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- PS/Michael Ancram (L & B) - M Castle
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- PS/Mr Fell - M Castle
- Mr Thomas
- Mr Legge - M Castle
- Mr Bell
- Mr Steele - M Stormont Hse Annex
- Mr Watkins - M Castle
- Mr Williams - M Stormont Hse
- Mr Wood (L & B) - M Castle
- Mr Daniell
- Mr Brooker
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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

21 February 1994

From the Private Secretary

PUS/ 46
22 FEB 1994
N.I.O. LONDON

John Jonathan,

**MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE TAOISEACH,
10 DOWNING STREET, SATURDAY 19 FEBRUARY 1994**

The Prime Minister and your Secretary of State met the Taoiseach and Tanaiste for an hour and a half on the morning of Saturday 19 February, before the England/Ireland Rugby International at Twickenham. The Taoiseach was accompanied by Martin Mansergh, Noel Dorr and Sean O hUiggin. Quentin Thomas and you were also present.

The Prime Minister said that he wanted to clarify where we now stood over the Joint Declaration. The JD had got off to a very good start. It had been widely supported. The Provisionals had not been able to find grounds for rejecting it. They had adopted the tactic of nibbling away through demands for clarification. But the Adams' visit to the United States had been a major setback. It had given Adams tremendous publicity. We needed to counter this.

Adams was clearly trying to buy time, and seemed to be afraid of splitting his movement. Was he buying time in order to have a chance of delivering the right answer? Or was this a tactic to evade a positive outcome? The Provisionals were now putting out smoke signals that they would not come to a conclusion before the middle of March. At a certain point the elastic would snap. The Government was under pressure, from Unionists and from its own backbenchers, to move ahead. We had been fortunate that the pressure had not been even stronger. But whatever happened, we should keep the Joint Declaration on the table: it would remain a foundation stone.

The Taoiseach agreed that the exercise had started well. There had been some perception in Northern Ireland that the Government was leaning towards the Unionists. This had led to suspicions that there were differences between the British and Irish Governments. However, opinion polls showed very wide support for the Joint Declaration in both the North and the South. The

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Provisionals had been put in a position in which it was very difficult for them to reject the Joint Declaration. They had therefore used the tactic of seeking clarification. The Taoiseach had tried to bridge the gap. Recent statements and interviews by Sir Patrick Mayhew had also done a lot to put the Provisionals under pressure. The Taoiseach did not think that Sinn Fein's argument that HMG should join the "persuaders" could provide grounds for them to reject the JD. Their case on the definition of self-determination was a more difficult problem.

The Taoiseach said that all the consultation meetings held by the Provisionals in the South had produced a positive outcome, with one exception. In the North, there were still some hardline areas, such as East Tyrone. However, the Taoiseach did not expect the Provisionals to reject the Joint Declaration. He thought they would find a convoluted way of tying it in with their own peace initiative - perhaps basing themselves on an old Sinn Fein paper "Towards a Lasting Peace". He thought a majority of the Provisionals favoured acceptance. This would not carry the day while there was still a risk of a serious split in the movement. He himself did not want the Provisionals to split again. The last division had brought worse violence in its train. It was essential for the leadership to carry certain people with them.

The Prime Minister said that he saw this point. However, the longer the Provisionals delayed, the less acceptable this would be on the other side. Support for the Joint Declaration both in the UK and in Northern Ireland would diminish. They had indicated that they would give an answer at the time of the Ard Fheis. Now this was shifting backwards. To counter pressure from those who argued that the Joint Declaration was dead and buried, we needed to be seen to be making progress. This was a political reality.

The Taoiseach said that he had never regarded the Ard Fheis as a realistic time for an answer. We shouldn't set a deadline. Sinn Fein held a conference every year.

The Prime Minister enquired about the incendiaries set off in central London overnight. The Taoiseach speculated that they were the work of criminal elements at the margin. There were people who didn't want the initiative to succeed. Loyalist paramilitaries were also running free, and trying to aggravate the situation. The process was happening on both sides. He thought that about two-thirds of the Loyalists were prepared to sit it out, but one-third were not. We had to remember that the IRA worked on a cellular structure.

