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- Mr Leech - M*
- Mr Thomas*
- Mr Arston - M*
- Mr Cooke*
- Mr Dedds - M*
- Mr DORRILL*

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL 724/6

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UNDER/ SEC
 25 JUN 1991
CENT SEC

21.vi.91

J S Wall Esq
10 Downing Street

Dear Stephen,

25/6
as the [unclear]

PRIME MINISTER'S TALKS WITH MR HAUGHEY ON 21 JUNE: NORTHERN IRELAND DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Prime Minister may find it helpful to have a brief resume of developments over the past day or so.
2. In the political talks in Northern Ireland the parties are still at the stage of clarifying their opening position papers in response to questions from the other parties. There is a serious and purposeful atmosphere. The talks are due to resume on Monday with questioning of Dr Paisley.
3. During the week the Unionists, especially the DUP, have begun to voice their concern that the Anglo-Irish Conference planned for 16 July should be postponed, saying that if it is not their electorate would not be able to countenance the continuation of the talks process. They argue that the original proposition envisaged a "gap" between Conference meetings of about 10 weeks to provide an opportunity for political dialogue; that the factors which led to a 7-week delay before the start of plenary sessions was not their fault (though this could of course be disputed); that they are prepared to intensify the schedule and work through the summer to make progress within a 10-week timescale; and that the Anglo-Irish Conference should be postponed for at least 2 or 3 weeks to enable an opportunity for real political progress to be made. This all came to a head during yesterday evening's debate in the House on the Order renewing 'direct rule', which saw impassioned speeches on the subject from the 3 DUP MPs, but also underlined the fact that the UUP are taking a more restrained line and may indeed be considering possible ways round this apparent obstacle.

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4. Mr Brooke's position is that it had been agreed between the two Governments and announced before the start of the "gap" that a Conference would be held on 16 July, but he is willing "to initiate discussions with all the participants, including the Irish Government" to bring about agreement on "a basis for a resumption of the talks".

5. Irish and British officials met in Dublin yesterday. The Irish tended to interpret the Unionists' position on the 16 July Conference as an attempt to put the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement into extended suspension. This is an unhelpful line as the current talks arrangements had been carefully constructed to satisfy both Unionists (who wanted a suspension of the Anglo-Irish Agreement) and the Nationalists (who are against suspension).

6. Despite repeated statements to the contrary, the Irish still appeared to suspect that we may be tempted to argue for postponement of the Conference. They also reaffirmed their desire for a meeting of Strand Two before 16 July, but less strenuously. They were however reluctant to acknowledge that this becomes more difficult if the Governments stand firm on the 16 July Conference.

7. Irish officials restated their willingness to show flexibility about further meetings after 16 July. Their approach reflects a judgement that the process is likely to be stretched out over a period of a year or more, a view far removed from that of the Unionists. Their approach failed to recognise the strength of Unionist feeling about a conference on 16 July, or Unionists' reluctance to envisage a continuing process punctuated by regular Conference meetings. A more detailed note on the 16 July IGC is attached; Mr Brooke's view is that we should not take the lead in raising this issue and that if it is raised with the Prime Minister in tete-a-tete, it should be referred to Mr Brooke and Mr Collins to consider in detail.

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8. Irish officials also raised, on instructions, our reluctance to hand over copies of the opening presentations made by the political parties in the absence of a decision to publish these. Irish officials argued that this was against both the spirit and the letter of agreements between the two Governments over the past 15 months. Mr Brooke's position has been based on Irish agreement (at Unionist insistence) that they should have no part in anything to do with Strand One of the talks. The plenary meeting on 19 June decided that individual parties could decide about publication and the presentations are now gradually emerging. The immediate issue may therefore fall away. The Taoiseach may nonetheless raise this point with the Prime Minister, who will no doubt refer the matter, without commitment, to Mr Brooke.

