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RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE  
TAOISEACH AT CHEQUERS ON MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER AT MIDDAY

Present:

Prime Minister	The Taoiseach
Foreign & Commonwealth Secretary	The Tanaiste
Northern Ireland Secretary	Mr. Barry
Sir Robert Armstrong	Mr. Nally
Mr. Powell	Mr. Donlon

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The Prime Minister invited the Taoiseach to report to their colleagues on the discussion which the two of them had had earlier in the morning.

The Taoiseach said that the discussion had worried him. He thought that the British side were falling into the trap of regarding the Northern Ireland problem as only a security problem. In fact the security problem was there because there was a political problem and it was that which had to be solved first. The British side did not seem to him to have accepted that reality. Instead they were focussing on security without seeing it in its wider context. It was simply not possible for an Irish Government to join a Joint

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Security Commission unless there was also a political dimension with which the minority could identify. The limits of that political dimension were clear. British sovereignty could not be challenged and nothing should be done to destabilise the majority. But there had to be a political dimension. He had come out of the earlier discussion rather depressed because he did not feel that it had got to grips with this aspect.

The Prime Minister said that her understanding was that the Taoiseach needed three things in order to go ahead with the referendum on changes in the Irish constitution and recognition of the Border. The first was co-operation in security matters. We did not see this as directed at battering down the minority, to pick up a phrase used earlier by the Taoiseach. A Joint Security Commission would be a way to help the minority ensure that their legal rights were upheld. The nationalist minority would be able to see the Commission as a forum where any matter affecting them in relation to security could be raised. The Irish Minister of Justice would be a member and would in effect act as an advocate for the minority community.

The second requirement was the need for a political framework in the North. Several models had been tried in the past. An arrangement had to be found which was acceptable to both the majority and the minority. But some impetus was needed to get them to agree. It would be helpful if the Irish side could encourage the SDLP to take part in the discussions.

Thirdly there was the judicial/legal aspect. This had not been discussed at length but she believed that there were no major obstacles to progress, though more work was needed.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that in our concept

a Joint Security Commission would cover a great deal of ground. It would go beyond policing into penal and legal matters. The advantage of calling it a Joint Security Commission was that it would make it difficult for the Unionists to challenge the Republic's involvement in it since co-operation in security matters was clearly desirable. As regards the political framework, the elected representatives of the two communities had to be brought to talk to each other. The Unionists had a strong tactical position at the moment, since they could claim that they were ready to talk but had no interlocutor. It would be necessary to put pressure on both communities to get involved in discussions. The Prime Minister added that we were barred from holding out to them the prospect of change in the Republic's constitution as an incentive. So the only leverage which we had with them was the urgency of finding a solution and their ambition to govern themselves. What encouragement could the Irish Government give to the SDLP to take part in talks?

The Taoiseach said that the SDLP had been seeking involvement in government since 1971 but the Unionists were determined to exclude them. The Prime Minister said that it was no good returning to power sharing, it simply was not on. Mr. Barry said that all the Unionists had in mind was to allow the Nationalists to hold the chairmanship of committees in the Assembly. This was not enough. The Taoiseach said that history could not be ignored. It was clear that the Unionists wanted to exclude the minority permanently from any power. The Prime Minister said that one had to assume that the Unionists had learnt something from the last ten years. Mr. Barry doubted that they had.

The Northern Ireland Secretary suggested that, given the difficulties over a political framework, the most realistic goal for the current discussions was acceptance of the principle of Irish Government advocacy in an area which

was most sensitive for the minority community, namely policing and security. The British Government were ready to agree to a Joint Security Commission without the quid pro quo of a change in the Irish constitution. At the same time both the British and Irish Governments should lean on the political leaders in the North to re-enter serious discussions. No-one could guarantee that they would clear the fence of agreement. But they must be made to take it again and again. The Foreign Secretary added that the search had to be continued for something which was neither majority rule nor power sharing. As regards the Joint Security Commission the new factor was the perception that it would be a place where the Republic could provide advocacy for the views of the minority on all points where they thought that the present system did not allow them sufficient protection. With this wider remit, the Commission could address itself to the areas of major discontent for the minority. Mr. Barry said that the minority continued to see the RUC as a Unionist police force. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that this was precisely the sort of point which could be canvassed in the Security Commission.

