

Ref. A084/1841

PRIME MINISTER

Northern Ireland

At your meeting on 21 June, it was agreed that at Cabinet on 28 June, under Parliamentary Affairs, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would tell the Cabinet the line which he proposed to take in the debate on the report of the New Ireland Forum on 2 July.

2. It was also agreed that you would seek the authority of Cabinet for a further round of secret exchanges between the Secretary of the Irish Government (Mr Dermot Nally) and me, following the initial exchange authorised by the Cabinet earlier in the year.

3. I now attach a speaking note on the latter point. The note has been agreed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Northern Ireland Office.

4. You will see that, in paragraph 2 of the speaking note, I have not referred in terms to the indications from the Taoiseach and from Mr Barry that the Irish Government is now prepared to consider amending Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution so as to waive the territorial claim to Northern Ireland. This is obviously extremely sensitive: if any whiff of this reached the press, Dr FitzGerald could be put into an impossible political position. The speaking note simply refers, therefore to "formal action" which would have the effect of waiving the claim (or at least putting it in suspense). I understand that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would prefer you to be explicit on this matter. I have to say that I think that the risks are so great that you should avoid being explicit if you possibly can. I am seeking an opportunity for a word with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland before Cabinet to make it clear to him that I feel bound to advise you accordingly.

Approved by *Rf.*  
ROBERT ARMSTRONG  
and signed in his absence

27 June 1984

SPEAKING NOTENorthern Ireland

At our last detailed discussion of Northern Ireland on 16 February it was agreed to authorise the Secretary of the Cabinet to make an informal, secret and strictly explanatory approach to the Secretary of the Irish Government. The approach was for two purposes: first, to signal to the Taoiseach in advance of the New Ireland Forum's report that the British Government was thinking constructively about the problem; and secondly to explore how far the Irish were seriously interested in finding ways of reassuring Unionist opinion about Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom in return for arrangements which would associate the Republic in some visible way with law enforcement in the Province. We agreed to consider the matter further in the light of the Irish Government's response.

2. Sir Robert Armstrong spoke to the Irish Government Secretary early in March on the lines authorised. The response was not conveyed to us until the middle of May, by which time the New Ireland Forum report had been published. I had a very general discussion with the Taoiseach on 26 June, in the margins of the European Council at Fontainebleau, but we did not discuss any detailed proposals. It is clear that the Taoiseach and Ministers on the Irish side who are aware of the secret exchanges have taken our approach very seriously and want to treat it as a basis for further discussion. They are prepared to consider formal action which would have the effect of waiving (or at least putting in suspense) the territorial claim to Northern Ireland embodied in their Constitution, and of recognising that there could be no change in the present position in Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people in the Province. Although they would formally acknowledge continuing British sovereignty over Northern Ireland, their opening bid (as foreshadowed in the Forum report) is for a wide measure of joint authority between the two Governments. Responsibility for foreign affairs, defence and finance would remain solely with Britain

and large areas of administration would be devolved to a power-sharing executive, but the Irish envisage that on remaining internal matters, including security, the British and Irish Governments would act jointly. I should emphasise that the Irish proposals are tentative and far from fully worked out, and that they have been put forward (as our own ideas were) as a basis for discussion and not as a take it or leave it package. There have been subsequent indications that they would consider arrangements under which the Irish Government's role in relation to Northern Irish affairs was in effect no more than consultative.

3. The Taoiseach sees a distinction between "joint authority" and shared sovereignty: he argues that the British Government would choose to make the exercise of its sovereignty a matter of joint decision in certain fields. We have made it clear to the Irish Government that we do not think that the distinction would carry this weight, and that any proposals for sharing authority in Northern Ireland between the two Governments would be, and would certainly be seen in Northern Ireland as being, inconsistent with the maintenance of British sovereignty. But we have still to give a considered response to the ideas put to us. We have, of course, also to make a public response to the New Ireland Forum report which is to be debated in the House on 2 July.

4. After discussion with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I have come to the conclusion that further exploratory talks between the Secretary of the Cabinet and the Secretary of the Irish Government would be justified. The purpose would be to find out exactly how far the Irish might be prepared to go in waiving their territorial claim, and what is the minimum degree of Irish involvement in Northern Ireland which they would be ready to settle for in return. On the latter point we should have to be very careful not to be drawn into any arrangement which constituted, or could be represented as, shared sovereignty. But, once the territorial claim was effectively and convincingly waived, it should be possible to envisage a considerable measure of



institutionalised consultation between the two Governments on Northern Irish affairs, possibly conducted through an Irish resident representative in Belfast. Such consultation could, for example, provide an umbrella for the closer co-operation on the security front which we are looking for; but it would have to cover other more "political" areas as well. One ingredient in any package could be a measure of devolution to the Northern Ireland Assembly; the SDLP are unlikely to agree to participate unless there is a substantial Irish dimension. We need to probe the Irish position further in order to be able to establish whether there is any real prospect of reaching agreement with them on arrangements which we could accept and which would enable them to waive their territorial claim. Our ultimate aim would be to achieve a settlement in Northern Ireland which would command sufficient support from both the majority and minority communities to make possible a return to a system of devolved government in the Province, help to reverse the growth of alienation of the minority and thus erode support for terrorism and Sinn Fein.

5. Cabinet will, of course, be consulted again before any firm proposals are put to the Irish. Meanwhile, however, I hope colleagues will agree that there should be a further round of exploratory talks between the Secretary of the Cabinet and the Secretary of the Irish Government on the basis I have described.

w - 100 level



CONFIDENTIAL

11