9. I am sending copies of this letter to Christopher Prentice (FCO), and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

Derry

A J D PAWSON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

AnnexTALKS WITH MR HAUGHEY 21 JUNE: 16 JULY INTER-GOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCE (IGC)

The Taoiseach will be well aware of recent statements by Unionist Leaders (mainly DUP, although with some UUP support) that the talks process will be at an end if the IGC on 16 July goes ahead as planned.

He may suggest that this could be met by "flexibility" by the two Governments, to the effect that the IGC would go ahead on 16 July; a new "gap" would be launched immediately after 16 July, lasting until an IGC in early September; this would allow a resumption of the talks in the second half of July (assuming that most if not all the participants will not want to meet in August); and there would be a further significant "gap" after the early September IGC. He might argue that such an approach, while not succumbing to Unionist blackmail on the 16 July IGC, nevertheless met the underlying rationale of their case by providing extra time in the second half of July in recognition of the time consumed between 30 April and 17 June on purely procedural matters.

It would be difficult to reject this approach out of hand but the Prime Minister might invite Mr Haughey to consider whether it would take the trick with the Unionists. He might say

- what the Unionists want is clearly a lengthening of the present "gap" to compensate for at least some of the time used up on purely procedural matters between 30 April and 17 June (for some of which the Unionists would - with some validity - blame the SDLP);

- does the Taoiseach really believe that a new "gap" would take the trick with them, bearing in mind that it would last only from 16 July to early September, a shorter period than some of the recent intervals between IGC meetings

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- the Unionist reading of the 26 March statement that the 10 week gap was intended for intensive discussion of substantive issues has some plausibility.

If the Taoiseach himself suggests deferring the meeting on 16 July until a fixed date 2-3 weeks later the Prime Minister might agree that this seems highly desirable in principle and that Mr Brooke and Mr Collins should discuss the detail.

If he does not, there is a difficult question of judgement as to whether the British side should take the initiative in leading the Irish side into a discussion of the point. If we decided to do so we might say:

- Mr Haughey will have had a report of the Unionist interventions in the Direct Renewal Debate last night, and especially of the key speech by Peter Robinson. How does he rate their mood? Does he agree that there is now a danger that their position has a momentum which could mean that they will not be able to climb down from their threat to withdraw if the IGC goes ahead on 16 July?
- the two Governments must give real weight to the extent to which Dr Paisley in particular is fearful of the reaction of his own more extremist supporters
- HMG remains clear that it would be wrong for it to propose that the 16 July IGC should be deferred
- if, however, the Irish Government were to propose a new date for the IGC around the end of July, it may be that that would suffice to keep the show on the road, with all the potential benefits associated with that. Mr Robinson's speech hinted as much

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- HMG would entirely agree that any new, later date should be fixed in advance. Clearly wrong to allow the Unionists to think that they can push the end of the "gap" back indefinitely, thereby effectively achieving suspension of the Conference

- extension of the gap in this limited way would also provide a more realistic prospect of achieving a launch of Strand II before the summer break. Mr Brooke told Mr Collins he would use his best endeavours (subject to the 26 March groundrules or transition) to launch Strand II on 8/9 July. But the pace of substantive discussion in Strand I so far now makes that look unachievable.

Mr Brooke thought the Prime Minister would want to have the above line of argument sketched out in case discussion in tete a tete went in such a way that the Prime Minister felt he needed to deploy it. Mr Brooke's present view, however, is that it would be premature to take the initiative in putting these points to the Taoiseach. It is a message which may not be well received. The Unionist position is not monolithic and may either harden or fracture. It is not yet clear whether this is a make or break issue. The arguments may have greater force after a further week of Strand I plenary discussion than now. Mr Brooke accordingly suggests that for the purpose of tonight's meeting our line should be that:

- we are not ourselves proposing deferring the 16 July IGC
- if the Irish suggest this we should agree and he and Mr Collins should negotiate the detail
- if Mr Haughey proposes a new gap immediately after a 16 July IGC we should point out that this may not do the trick but agree that Mr Brooke and Mr Collins should be left to pursue further the question of resumption.