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16 MAR 1983  
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P.S.'s

281/3

- 1. MR BRENDAN
- 2. PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L)

- cc: PS/Secretary of State (B) M
- PS/Ministers (L&B) M
- PS/Sir Philip Woodfield (L&B) M
- PS/Sir Ewart Bell M
- Mr Bourn M
- Mr Merifield M
- Mr Doyne-Ditmas M
- Mr Buxton M
- Mr Angel
- Mr Burns
- Mr Reeve M
- Mr Abbott
- Mr Edis M
- Miss Davies M
- Mr Gilliland M
- Ms Drummond
- Mr Eyers, RID FAX ROOM

HEAD OF THE N.I.  
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CIVIL SERVICE

I agree broadly with this approach. We must be sceptical about whether the Forum will serve better to clarify the national position or to advance the cause, in Northern Ireland, of the SDLP. But it seems best to take a relaxed (if distant) approach to it. There will be some time to consider it.

JP 11/3

RECEIVED  
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STORMONT HOUSE ANNEX

FORUM FOR A NEW IRELAND

1. The Secretary of State may wish to have an assessment of how we see the Irish Government's proposal for a Forum for a New Ireland.

Background

2. The Forum is an adaption of Mr Hume's proposal for a Council for a New Ireland. For some time Mr Hume has been disappointed at the lack of reaction in the Republic. We know that the Government had a number of very grave doubts about the wisdom of proceeding with it. As originally proposed Mr Hume's idea did not in all respects sit easily with Dr Fitzgerald's approach to affairs in the North and to the need to involve Unionists in a long term process of reconciliation. Mr Barry mentioned some of these doubts to the Secretary of State when they met in January. At the end of February the Irish Government proposed all-party talks in the Republic to prepare the way for an all-Ireland Forum on peace and reconciliation in the context of the new Ireland. That statement made no specific reference to the Council as such, and although it was welcomed by Mr Hume in measured terms it did not go as far as he would have liked. Almost immediately Mr Haughey capped this statement in his speech to the Fianna Fail Party Conference by suggesting that the Council for a New Ireland would be a valuable first step in the preparation for the "final constitutional settlement", and for the drawing up of a scheme which might be discussed between the two Governments.

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3. There is a good deal of evidence that the statement on the Forum issued on 11 March was a very rushed affair. The Government was faced with a question in the Dail on 15 March from Mr Haughey asking if they would set up the Council as proposed by the SDLP. An announcement by the weekend also meant that Mr Barry could take credit for it during his St Patrick's week visit to the USA, probably seeking support for the idea from the US Administration.

## Statement of 11 February

4. A copy of the Irish Government's statement is attached. It moves some distance from Mr Hume's original proposal and accommodates a good deal of Dr Fitzgerald's approach. In a number of respects it is more helpful than it might have been, and very probably would have been under Mr Haughey. For example, it refers broadly to a new Ireland, rather than specifically to a United Ireland as such; it makes specific reference to those elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly rather than more general reference to political parties in the North; it mentions directly people of all traditions in Ireland; and it suggests there should be a report on the structures and processes through which its aims can be achieved, rather than a blue-print as such.

5. The Irish have since emphasised to us that the purpose of their initiative was to do something to strengthen the position of the SDLP, about which they remain acutely worried. They had concluded that something should be done to demonstrate to the nationalist community that the Irish Government was concerned to safeguard their interests and that they could trust the SDLP. The Irish are alert to the risk that the whole idea is capable of becoming an irritant between the two Governments, and within such room for manoeuvre as they have they have sought to avoid that happening. They are not expecting us to <sup>do</sup> anything in particular as a result of their statement and in any case remain of the view that nothing is likely to happen of great substance in Anglo-Irish affairs this side of the General Election.

6. The fact that Mr Haughey agreed to the Government's statement should not lead to the conclusion that it will have a smooth path.

The Taoiseach had a good deal of difficulty in getting him to accept the statement. Mr Haughey subsequently made clear that he saw the proposal as consistent with his policy for Northern Ireland and that he was participating on that basis; he did so in a statement, which reiterated the firmly nationalist line which he took in his recent Party Conference speech.

7. The reaction in the Republic has been generally favourable, although it is well understood there that continuing co-operation between the Government and Fianna Fail on this matter will not be by any means easy. In his BBC radio interview the Taoiseach himself acknowledged that differences might emerge.

