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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 July 1984

NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your letter of 26 July enclosing Robert Andrew's note of his discussion on 19 July with the Irish Ambassador.

The Prime Minister has read the note with interest. She notes that Mr Dorr still appears to harbour the hope that joint authority will somehow be acceptable to us. She hopes that further efforts will be made to convince him that it is not.

I am copying this letter to Len Appleyard (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office), Sir Anthony Acland, Mr David Goodall, Sir Philip Woodfield, Robert Andrew and Graham Angel.

N/O

N/O

N/O

Charles Powell

Graham Sandiford, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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COPY LIST OF MR SANDIFORD'S LETTER TO MR BUTLER DATED 26 July

Copy No 1 Mr Butler (only copy with enclosure)
2 Mr Appleyard
3 Mr Hatfield
4 Sir Antony Acland
5 Mr David Goodall
6 Sir Philip Woodfield
7 Mr Robert Andrew
8 Mr Graham Angel
9 File

All with enclosure



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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

1. Mr. Powell C.D.P. 27/7
2. Prime Minister

F E R Butler Esq
Principal Private Secretary
to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

26 July 1984

Dear Robin,

NORTHERN IRELAND

Attached is a copy of a note by Robert Andrew of a discussion he had on 19 July with the Irish Ambassador. The Secretary of State has commented that he considers this to be a particularly accurate and well expressed account of the current position, and that he would be grateful if it could be drawn to the attention of the Prime Minister.

Copies of this letter go to Len Appleyard and Richard Hatfield, to Sir Antony Acland, Mr David Goodall and Sir Philip Woodfield, and to Robert Andrew and Graham Angel here.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Sandiford

G K SANDIFORD

Encl

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PUS/L/505/MLR

PS/Secretary of State (L)

cc Mr Brennan O/R
Mr AngelDISCUSSION WITH IRISH AMBASSADOR - 19 JULY 1984

1. I had a long discussion with the Irish Ambassador, Mr Noel Dorr, over lunch yesterday in an attempt to clear up some of the points which were evidently still worrying him at the end of his meeting with the Secretary of State on the previous day.

2. The discussion went over some of the ground already covered with the Secretary of State and was thus somewhat repetitive. As I understand it, there are three main points of concern;

a. Uncertainty about what HMG's policy now is on the 'Irish dimension' and suspicion that we do not fully appreciate the importance of what the Irish are trying to do;

b. A belief that the Secretary of State's views are somehow different from those being expressed by Sir Robert Armstrong on the Prime Minister's authority; and

c. A fear that the Secretary of State's talks with party leaders in the North will somehow undermine the Armstrong/Nally talks.

3. Dorr said that the Irish Government was reasonably pleased with the Secretary of State's speech in the Forum Debate on 2 July, and in particular welcomed the fact that his carefully

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chosen words had not ruled out the possibility of the British Government accepting the third of the Forum Report's models (joint authority) as a basis for further discussion. But in a subsequent interview with RTE Mr Prior had indicated that all three models were unacceptable; and he now seemed to be concentrating on trying to establish a system of government in the North in which the Irish dimension would play only a minor part. Dorr thought that there was "all the difference in the world" between this attempt, which was similar to those which had been going on over the years, and the very important new initiative which was being contemplated in Dublin. Mr Prior seemed to have been warning him on 18 July that the Prime Minister and other colleagues were not prepared for a major initiative. He wondered whether the British Government fully appreciated the magnitude of what the Irish Government was offering; it would be putting its very existence at stake in a referendum on Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. The Government would not be able to face the political challenge involved in a constitutional referendum without a very large quid pro quo in terms of joint authority "or something like it". Moreover, the quid pro quo would have to be "transparent", both to reverse the alienation of the nationalists in the North and to make constitutional change acceptable in the South. For this purpose a large and dramatic gesture was required; it was not enough to talk of proceeding cautiously, step by step. It would take time to reach agreement between the two governments on what actually the dramatic gesture was to be; but the chance of success would be prejudiced if the parties in the North meanwhile took up entrenched positions as a result of their talks with Mr Prior and with each other. The Irish Government had no confidence in the ability of the parties in the North to reach agreement on their own. The Irish preference was still that the two governments should establish a joint study of principles as a framework within which all the parties (ie the two governments and the parties in the North) could then seek a solution.

