

SECRET



File M
SECRET (a-d)
MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

Filed on:

From the Private Secretary

4 December 1991

Dear Tony

**PRIME MINISTER'S TALK WITH THE
IRISH PRIME MINISTER: 4 DECEMBER**

I am recording separately the plenary talks between the Prime Minister and Mr. Haughey in Dublin today. This letter records the preceding prior conversation at which Dermot Nally and I were present.

After allowing the Prime Minister a brief reference to the EC Intergovernmental Conferences, Mr. Haughey launched into the subject he most wanted to talk about: Northern Ireland. Twenty years on, he said, both governments had put enormous resources into combatting violence but we were getting nowhere. The IRA were still capable of carrying on, and doing much damage. Mr. Haughey's major objective was to bring violence to an end. He thought that the two governments could probably succeed. Gerry Adams was tired of the violence and wanted out. Mr. Haughey and Mr. Hume were keeping in close touch. The suggestion was that if the two governments could put out a strong statement it would have an enormous impact on Adams and his cohorts.

The Prime Minister said that he had a general inkling of this idea from a conversation he had had with John Hume. He wondered what the substance would be. Both governments were frequently making statements on violence but those did not stop the violence taking place. What would be new this time? What guarantees would there be that the violence would stop for more than a moment? The prize of stopping the violence was a very real one, especially as those engaged in the tit-for-tat violence of the last few months were increasingly well organised. But he wondered whether we could say anything that would have any lasting effect and not simply weaken our position vis-a-vis the terrorists.

Mr. Haughey said that the sort of statement he had in mind would build on the recent very good statement by Mr. Brooke making clear that the British Government had no economic or military interests in being in Northern Ireland and would honour the decisions of the Irish people. If we could now go a bit further than that that would lead to a decision by the IRA to stop the violence. The Loyalists were simply modelling themselves on PIRA and had said that they would stop if PIRA stopped. He hoped that officials in both governments could work on such a statement.

SECRET

The Prime Minister said some commitments were unbreakable. Mr. Brooke's statement had incorporated Article I of the Anglo-Irish agreement, namely our commitment to respect the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We could not break that. It would also be impossible for us to enter into direct discussions with the Provisional IRA. The Prime Minister was not at all clear what could be said. Mr. Haughey said that he was not clear either but he would take Mr. Brooke's statement and go a bit further, but not necessarily breaking any existing commitment. The statement would make clear that the British Government was not standing in the way of the people of Ireland.

The Prime Minister asked what such a statement would buy. Mr. Haughey said that he was being told by John Hume and by a number of clerics that it would buy an end to the violence. Adams was prepared to use his influence with the IRA. He repeated that the basis would be Mr. Brooke's statement - perhaps going a bit further. He could not spell out what the statement should be but we should work on it.

The Prime Minister said that on the assumption that a statement could be worked out which incorporated our unbreakable guarantees and assuming (which seemed unlikely) that that created a framework in which the Provisionals gave up the violence and the Loyalists reciprocated, what would happen then?

Mr. Haughey said there were lots of alternatives. We could arrange another all-Ireland forum or a national convention to decide on future structures. There were endless possibilities. In response to a question from the Prime Minister, Mr. Haughey said the difference between what he was suggesting and the existing inter-governmental conference was that all the parties might be involved. The Prime Minister said that we would have to think through all these implications before we drafted any statement. There would be huge and dark suspicions. What Mr. Haughey was suggesting posed many difficult questions which did not have obvious answers. To embark and fail would be unforgivable and damaging. He was not unsympathetic to the principle if the prize was grabbable but he was a bit sceptical whether the prize was there. We had had previous indications that the IRA might be willing to give up violence but they had proved groundless. Individuals had got tired but others were ready to take up the cause.

Mr. Haughey said he had never made a proposal of this kind before. He was only doing it because he did detect a sea change. He thought a statement of the kind he had proposed would be followed by a political process.

The Prime Minister said that perception in Britain was not of any slackening in PIRA activity - quite the reverse, eg. the planned attack on the Blues and Royals in which the would-be bombers had been blown up. The impression we had was that PIRA was well-financed and organised with active service units on the continent and mainland Britain and still pursuing the goal of violence quite savagely. Mr. Haughey said that in a way that was true. Indeed, that was the joint assessment of the two governments. But there was a change on the political side. The

The Prime Minister said some commitments were unbreakable. Mr. Brooke's statement had incorporated Article I of the Anglo-Irish agreement, namely our commitment to respect the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. We could not break that. It would also be impossible for us to enter into direct discussions with the Provisional IRA. The Prime Minister was not at all clear what could be said. Mr. Haughey said that he was not clear either but he would take Mr. Brooke's statement and go a bit further, but not necessarily breaking any existing commitment. The statement would make clear that the British Government was not standing in the way of the people of Ireland.

