

SECRET and PERSONAL

SPEAKING NOTE

Following the Hume/Adams statement there is now a great deal of public interest in what we know as the Joint Declaration Initiative. In Northern Ireland there is confusion and suspicion about the Government's role but our public line is holding. Hume has now made it clear (and the Irish Government concur) that he will brief the Taoiseach next week after returning from the United States.

2. So far we have engaged in such a way as to enable us to deny active involvement. You agreed with the Taoiseach to authorise exchanges principally through Sir Robin Butler and Dermot Nally, where the British consider proposals and register points of principle. More recently the heads of the Liaison Group have been given some licence to explore language because of its relevance to the overt Talks process.

3. The Hume/Adams demarche, coupled with the latest Irish text (JD.8), means that it may not be possible to maintain our exchanges on that discreet and uncommitted footing. I judge that we need either to disengage or to decide, perhaps initially through officials, on a more active attempt to bring the text to an acceptable form. This is only worth doing if the scheme it contains is acceptable in principle.

4, Engaging and delivering the Joint Declaration, if agreed, carries high risks - publicly, in the party, with the Unionists, and in the House. Much may depend on careful private handling of Mr Molyneaux.

5. On the other hand the prize is very great. The present text (JD.8) does not ask us for very much. I believe we could make further progress on the text to produce something which would

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be an acceptable price for peace. In the short term part of that price would be turbulence in the political development process in Northern Ireland itself. All the Talks participants, for their different reasons, might not be willing to engage actively in the process for some time. Michael Ancram judges, however, that it should not close off his private bilaterals which are now showing promise. It is also relevant that the JDI is the central Irish pre-occupation and that their attitude to the Talks is bound up with it. This may work for good or ill.

6. All the evidence also suggests that the Provisionals wish it to be thought that this is the only available road to peace.

7. Against this background my own judgement is that we should now authorise officials to work actively on drawing up an acceptable version of the Joint Declaration, especially paragraph 4 (and you have seen a possible alternative draft).

7. I suggest that Robin Butler and John Chilcot take this forward with Dermot Nally, but that we authorise Quentin Thomas, who will be in Dublin tomorrow for a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Liaison Group on the Talks to tell O hUiginn that this is what we have decided.

4. The third paragraph is identical to that in JD.7 until the end of the final line which adds "and its relations with the neighbouring island". Again this paragraph is largely apple-pie and the effect of the additional phrase is to give some recognition to a "British dimension". It is broadly consistent with the declared aims of the Talks process. Nonetheless we should seek wording less focussed on Ireland as an entity, and closer to the language of the Statement of 26 March 1991, which launched the Talks.

5. Paragraph 4 has already been commented on separately. The