8. The reaction in Northern Ireland has been broadly predictable. There was very strong condemnation from Dr Paisley, who alleged an international conspiracy and linked the proposal to the European Parliament's report, the St Patrick's Day parade in New York and to Mr Livingstone's visit to the Province. The Official Unionists also condemned it. The Alliance Party rejected the proposal quickly, stressing the need for the Assembly to work and their belief that the Forum would be a diversion. Sinn Fein condemned the Forum as simply an attempt to bolster the electoral fortunes of the SDLP and as something which would weaken the nationalist movement.

#### Conclusion

9. We have established our position in terms of the attached Line which was put out on Friday evening. It is a position to which we can return as the Forum develops and which we can credibly repeat without having to make further comment of substance. It reflects our feeling that parties in the Republic and Northern Ireland are entitled to come to their own views on these matters and it allows such benefits as there may be for the SDLP to accrue without their being the appearance of intervention or criticism on our part. At the same time it repeats the point that the Forum cannot change the basic constitutional principles.

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10. It remains to be seen how the Forum develops. Its path will not be smooth, given in particular the differences it is likely to expose between the two main parties in the Republic. It is far from clear at this stage how far the SDLP will be able to take domestic political credit for having launched the proposal and for taking part in it, and whether such credit would come quick enough for them to benefit to any significant extent in the General Election. One additional uncertainty would be the American angle: it is quite likely that the Friends of Ireland will make some welcoming references to the Forum in their St Patrick's Day Statement tomorrow, and we do not yet have any indication of whether the US Administration will react. We have taken steps to ensure that the US authorities are aware of the genuineness of our public reference to people's entitlement to take part in such discussions if they wish; of our appreciation of the desirability of strengthening the moderate nationalist party against Sinn Fein; of our feeling that by virtue of the reaction it will excite the Forum could be an irritant in Northern Ireland; and that it will not of itself further the development of the political process which our policy and the Assembly is designed to encourage. A US Government reaction which was too overt and which paid too little regard to the existence of other factors could possibly embarrass us and fit uneasily with our hands off approach.

11. Subject to any complications which may arise on the American front, there is no reason for us to change our posture. In the circumstances of SDLP non-participation in the Assembly for the foreseeable future we <sup>privately</sup> can/welcome the Forum for such benefits as it may bring. These may either be in the short run for the SDLP in the forthcoming elections or in the longer run, as Mr Hume himself emphasises, for such encouragement that it gives to people in the Republic to address seriously questions about Irish unity. Though we could not have moved from the position that people can engage in such discussions as they want, we might in other circumstances have, for example, been more sensitive to the implications of the Government of the Republic as distinct from the parties involving itself in quite this way. We cannot openly welcome the Forum whilst holding

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to our position on the Assembly and the need for participation by all those elected to it. But nor should we if at all possible allow ourselves to be shifted from our neutral position or to become caught up in exchanges that will no doubt take place in the coming months.

*S.W. Boys Smith*

S W BOYS SMITH

16 March 1983

**CONFIDENTIAL**

LAB

McCannan  
14.3

14 MAR 1983

*[Signature]*

The following statement is being issued at 5 p.m. today on behalf of the Irish Government:

The Government propose to arrange, in agreement with the political parties concerned, for the establishment of a forum for consultations on the manner in which lasting peace and stability can be achieved in a new Ireland through the democratic process.

Participation will be open to all democratic parties which reject violence, and which have members elected or appointed to the Oireachtas or the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The views of other people of all traditions who agree with the purpose of these consultations and who reject violence will also be sought by the forum.

It would be the intention that the forum will report before the end of the year on possible new structures and processes through which its objective might be achieved.

The Taoiseach will arrange a meeting of the leaders of all the parties who wish to participate at an early date to discuss the arrangements involved.

11 March, 1983

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF  
THE IRISH EMBASSY

*[Signature]*

17 Grosvenor Place.

## IRISH FORUM

It is of course open to the Government and parties in the Republic to discuss what structures and arrangements would, in their view, be appropriate if what the statement describes as a "New Ireland" were to come about, and it is for the people in Northern Ireland to decide whether they wish to participate in such discussions.

But such discussions cannot affect the fundamental position that Northern Ireland is and will remain a part of the United Kingdom while the majority of its people so wish. That is formally set out in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 and the Government of the Republic are also committed to that principle.

11 - March - 1973