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SECRETDRAFT MESSAGE FROM THE TAOISEACH
TO THE PRIME MINISTER

I thank you for your message of 24th March advising me of what you intended to say in the House of Commons later in the day.

So far as public response to your statement in the House is concerned I issued a brief communique early on Friday afternoon last. Its contents, no doubt, were conveyed to you.

Naturally we saw it as our primary duty to ensure, to the fullest extent our influence extended, that your proposals should bring an end to violence on the one side whilst also avoiding violence on the other. The leaders of the Opposition parties here, with whom I had private conversations, were equally concerned that their comments and those of their colleagues should be suitably helpful. The same was the view of the leaderships of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and of the Nationalist Party with whom my colleagues and I had a meeting on Friday evening.

So far events have been reasonably favourable. I am confident that the political leadership of the minority in the North now have the opportunity, allied to the skill and determination, to lead their community away from any condoning of the further use of violence. I am also more than a degree optimistic that the broad mass of the majority community prefer to live in peace and will not follow a violent crusade to restore a political leadership which had grievously failed them over a long period of time.

I understand that the Social Democratic and Labour Party have decided to be available for informal discussions immediately on the formation of the Advisory Commission. This, in addition to their responsible reaction generally to your proposals, is a happy augury. With the speedy ending of internment without trial

the way would be clear for the SDLP and the Nationalist Party to engage in the discussion you envisage in an effort to reach agreement on a new way forward.

I hope it will later become possible for you to reflect again on the proposal for a system of regular plebiscites in the North about the border. I should be less than frank in this message if I did not let you know of my reservations about this idea on grounds both of principle and practice. Of principle, because the question of Irish unity cannot be settled solely within the borders of Northern Ireland; and of practice, because I believe that the advent of the plebiscitory period would, on each occasion, lead to renewed polarisation of the communities and almost certainly encourage violence on one side or the other and probably on both. It is my abiding view, of course, that Irish unity must properly be obtained by agreement; to this I have added my belief that our two Governments should, each in its domain, mutually prepare the ground for obtaining the agreement of the North. This will be a delicate task and will take time. A softening of opinion among the majority, which will be a primary function of my policy is what we seek. Progress in this way could be seriously disrupted by a hardening of attitudes at each plebiscitory period. However these are matters which we can talk about when next we meet.

I am sending you this message through the Ambassador whom I was glad to instruct to return to his post last Friday.