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The Prime Minister said that it would be hard to persuade people that the incendiaries were a coincidence. Violence and bombs were a serious problem for us in handling the political process. The Tanaiste said that we should deal with this in the framework of our security cooperation.

The Prime Minister said that we needed to demonstrate that we were pursuing the same objectives. We should save our differences for private discussion. He wanted to look at the options for the next stage. Both Governments felt that Sinn Fein should be given a little more time, though the Irish Government would allow them longer than the British. We could not allow anyone, whether Provisional or Loyalist, to hold a veto over talks. We therefore needed to look at the three-stranded talks process. The Prime Minister was very committed to it. We needed the Irish Government's response on the joint framework document, so that the process could move forward. He was not sure why it was taking so long on the Irish side to produce a response on the document. He stressed that we meant a three-stranded approach, not just one-stranded.

The Taoiseach said he was glad to hear this. At times, he had not been sure whether the British Government was pursuing one strand or two, or three. He was totally committed to the three-stranded process. The British Government was asking the Irish to put its position forward: but he was concerned that, when this came out, it could deflect attention from the Joint Declaration. He was also concerned about the Prime Minister's remark that there was pressure to take the Joint Declaration off the table. The Prime Minister said that this was not his own view, but it was a political reality that such pressure existed.

The Taoiseach said that the Irish Government was in a different position from the Parties. The Irish paper would set out the basis on which his Government would be prepared to change the Constitution. It was likely to leak into the press. He stressed that it would be damaging to the Joint Declaration if there was any perception that we were pursuing less than a deep three-stranded process. Work on the Irish document was well advanced. Officials would be able to hold talks on it.

The Prime Minister asked when the Irish paper would be ready.

The Tanaiste said that the Irish first needed clarification on the agenda. They wanted to be sure that we were not talking about the minimalist approach favoured by Jim Molyneaux. This would not solve the problem. There had to be a deep three-stranded process.

Your Secretary of State said that it had been agreed in September that officials would draft a joint working paper ad referendum to Ministers (he quoted the terms agreed then). HMG had taken the lead; but we had never received the views of the Irish Government. The views of Mr. Molyneux were beside the point.

The Taoiseach said that the Irish were doing work on the subject. He had tried to get Molyneux to meet him.

Sir Patrick Mayhew said he did not know precisely why Mr. Molyneux had not wanted to meet the Taoiseach; but further progress should not wait for that. The Prime Minister said that the longer there was delay over the joint framework documents, the greater the pressure on us to show progress on Strand One. After the meeting, we were bound to be asked when the talks would reconvene. The stock answer was getting threadbare. We needed agreement that the Joint Liaison Group would meet soon, and that the Irish Government would produce its ideas.

The Taoiseach said the Irish position was "not that far away". He repeated that the Irish wanted to know what kind of talks were envisaged. This should not be a minimalist approach. The Tanaiste said that the Joint Declaration provided a point of departure. It should be made clear that this was a foundation stone agreed between the two Governments for further talks.

Your Secretary of State said we had no difficulty in defining the Joint Declaration as a foundation stone. It incorporated the fundamental constitutional principles. But it was dangerous to talk of waiting. This suggested that we were holding action in abeyance. It was very important to avoid giving that impression. We needed to show that action, including the talks process, was going ahead. When a version of the Irish paper had leaked in November, the Tanaiste had argued that HMG were dragging their feet over the Joint Declaration. We now had the Joint Declaration, but we did not have the Irish paper.

The Taoiseach claimed to be concerned that the link with the Joint Declaration was being discarded. He referred to a letter from your Secretary of State to Ian Paisley. Sir Patrick Mayhew firmly rebutted the case built on the Paisley letter. The Prime Minister said that we were in danger of beginning to suspect each other's motives again. The Irish Government thought HMG was only interested in Strand One, and wanted to ditch the Joint Declaration. This was not so, and he was happy to make this clear. We, for our part, needed to

know where the Irish stood. It was not essential for them to put their position in writing at this stage, but we needed to discuss it. Nor had the Adams visit to the United States helped matters. As a way of correcting this, he mentioned the possibility of a joint presentation by British and Irish Ministers in the United States. Another option would be a joint article for publication in the UK, Ireland and the USA.

