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SECRET AND PERSONAL



10 DOWNING STREET
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15 November 1993

From the Private Secretary

Dear Jonathan,

MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH, 12 NOVEMBER

I would be grateful if this letter and its enclosures could be given a strictly limited circulation.

This letter is to supplement the oral account of my visit to Dublin on the evening of 12 November which I have given to you and to others. With our Ambassador, I had a long, and at times fairly heated, discussion with the Taoiseach, until 9.15pm; followed by about three hours of further discussion and argument over dinner with Martin Mansergh (Political Adviser to the Taoiseach) and Sean OhUiginn. I enclose the Ambassador's comments and summary of the discussion.

I stressed that the purpose of my visit was not to negotiate or go into the substance of the Joint Declaration. I had been sent to deliver the Prime Minister's letter; to explain the thinking which lay behind it; to underline the importance which the Prime Minister attached to cooperation with the Irish government and to his personal relationship with the Taoiseach; and to correct the misapprehension that we had definitively rejected the Joint Declaration approach. On the latter point, I said that Sir Robin Butler had described the many difficulties which we saw in the Joint Declaration, especially as a result of Hume/Adams. We had as great an interest as anyone in a cessation of violence, but had to be sure that any proposals were viable, and were not likely to lead Northern Ireland into even greater difficulties. Sir Patrick Mayhew would be seeing Archbishop Eames on the following day. The Prime Minister was then due to have a meeting with the Archbishop. He and other Ministers concerned would need to consider very carefully the proposals made by the Irish government. This was likely to take us about a week. We would then be able to send our definitive response. That, effectively, was how matters were left at the end of the evening.

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The key points from the Irish side were as follows:

- the Taoiseach had been working on this approach from the time he took office. It had now reached the point where a decision was needed. The Irish wanted a straight answer from us, and very quickly. There was an unprecedented window of opportunity. Time was of the essence. Every day counted. To give no answer would be the same as to say no;
- the Irish were not asking HMG to concede any points of principle. It was just a matter of words. Moreover, Archbishop Eames was very happy with the text. If he judged that it was acceptable to the Unionists, and was prepared to speak up in support of it, how could it not be good enough for the British Government? Eames had been assured by an authoritative source that, if PIRA violence stopped, 90-95% of Loyalist violence would stop within seven days. Separately, the Irish had heard via Alderdice that Molyneaux was aware of what was afoot and was prepared to acquiesce passively;
- we could not expect PIRA to surrender unconditionally. We needed to understand their ideology. They could not simply give up. They had to have something to show to their supporters in return for the years of struggle and sacrifice. (Comment: this implicitly contradicted the suggestion that we were merely asked to sign up to "just words");
- the Taoiseach would not pass up this historic opportunity. If we did not join him, he would go it alone. He was prepared to stake his own future on it;
- the Irish now considered the JDI to be the only available road to peace. No-one could take seriously the notion that Michael Ancram's talks might lead to peace;
- in Brussels, the Taoiseach had agreed to set aside the Hume/Adams dialogue, although this had led him into much political trouble at home. This was because it was his understanding from the Brussels meeting that HMG had agreed to go ahead with the Joint Declaration Initiative, once it was distanced from Hume/Adams and subject to some further work (including consultation with Archbishop Eames);

- the Prime Minister had no conceivable reason to be surprised at the Irish reaction to the Butler/Nally meeting. It was the Irish who were surprised by HMG's behaviour. We had not adhered to the commitment in the joint statement to work for a "framework for peace, stability and reconciliation". Instead, British Ministers and spokesmen had placed their emphasis on the talks process. The line taken by the British side at the 10 November meeting had shown irrefutably that we had gone back on the Brussels understanding and shut the door on the JDI. (In Mansergh's phrase: "You took Albert for a ride in Brussels and then hung him out to dry".) Sir Robin Butler had said that nothing had changed since before the Brussels meeting;
- my attempts to suggest that, especially as a result of Hume/Adams, there were real difficulties over the JDI were the evasions to be expected from a diplomat, and merely confirmed the line taken by Sir Robin Butler. Likewise, the Irish could not give credence to my suggestion that British Ministers could not be in the position of bargaining through the Irish government with Sinn Fein/PIRA. So long as we were not talking directly to the IRA, we were abiding by our public commitments. It was offensive of me to suggest that talking to the Irish government could also be politically delicate. Was I equating them with the IRA?

This was accompanied by a fair amount of recrimination about our alleged hostile briefing of the press, and denials that anything had been said or done on the Irish side which departed from the Brussels position. OhUiginn delivered ponderous and theological lectures about nationalist philosophy (and our inability to understand it) at intervals during the evening, beginning in the Taoiseach's office. A more revealing line from OhUiginn, uttered with even greater frequency, was that "Albert is a bottom-line man".

Conclusion

The Irish government's present objective manifestly is to apply the maximum pressure through all channels on us to endorse the Joint Declaration Initiative and let them go ahead with it as quickly as possible. The more theatrical side of the Taoiseach's performance was designed to enhance that pressure. Underlying this, there appears to be a blinkered belief by Reynolds in his initiative which leads him to ignore potential pitfalls or reservations expressed by others. He has treated the amber light shown by Eames as green. In his excitement, perhaps, he has taken no account of the warnings of

qualifications conveyed by the Prime Minister in Brussels. Our refusal to give him an instant and almost unqualified yes last week has now made him highly suspicious, and perhaps minded to treat future requests from us as wrecking amendments. OhUiginn is feeding this suspicion assiduously. Reynolds' preparedness to go down with his guns blazing is a danger.

The Irish deadline was expressed in various forms. At some moments, Reynolds suggested that he would go ahead unilaterally if we did not sign up within a week. More seriously, he focused on the 3 December summit as the time to bring the Initiative to a head. But Mansergh recalled the terms of Reynolds' speech to his party conference, in which he had said that it should be possible to determine by the end of the year whether there was going to be peace.

Mansergh seemed to attach little importance to the length of a firebreak. If there was a cessation of violence, Sinn Fein would be able to enter immediately into exchanges with the Irish government (through the Convention?). This would satisfy the immediate need.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Sawers, Sir David Gillmore and Sir Timothy Daunt (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and to Sir Robin Butler and to H.M. Ambassador, Dublin.

*yours ever,
Roderic*

RODERIC LYNE

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Northern Ireland Office.