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ANGLO-IRISH SUMMIT: CHEQUERS: 18/19 NOVEMBER 1984

RECORD OF A MEETING IN THE LONG GALLERY: 10.15AM, 19 NOVEMBER

Present:

UK Side

The Secretary of State for  
Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs

The Secretary of State for  
Northern Ireland

Mr Robert Andrew

Sir Ewart Bell

HM Ambassador Dublin

Mr Robin Butler

Mr David Goodall

Mr Gerald Clark

Irish Side

The Tánaiste (Mr Spring)  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
(Mr Barry)

Mr Andrew Ward

Irish Ambassador in London

Mr Michael Lillis

1. The meeting then turned to Northern Ireland. Mr Hurd said there were two main areas he would like to discuss: firstly those subjects where the Irish Government wanted to issue warnings or suggestions about Northern Ireland policing, or activity on the borders; and secondly cooperation in the broadest sense, where both sides needed to work closely together. He would start by mentioning some of the subjects raised by Mr Barry at their last meeting in Dublin on 25 October.

2. On the Crossmaglen Athletic Ground there were to be meetings later in the week where proposals for cross-purchase of land would be examined further. On the border bridges a number of pedestrian bridges were now under construction. Our aim was to find a compromise which met Irish concerns about the convenience of local access, and at the same time did not detract too much from security.

3. Mr Barry said that this was very helpful. He wondered whether the Northern Ireland Secretary could also review the cases of youths whose crimes had been committed when they were under age and who therefore were detained without a fixed sentence. Mr Hurd said that five of these had already been

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released, and the NIO were looking at the cases of the others. He was also examining the length of time that prisoners were kept on remand before being brought to trial. One of his forthcoming tasks would be to study the Baker report on the administration of justice in Northern Ireland. There would have to be a debate in the House of Commons on it soon, at which he would have a number of decisions to announce. This would not be easy for EMG as some of the issues involved were very prickly within Northern Ireland. Mr Hurd also said that officials would be meeting about home-made explosives. The Prime Minister would not raise it at this meeting. It was however important that action should be taken. Mr Barry emphasised that the British would have to act too. Closing fertilizer factories in the Republic alone was not enough, or acceptable.

4. Mr Hurd then turned to police cooperation. He said that the relationship between the Garda and the Metropolitan Police Special Branch had been fine before the Glenholmes affair. This had been very damaging. He hoped that it would be a passing phase. Mr Barry would have noticed that the rest of the press were now attacking the "Sunday Times". Mr Barry agreed that it was damaging. He said the Garda would not understand the motives of those who leaked the story in the terms which had appeared.

5. Mr Hurd then referred to RUC/Garda relations. He thought that Mr Noonan's remarks on 25 October had been extremely interesting. The antipathies between the men at the top were well known. He was worried that the Chief Superintendants had not met either. He thought this kind of difficulty was a suitable subject for the Joint Security Commission which had been proposed. He promised to do his best with Sir John Hermon with a view to mending fences with the Garda Commissioner. Mr Andrew said that Sir John Hermon was thinking of writing to Mr Wren. He asked whether that would help matters or would it be counter-productive. Mr Barry encouraged Sir John Hermon to write if he believed it could improve his relationship with Mr Wren.

6. Mr Barry returned to the question of prisoners. He said that more than 100,000 people in Northern Ireland had a relative in

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prison. In relation to the size of the population this was a huge number. It would have an important political effect if some of those in prison could be released, especially where their crimes were committed when they were under age, and where they showed clear signs of having recognised the error of their ways.

Mr Hurd said that the criterion for such release would have to be an assessment of whether the prisoner might commit similar crimes again. One misjudged release would have a very serious effect in the other direction. Mr Barry said that the prisoners' chaplains could offer reliable advice on the prisoners' state of mind.

Mr Hurd said that prison policy was a great worry. The paramilitaries had made great efforts to bring the present prison population under their control. There was an unholy conspiracy to suborn the prison staff by paramilitaries of both sides. The situation required constant vigilance. He had resisted segregation at Magilligan prison. He did not envy prison governors their job. Over 20 prison officers had been murdered by the terrorists. Mr Andrew mentioned that there were some 2,500 people in prison now. The numbers were slowly declining. Violence had peaked in the early/mid 1970s, and many convicted then were reaching the end of their sentences. He referred to the young boys mentioned earlier who had been released by the Secretary of State. British policy was now to give release dates some way in advance. These releases were making an increasing impact.

