



No - This is for the office we will call for info and me. I'll return no

Ref. A085/3024

MR POWELL

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

During the coming weeks we shall clearly need to be able to respond quickly and sensitively to developments in the situation in Northern Ireland. For instance, we need now to work out, as a matter of urgency, what measures or actions are open to us which may help to allay unionist suspicions and (in particular) to respond to their feeling that they have not been consulted and that the nationalists (through the Irish Government) are being given an "inside track" denied to them; but which will not give the Irish Government the impression that the unionists are being given a power of veto or a right to monitor everything that is said, or all the views and proposals that are put forward, in the Intergovernmental Conference. The Taoiseach and his colleagues have on the whole had an easier ride than they expected in the Dail, and are at present disposed to be understanding and constructive about our problems in handling the unionists. We need, however, to get it right with them, as well as with the unionists, and to keep them informed about what we are doing and propose to do, so that they are not taken by surprise and will give whatever support and assistance we need to ask of them.

2. I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has expressed some concern lest we may put all that we have gained or hope to gain from the Anglo-Irish Agreement at risk, if we do not get the balance of the handling right in this period.

3. I believe that, in terms of machinery, this may require us to be able during the coming weeks to work hardly less quickly and flexibly than we did during the South Atlantic War.



4. This will require a strong and continuous political steer. This will mean a readiness to hold meetings of the Ministers concerned at short notice and as often as need be. The Ministers concerned are obviously mainly the Prime Minister and the two Secretaries of State; the Prime Minister may also wish to involve other Ministers who were present for the informal meeting on 21 November (the Lord President, the Home Secretary, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip). I do not suggest setting up a new Committee for this purpose, or even setting aside a regular time for meetings; but I should like to warn the Private Offices of the Ministers concerned to be ready to respond positively to calls for urgent meetings. If the Prime Minister is content, I will so proceed.

[Such they would anyway]

5. Because the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is so much away, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland needs (and will certainly need during this time) to spend a good deal of time in Belfast, I would propose to support this arrangement with regular and frequent meetings myself with Mr Goodall and Mr Andrew (or in his absence a senior representative of the Northern Ireland Office) to maintain an up-to-date assessment of the situation and provide advice to the Prime Minister and her colleagues in forthcoming problems likely to require Ministerial decisions and on how they might be handled.

MS

6. For the present, and so long as unionist reactions are basically political, it should not be necessary to involve the Secretary of State for Defence or the Ministry of Defence at official or military level; but we must be ready to do so if the situation seems likely to evolve in a direction where that might be necessary.

MS

for ROBERT ARMSTRONG

25 November 1985

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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sir Robert Armstrong's minute attached suggests:

(a) a small group of Ministers should be on constant standby, to give a political steer on problems which may arise. This would include the Lord President, Lord Privy Seal, Northern Ireland Secretary, Home Secretary and Chief Whip;

(b) this would be underpinned by a group of officials chaired by Robert Armstrong and including David Goodall and Robert Andrew. This would be the main source of advice to Ministers.

This is in effect a bid by RTA to keep control of advice on Northern Ireland matters firmly in his hands. It therefore cuts heavily into the Northern Ireland Office's responsibilities and you would want to consult Mr. King before agreeing it. (RTA's minute is carefully not copied to other departments). I think I also detect another reason: a worry that the Northern Ireland Office will be too anxious to reassure the Unionists and will not be sufficiently alive to Irish sensibilities or sufficiently loyal to the letter of the Agreement. It is therefore a matter of political balance.

These points are not exactly explicit in RTA's minute. But I think they are there and you should consider carefully before agreeing to what is made to look like a straightforward machinery of government decision.

C.D.R.

(CHARLES POWELL)

25 November 1985

SRWALJ



10 DOWNING STREET

(3)

From the Private Secretary

Sir Robert Armstrong

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

You minuted me on 25 November about arrangements for Ministerial and official consideration of Irish matters in the period ahead.

You should know that the Prime Minister is strongly of the view that it is for the Northern Ireland Office to lead on Northern Ireland matters in this period, and it is to the Northern Ireland Office to which she will look in the first instance for advice. She would wish this to be fully reflected in any arrangements made.

(C. D. POWELL)

26 November 1985

SECRET AND PERSONAL

JB