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SECRET AND PERSONAL

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**PRIME MINISTER'S TETE-A-TETE MEETING WITH THE
TAOISEACH, DUBLIN CASTLE, FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER**

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach spent the first half hour without note takers. Their discussion included some very frank talk about events which have caused friction in relations over the past few weeks, including the unattributable briefing given by the Taoiseach to the Irish Times (printed on 2 December).

Martin Mansergh and I joined the meeting at 1150. It then ran until about 1300.

The Prime Minister suggested that we should try to agree on the end point. He thought that the common objectives were a permanent cessation of violence and a lasting political settlement. We needed to carry both sides of the community - or at least a majority of them - with us. An agreement would also have to be politically viable for the British and Irish Governments. It would have to be sold to the Cabinet, Parliament and public opinion in each country. He acknowledged that this presented some difficulties for the Taoiseach. There were difficulties also on his side.

The Prime Minister said that things had not gone well in recent days. This had led to considerable frustration on both sides.

The Taoiseach agreed that the joint objective was to find a formula for a cessation of violence; and, at the same time, to create an environment in which the talks process might prosper. It had always been agreed between him and

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the Prime Minister that, during their respective terms in office, they would make a real effort to secure an end to violence. The Prime Minister commented that it would be useful to emphasise that he and the Taoiseach had embarked on their objective from the time of their first meeting at Downing Street - well before the Hume/Adams dialogue.

The Taoiseach agreed. He had given the Prime Minister the first draft of a joint declaration in June. It needed to be acceptable to both Governments and Parliaments. It would also have to command the support of both communities, and to get the paramilitaries on both sides off violence.

The Taoiseach said that these remained as the agreed objectives. However, events along the way had caused annoyance. For example, there had been much concern at the Irish Cabinet meeting on 30 November that his Government had engaged in open exchanges with HMG, and the two Prime Ministers had developed a close relationship, only to discover that the Government did not know of the British exchanges with PIRA. His colleagues had expected that he at least would have been briefed on this. They were particularly dismayed, given that the Irish Government had distanced itself from the Hume/Adams process. There had since been further revelations. The Irish felt let down. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was another problem area. So was the fact that we had received a message telling us that the war was over, but had not passed this on to the Irish security forces. The question had therefore been raised whether the two Governments were as close as they claimed to be. He acknowledged that the Prime Minister had said, courageously, that the channel of communication remained open. Nevertheless, the Irish wondered whether they were caught up in a Dutch auction. Were there two parallel

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processes going on? Publication of the exchanges with PIRA had given the impression that the IRA knew more about what was going on than the Irish Government.

The Prime Minister agreed that this was the time to clear the air. The document conveyed by the Irish Government in June had presented great difficulties for us. Nevertheless, we had continued to discuss it. He still wanted the two Governments to be able to produce an acceptable document. He was prepared to go on trying. Today, tomorrow or next year as necessary.

The Prime Minister said that the IRA's approach in February had come through a secret channel. As the published exchanges showed, we had not entered into a substantive negotiation with them. We had published all the messages which had been passed. There had been no discrepancy with our public position. For security reasons, only a handful of people on the British side had been briefed on these exchanges. He had not briefed the Cabinet as a whole, as this would have put lives at risk. He could hardly discuss things with another Government which he had not discussed with his own Cabinet.

The Prime Minister said that the exchanges had stopped for the time being. PIRA was emitting unhelpful body language. McGuinness had been putting out fabricated stories about meetings. We were certainly not in a Dutch auction. We had only had question and answer exchanges with the IRA, which would have terminated with their entry into exploratory talks.

The Prime Minister said that the Taoiseach had taken some brave decisions. So had we. We had held sensitive talks with the Irish, acknowledged the PIRA

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link, put out the Guildhall Speech, and offered a remarkably short interval between a cessation of violence and the beginning of dialogue. The proposed joint declaration was a risk. It would register advances in our position. If there was no end to violence, it would be said that we had made an offer to the IRA and gained nothing in return, except to raise the base line for the next time.

The Prime Minister said that he was very frustrated about briefing of the Press by the Irish Government. To say, for example, that the British Government had put forward proposals which were "totally unacceptable" would make it harder to sell the joint declaration to Parliament. Suggestions that we were not prepared to take a risk, the line put out on self-determination, and allegations that we had done a deal with the UUP were all extremely unhelpful.

The Prime Minister said that we had now been waiting for a very long time for the Strand 2 paper from the Irish Government. The version which had leaked to the Irish Press had caused an uproar in the North. We still had not received the authorised paper. The Irish had not yet made it possible for our officials to get together.

The Prime Minister said that the only gainers from a rift between the two Governments would be the extremists.

The Taoiseach acknowledged that some of the briefing had come from the Irish Government, though not all of it. As for the leaked document, the Irish had the right to put what they wanted in their paper. They would not have expected it to be acceptable to us. They had been very annoyed when Paisley had quoted

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the Prime Minister as saying that he would boot the document over the roof tops. Downing Street had told the Taoiseach's office that we were rebutting this remark. But we had not done so. This had made the Irish look foolish.

The Taoiseach denied authorship of the speculation about a self-determination formula. This was the Provo line, not his. He knew that it would drive the Unionists bananas. It was not in his interests to do so.

The Taoiseach distinguished between two separate processes. If the violence could be halted, the talks process would have a much better chance. His approach was to try to freeze the position through the peace initiative. The joint declaration did not undermine the position of the British Government or of the Unionists. The only losers from it would be Provisional Sinn Fein. The joint declaration did not incorporate any of their four principal objectives.

