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From the Private Secretary

1 December 1993

**DUBLIN SUMMIT, 3 DECEMBER:
ON/OFF/ON?**

Summary

After an exercise in brinkmanship by the Irish side, which threatened the Dublin summit and the future of the Joint Declaration initiative, the Taoiseach agreed late on 30 November to hold a working summit on 3 December with a very short concluding statement. The aim of the summit would be to carry forward discussions on the Joint Declaration text, with reference also to the British draft; but completion of this work was not a pre-condition, and we did not expect to reach a conclusion on 3 December. We would instead indicate that we expected to hold a further meeting before Christmas for this purpose.

The Taoiseach, whose preference was to postpone the summit for a cooling down period, will have to seek the Tanaiste's agreement overnight, before confirming to us on the morning of 1 December that arrangements and an announcement may go ahead.

We shall need early advice on whether the summit should be preceded by a meeting between officials.

Busy readers stop here.

Detail

The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach reached virtual agreement on 29 November, subject to approval by the Irish Cabinet, that they would hold a working summit in Dublin on 3 December.

While the Irish Cabinet was in session on the morning of 30 November, we received messages through different channels that feelings were running high against the UK. The Tanaiste was said to be incensed that we had run a channel of communication to PIRA, and had apparently been prepared to

sideline the Irish government if this channel produced results. Other Cabinet members reportedly regarded us as duplicitous on a number of counts. They believed that the document leaked to the Observer had come from a British source. They believed that British intelligence had briefed Panorama against the Taoiseach and Martin Mansergh. They were suspicious about press reports that British intelligence had bugged the Hume/Adams talks.

When I telephoned the Taoiseach's Private Secretary to ask if the way was clear for the Prime Minister to announce the summit at Prime Minister's Questions, he said that the Taoiseach could not agree to this, but was having trouble in clearing the proposal with his Cabinet.

After the Cabinet meeting, Sean o hUiggin was deputed to convey the Irish government's position to HM Ambassador. This was that the Taoiseach would go ahead with a summit on Friday if, and only if, the Irish Joint Declaration text was to be the product of the meeting. o hUiggin said that there had been a long and unhelpful Cabinet discussion. The Cabinet had considered that the Irish government had been open with us, while we had acted under the table. They had seen our action in producing a new text late in the day as meaning that we were not serious about the exercise.

On the Prime Minister's instructions, I advised the Taoiseach's Private Secretary that the Irish government should reconsider this message before we took official cognisance of it, and certainly before there was any question of the two principals speaking on the telephone. We could not accept an ultimatum. The Joint Declaration was not acceptable as it stood. If the Irish stood by this position, they would be torpedoing the peace initiative. We should not allow ourselves to be blown off this course by a series of accidents and misperceptions. The consequences would be very damaging in all areas.

You passed a parallel message to the Tanaiste's Private Secretary.

In the early evening, Martin Mansergh rang back on the Taoiseach's instructions. We spoke for about an hour. His tone, as he himself described it, was studiously non-abrasive. He spoke without interruption for about the first 20 minutes. He spent this time climbing down the ladder. Without boring you with the details, he said that he was relaxed about Panorama; half-apologised for the abrasive tone taken by others; and blamed PIRA, not us, for the weekend's events ("a propaganda exercise which backfired on them"). He praised your Secretary of State's performance in the House and the Government's "brave" statement that we would keep the channels of communication open. And much else in this conciliatory vein.

Mansergh's substantive argument was that it might be best to let the dust settle before holding the summit (he acknowledged that this contradicted earlier Irish pressure to meet on 3 December). The Irish government were not sure that the Joint Declaration would take the trick if we issued it now. They thought PIRA might be too disoriented to reach any decision.

We discussed the respective drafts. I said that our text had been intended as a genuinely positive response, containing much of the substance of the JD. As far as we were concerned it was still on the table. We would wish to refer to it in any discussions. We were also prepared to work on the basis of the draft Joint Declaration but would need changes, some of which were to important points. I reminded Mansergh of the Prime Minister's exchange with the Taoiseach about the Irish Convention. Mansergh said that Dublin had not viewed the Convention with a lot of enthusiasm, but John Hume attached great importance to it. I replied that the leaked Irish paper had made the Convention unsaleable to Unionists. (Mansergh confessed that he had not read the leaked paper.) I told Mansergh, as I had earlier told Calum Butler, that since the Prime Minister's telephone call we had been working hard and had made some progress.

Mansergh at first maintained that the Taoiseach had effectively taken our text off the table in his conversation with the Prime Minister. I said that we could not accept this. We might not have to push our text, but we could not withdraw it ahead of a proper discussion.

I said to Mansergh that, if we were eventually able to reach agreement on a text, it would have to be put forward as a final position - in effect on a take it or leave it basis. The text could not be open for negotiation with PIRA. This would not only be a grave tactical error, but anything which smacked of negotiation, even by proxy, would contravene our stated position and assurances. The two governments would have to make their best judgement on acceptability to different sides of the community. We would of course aim for something which took both tricks, as the Prime Minister had said, but had to accept that there could be no guarantee of success.

Mansergh and I agreed to put two options to our principals - for a working meeting this Friday or for postponement. The Prime Minister opted for the former. The Taoiseach's preference was for the latter. After further consultation, he agreed that we should hold a working summit this Friday. We would not aim for a substantive communique expressing positions of principle. The outcome would be a short statement recording that we had made progress during the day, were continuing to work together, and hoped to bring the

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exercise to a successful conclusion at another meeting of the two Prime Ministers in the near future. It was understood that the aim was to hold this second meeting (ie to reach agreement) before Christmas. The European Council at Brussels (9-11 December) might possibly provide the venue, but was more likely to offer a check-point, as we expected to need a little more time. It was also agreed that discussion at the summit would essentially be on the basis of the Irish draft Joint Declaration, but on the explicit understanding that points might be imported from the British text.

Before going firm on this agreement, the Taoiseach would have to speak to the Tanaiste very late on 30 November. The Irish side would telephone us before 11am on 1 December to confirm that the summit could be announced. Despite the difficulties raised earlier in the day by the Tanaiste, Mansergh sounded confident of securing the final green light.

We did not define whether the summit should be preceded by a preparatory meeting on the texts between officials. You will wish to consider the pros and cons of this with the Cabinet Secretary. I should be grateful for early advice.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Sawers (FCO), Joan MacNaughton (Home Office), John Pitt-Brooke (MOD), Jeremy Heywood (HM Treasury) and Melanie Leach (Cabinet Office).

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