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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

2 December 1993

London SW1A 2AH

Dear Roderic,

Foreign Secretary's Meeting with the Irish Foreign Minister,
Brussels, 2 December

Summary

The Foreign Secretary sets out our difficulties over the language in the Joint Declaration and the Taoiseach's idea for an All-Ireland Convention. Explains in detail why carrying Molyneux with the process is essential.

Spring shows awareness of why Hume/Adams is neuralgic for us and a willingness to look at the Convention idea again. Accepts the importance of carrying Molyneux with the process. Unconvincing on the link between a Joint Declaration and a cessation of violence by PIRA.

For tomorrow's Summit, Mrs Geoghan-Quinn will be involved.

Detail

The Foreign Secretary had a 20 minute bilateral with the Irish Foreign Minister in Brussels on 2 December at 1730. The meeting was at Spring's initiative.

HMG/PIRA Contacts

Spring began by complaining about the messages between HMG and PIRA. While they thought such contacts might exist they were taken aback by the amount of detail and the exchanges of document. He claimed the Irish Government had been open about their activities and were conscious that Hume/Adams was unacceptable because of its origins. They were therefore hurt by the revelations of the last week. He thought the response in the House of Commons on Monday had been remarkable and moved the debate onto a new plane. He hoped the basis existed to make real progress with an agreement over the course of the next few weeks.



The Foreign Secretary said he had known about the contacts with PIRA. They had not dealt with substantive matters, only with the cessation of violence. In the end, we were saying nothing to PIRA in private that we were not already saying in public. There was no question of marginalising Dublin.

Joint Declaration

On the substance, the Foreign Secretary explained again why the Hume/Adams initiative was unacceptable for the majority in the North. But the same did not apply to a Joint Declaration. Our difficulty on the latter was that the balance in the present draft was wrong. The language was heavily loaded and oriented towards the Republican approach. We knew, equally, that the Taoiseach did not like our own draft. But both were on the table and both should be discussed.

Spring agreed, but warned that the Taoiseach attached much more weight to his document which had been in preparation for six months. This included input from Archbishop Eames and sought to reflect the views of all communities. (The Foreign Secretary warned that we were not receiving the same account of Eames' attitude towards the Joint Declaration as Dublin.) Spring went on to say that, with some imagination, he felt a document could be put together which brought an end to violence. The Foreign Secretary questioned the basis on which this was asserted. In answer to Spring's question about attitudes within PIRA, he said that we believed there had been a considerable row about the cessation of violence and that the negative side was gaining the upper hand: they were certainly trying to destroy the evidence of their willingness to end violence contained in their first message. Spring acknowledged this point.

The Foreign Secretary said that the concept of the Convention was also causing problems. We knew the Taoiseach was wedded to it. But no Unionist would give it the time of day. Spring said the aim of the Convention idea had been to create a forum for Sinn Fein to enter Constitutional politics much earlier than they would be able to under the All-Party talks. If the Convention was a key obstacle to us in the Joint Declaration, then it could be looked at again.

Molyneaux

The Foreign Secretary said he wanted to explain Molyneaux's position. He was a crucial figure, not because of arithmetic in the House of Commons, but because of his position in Northern Ireland. It was one thing to take on the DUP: it was quite another to fail to carry with the process

the leader of the mainstream Unionist community. Molyneaux's position had moved, mainly by being silent while Paisley fulminated. If Molyneaux had come out against, the process would have gone into deep freeze. He was deeply shocked by the ideas circulating but his native caution and some skilful work on our part had kept him with the process thus far. He was reasonably trustful of HMG and his attitude to the Irish Government had become more positive. But he remained suspicious of Hume, not least for the way Hume had disrupted the three-strand approach.

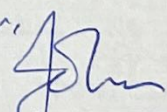
Spring readily agreed that Molyneaux had to be carried with the process and referred to his own efforts to achieve that. He also referred to a statement in the Irish press today from Martin MacGuinnis, in which he expressed a willingness to meet Molyneaux (Spring was rather confusing on this point). He went on to argue that PIRA, too, had moved: they had accepted the need for Constitutional change in the South and our position on the guarantee to the majority in the North.

Arrangements for the 3 December Summit

In a brief discussion of the programme for the Anglo-Irish Summit, Spring said that the Irish Minister of Justice would also be involved, making it three Ministers on each side. Spring agreed on the advantage of having some meetings in plenary, especially at the start and over lunch. The Taoiseach was committed to this being only the first of a series of meetings.

The Foreign Secretary said the Summit could be taken up with arguments about presentation. We knew the Taoiseach was steamed up about the Panorama programme. For our part, we were concerned about articles in the Irish press today. We could spend a lot of time, fruitlessly, on these issues. Spring was reassuring: the Irish aim was entirely serious, it was too important to be otherwise. They had no ulterior motive other than to end the violence and normalise trade and economic arrangements.

I am copying this letter to Jonathan Stephens (NIO) and Melanie Leech (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

(R J Sawers)
Principal Private Secretary

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