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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

29 August, 1984.

C.D. Powell, Esq.,
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Prime Minister.
This is the brief for
the very restricted
meeting with Dr.
Fitzgerald after
lunch. Main points are
on cards
C.D.P.
3/1

Dear Charles,

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

At the Prime Minister's meeting with the Taoiseach on 3 September on community matters, half an hour has been set aside after lunch for a private talk on Anglo-Irish bilateral questions. This is at the Taoiseach's request, and will provide an opportunity to take stock of the secret exchanges between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Nally, the latest of which was in London on 30 July (Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to the Prime Minister on 3 August, on which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland commented in his minute of 14 August).

2. Sir Robert Armstrong is away until 3 September. But the Prime Minister will have seen from his minute that although Mr. Nally and Mr. Lillis have been pushed some way towards accepting that joint authority is not available and that the most that the Irish can look for is institutionalised consultation between the two Governments on Northern Ireland affairs, the Taoiseach himself is still looking for a measure of shared authority, particularly in the security field. There is evidence that he believes that this is necessary if he is to have any chance of carrying a referendum to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution. The Irish also believe that the alienation of the minority community in Northern Ireland from the forces of law and order in the Province cannot be reversed without some change in the structure of the Security Forces to give them a nationalist as well as a unionist identity. At the same time, it is clear that the Taoiseach is strongly committed to continuing the present dialogue with the British Government and does not want it broken off.

3. In the limited time available, it will be best for the Prime Minister to concentrate on a few main points. She might begin by welcoming the constructive spirit in which the Taoiseach is approaching the problem of Northern Ireland and by noting that there is a wide measure of common ground between the British and Irish Governments on the subject: both are

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concerned to defeat terrorism, to halt the political advance of Sinn Fein and to find ways of integrating the minority community into the political life of the Province. We recognise that these objectives cannot be achieved without the Irish Government's cooperation; and in the exploratory talks between Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Nally both sides have been looking for ways in which, consistent with Northern Ireland's position as part of the United Kingdom, expression can be given to the Irish Government's legitimate interest in the affairs of the Province. This task will be greatly assisted if the Irish can bring themselves to waive their territorial claim, since as long as the claim is maintained any formal involvement of the Republic in the Province's affairs is bound to be seen by Unionists as a concession to that claim and a step down the road towards the incorporation of Northern Ireland into the Republic.

4. In this context, we recognise the magnitude in Irish terms of their offer to amend Articles 2 and 3 of their Constitution, and we realise that this can only be done on the basis of a commensurate British response. As has been made clear, in the Armstrong/Nally talks, we cannot entertain proposals which would involve sharing actual authority in Northern Ireland with the Government of the Republic either in political or security matters. Arrangements of that kind would be unworkable in practice and unacceptable to Parliament as well as to majority opinion in Northern Ireland. What we are prepared to offer the Irish Government however is a means of exercising direct influence over the affairs of the Province through institutionalised consultative arrangements about political and security matters.

5. It will be important to ensure that Dr. Fitzgerald understands just how big a move this would be from the British side, in that it would involve for the first time a formal British acknowledgement of the Irish Government's right to a say in Northern Ireland's internal affairs. Such a major change would be vehemently, and perhaps violently, attacked by Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland (with some sympathy in Great Britain) as well as by the IRA. The political risks for us would be no less than those the Irish Government would face in a referendum. If we are to go down this road, both sides must be sure that any agreement is robust enough to withstand the wrecking efforts of extremists and terrorists, and that it is not undermined when the crisis comes by each Government putting a different interpretation on what the agreement means.

6. It would also be desirable to make it clear to Dr. Fitzgerald that the ideas put forward by Mr. Nally on 30 July in relation to security are unrealistic. In particular, the breakup and disarming of the RUC would bring a violent reaction and have disastrous consequences for the morale of the force. Any attempt to share operational control over a police force would

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✓ prove unworkable. (The arguments are set out in detail in Mr. Prior's minute to you of 14 August.) But we recognise that there is a serious problem about the acceptability of the RUC and the UDR to the minority community, and it is for this reason that we would be prepared to offer the Republic a say in Northern Ireland security at the top level - including the opportunity to develop new arrangements for working together and to look for ways of involving the minority in policing. We cannot offer the Irish a veto on Northern Ireland security decisions; nor can we demoralise the RUC, scrap it, and start again. But we are prepared to consult, and be seen to consult, the Irish closely about security policy through the medium of a Joint Security Commission.

7. It would be unwise at this stage for the Prime Minister to be drawn into a detailed discussion of what the hypothetical consultative arrangements might look like, or how they would dovetail with a greater measure of devolved government in Northern Ireland, should it prove possible to bring this about. If the Irish accept the principle of consultation, the details will need to be explored in further official discussions; but official talks will get nowhere if the Irish keep trying to manoeuvre them in the direction of joint authority. I suggest therefore that the main aim of the Prime Minister's talk with Dr. Fitzgerald should be to establish whether he would be prepared to consider implementing his Government's offer to seek amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution as part of a package providing for institutionalised consultation. If he believes there is scope for progress on this basis, it might be appropriate for the two Heads of Government to mandate Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Nally to examine the scope and nature of the consultative arrangements which would be needed and to report before the next Anglo-Irish bilateral summit (which it was agreed at Fontainebleau should be held in the autumn but for which no date has yet been fixed).

8. As the discussions between Sir Robert and Mr. Nally cease to be exploratory and start to focus in detail on structures, it will be necessary to broaden the representation on either side to bring in people with expert knowledge. Mr. Prior's speech in Parliament on 2 July stating that he would have discussions with the Irish Government, together with leaks from the Irish side and from Mr. John Hume as well as intelligent press speculation, probably make it unnecessary and unrealistic to deny that official discussions are taking place in preparation for a bilateral summit meeting in the autumn. The Prime Minister may therefore wish to discuss with Dr. Fitzgerald how best to acknowledge that the talks are taking place.

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9. The approach suggested in this letter has been approved by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who will as you know be seeing Mr. Barry and the Taoiseach in Dublin on 31 August. Arrangements are being made for the Prime Minister to be given an account of any significant points which may emerge from Mr. Prior's meeting before she sees Dr. Fitzgerald.

10. I am sending copies of this minute to the Private Secretaries of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and to Sir Robert Armstrong, Sir Antony Acland, Mr. Robert Andrew and Sir Philip Woodfield.

Yours ever

David Goodall

(A.D.S. Goodall)

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