The Taoiseach said he could certainly consider a joint article. Our concern about the United States was misplaced. The message given to Gerry Adams by everyone there had been that he should back the Joint Declaration. As a result, he was now under greater pressure. The Taoiseach did not expect him to get another American visa if he did not accept the Joint Declaration.

Your Secretary of State said that unity between the two Governments was our strongest point. The prize for those opposed to the Joint Declaration would be to separate us. We should therefore find a way of demonstrating our united approach, whether through a presentation, an article or some other means.

The Tanaiste said we should do this when the talks process was further advanced. He was not ruling out the idea, but it needed a clear purpose. The Prime Minister suggested that we should look at an article for the short term, with the possibility of a joint visit later. He mentioned that he might be putting an article of his own into the Irish News shortly.

Boundary Commission and Select Committee

The Taoiseach said that the recommendations of the Boundary Commission looked very suspect, especially when linked to a Select Committee in which the SDLP would be outnumbered by one to four. The Prime Minister said that the Boundary Commission had nothing to do with him - or with the Taoiseach. It was not under Government control. He would take a very robust line if anyone raised the subject with him. It would be constitutionally improper for the Government to interfere.

The Taoiseach said that the Boundary Commission's recommendations would reduce the number of nationalist seats. In Northern Ireland, people knew exactly whether the votes lay. He was talking about the perception which this created, in combination with the composition of the Select Committee.

The Prime Minister hoped that the Taoiseach was not suggesting that he should try to tilt the Boundary Commission. The Taoiseach should make the point publicly that its recommendations were formed independently of Government.

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The Tanaiste said that he was aware of this. However, Northern Ireland differed from other places. This was where gerrymandering came from. The Prime Minister said it was important to lay this to rest. To speak in those terms in public would be explosive. We should both make clear in public that the Boundary Commission was independent.

Martin Mansergh said that, nevertheless, two nationalist seats were being collapsed into one. The Prime Minister asked what Mansergh recommended he should do about this.

Your Secretary of State said he could do nothing about the Commission. He had advised John Hume to make his point through the process of representations and local inquiries. It would not be helpful to create a perception of a conspiracy.

The Taoiseach reverted to the balance of the Select Committee.

Your Secretary of State said this was a matter for the House of Commons. By convention, the government had a majority on Select Committees. The SDLP's links with the Labour Party were also relevant.

Conclusion

The Prime Minister asked if the Irish side had any more points to raise. Did they have concerns about the "notions" checklist. Your Secretary of State explained the background. To avoid surprises, he had told the Tanaiste in advance that he would be putting forward a checklist.

The Tanaiste said that the paper contained only one minor reference to the Joint Declaration. It should have been anchored in the Joint Declaration. The Joint Declaration had been widely supported and provided a strong foundation. Our aim should be to get all parties on board while the train was moving slowly out of the station. He said that he was concerned about Mr. Molyneaux's position.

The Prime Minister suggested language for the two sides to use when speaking to the press. They could make clear that work would now go ahead on the talks process. In the course of a short discussion on the press line, this point was agreed. O hUiggin made a last minute attempt to argue the toss. He demanded to know what the relationship would be between the future talks and

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Michael Ancram's round. Your Secretary of State said that each party had agreed to see Michael Ancram. The Taoiseach said it had never been envisaged that Ancram's talks would cover all three Strands. O hUigin went further: Ancram's talks were a "total departure" from the procedure agreed last March. It needed to be made clear that the real basis of the talks was to build on the work of the Joint Declaration. Your Secretary of State replied that we had no problem in treating the talks process and Joint Declaration as complementary. The Prime Minister summed up that it was agreed that the Liaison Group should meet before the 10 March IGC.

For completeness I attach the transcript of the joint doorstep in Downing Street which followed the meeting. (already circulated)

Yours ever,

Roderic

RODERIC LYNE

Jonathan Stephens Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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