The Taoiseach said that the search for a peace formula must not be pushed off course. The Prime Minister said that that was why he had come to Dublin, despite his anger at the suggestions made earlier in the week that the meeting could not go ahead. Had the meeting not happened, it would have pushed the two Governments apart for a long time. The Taoiseach commented that the most important conversation he had had with the Prime Minister had been that on the telephone during the week.

The Prime Minister asked when the Irish would help the talks process to move ahead. The Taoiseach replied that we would receive a paper; the Prime Minister could rest assured about that. The Prime Minister hoped it would come soon. Its absence was holding up the process.

The Taoiseach observed derisively that the Ancram talks were not going anywhere. Jim Molyneaux was writing the script. He wanted to have Strand 1 - and forget the rest.

The Prime Minister refuted this. Ancram was making progress. But we had to carry the Unionists with us, or we would have wasted our time. If he had wanted a safe life, he would not have been talking to the Taoiseach. He could just have said that the Taoiseach represented PIRA's position. He had to take account of the situation in Northern Ireland. But in fact there had never been a time when the British and Irish Prime Ministers and their advisers had been in such close touch.

The Taoiseach said that he had contacts with a wide range of people. He knew that Molyneaux was important. But the Reverend McGee had told him that there was a mood for peace among the paramilitaries.

Turning to PIRA, the Prime Minister asked whether a permanent cessation of violence was attainable. Did we know their bottom line? Was it compatible with our principles? What was the situation within PIRA?

The Taoiseach replied that PIRA's political objectives were well known. However, there was a generational change, which presented opportunities. The leadership wanted a better life for their children. There was a big debate going on. A week or two ago, he would have said there was a good chance of a cessation of violence. He knew that peace had been discussed down to branch level. It wasn't clear whether a power struggle was now taking place. He feared that the hawks might outnumber the doves. Nevertheless, he thought

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there was a mood for peace. If we could not capitalise on this, there was a risk of creating a platform for the next generation of violence.

The Taoiseach said that, as was now well known, Martin Mansergh had acted as a link to people who were in touch with PIRA. This had come out from the bugging of the Clonard (sp?) Monastery. The Prime Minister warned that it would not be profitable to go down that track again. The Taoiseach dismissed this. The Prime Minister should not assume that British intelligence told him what they were up to. Intelligence organisations never did.

Mansergh said the recent events had put PIRA under severe strain. The thought that McGuinness had said that the struggle was over was very damaging. PIRA's highest objective was to hold their own organisation together. They feared that HMG was trying to divide them. They wanted to go in a convoy for peace. Mansergh said that the recent propaganda battle had not gone PIRA's way. They might have thought that they were lobbing a grenade at us, but it had not had this effect.

Mansergh said that PIRA wanted peace on the best terms they could obtain. They felt that they had John Hume with them. They enjoyed wide support in the nationalist community. But they were not being put to the test. They were playing poker.

Mansergh said that PIRA's real interest was in the attitude of the British Government, rather than in proposals simply from the Irish. They thought that the British might just be stringing them and the Irish Government along. They couldn't read the British Government's intentions.

The Prime Minister asked why, if that was the case, PIRA had leaked the first message, forcing us to publish all of the exchanges. And why had they made separate approaches to the British and Irish Governments?

On the second point, the Taoiseach said that PIRA saw Fianna Fail - not the SDLP - as their main political rivals in Ireland. If they were going to opt for a political route, they wanted to expose the present Irish Government as taking a hard line.

On the first of the Prime Minister's questions, Mansergh said the Irish had heard two months ago that the DUP possessed a leaked document. It had gone to Nigel Dodds. Dodds had boasted that the DUP would use it when they could cause maximum damage.

The Prime Minister said that we had no collateral for this. Our own evidence pointed in a different direction. He thought the IRA had leaked the document to try to damage HMG, but had simply got it wrong.

The Taoiseach said that, in order to protect its own position, the Irish Government had put a lot of Republican language into the June document. It had not needed to consult the IRA as it knew their position well. But changes to the paper meant that it now offered a balanced diet. It would be very hard for PIRA to reject the paper.

The Prime Minister asked whether now would be the right time to put forward a joint declaration. The Taoiseach said that he would want to judge this very shortly before the time of release. Mansergh thought that PIRA had made a

psychological decision to opt for peace. We should pin them down. It would be very damaging and demoralising for them to reject an offer and reverse course. The Taoiseach said that evidence from Irish intelligence backed this up.

The Prime Minister said that any document could not be negotiable with PIRA. Mansergh said this was not necessary. They had had plenty of opportunities to put their bids in.

Turning to the Unionists, the Prime Minister said that even among the middle classes there was now much fear and suspicion. The leaked Irish Government paper had given them the impression of a hidden agenda for Pan-Irish structures. They were afraid of being drawn down a slippery slope. The consent principle was no protection against this, as it would only come into effect at the bottom of the slope. By then, it would be too late.

He thought that the sticking points for Unionists were:

- the constitutional guarantee/consent principle/acceptable formula on self-determination;
- avoidance of the slippery slope to joint authority and Pan-Irish structures;
- amendment of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution;
- that the British Government should not become a "persuader" for a United Ireland, or acknowledge its "value".

The Taoiseach said that he had much the same impression. These were not new points. However, he had to say that Articles 2 and 3 were now seen in the Republic as something of a "green herring".

Martin Mansergh said that the fundamental requirements of the Unionists, like the principles of the British Government, were respected in the Joint Declaration.

The Taoiseach said that the points which the Prime Minister had raised really belonged in the talks process rather than in the peace initiative. He acknowledged Unionist fears about not being consulted as they were taken down the road. He thought the Unionists should be consulted. He had always felt that they should have been consulted over the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We were suffering from the legacy of the failure to secure their consent then.

The Prime Minister suggested that the two delegations should meet collectively after lunch to go paragraph by paragraph through the draft Joint Declaration. The Taoiseach agreed.

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