



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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*Agreed by Taoiseach
for mail; and sent.*

Message from the Taoiseach to the Prime Minister

24/6

An Aide-Memoire

which may be of help as a background to our forthcoming
discussion

History has ordained that, regrettably, we both approach the affairs of Northern Ireland from different perspectives.

You will be aware, from much that I have said publicly and privately in the past, that as an Irishman, it has always been a matter of deep regret to me that Ireland is divided. I look forward to a sovereign united Ireland under new political structures which will adequately and generously reflect the diversity of our traditions and provide full guarantees for the rights of all. The achievement of this aim would, in my view, end the historic dissension between Ireland and Britain and lead to an even closer and more friendly relationship between our peoples.

The aspiration to a sovereign united Ireland must - and indeed could only - be achieved by peaceful means. A united Ireland could not come about through violence; it would not work if it did; and every act of violence or bloodshed on this island sets back further the date when what I hope for most deeply can be achieved.

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I am pacifist in outlook and by conviction. I abhor violence of any kind - whether it is that of an institution or of an individual. It was I as Minister for Justice in the 1960s who promoted the legislation which largely abolished the death penalty in this State.

I could not possibly accept any suggestion that I would support or condone violence - anywhere, by anyone, or for any purpose - or find in myself any sympathy for those who resort to it. It offends against my deepest and most firmly held convictions.

The IRA does not recognise our Constitution and their stated aim is the destruction of this State. The fact that I and my government have to deal with the problem in ways that are different from yours requires not your condemnation but your understanding. For what we are talking about here affects every Irishman and woman in this island. We are dealing, in a way which you are not, with the hearts and mind of an entire population. The political environment in which we act is fundamentally different from that with which you have to deal. And you will, I am afraid, have to accept my judgement as to how best I and my government deal with that environment, knowing that our commitment against terrorism is at least as great as yours and our stake in the struggle against it many times greater than yours. If our methods are different, it is because our environment is different - not because we want them to be any less effective.

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I turn now to the Anglo-Irish Agreement which has set the basic framework for co-operation between us in relation to Northern Ireland, and which built on the structures for closer co-operation between our two countries which you and I envisaged at our two meetings in 1980.

At the time of the Agreement I was in Opposition here and, as you are aware, I and my Party were critical of some aspects of the Agreement. When we came to office in March 1987, however, I made it clear, publicly and repeatedly, at some political cost, that my Government would accept and fulfil honourably the commitments entered into by our predecessors. I have repeated that I regard this both as a legal obligation - because the Agreement is an international agreement entered into between two sovereign Governments - and as a moral obligation - since I believe that in face of the tragedy of Northern Ireland no one has a right to neglect any instrument or means which might help to bring an improvement.

My full acceptance of the Agreement is in no way inconsistent with the obvious point which I have often made that Northern Ireland as it was constituted in 1920/21 has in fact failed to work. From the outset, it was a divided society with all eyes focussed on the border which had made one community a majority

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and the other a minority within it. It is surely legitimate for me as Taoiseach to hope for, and to work towards, a more generous and lasting solution, on an all-Ireland basis. That possibility is recognised in the Agreement itself which refers to the aspiration to a sovereign united Ireland achieved by peaceful means and through agreement; and promises the support of the two Government for the necessary legislation if a majority of the people of Northern Ireland clearly wish for and formally consent to a united Ireland.

It is now generally accepted that the IRA cannot be defeated militarily. In my view, action to defeat violence and implement the Agreement requires two fundamental approaches: (a) measures to change the situation within Northern Ireland to an extent which will make the minority there feel that the institutions of Government and of authority under which they are living are such as to reflect and accommodate their sense of identity as well as that of the majority; and (b) resolute action, including whole-hearted cross-border co-operation on security against those whose violent actions promote division and conflict. These approaches are without prejudice to action elsewhere, to achieve what I would regard as the only solution which will bring lasting peace to this island and the benefits of full understanding between our two countries which I believe on all the evidence of history is necessary.

