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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 November 1984

Dear Len,

ANGLO-IRISH SUMMIT

The Prime Minister held a meeting this evening with the Foreign Secretary and the Northern Ireland Secretary to discuss the forthcoming Anglo-Irish Summit. Sir Robert Armstrong, Mr. Goodall, Mr. Andrew, Mr. Cartledge and HM Ambassador, Dublin were also present.

The Prime Minister said that the Armstrong/Nally talks had been based on the principle of symmetry, with the Irish side dropping their territorial claim and recognising the border. However, the latest Irish speaking note put forward a number of unacceptable demands, and suggested that the Irish Government had still not come to terms with the fact that Joint Authority was not on offer. There must be some risk that they had concluded that the talks would not lead to an outcome acceptable to them, and were preparing to leak their position as set out in the speaking note. We should, therefore, prepare a firm reply setting out our own position, which could equally be made public if necessary. We also had to consider seriously whether the present talks could usefully continue. This could only be judged in the light of her discussions with the Taoiseach at the Summit itself. She accepted that the breakdown of the talks would be represented as a victory for the IRA, and could jeopardise our security cooperation with the Republic. But at the same time it was hard to avoid the conclusion that neither side was able to go far enough to satisfy the other's minimum needs, and that in consequence more limited objectives should be sought.

In discussion it was agreed that the first task at the Summit was to find out the Irish bottom line, and establish whether the gap between our positions was unbridgeable. It was recognised that the Irish side might be getting cold feet about the referendum and the difficult campaign which would precede it. An outcome which both sides could regard


As a modest success was not necessarily unattainable. This would be based on a balance of measures established at a lower level than envisaged in the British statement of position. Clearly joint authority would have to be absolutely excluded or any proposal tantamount to it. But consultation remained a possibility if the balance could be got right. A Joint Security Commission could be presented as in the interests of both sides. There would be no commitment, at this stage, on other issues. This would be preferable to a breakdown, which would be very damaging to Dr. FitzGerald's position, remove any serious hope of getting the SDLP back into a devolved Assembly, and could be damaging to the perception of our Northern Ireland policy in the United States. Against this, it was argued that we could not be too sanguine about the prospects for a limited package. Security cooperation would probably only be acceptable to the Irish in return for a substantial quid pro quo.

Concluding the discussion the Prime Minister said that she would have to judge in the light of what Dr. FitzGerald had to say whether the discussions could usefully be taken further and, if so, by what means. She would need to recall the basis on which the talks had been started and disabuse him of all hope of our agreeing to Joint Authority in any guise. But she would make clear our willingness to continue with various forms of cooperation. In the meantime:

- a) The Irish Government should be informed that we could not accept their revised draft communiqué. Our own version represented the furthest which we could go;
- b) A vigorous reply should be prepared, and cleared with her, to the Irish speaking note;
- c) She would give a press conference following the Summit, but not jointly with Dr. FitzGerald.

I am writing separately about the administrative arrangements.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Graham Sandiford (Northern Ireland Office), Robert Andrew (Northern Ireland Office), David Goodall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,*  
  
(C.D. Powell)

Len Appleyard, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office