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ASST. / mm 234/6  
JUN 1991  
CENT SEC

2219

FROM: Q J THOMAS  
Talks Secretariat  
18 June 1991

UNDER/ 521/6  
SEC  
19 JUN 1991  
CENT SEC

MR Maxwell

To see & return

MA  
19/6

- cc PS/Paymaster General
- PS/Minister of State
- PS/PUS
- PS/Mr Fell
- Mr Ledlie
- Mr Pilling
- Mr Alston
- Mr Thomas (L)
- Mr Wood (L&B)
- Mr McNeill
- Mr Cooke
- Mr Dodds
- Mr D A Hill
- Mr D J R Hill
- Mr Petch
- Mr Archer, RID FCO
- HMA Dublin
- Mr Gowan, Cab Office  
(via SIL)
- Mr Brooker
- Mr Pope

19/6

*in the office*

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

26 MARCH STATEMENT: IGC ON 16 JULY

1. The Secretary of State asked for an analysis of the 26 March statement in terms of the proposal to hold an IGC on 16 July.

2. The key passage of the 26 March statement is this:

"To allow an opportunity for such a wider political dialogue, the two Governments have agreed not to hold a meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference between two pre-specified dates."

The dates were duly specified as 26 April and 16 July.

3. This amounts to an unequivocal commitment not to hold an IGC between those dates.

4. It does not amount to an unequivocal commitment to hold an IGC on 16 July. There have been a number of public statements, on behalf of both governments, that they do indeed intend to hold an IGC on 16 July both when the gap dates were announced and

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subsequently. Nothing has been said, I believe, on behalf of HMG to suggest that there is any doubt about it. Moreover all the participants have well understood from the beginning (April/May last year?) that there would indeed be an IGC at the end of the gap, and that there was a firm commitment. My understanding is that at the tête-à-tête discussion with Irish Ministers on 14 June both sides confirmed their decision to hold an IGC on 16 July.

5. Nonetheless it is open to the two Governments to decide that the IGC should not meet on 16 July, and should meet again on say 31 July. On the formal level, it is not the 26 March statement which makes this difficult, so much as our ability to secure Irish Government agreement. Less formally, there is of course an argument that it would be wrong for the two Governments to abandon the 16 July date. Against that, it could be said that the long delay in starting plenaries creates a new situation.

6. Without greater knowledge of what transpired in last week's tête-à-tête, I have some difficulty in judging the prospects of securing a postponement of 16 July IGC. My impression is that the moment to open that with the Irish Government may have passed with the agreement to hold IGCs both on 16 July and in early September, with the prospect of a new "gap" starting then. That seems a realistic scheme, though there is certainly the prospect of a difficult exchange with the Unionists before it is agreed. (The Daily Telegraph report of it today may prepare the ground helpfully or otherwise.) If that is our approach, it follows that we should continue to show no hesitation about the intention to hold an IGC on 16 July. This also gives us a defensible posture, with the Irish Government, SDLP and with a wider public, in terms of meaning what one says.

7. I suggest that the line to be taken in the debate on the renewal of Direct Rule might be as follows:

"The 26 March statement announced that there would be a gap in meetings of the IGC to provide an opportunity for political dialogue. It was announced subsequently that the gap would run between 26 April and 16 July. The political talks have started

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and useful exchanges are taking place. However, because there was considerable delay arising from the need to resolve a number of difficult and sensitive procedural and other issues, it seems unlikely that all issues can be resolved before 16 July. HMG will honour its agreement with the Irish Government to hold a meeting of the IGC on that date. However it believes a basis for a resumption of the talks should be found, and it intends to initiate discussions with all the participants, including the Irish Government, to bring this about."

8. This may frighten the horses, but do our exchanges with the Irish Government allow for a different approach?

Signed:

Q J THOMAS  
Talks Secretariat  
18 June 1991

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