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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

When we met on 5 October I promised to let you have a minute on the possibility of giving the Unionists some advance warning of your intended discussion with the Taoiseach on 19 November to avoid subsequent accusations of bad faith.

2. I have since seen Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 10 October and I agree that we must avoid the dangers to which he refers. Any disclosure of the role that we have contemplated giving the Republic in the North would produce a strong and public reaction, from Paisley in particular, which could prejudice our talks with the Irish and make your task at the Summit more difficult.

3. On the other hand, I am anxious that neither you nor I should be accused later of misleading the Unionists. If momentum is to be maintained, I ought to meet the Party leaders in the North again towards the end of October or the beginning of November to follow up my introductory talks and to press them on the development of their thinking on devolved government. In view of my predecessor's statement in the debate on 2 July that "the Government will want to have talks with each of the parties involved and with the Irish Government"; press speculation about an impending Anglo-Irish initiative; the knowledge that you are shortly to meet the Taoiseach; and my own meeting with Mr Barry on 25 October, it will hardly be possible to avoid some reference to the Irish dimension, or an acknowledgement that a dialogue with the Republic is under way. But given that we are not expecting any dramatic new "deal" to be concluded on 19 November, so that there will not be much after the Summit for the Unionists to complain about, I believe that I could briefly enter on this part of the subject without provoking the sort of Unionist reaction which we want to avoid at this stage.

4. I would remind Molyneaux and Paisley that my predecessor, in his speech on 2 July, referred to talks not only with Party leaders in the North, but also with the Government in Dublin. I would say

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that as they know, you are to meet the Taoiseach in November and it would be helpful in this context for me to be able to pass on to you the latest thinking of the Northern Ireland parties. The Unionist readiness to recognise the nationalist identity and consider safeguards for the minority will make it easier to answer criticism from Dublin and elsewhere. Naturally, there has been some contact between the two Governments to prepare for the Summit.

5. I would go on to say that I do not know what will emerge from the Summit but the Unionists can be reassured that HMG remains firmly committed to the principle that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland as part of the UK without the consent of the majority of its people, and that we have no intention of adopting any of the three options set out in the Forum Report. On the other hand it is common ground that if we are to defeat the terrorists the two Governments and the security forces need to co-operate more effectively. There is a case for the expansion of present arrangements for co-operation and consultation in areas such as security but it is the firm intention of the Government that the Secretary of State would remain in charge and there is no question of our giving up our sovereignty over Northern Ireland. I would indicate at the same time my interest in their ideas for some form of provincial arrangements for majority rule with safeguards.

These phrases raise the very fears they seek to allay.

6. In response to the inevitable questions, I would take the line that I could not disclose details of the official exchanges or of my meeting with Mr Barry. I would not mention the amendment of the Irish constitution, (institutionalised consultation,) or the other specific measures which might be included in a possible package, though if any specific items were raised by Molyneaux and Paisley I would seek to elicit their views on a hypothetical basis. If asked whether there was any "secret deal" I would reply that there was no deal of any sort; the discussions were purely exploratory.

7. I am hopeful that if I were to trail the Summit before Molyneaux and Paisley in this way it might serve our purpose without producing extreme reactions. Exactly what I said would depend in part on the

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progress of the Armstrong/Nally talks, and I think it would be essential to inform the Irish Government of my intention, to avoid possible accusations of undermining the Summit. I could do this when I see Mr Barry.

8. In addition to speaking to Mr Molyneux and Dr Paisley I should have to speak to the leaders of the SDLP and the Alliance Party at about the same time. For the SDLP the message will be that they should not pin all their hopes on the follow-up to the Forum Report; that the follow-up to the Forum Report will not itself produce any complete answer to the question of how Northern Ireland is to be governed; and that the SDLP should soon open their promised discussions with the Northern Ireland parties.

9. I am Top for Questions on 8 November and no doubt the "Irish dimension" will be raised then. I would propose to respond on the lines suggested above and in paragraph 7 of Sir Robert Armstrong's minute.

[in week-end box] C.D.P.
10. It is incidentally interesting and helpful that the clear and well-written pamphlet, "Britain's undefended Frontier" just published (written by Peter Utley, with John Biggs-Davison and other noted pro-Unionists as co-authors) favours a joint Security Commission. You may like to glance at this (copy attached).

11. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

N. G. W. and
Private Secretary

for DH
(Approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence in Belfast)

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