the elections. He did not, incidentally, think that the date of the Dail elections (or the date of the district council elections in Northern Ireland) need have any influence on the date of the Steering Group meeting envisaged for early May. Nor need electoral dates have any influence on the plan to hold the next batch of Study Group meetings in London on 13th-14th April.

7. Neither Mr Nally nor Mr Kirwan volunteered any reference to the Maze hunger strike. When I referred to the fact that Mr Sands might well be nearing death on 13th-14th April and newly dead in early May, they said only that this need not in their view influence the choice of meeting dates.
8. Mr Hastie-Smith tells me that the other main event in the Security Group meeting was that we were able to get our wishes about extradition clearly on the record. The Irish did not of course agree with them. But they emphasised the possibility that a man who had just got off in extradition proceedings might be re-arrested and tried (in the Republic) for the same crime. This was new and welcome to the Northern Ireland Office. The implication seemed to be that, in order to discourage republican terrorism in either territory, the Irish Government might lean on their legal authorities to ensure that such a trial took place before long and ended in a conviction.
9. My general though still provisional conclusion from all this is that Irish ideas about the way the Studies exercise ought to go are not only becoming considerably clearer but also look like being broadly acceptable from our point of view.

12th March 1981

R L WADE-GERY

Extract from Taoiseach's Speech to the Dail on
Irish Neutrality on 11th March 1981

We have a clearly defined national policy on defence. Our position in international affairs is equally clear and leaves no room for ambiguity and doubt. So too is our stand in pursuit of the aspiration of a united Ireland. This Government will not be deflected from calmly and firmly pursuing the policies which we are convinced are the right policies for our country and for all her people. The studies on which the two Governments are embarked pose no threat to anybody. The subjects of those studies are set out in the Communique debated in this House on 11th December, 1980. The studies, which must for the present remain confidential if they are to be worthwhile and productive, do not represent decisions. They represent a process of exploration by experienced officials of the ground to be covered and when they are completed they will be submitted to the British Prime Minister and myself for whatever political decisions we may be in a position to take.

A way forward must be found. There is no section of the population on this island that can benefit from a perpetuation of the present situation. In our view progress can be made by the two sovereign Governments acting in concert and re-examining all aspects of their relationships. Let me give this final assurance. No matter what the circumstances nothing will ever be done by this Government that would jeopardise or prejudice the safety of our people, the security of the State, the independence and sovereignty of the nation, or the eventual unity of Ireland in peace and harmony.