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The first two approaches are closely related; and both are fundamental to the proper working of the Agreement. It must not be the case that one is seen publicly to be the primary concern of my Government and the other of yours.

This in my view requires not only that each of the two Governments work the Agreement to the full, but that each show a continuing attention to the concerns and the political sensitivities of the other in relation to the range of matters which arise under the Agreement. I have to say, with regret, that over a series of issues in recent months, I have not felt that sensitivity and attention to working in accordance with the spirit of the Agreement was always clearly in evidence on your side. For us, this series of events dates from the Stalker/Sampson announcement in the Commons, through the Thain case and the Birmingham 6, the McAnespie and Gibraltar shootings and the dreadful events connected with the Belfast funerals: for none of these had we the slightest responsibility. But each event helped to heighten tensions and created considerable political difficulties for us which should not be underestimated.

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I know that you on your side have strong views about security issues and your own sensitivities, and I do not want to dwell in detail on these points here. I do believe that security co-operation between us has been good - better I would venture to say than at any time in the past. And I would ask you to understand that while we are doing and will continue to do everything possible to defeat violence some of the specific measures for which your people are asking would not in my view contribute to that end. They would in my political judgement create such a reaction here as to be totally counterproductive.

You may hold the view that co-operation from the South could ensure the defeat, or the virtual elimination of terrorism, and if terrorism continues it is because the co-operation is not as good as it should be. The fact that security co-operation does not in itself produce an end to violence is not a reflection on its quality and certainly not on our commitment to it. The areas immediately south of the border are policed more regularly than ever in the past and more intensively than in many contiguous areas on the Northern side - for the understandable reason perhaps that it is more difficult for the Northern security forces to move freely in those areas on their side. The fact that much of the violence takes place in Belfast or otherwise deep within Northern Ireland and far from

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the border, in areas where the Northern security forces are fully in control, shows clearly enough that those who engage in violence can find a way of carrying it through notwithstanding committed and effective policing. I do not see this inability to achieve conclusive results in ending terrorism, by security measures, within Northern Ireland as a reflection on the commitment of the RUC and the British Army; nor should you see the cross-border element, which does indeed exist and which continues, as evidence of any lack of commitment on the part of our security forces. Never in the history of this State have some 50,000 houses been searched for arms, as in the recent operation Mallard. And I am told that rarely, if ever, have the relations between the two forces been better even though there may be room for some specific improvements in the procedures for co-operation.

We in this country have a greater interest than anybody else in ending conflict and division in Northern Ireland and the violence which flows from it. Apart from the terrible suffering which the campaign causes, there is for us the burden of security measures on the border which are directed to containing violence within Northern Ireland and co-operating with your forces to end it, and the less obvious burdens and strains imposed on our whole society through the association of

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the name of Ireland with this terrible violence; the effects on our economy, on tourism, on industrial development; and above all the diversion of national and political energy over many decades to issues which go to the very heart of our identity as a State. I hope you will understand how heavily these burdens weigh on us and have weighed on us; and how important I, as head of an Irish Government, consider it to work for a future where they will be eased and lifted; and where we can have peace and a true reconciliation.

In the longer term I hope that this can begin through a process of negotiation between representatives of all the constitutional, democratic parties on the island; and I am encouraged by some recent indications by Unionist leaders that they might be willing to think on these lines. You, I believe, would not oppose this. Indeed I would like to think that even if you do not see it as an immediate prospect, you would be glad if it were ultimately to come about, since it could be the beginning of a new era of close co-operation between all the peoples of our two islands, freed at last from the heavy burdens which history has laid on all of us. That would indeed be an achievement of truly historic proportions.

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While this remains my long-term hope, I believe that it is quite possible and fully consistent with this to commit myself wholeheartedly, as I have done, and will continue to do, to working and implementing the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the full. You can continue to count on my commitment on this. I hope that I, on my side, can continue to count on yours.

24 June 1988.