

SECRET AND PERSONAL



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From the Principal Private Secretary

18 October 1993

cc PS/SofS(B)

PS/PVS(L)

Mr Thomas

Mr Devereux

Mr Cooke

Mr Rickard

Mr Beeton
Mr May.

Dear Jonathan,

**JOINT DECLARATION INITIATIVE:
PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR. MOLYNEAUX**

The Prime Minister saw Mr. Molyneux this afternoon to brief him on the Joint Declaration Initiative. Sir Robin Butler was also present. The meeting was on Privy Council terms and both the Prime Minister and Mr. Molyneux agreed that they would not make public the fact that they had met.

Please could this letter be shown only to those with a direct need to know.

The Prime Minister said he had received an approach from the Irish government, who believed that there was a real chance that PIRA would agree to a cessation of violence if a suitable Joint Declaration between the two governments could be agreed. The Prime Minister had been suspicious of this, but had been encouraged to consider it more seriously because of separate intelligence advice which indicated that PIRA were indeed contemplating a cessation of violence.

He gave Mr. Molyneux a copy of the intelligence assessment for him to read at the meeting. Mr. Molyneux did not dissent from the conclusion, though he noted that there was a long track record of republican movements splintering at critical moments, which might make the full deliverability of a cessation of violence doubtful.

The Prime Minister then showed Mr. Molyneux the latest version of the Joint Declaration. He stressed that it was a document prepared by the Irish Government. It had been modified in the light of points which the British Government had made about the principles which they believed were

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paramount. These included a reiteration of Northern Ireland's constitutional guarantee. The Irish Government believed that with a Declaration such as this, they could deliver an agreement by PIRA to end the armed struggle. The Prime Minister emphasised that the British Government had had no direct or indirect negotiations with PIRA itself in relation to this document.

Mr. Molyneaux read the Declaration. He raised several detailed points on the text, on which the Prime Minister and Sir Robin Butler explained their interpretation, and in particular that there was nothing which committed the British government beyond what it had already agreed to.

Mr. Molyneaux said that, with some personal regret, he had to say that he thought such a Declaration would do more harm than good. He would be failing in his duty if he was not frank. The language in the Joint Declaration was very much based around nationalist and republican texts. He understood that there were qualifications and safeguards, and that it was possible to interpret the text in a way that fully protected the Government's position. But he did not believe it would be possible to get this across in Northern Ireland to those who favoured a continuation of the Union, both Catholics and Protestants. Nor did he think it would be possible to rectify this by phrasing the odd sentence differently. As it stood, the text appeared to favour the Irish government's position, and to favour a united Ireland.

The Prime Minister said he was grateful to Mr. Molyneaux for being so frank. He would now discuss these issues with your Secretary of State and the Foreign Secretary. If, on reflection, Mr. Molyneaux had any further thoughts, the Prime Minister would be glad to receive them. Mr. Molyneaux said he would have a stab at putting down some thoughts which would be acceptable to the unionist side, but which might also appeal to the Irish government.

I am copying this letter to John Sawers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and to Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office).

Yours
Alex

ALEX ALLAN

Jonathan Stephens, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.