

Covering SECRET & PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON W1M 0AB

Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

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SECRET AND PERSONAL



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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

26 January 1994



Dear Jonathan,

MINISTERIAL MEETING ON NORTHERN IRELAND, 26 JANUARY

The Prime Minister chaired a meeting of Ministers on 26 January to discuss policy on Northern Ireland. The Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr Michael Ancram MP, Sir Robin Butler, Sir John Chilcot, and Quentin Thomas were present.

The Northern Ireland Secretary described the broad strategy set out in his minute "The Way Forward" of 24 January. He stressed that our strongest weapon against the Provisionals was our alliance with the Irish government.

Joint Declaration

The Prime Minister said that the Joint Declaration had secured wide public support. But, unless we were careful, Sinn Fein's repeated calls for clarification could lead it to fray at the edges, and American support might also diminish. Unionist pressure for action and tighter security measures would build up. We needed to find a way of keeping the initiative. We should also be clear about what we would do in the event of an IRA rejection of the Joint Declaration, or an IRA outrage, which could amount to the same thing.

The meeting discussed how we should counter Sinn Fein's calls for clarification. It was agreed that any attempt to offer clarification would go back on the earlier Government position, and alarm Unionists. If Sinn Fein had really wanted clarification, they would have asked for it privately. Our main aim should be to keep the Joint Declaration intact and ensure that HMG and the Irish government remained firmly at one over it. We should put pressure on Sinn Fein. The Irish government might challenge Sinn Fein, who had not been able to specify what points needed clarification.

SECRET AND PERSONAL

It was agreed that we should reiterate HMG's position on the Declaration as set out in the Northern Ireland Secretary's speeches of 20 and 21 January. It could be made clear that the Joint Declaration remained on the table. It was agreed that we should aim for a joint Irish/British presentation of the Declaration in the US, to help keep the Americans on side.

Mr. Ancram said that, in discussion with him on 24 January, John Hume had accepted that Adams was actually seeking re-negotiation, not clarification. The Prime Minister wondered whether he might be persuaded to say this publicly.

Summing up the discussion, the Prime Minister said that the Northern Ireland Secretary should pursue with Dick Spring at the IGC on 28 January the possibility of an Irish approach to Sinn Fein over clarification, and the idea of a joint presentation in the US. We should aim to keep the Joint Declaration in the forefront of people's mind by a further speech which he or the Foreign Secretary might make in similar terms to those used by the Northern Ireland Secretary on 20-21 January.

Talks process

The Prime Minister said that we should in any event press ahead with the talks process. Mr. Ancram said he believed that all three parties were prepared to sign up in principle to intensified and more focused talks (although the Unionists were unsure, and wanted an assurance that if they did sign up, the talks would make progress). None of the three wanted to move yet to a round table format. Mr. Ancram was therefore working on a "shaded structure" of general areas within the three strands where progress might be made. These might then be pursued by bilaterals between the three parties, the UK and the Irish government. The format could be explored with the Irish government.

The Prime Minister said that we should not be held up by the prevarications of each side in turn. We must be ready with UK proposals if we were unable to relaunch formal talks. The Northern Ireland Secretary had suggested that we should be ready to publish our proposals by Easter at the latest.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said that there should be some flexibility on timing. We had told the Irish Government in September what the joint framework paper, which would be the basis for the three strands, would look like. They would not be taken by surprise. He outlined the ideas in Strand One. These could be worked up and published in a White Paper which was

already on the stocks. Mr. Ancram said that we should give no indication at this stage of our fall-back position because the Unionists would exploit it. We would then risk losing the SDLP and the Irish Government at a stage when we wanted them on board for the talks.

Summing up, the Prime Minister said that Strand One should be fleshed out in case the talks broke down. It might not carry Irish Government support. But we should be prepared to publish our ideas. We should avoid a long hiatus if the talks broke down.

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of 3 strands

Contingency planning

There was some discussion of contingency planning with the Irish Government in the event of a rejection of the Joint Declaration. It was agreed that the Northern Ireland Secretary should pursue his proposals on enhancing cross-border cooperation on security with the Irish Government, and review measures within Northern Ireland, including possible changes to the law, on the lines set out in his minute and the NIO paper of 29 December. These matters should be considered separately at a later stage.

X | The possibility that the Irish Government might call for a referendum north and south of the border if the IRA rejected the declaration was discussed. There was no support for this idea. The presentational benefit would be relatively small. Both extremes in the North would seek to exploit a referendum.

Adams' visa

MS PHILIPPA LESLIE-JONES

An American decision was imminent. The Americans were thinking of making a conditional offer, and we were arguing strongly for stringent terms. It was agreed that we should keep up our pressure. At the same time, we should prepare a public line, in consultation with H.M. Ambassador in Washington, to use in the event of a US decision to grant Adams a visa.

IRA attack

The Prime Minister said that the risk of a spectacular IRA outrage could not be ruled out. We should consider how we should react. It was agreed that a possible public response covering the Joint Declaration, the talks and security should be prepared.

Talks with the Irish Government

The Irish Prime Minister would be coming to the UK for the rugby match on 19 February. The Northern Ireland Secretary had also invited Dick Spring. He thought we should take the opportunity to touch base with the Irish informally. It was agreed that we should explore the possibility of an informal meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach.

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dinner

The Foreign Secretary mentioned that Dick Spring had invited him to talks in Dublin on the future of Europe on 21 February. That would be an opportunity to go over the ground.

I have already circulated a list of action points arising from the meeting.

I am copying this letter to John Sawers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Nick Macpherson (HM Treasury), Joan MacNaughton (Home Office), John Pitt-Brooke (Ministry of Defence) and Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,
Philippa*

MS PHILIPPA LESLIE-JONES

Jonathan Stephens, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.