The Prime Minister asked what such a statement would buy. Mr. Haughey said that he was being told by John Hume and by a number of clerics that it would buy an end to the violence. Adams was prepared to use his influence with the IRA. He repeated that the basis would be Mr. Brooke's statement - perhaps going a bit further. He could not spell out what the statement should be but we should work on it.

The Prime Minister said that on the assumption that a statement could be worked out which incorporated our unbreakable guarantees and assuming (which seemed unlikely) that that created a framework in which the Provisionals gave up the violence and the Loyalists reciprocated, what would happen then?

Mr. Haughey said there were lots of alternatives. We could arrange another all-Ireland forum or a national convention to decide on future structures. There were endless possibilities. In response to a question from the Prime Minister, Mr. Haughey said the difference between what he was suggesting and the existing inter-governmental conference was that all the parties might be involved. The Prime Minister said that we would have to think through all these implications before we drafted any statement. There would be huge and dark suspicions. What Mr. Haughey was suggesting posed many difficult questions which did not have obvious answers. To embark and fail would be unforgivable and damaging. He was not unsympathetic to the principle if the prize was grabbable but he was a bit sceptical whether the prize was there. We had had previous indications that the IRA might be willing to give up violence but they had proved groundless. Individuals had got tired but others were ready to take up the cause.

Mr. Haughey said he had never made a proposal of this kind before. He was only doing it because he did detect a sea change. He thought a statement of the kind he had proposed would be followed by a political process.

The Prime Minister said that perception in Britain was not of any slackening in PIRA activity - quite the reverse, eg. the planned attack on the Blues and Royals in which the would-be bombers had been blown up. The impression we had was that PIRA was well-financed and organised with active service units on the continent and mainland Britain and still pursuing the goal of violence quite savagely. Mr. Haughey said that in a way that was true. Indeed, that was the joint assessment of the two governments. But there was a change on the political side. The

IRA recognised that they were in a stalemate and were getting nowhere. There was certainly a sea change in Gerry Adams' attitude.

The Prime Minister said that we must look most privately at whether any wording could be agreed. In the light of that discussion we could then decide whether there was any basis for going ahead. He must, however, confess to doubts as to whether we could succeed. We had to (i) retain the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland, (ii) ensure that others believed that matters were being looked at equitably, (iii) come up with a declaration that would be persuasive enough to stop the violence. That was quite a three card trick. He had no objection to looking at wording in the very smallest of groups.

Mr. Haughey said the contacts would be office to office. He fully understood Mr. Major's scepticism but we would have to try. The prize was so great and the awfulness of the present violence so real. The Prime Minister said that Mr. Haughey must be clear that any statement would have to reaffirm as a basic point that any solution must carry the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Mr. Haughey said that he accepted that. That was common sense at this stage of the game. The Prime Minister said our commitment was unbreakable. He could not move from it. He was surprised that Mr. Haughey thought that any statement made on that basis would be acceptable to the Provisional IRA. Mr. Haughey said that nonetheless he believed that it would be. It was not just Mr. Hume who was involved, but a number of clerics with influence who were active as well. There was a mood on the Republican side for something to be done. No harm could come of our exploring the possibilities.

The Prime Minister said that if there was a mood for abandoning violence why were the Provisionals making things more difficult for us by stepping up their campaign? Mr. Haughey said that that was their psychology. They always wanted to prove their machismo. The Prime Minister commented that it took two to tango. If you were blown to smithereens you were unlikely to dance. The Provisionals should not assume that we had gone soft on terrorism. Mr. Haughey agreed. We must none of us ever give that impression.

Mr. Haughey said that the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was going all right but it was running out of steam. It was ticking over and not really getting anywhere. The Irish side would like to broaden it to see how the Single Market would affect co-operation between the two governments. The Prime Minister said he was happy to do that. He thought we should contemplate more regular meetings between the two leaders, perhaps with Mr. Brooke and Mr. Collins present to look at a range of interests, international, bilateral and Ireland matters as well as matters affecting the United Nations where we both had interests at stake.

Mr. Haughey said this was a very good idea.

It was agreed that Mr. Nally and Sir Robin Butler would examine the scope for a declaration on the basis set out above.

Just the two of them should discuss the issue and they should then report without any commitment to the two heads of government.

I am copying this letter to Richard Gozney (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and to Sir Robin Butler.

Jans,
Stephen

J. S. WALL

Tony Pawson, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office