



Ref. A084/2918

PRIME MINISTER

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Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

The purposes of your meeting at 2.30 pm are:

1. To take stock of progress in the talks which I have been holding with Mr Nally.
2. To assess the prospects of an acceptable outcome to those talks, and (more narrowly) the prospects for your meeting on 19 November with the Taoiseach.
3. To give me instructions for my next meeting with Mr Nally, 3 November.
4. To consider, in the light of that, what line the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should take with the parties in Northern Ireland.

2. Since I reported to you on the last meeting with Mr Nally, we have been engaged in the preparation of a "position paper" --- (Annex A), a copy of which I attach. The talks with Mr Nally have of course been entirely exploratory and without commitment on either side. The position paper seeks to sum up, from the British point of view, where it seems that the possibility exists of a measure of agreement with the Irish Government, and what the outstanding points of disagreement are.

3. The key question is whether you and your colleagues think that there is sufficient prospect of reaching an acceptable agreement to justify continuing the process; or whether there is not in your view such a prospect and you should use your meeting with the



Taoiseach to say in effect that it is all too difficult.

4. As you know, the Irish Government, and particularly the Foreign Minister, have been tending to build up expectations of movement on the Northern Ireland question. In their public speeches they have expressed impatience at the British Government's slowness at producing a British "answer" to the report of the Forum for a New Ireland, though the Taoiseach has been careful to say that the substance of the answer is more important than speed of response. They are deeply, and I think genuinely, concerned about the alienation of the minority in Northern Ireland, and anxious to make visible progress to reverse that alienation before the local elections in Northern Ireland in May 1985. They fear the prospect that, as a result of those elections, the PIRA could supplant the SDLP as the legitimately elected spokesman of the minority community; and that political success in Northern Ireland could also lead to greater political success for Provisional Sinn Fein in the Republic. I am told that the Taoiseach is increasingly optimistic about his prospects of winning a referendum for a change in the Irish Constitution to waive the territorial claim. What he needs in exchange for that is as significant as possible an "Irish dimension" in the Government of Northern Ireland, particularly but not only in the field of security; and some changes in practical policing which would restore the confidence of the minority community in the police in their areas.

5. On our side, the political case for continuing the process remains the same as the case for embarking upon it. It is essentially that we cannot afford to do nothing, and that the risks of doing nothing are as great as or greater than the risks that would be attendant upon an agreed package; that Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland is readier than formerly for some movement; and that you, recently re-elected with a substantial majority and enhanced political authority, in combination with this Taoiseach, have an opportunity of a kind which has not occurred for many years and may not occur again for some time.



6. The Irish Government undoubtedly think that their willingness to go for a referendum to amend the Constitution in order to waive the territorial claim constitutes a very large and, from their point of view, risky step on their part. They see it as a step which they could not take without movement of corresponding magnitude on our side. They would in the end, I believe, settle for "institutionalised consultation" and no more: but they will keep up the pressure on us to go as far as we can within that framework. They will also keep up the pressure for some "restructuring" of the RUC, even if only on a temporary and cosmetic basis, since they see this as indispensable to improving the confidence of the minority community in policing. I gather that the Taoiseach and his colleagues were thrown into considerable gloom by the visit of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Mr Andrew on 25 October: the Secretary of State and Mr Andrew pointed out that among Unionists the waiving of the territorial claim would be seen as little more than a recognition of reality, and emphasised the practical difficulties and objections surrounding the kind of measures that had been discussed in the Armstrong/Nally talks. This seems to have led the Taoiseach to wonder whether your own position had changed, either as a result of the Brighton bombing or for some other reason, and whether you now no longer hoped for or wanted a positive outcome to the talks. He is said to feel that, if you have lost interest, it would be better not to have the Summit meeting on 19 November.

7. What we have been discussing in those talks is a package of measures which has an "Irish dimension": that is to say, one which would give the Irish Government some sort of say in the affairs of the Province of Northern Ireland. It is a high risk exercise on both sides: for them because of the waiver of the Republic territorial claim, for us because of the risks of violent Unionist reaction to any form of "Irish dimension".



8. If you and your colleagues think that the risks are too great, the question is whether there is any alternative. It would be possible to think in terms of a package which was purely internal to Northern Ireland, with an intensified security campaign, measures to meet symbolic minority concerns (flags, use of the Irish language, and such things), and a renewed attempt to establish a devolved government with minority participation. All the indications are, however, that such a package would stand little or no chance of success, in terms of being conducive to greater peace and stability: the Irish Government and the SDLP would be very unlikely to go along with it, and the risks of greater polarisation in Northern Ireland would be increased, with all that that would mean for the violence and for the progress of the Provisionals.

9. I recognise your concern that the contacts with the Irish Government may be moving too far and too fast. As I have said, the Irish representatives have both publicly and privately been keeping up the pressure for movement. But we shall not now be making any significant further progress before your meeting with the Taoiseach. The next meeting with Mr Nally will in effect be confined to refining the position we have reached, for the purpose of setting it out for you and the Taoiseach to consider at the Summit. Even if it is agreed that the process is to continue thereafter, there is a great deal more work to be done before we are in sight of an agreed package. In my judgement, the question for the forthcoming Summit is not whether to go ahead with a package, but whether to continue discussions so that the question of whether to go ahead can be considered at a subsequent Summit meeting. In that case you would need to reach some understanding with the Taoiseach about the pace and timetable of further discussions.

10. You would also need to discuss with him whether there is any general statement that you and he could issue from the Summit. Unless the talks are to be discontinued, the Taoiseach is likely to press for some kind of communique which holds the door open to the future. You will wish to consider with your colleagues



whether something on the lines of the draft attached (Annex B) might provide a possible basis for this.

#### HANDLING

11. If the agenda in paragraph 1 is agreed, and subject to any suggested additions to it, the discussion might be structured in the following way:

(i) The Armstrong/Nally Exchanges

You may wish to ask me to open the discussion by summarising the position reached following my last round of talks with Mr Nally. [I would base myself on the Position Paper which has been prepared by officials for submission to the Secretaries of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Northern Ireland.] You should ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary for their views on whether the elements of agreement already achieved at official level between the two sides could in themselves (i.e. if no further progress were to be made) constitute a package which would be politically saleable in the South and politically acceptable in the North. If the view is taken that the package would have to be more substantial, which potential ingredients offer the best prospects for enlarging the area of agreement? (You have already recorded your reservations about the Irish proposal for a Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland and on the possibility of an operational element in the consultative role of a joint security commission.) What would be the political impact, both on the Irish Government and on the IRA, of any signal from the British side that they see no realistic prospect of a useful outcome from the current secret exchanges? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should be invited to comment.

(ii) Summit Declaration

--- Subject to the views expressed in the discussion up to this point, you should invite the views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary on the "Draft Joint Declaration on Northern Ireland" (text attached below) which might be issued at the Anglo-Irish Summit. How would the Unionists be likely to react to it? Should I be authorised to hand over a copy of this draft, amended as necessary, to Mr Nally during my next round of talks with him?

(iii) Line to be taken with political leaders in Northern Ireland

Would an adverse reaction in the North to a Summit declaration on the lines of the attached draft be to any extent defused if the leaders of political parties in Northern Ireland were to be given some general indication of our thinking on the desirability of an Irish dimension: or would any lifting to trigger hostile or unhelpful statements in the North which would in themselves reduce the Summit's chances of success? The Northern Ireland Secretary should be asked to comment, and to give his views on current expectations in the North concerning the Summit. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should also be asked to comment.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

1 November 1984