7. Mr Barry in this discussion referred to Mr Hurd's acknowledgement of the Irish need to make representations. Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, and this acknowledgement of the Republic's representations was unique in the world. Any solution to the Anglo-Irish question must reflect that unique situation; otherwise it would harden further.

8. Mr Hurd said that the security authorities were planning gradually to relax existing controls in city centres. There had been a move planned for 1 November but owing to a leak it had been postponed. The authorities did not wish the PIRA to take advantage of any publicity about these relaxations by striking at commercial premises. He hoped that Londonderry would be the next

area for relaxation. These relaxations had a very beneficial effect in that they gave encouragement to commercial life and investment. Marks and Spencers had recently doubled the size of their Belfast store.

9. Mr Barry referred to the proposed new road from Dundalk to Newry. Mr Hurd said that Mr Patten and Mr Kavanagh would be meeting in the following week to discuss this. Sir Ewart Bell said that the key to the new road was the Dundalk by-pass. The Northern Ireland authorities had agreed to build the by-pass round Newry which was of greater importance to its inhabitants than the new road itself and for the scheme to work it was essential that the Dundalk by-pass section should also be built. He explained that our "additionality" rules meant that European funding was of no great help to us. The real problem was that a lot of new roads had been built in Northern Ireland and under the impact of Government expenditure cuts the budget had now shrunk drastically and it was difficult to fit major jobs like the Newry/Dundalk road into the small budget now remaining.

10. Mr Spring said that at dinner the previous evening the focus of discussion had been the opportunity which both Governments had, as they had long terms of office remaining to them before the next elections, to keep the momentum of Anglo-Irish cooperation going. Sir Geoffrey Howe acknowledged the force of that, and suggested that there were three specific areas which they might explore: improved institutional arrangements on security (it was up to the political leaders to encourage their policemen to cooperate with each other); consultations outside the security field; and measures to deal with alienation.

Mr Barry said that there was a security problem because there was a political problem. If the political problem were dealt with effectively the security problem would gradually wither away. As there was no proper role for the nationalists in Northern Ireland the British Government had a foreign government representing their interests, which must be intolerable for the British Government. For its part the Irish Government spent comparatively huge sums on security in the border areas.

Sir Geoffrey Howe said that the clue lay in the fact that the

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Irish Government raised such questions. Mr Hurd said that the process started by the previous Summit in 1983 had been beneficial. It should continue. The question arose of the level of ambition of our exchanges. Some suggestions were of very high risk for both sides: for the Irish Government in relation to the outcome of a possible referendum, and for the British Government in relation to the reaction of the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland. We had to balance these factors. The Joint Security Commission could be narrow or broad in scope. It was possible to treat it on its own immediate merits as a contribution to security without taking steps to include any political pay-off. But it could have wider use: it could be a forum for the sort of advice and warnings which Mr Barry had given him and before him Mr Prior. Ideas about devolution tended to get mixed up in this discussion. The local politicians would have to be brought in. There was as yet no real dialogue between them, and this would be needed before the Cabinet could produce a blueprint.

Sir Geoffrey Howe said that the main political disadvantage of a Joint Security Commission surely only arose if it dealt only with security, even if within its own terms it would have a beneficial effect. He thought that a Joint Security Commission however could enable the Irish to make an input to policing policy in the North. It would also disclose the unusual nature of the relationship between the two countries. It could help to develop structures of local Government which would give a greater chance of achieving something that worked, and which fell somewhere between majority rule and power sharing, and it would give scope for an input from the Irish Government to areas which strictly lay outside security. A step by step approach based on a process of this kind, encouraged and maintained over a long period, might be easier than the package for each side to sell to its clients.

11. Mr Barry said that the difficulty with the package was that the Irish Government did not have the final say. A referendum was required. If the package was not properly balanced the public would reject it. That would cause a very difficult situation. The PIRA would denounce the Republic's Government for betraying the nationalist cause and would simultaneously provoke

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a Unionist backlash in the North. The package was difficult enough anyway. The official Opposition was likely to oppose it. If the nationalists in Northern Ireland did not view it with enthusiasm and did not support it the Government would lose the referendum.