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4. In reply I said that I hoped the Irish Government had not got the wrong message from the Secretary of State's Forum speech. In deference to urgent requests by Mr Barry and Dorr himself the Secretary of State had indeed used a form of words which did not entirely close the door on the concept of joint authority. But it remained the position of HMG that joint authority as defined in the Forum Report or in the proposals put forward by Nally in May was unacceptable. We could see no way in which sharing with the Irish Government matters such as the control of security forces and the appointment of members of an Executive could be compatible with the maintenance of UK sovereignty over Northern Ireland. I emphasised that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State were at one on this and added that I understood the Prime Minister had made the point to the Taoiseach when they met at Fontainbleu. I had not yet seen the record of Armstrong's talk with Nally on 16 July, but I understood that he too had made it quite clear that a joint authority solution was not acceptable and had proposed instead an Irish dimension based on consultation.

5. I went on to say that a consultative arrangement, which we envisaged would be systematised or institutionalised in some way, would be a very large step for a British Government to take, recognising as it would formally and publicly a clear right by the Irish Government to some influence in the affairs of Northern Ireland. It would not be easy for a British Cabinet to accept such a step, which would be widely condemned by Unionists, and this was why the Secretary of State had sounded a note of caution.

6. I did not think that there was any significant difference between the views expressed by the Secretary of State and those expressed by Armstrong at his meeting with Nally. Inevitably the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland saw the problem from a Northern Ireland perspective and was primarily concerned with the way in which the government of the Province was to be carried on. Our view was that this was best done in the form of a devolved government acceptable to both the majority and the minority communities. The purpose of the Secretary of State's talks with the party leaders was to explore whether it was likely to be possible to devise a system which would certainly not receive the enthusiastic support of either side but might possibly

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gain the reluctant acquiescence of both. To this end we would have to put some pressure on the Unionists and we hoped that the Irish Government would be prepared to put pressure on Mr Hume. I did not think that these talks would prejudice discussion of the Irish dimension; indeed, as Mr Prior had indicated, we saw the two as complementary. Nothing was going to happen quickly, if only because the Northern party leaders were all going on holiday. The Secretary of State hoped to have further exchanges towards the end of August; but if, as expected, he left office in September he could do no more than lay foundations for a successor to build on. It was this part of the process which we judged would have to be gradual and conducted on a step by step basis. The SDLP would certainly not take up a position until it was clear what might be available in terms of an Irish dimension. Meanwhile, I suggested that the fact that private and confidential talks were taking place might actually help to prevent the party leaders making public statements which would limit their room for manoeuvre.

7. I added that we saw the Irish dimension as more than just a means of persuading the SDLP to participate in a system of government, important though this was. We saw it as a means of reassuring the nationalist minority in the North; and to this extent it could become even more important if attempts to establish a devolved government failed and we had to continue with direct rule, since if the SDLP were no longer able to champion the cause of the nationalists, the latter might look even more to Dublin for support. The requirement was to devise an Irish dimension which would reassure the nationalists without provoking too strong a Unionist reaction. This was why we attached importance to amending Articles 2 and 3 so that, with the territorial claim removed, we could represent to the Unionists that the Irish dimension was not a step down on the slippery slope towards Irish unity. As regards the idea of a joint declaration of principles, I commented that in the Forum debate the Secretary of State had in fact enunciated a series of principles to set alongside those in the

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Forum Report. I would not necessarily rule out some attempt to construct a common framework, if this were thought to be helpful; but it seemed to us more important to explore what might be done in practical ways rather than to go on repeating general principles.

8. Dorr thanked me for this clarification of our views and said that he was "partly reassured" by it. He is going on leave at the beginning of August and we agreed to meet again early in September. As I left the Embassy I teased him a little about reports in the Irish press that the coalition was breaking up and there would be an early General Election. Did this mean that we might soon find ourselves dealing with Mr Haughey? Dorr replied seriously that he did not think the Labour Party would wish to risk an election at the present time and added that experience had shown that Mr Haughey behaved more responsibly in Government than in Opposition!

20 July 1984


R J ANDREW

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