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Meeting with David Goodall, 30 October 1984

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I spoke to Goodall (until recently Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet Office and now Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office) for a couple of hours in London last night. We were both guests at a dinner for Mr Prior in the Embassy and we arranged to meet afterwards.

Goodall said that, apart from some casual exchanges, there had not been any formal meeting about Northern Ireland between the key British Ministers i.e. the Prime Minister, Howe and Hurd, for several weeks. The approach taken by Hurd and Armstrong in Dublin was a unilateral initiative on the part of the Northern Ireland Office which did not have the authority of either the Prime Minister or the Cabinet.

There will be a meeting of the three key Ministers involved tomorrow (1 November) after the weekly Cabinet. That meeting will consider a paper prepared by Goodall which will propose two options:

- first, that the British should decide that the exchanges are unlikely to make significant progress and should therefore be discontinued;
- second, that the exchanges continue on the basis of Mrs Thatcher's "basic equation", the removal of the "territorial claim", on the one hand, and a balancing "package" providing for Dublin "involvement" in a new system of government for Northern Ireland, on the other.

The paper makes the point that the Irish could not contemplate undertaking a referendum unless the "package" were substantial. According to Goodall, the paper goes on to say that the Irish could not contemplate any watering down of what the British now know the Irish are seeking.

Goodall expects Hurd and his Permanent Secretary, Andrew, to oppose the second option quite strongly but his own guess is that the Prime Minister will go along with it. His advice was that we should not assume that any new British "line" existed unless and until this was confirmed to the Irish side by Armstrong (the next Armstrong/Nally meeting is on Friday and Saturday, 2/3 November).

Goodall said that there is a serious conflict between the approach that he and Armstrong have been urging on the Prime Minister and the line taken by the Northern Ireland Office. The conflict, which has bitter overtones in Whitehall, was perhaps inevitable: in one sense it may have been a mistake not to include the NIO from the beginning of the current round of Nally/Armstrong talks; on the other hand, had they been included (thereby obviating their resentment at having been excluded, which is a major source of the division in London), it would have been far more difficult to achieve any meeting of minds between Nally and Armstrong. Goodall said repeatedly that the Prime Minister has a high regard and affection for the Taoiseach. In his view the Summit meeting is the key to this whole process: she would not make up her mind with any degree of finality until she has had a long personal talk with the Taoiseach. He personally believed that the Summit should centre on the tete-a-tete and felt that, if necessary, there should be two sessions en tete-a-tete.

He also felt that the prospect of coming to Ireland still caused her real distress. I said that he was probably aware that the Taoiseach had written her a personal note after the Brighton bombing which was intended to let her gently off the hook, if necessary. He was so aware.

On Hurd (a former colleague of his and a friend), he said with some regret that it was perhaps inevitable that at this stage Hurd should be so overwhelmingly influenced by his own civil servants. This situation had, as he said, "created a problem".

I asked him about the "joint paper" that we had planned to draw up together. He said that the position on their side now was that they would, if the Prime Minister and Ministers approved tomorrow, bring with them to Dublin a paper which attempted to describe the positions of the two sides. They would show us this paper on Friday and Saturday but would not give it to us. The aim would, however, be that the two sides would emerge from the weekend meeting with a precise idea of where the two sides were.

He added that the British side would also bring to the weekend meeting a draft statement of objectives which might form the basis of a communiqué for the Summit. We could work together over this but the two Heads of Government would clearly reserve their position on issuing it until the Summit itself.

If I can sum up my impressions:

- as of last night the situation in London was a good deal more open than we had suspected; we will not know until the weekend whether the Prime Minister is taking a different tack from that which her side have been following for the past few months;
- Hurd and the NIO are, as we suspected, "playing their own game"; at this stage they are essentially trying to scuttle the success of the Nally/Armstrong process in such a way as to set up Dublin for blame as the party responsible for a failure to make progress;
- at the level of the small group of senior civil servants in London who are engaging in this process, there is a bitter struggle going on, the outcome of which will only be decided by the Prime Minister herself; this has not yet happened;
- in short, we are still "in business" and should not allow ourselves to be dismayed by the approach which

Hurd took in Dublin -- at least not until that approach has been backed by the Prime Minister, which is not the case as of this moment.

M.J. Lillis

31 October 1984

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Tanaiste
Minister
Minister for Justice
Attorney General

Secretary
Mr Nally
Mr Quigley
Mr Ward
Ambassador, London