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Meeting at Northern Ireland Office, London - 11 February 1975

Irish side:

Dr. D. O'Sullivan, Ambassador, London
Mr. Seán Donlon, Department of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Dermot Nally, Department of the Taoiseach

British side:

Mr. Douglas Janes)	
Mr. Denis Trevelyan)	NIO
Mr. G. Watson)	
Mr. B. Harding		FCO

(Following the meeting which took place at the NIO from 10.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., Sir Geoffrey Arthur of the FCO hosted a working lunch for the participants).

The following is a brief summary of the main items discussed:

1. Irish Dimension

As directed in the Government decision of 17th December, 1974, the Irish side -

- (1) rejected the view in relation to the Irish dimension put forward recently by a British official delegation in Dublin;
- (2) confirmed
 - (a) that any enduring political arrangements in Northern Ireland must take account of the special relationship which exists between the two parts of Ireland and
 - (b) that this Irish dimension will be the subject of further consultations between the two Governments and with elected representatives in Northern Ireland.

The discussion opened with a reference to the meeting with Janes in December at which he had said that the point on which the NI Executive fell was the significance and nature of the Irish dimension and that for any future arrangement to be successful it would be necessary to reassure Protestants by avoiding an institutionalisation of the Irish dimension. We pointed to the communiqués issued after meetings in September and November 1974 between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister and made it clear that as far as we were concerned the statements contained in them on the Irish dimension represented our joint position. There could be no

departure from that position without negotiation. We were not, however, publicly emphasising the institutionalisation of the Irish dimension since we recognised the fears on the majority side. The important thing at this stage was to get agreement between the parties in NI on a form of government for the area and there could then be discussions between the parties concerned and the Dublin Government on the question of the Irish dimension. The British side noted our views and said that in December when they had talked to us about the Irish dimension they had been very concerned about abrasive speeches on the subject by elements within the SDLP and they had feared that if these speeches continued there would be no possibility of fruitful discussions on power-sharing. They were less apprehensive now than they had been in December and they felt that the SDLP as a whole were being more sensible on the issue.

The question was raised of encouraging co-operation between organisations North and South, as a means of developing a better appreciation of the quality of an Irish dimension, in economic and social affairs. It was suggested that perhaps in some areas, with British Ministers, there could well be a certain hesitation in developing this co-operation - and that, in fact, the position might even be worse than it had been some years ago. Mr. Janes said that he had discovered some old instructions, requiring the consent of the Secretary of State before these contacts were instituted. They did not feel that this was the time to do away with these instructions by specific edict, but so far as the British were concerned, they were giving and would continue to give their backing to the development of contacts. However, they did not wish to do this too obviously. If there was any particular case where there were difficulties, we should not hesitate to get in touch directly with the British who would try to sort things out.

2. Security Co-operation

There was some discussion on the broader aspects of this with the Irish side emphasising that it was primarily an inter-police matter. We also asked that every effort should be made to stop the anti-Dublin propaganda on security which was a regular feature

of British briefings. This was totally counterproductive. They could not expect co-operation from the forces on the ground if these men were being subjected to a barrage of flack from media briefings by "security sources" in Lisburn. Though it was not something on which we could comment in detail it seemed to us that it would perhaps be well to look into the co-ordination arrangements for briefings from there and from the N.I.O. We had it from the Department of Justice that none of the incidents involving finds of explosives had been reported to the Gardaí or the Department at the time they had happened over the past year. All we were getting were general allegations - made afterwards and often in the press. If they wanted co-operation to be effective, they must in their interests as well as ours, see that the arrangements for communicating data were improved - and that at the least the press just did not get their briefing (in the form of complaints) before the Gardaí or other responsible authorities. If there were problems, we should be told through recognised channels and we would examine the matters. We were currently examining matters which had been raised since 19 December and were looking at the suggestion that there should be a meeting at official level to discuss them. We would respond to the suggestions through the British Embassy in Dublin.

On the general question of the security meetings between police forces North and South, the British said that they were reasonably happy - but would like if possible if the proceedings could be speeded up.