Mr. Barry said that a way still had to be found to give the nationalists a say in the future of Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister pointed out that the minority already exercised power in some areas of Northern Ireland where they constituted the majority. Mr. Barry said that unlike the Unionists, they exercised their power fairly. The Taoiseach read out some statistics about the unsatisfactory record of Unionist Councils. The Prime Minister said that no-one was an advocate of unfair Government by majority.

The Taoiseach returned to the Joint Security Commission. If the minority were to accept it as a significant step it would have to be a bit more than advisory. For instance there might be a convention that no

senior appointments in the police would be made unless they were acceptable to both sides. The Prime Minister objected that this once again smacked of joint authority. The Taoiseach then turned to the political framework and again argued the case for "involvement" of an Irish Minister in the Government of Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said that she could not accept "involvement". Some phrase such as "making a contribution to" might be acceptable. The Northern Ireland Secretary said that if the Irish Government wanted to go beyond the Joint Security Commission to institutionalised consultation over a wider field of policy, then this step must be accompanied by a referendum on changes to the Irish constitution. The more modest and realisable objective was a Joint Security Commission on its own. This would not require any action from the Irish Government except in the field of security. In any event he was not certain that a change in the Irish constitution would carry enough conviction with the Unionists to persuade them to accept institutionalised consultation. Mr. Barry observed that the Republic had always in the past been told that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution were the great barrier to progress.

The Taoiseach enquired whether the Prime Minister envisaged a conference of all the parties in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said that this had been tried in the past but had not worked very well. The Northern Ireland Secretary added that a conference might come at the end of the day. The Tanaiste said that a Dublin presence would be necessary if such a conference were to make progress. The Prime Minister said that in that event the Unionists would not attend. Mr. Barry suggested that the British Government could threaten to reach a settlement over their heads. The Prime Minister said there was no question of this. We could not overrule the majority. The Taoiseach said that he hoped the idea of an appointed executive, which could not be boycotted, would be kept alive.

The Prime Minister said that she wanted to make one more effort to convince the Taoiseach that it was worth going ahead at least with the Joint Security Commission. This could be a first and exemplary step towards close co-operation between the Northern Ireland Secretary and a Minister from the Republic. Mr. Barry said that if this were the only result of the Anglo/Irish talks it would risk the end of Dr. FitzGerald's Government. The Prime Minister concluded that in that event we could only aim for a very general communiqué. The Taoiseach said that he feared that lack of progress would have an unfortunate effect on the local elections in May. Perhaps he and the Prime Minister could have a further meeting early in the New Year. The Prime Minister said that a meeting without substantive progress could be more damaging than no meeting at all. The timing of a further meeting would have to be judged in the light of the prospects and of progress in the meanwhile in contacts between the parties in the North.

The Taoiseach said that he was disappointed. He feared that the present combination of favourable circumstances for making progress would not recur and could be snuffed out altogether in May next year. It was vital to come up with something which would ensure that the outcome of the local elections in May did not undermine constitutional politics in Northern Ireland. He acknowledged that what the Prime Minister had proposed was a step forward. But it was not enough to achieve a lasting solution. He had reached a point in the Republic where it was possible to envisage amending the constitution. This could in turn release forces in Unionism which would allow further movement. He did not wish to surrender this possibility. The Prime Minister said that the aim of an enduring settlement was worth going for but one had to be realistic. The Taoiseach repeated that he recognised the lesser objective was worthwhile but did not yet wish to give up on the larger one. He asked whether the Prime Minister agreed that the

Nally/Armstrong talks should continue. The Prime Minister confirmed that they could. The Northern Ireland Secretary urged the Taoiseach to encourage the SDLP back into talks with the other parties in the North. The Taoiseach said that he would speak in this sense to Mr. Hume.

The meeting ended at 1345 hours.

19 November 1984