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Prime Minister ✓

I should welcome the opportunity, as suggested in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute to you of 18 June to discuss with you and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on Thursday where we now stand in the Anglo-Irish talks.

2. Sir Robert's minute records the anxiety of the Irish side that I should not go too far, at this stage, towards unveiling the subject matter of the talks to the leaders of the Unionist Parties. I have also seen HM Ambassador's, Dublin reports (Dublin Tel Nos 379-381 of 18 June) expressing the Taoiseach's views. I understand these anxieties. As we have recognised in previous discussions, we need to form some assessment of how the Unionist Parties would react to an agreement, and we shall invite accusations of dealing behind their backs if we keep them in ignorance. On the other hand, we do not, at this stage, want to provoke them to action which will prejudice the negotiations that are still to take place. It is not easy to steer a course between these shoals but I am sure that when I see Messrs Molyneux and Paisley - and I cannot keep them at arm's length - I must open up the topic a little more than hitherto. They will have seen the speculation in the Press about the course which the talks are taking and will surely question me about it. I would not envisage going any further than the line taken in the attached speaking note, and I could possibly get away with saying a little less. But I think that it is just about the minimum that can be said at this stage.

3. They are at present understandably concerned about the renewal of PIRA attacks and the recent deaths of policemen. I want to get them to realise that the only way of bringing about a marked improvement in the security situation is to achieve more effective co-operation with the south. In practice this means in return being willing to take account of the Republic's views.

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4. I am copying this minute and enclosure to Geoffrey Howe and Sir Robert Armstrong.

N. Howard
Private Secretary

19 June 1985

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

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SPEAKING NOTE: ANGLO-IRISH TALKS

1. I recognise your interest in the Government's talks with the Irish Government and I want to give you now some clearer idea of what they are about. Inter-Governmental discussions of this kind must proceed on a confidential basis and I hope that you will treat what I have to say on that basis. (For Mr Molyneaux - on a Privy Counsellor basis.)
2. The principle of an Anglo-Irish dialogue was clearly stated in last November's summit communique. I have made no secret of it ever since. Talks have been progressing steadily but unhurriedly since then.
3. The dialogue has been conducted at both Ministerial and official level. It has had the Prime Minister's full approval. Officials have acted on Ministerial instructions and have reported fully to Ministers. Both I and Geoffrey Howe have been involved because, when it comes to relations with another sovereign Government, the FCO have a clear interest.
4. We have made it absolutely clear to the Irish that there can be no question of derogation of sovereignty or joint authority. Dublin ~~now knows~~^{has} that it cannot ~~expect~~ any executive role in affairs in the north. The talks have been valuable in getting that message across.
5. But what I and Cabinet colleagues recognise (as I am sure you do) is that Dublin has an inevitable interest in events in the north; and that if we can create a framework for the Irish to put their views to us, they are more likely to reach us in a constructive than in a negative form. As I have said in public (eg on 20 January) we are seeking a more methodical basis for the interchange that we have with Dublin over the north. We want to reassure the Irish that we recognise their interest and to ensure that we are fully aware of the viewpoint represented by Dublin's voice.

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6. So that is what the discussions with the Irish are aimed at; devising a framework through which the Irish can be seen to be communicating with us on certain matters in the north, thereby giving greater confidence in the institutions of government to those nationalists who would otherwise be hostile to them.

7. There has been a good deal of speculation on what these matters might be. I do not want to add to it. We do not yet know the shape of any final agreement. But the sort of areas we have been considering are those where we know the minority have a legitimate and particular interest: and where we incidentally need to secure the understanding and support of the Irish.

8. There is, of course, already some contact with the Irish on many of these matters. We are seeing, however, whether we can find an acceptable basis for formalising and regularising it. But what we will not do is hand over or share responsibility for any of it with the Irish.

9. As part of any agreement the Irish would make absolutely clear that they accepted that Northern Ireland ^{will} ~~must~~ remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as the majority wish. That is a valuable - and indeed an essential - element in any arrangement. It offers you the absolute assurance that an agreement cannot be a back-door route to Irish unity against majority wishes.

10. An agreement with the Irish would bring a number of advantages:

- (i) a more favourable environment for fully effective security co-operation with the north;

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- (ii) a recognised means of relaying Northern nationalist views;
- (iii) a closer understanding in the Republic of the realities of government in the north;
- (iv) avoidance of a worsening of the international position which would have implications for security, inward investment and public morale;
- (v) clear acceptance by the Republic of Northern Ireland's status as part of the UK;
- (vi) greater readiness of the SDLP to consider options to political progress within Northern Ireland.

11. On these the first is in my view the most important. The more deeply one analyses the present security situation in Northern Ireland, the more crucial appears the need for stronger co-operation with the south.

12. There can be no guarantee of success. The Taoiseach was not wrong in forecasting a 50/50 chance of success. Agreement is difficult because the Irish would prefer more than we can give them. But that is no reason for breaking off the talks. There is every advantage in reaching an acceptable agreement within the terms laid down last November.

13. There is no set timetable. We will see how discussions progress and be guided by that. But one way or another, I would expect the outcome to be settled later this year.

14. Finally, I should emphasise that this is an east-west arrangement between London and Dublin. It does not commit any future devolved authority in the north on matters which were devolved to that authority. So in the event of devolved government an agreement would have to be reviewed in that light.

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