It was also mentioned that if the co-operation of the people in the North with the forces of law and order were to be obtained it would be highly desirable to get down the quantities of arms etc. held around the Sandy Row and Shankhill etc. Unless the forces were seen to act equitably as between the two communities much of the slowly developing trust in them could be lost. How the British achieved the arms reductions in Protestant areas was not for us to say but the question was one demanding the closest study. The British side stressed the different approach of the security

forces to the two communities. In the Protestant areas, the RUC could operate, often with full co-operation from the community. In the other areas, they could not and the army had often to operate. They had an 85% conviction rate as a result of measures taken during the last assassination campaign. See details attached.

3. The IRA Ceasefire

In reply to question, Mr. Janes said that there had been a number of "meetings, telephone contacts and exchanges" with Sinn Féin representatives to explain to them HMG's policy and in particular to set out the possible reactions of HMG to a genuine and sustained cessation of violence. Everything that had been said to Sinn Féin was within the terms of public statements made by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons and elsewhere. Mr. Janes was not very specific, even when pressed, on the number of meetings which had taken place, on the subjects which had been discussed and on the Sinn Féin representation. He said some of the talks had been about what would happen if for example the Army or the RUC saw a few "familiar" IRA faces in the streets after the ceasefire. He also appeared to stress that the talks had been within the limitations of the Secretary of State's statement to the Commons on 14th January. He was apparently at a loss to explain where the 12 points and pieces of paper referred to in reports in that morning's London Times had emerged from. Generally, Mr. Janes said he did not have full information but this seems unlikely in view of the fact that he had already drafted the statement which the Secretary of State was to make in the Commons that afternoon. Trevelyan had also been in Belfast over the weekend and it seems unlikely that he would not have had the fullest information on what was happening. The great importance which the Irish Government attached to their being no shadow of "negotiation" or "discussion" directly with the Provisionals was stressed. The words used by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in a recent radio interview as to what could well be regarded as the "ultimate betrayal" were brought specifically to the attention of the British delegation -

who appeared to be in no doubt as to the dangers in the situation.

In a general comment on the cease fire, Mr. Janes said he thought that the Feakle discussions with the churchmen had impressed on the Provisional leadership more than anything else that ^{violence} ~~malice~~ had got them no where. Their hardline demands were really an attempt at reassuring their followers that all had not been given up.

We finally asked for the fullest briefing via the British Embassy in Dublin and it was agreed that this would be done. (I have now been in touch with the British Ambassador and he said they will be in a position to brief us on Friday, 14th February. I explained that I would be in Belfast today and could take a briefing there but he said that arrangements had already been made for his Counsellor to travel to Belfast tomorrow to obtain material for the briefing.)

4. Discussion Paper No. 3

We expressed doubts about the Executive Committee system of power-sharing. It seems that what the British side have in mind is the system used by some British local authorities - many of the present NIO staff worked on this either in former Departments or when they were at the Home Office - though they made it clear that they were not suggesting any particular model. They said that the points made in the Taoiseach's letter to the Prime Minister influenced the final drafting of the document.

5. Convention Elections

Though the British side said they had no date yet fixed, it became clear from our discussions that they will be held before the June EEC referendum. It appeared also that a chairman has already been selected, but it is not clear as to whether he has agreed to act. The exact timing will apparently be determined by their reading of the Provo ceasefire developments but an April date seems most likely. There is clearly little prospect of our influencing them on the choice of date.

6. EEC Cross Border Studies

We expressed strong reservations about the British attitude on the joint study under EEC auspices. Janes said that their objections were on two grounds, viz. firstly the proposal would give an appearance of institutionalising cross-border co-operation and secondly general studies had already been carried out on both sides of the border. A cross-border general study would benefit nobody but the consultants involved. The limited projects suggested by the British side would not frighten anyone and they would also have practical value. We asked them to look at the matter again and see if they had room for movement.

7. Assassinations

We raised this matter in the context both of recent court cases involving UDA murderers and five assassinations in the previous few days. We pointed out that something would have to be done urgently about illegally held guns in Protestant areas such as Sandy Row and explained that while we were not suggesting what should be done, consideration might be given to using the IRA ceasefire to take some action in this matter.

8. Law Enforcement Legislation

The British mentioned informally after the meeting the progress being made with this legislation on their sides. It has already passed its second stage in the Lords and would they hoped be through the Commons soon.