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DA

CONFIDENTIAL

25 November 1993

Mr Seán O hUiginn  
Assistant Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs  
Dublin 2

cc'd PST  
PSS  
Mr. F. Murrell  
Mr. T. Dalton  
YE 25  
11 5:30pm

Dear Assistant Secretary

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, HOME SECRETARY AND PRINCE CHARLES

At this time of year Ambassadors and High Commissioners are invited to a reception at the Palace by the Queen. Prominent British figures, including Ministers and senior officials, are also included and at last night's function I had an opportunity of snatching brief conversations with the Prime Minister and Michael Howard, the Home Secretary. The following is a brief account of our conversations.

The Prime Minister

"I assume we are firmly on course", I said to John Major. "No", he said, without hesitation, drawing attention to two developments which were distinctly unhelpful. One was the further meeting of Hume and Adams and the other was our leaked document. The Prime Minister said he had been kept very busy over the week-end trying to repair the damage and keep matters under control. Serious problems had been created for him. I suggested to him that he would surely have been pleased by the Taoiseach's interview on the David Frost programme on Sunday morning. I pointed out that the Taoiseach had gone out of his way to praise and admire the Prime Minister's role and his commitment to a solution. The Prime Minister admitted that at first he was very apprehensive when he heard that the Taoiseach had agreed to the Frost interview. Frost is, he said, a very clever interviewer and can, in a disarmingly deceptive way, winkle remarks and comments from his guest before there is a proper realisation of what happened. The Taoiseach, however, "had played a blinder" and Major asked me

to convey his congratulations to the Taoiseach. (It will be noted from a separate report that the Cabinet Secretary, Robin Butler, spoke in very similar complimentary terms earlier in the day about the Taoiseach's performance on the Frost programme).

John Major said it was the first time in 20 years that both the British Prime Minister and the Taoiseach had Northern Ireland at the top of their agenda. If the Northern Ireland crisis were nearer to home - say, in Surrey - he said, it would remain at the very top of the agenda until the problem was solved. That was the way he was approaching the matter and he knew that the Taoiseach fully shared these views. When they first met as Prime Ministers less than two years ago, he added, they dedicated themselves to the search for a solution. (Here, John Major was repeating a point made by the Taoiseach on the Frost programme).

I raised with the Prime Minister the question of the date for his meeting with the Taoiseach. Was 3 December suitable for him? Major said that there had been a premature disclosure of this date at the Dublin end. He felt that we could probably stick to this and then added significantly that there will still be much work to be done after that meeting (my emphasis). This remark was not, of course, unexpected, bearing in mind what he said last week in Parliament. On that occasion he said that much remained to be done before, during and after the meeting in Dublin (my emphasis).

#### Comment

The Prime Minister's opening remark to the effect that matters were not on course should not necessarily be taken at face value. My feeling is that by his choice of words he was deliberately getting across to us his sense of irritation and frustration over the leaked document and the Hume/Adams meeting. On the other hand he was particularly warm and complimentary when he spoke about the Taoiseach, their warm relationship of trust and his praise for his performance on the Frost programme. I also formed the opinion that British hesitation about the date of the Summit derives more from annoyance at the premature disclosure at our end than from any sense of unsuitability on their side.

#### Mr Michael Howard (Home Secretary)

Michael Howard is the most senior right wing Minister in the Cabinet, as the position of Home Secretary is (with Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer) one of the four great offices of State in the Government. I have reason to believe that he is the most sceptical of Major's top Ministers who are consulted on current Northern Ireland policy. At my brief meeting with him last night I used the opportunity to emphasise the real opening for peace that now existed and which may not recur for a long time. The British Government shared that perception and we were duty-

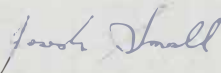
bound to explore every possibility to achieve peace and a solution to this long-standing problem. Whether out of politeness or conviction he seemed to nod in agreement. He told me he was very friendly at Cambridge with sons of F H Boland and Conor Cruise O'Brien and had spent a very pleasant week-end in Dublin with them on one occasion. As regards Irish Ministers, he had in recent years got to know Mr Bertie Ahern when he was Minister for Labour and Michael Smith, the Minister for the Environment. He had not, so far, met our Minister for Justice, Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn, but thought there might be an opportunity next week in an EC context. He agreed with my observation that there is not enough bilateral contact between our Ministers. I added that our Minister for Justice would, I was sure, be anxious to do something about that. You will recall that I wrote to you earlier in the week about this point.

We also discussed briefly the seizure earlier in the day of a huge consignment of arms and explosives from Poland destined for Loyalist Paramilitaries.

#### Prince Charles

In the course of a brief conversation with Prince Charles, the Prince expressed the hope that the current initiative launched by the two Governments would be successful. He said he look forward to meeting President Robinson in Cardiff on 30 November. Prince Charles is, as you know, Chancellor of Cardiff University.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small  
Ambassador