12. Sir Geoffrey Howe said that the package caused formidable difficulties for us too. He wondered whether we had identified the elements in it in sufficient depth. Perhaps it might be easier to take small steps now. Mr Spring said that the Irish understood that the package was risky for both sides. Unfortunately even on the broadest definition a Joint Security Commission would not give cross-community validity. The Irish Government had already made many gestures of this goodwill up front, for example on extradition. It had done this in the face of outrageous happenings in Northern Ireland like the Downes incident and statements from senior judges.

13. Mr Hurd said that his proposal was more complex. A JSC could provide a forum to discuss for example Catholic recruitment to the RUC or police policy with the Chief Constable. Meetings between the Ministers tended to deal with generalities when there were many practical things to be discussed between the technicians. Sir Geoffrey Howe said that in the course of the last ten years British and Irish officials and Ministers knew each other a great deal better as a result of their meetings in the European Community. We should make use of that as well as of the improving security situation. A big package might be too ambitious, although he took the point about both sides having Governments in a strong position. Mr Barry asked whether the proposal was to formalise what the present meeting was doing. Mr Hurd said that it was not exactly that. The body need not be called a Joint Security Commission; others could be added when needed. He was thinking more of thickening and broadening existing contacts. Mr Barry said that such a proposal would be a very high risk one for the Irish Government. It would be accused of helping the British frustrate nationalist aspirations. It would indeed be of higher risk than a referendum on a balanced package. Mr Spring said that the Irish Government were doing as

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such as was practicable under existing conditions already. How could this be improved by a Joint Security Commission on its own? Mr Hurd said he had mentioned three areas for possible improvement: cooperation on home-made explosives; relations between the Garda/RUC; and relations between the Garda and Metropolitan Police Special Branch. Mr Andrew said there were training possibilities and the need to increase resources in the border areas. He referred to the removal of the Garda's special border unit. Mr Barry said that he could also give examples of the RUC reducing its deployment on the border when the opposite might have been more appropriate. Mr Hurd said he would like to hear of such suggestions and comments.

14. Mr Barry said that the UDR was a serious cause of alienation. It used to have some good officers but they had retired. There were signs that former "B Specials" were getting back into the organisation. There was also the question of unreasonable "frisking" of young people. But all this was a matter of security detail. He believed that political moves must come first. Mr Andrew said that he hoped the Irish agreed that political agreement would not of itself abolish the security problem.

15. Sir Geoffrey Howe said that a full analysis was needed. Mr Barry's suggestions about prison policy and the searching of young people went beyond strict security. They were very sensitive politically, and improvements there might have more political effect than direct security gain. Social policy was also important. Housing and education in the rest of the United Kingdom fell not to Ministers but to local authorities for decisions, perhaps there was an undisputed middle here which could be analysed further.

16. Mr Hurd said that HMG were trying to hold off unionist agitation. This was the reason for their Joint Security Commission proposal. It would be difficult for the Unionists to complain about it as they were always accusing the Irish Government of doing insufficient on this score. For that reason it would be worth keeping the JSC title. It was the obverse of

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the Irish difficulty: a different name would cause alarm among unionists. Mr Barry said that if it was the only thing in the shop he would not enter it to buy. Mr Hurd asked whether that would be so if it had a consultative umbrella covering other subjects. Could not Mr Barry make a speech (which might embarrass the British a bit, but he could wear that) in order to sell it to the Irish public? Mr Barry said others might but not him. In any case he was able to make representations on all these points already to Mr Hurd, though his representations perforce were on the effects of the problem rather than on the cause of it. Mr Hurd said that the present arrangements did not allow them to have deep discussions about for example policing, because neither he nor Mr Barry were policemen and only met sporadically. But a regular forum which included policemen could be much more productive. Mr Barry said there was no reason why that should not happen without a JSC but it would not cure the problem. Mr Hurd agreed but added that it would be defensible against attack from both Unionists and Mr Haughey. It would also improve matters. He believed that the cure lay in working out ways in which both communities in Northern Ireland could work together on subjects of joint concern like housing and education which were not normally central government subjects. Mr Barry said that he did not like the idea of his going to the North every so often with a shopping list of complaints. The important thing was that 40% of the population in Northern Ireland did not accept BNG. Mr Hurd protested that this was not quite true: alienation was more complicated than that, and by no means universal among the Catholic minority. In some areas (eg Derry) the Catholics were in a majority on the local council. He had good relations with them.

17. At this point the discussion was broken off for coffee.