

SECRET AND PERSONAL



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

**ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS:
NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Prime Minister has considered the draft message to the Taoiseach attached to your minute of 11 November. She has approved it in the slightly amended form attached to this minute.

I am copying this minute and enclosure to the Private Secretaries to the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary.

C D POWELL

11 November 1985

A large, stylized handwritten signature, likely belonging to C D Powell, written in dark ink.

SECRET AND PERSONAL

DRAFT MESSAGE TO THE TAOISEACH

Thank you for your message of 7 November. I entirely agree with you that, as we move towards the conclusion of an agreement, contact at political level is essential to make sure we avoid misunderstandings.

2. I am glad that at the meeting that Dick Spring and Peter Barry had with Geoffrey Howe and Tom King they were able to reach a clear understanding on the matter of security co-operation between us. This is important in its own right, and it is necessary for us to be able to say publicly that the agreement provides the basis for effective and sustained co-operation between us in combatting terrorism, particularly along the border.

3. As to the Intergovernmental Conference and the Secretariat, I recognise and agree with the importance you attach to arrangements that make possible close and clear communication between our people and yours in pursuit of the purposes of the agreement. You can be sure that all of us, not least Tom King as the joint Chairman of the Conference, are determined to make the agreement work and to set up arrangements which will enable the conference to carry out the tasks which the agreement gives it.

4. We also want the agreement, and the arrangements set up to give effect to it, to be durable. There will be plenty of people who want to see it fail, and will be looking for opportunities to undermine it. You know as well as I do that it will not be welcome to the unionists. We shall make it clear that we are firm in our purposes, and are not prepared to see the agreement frustrated or destroyed by acts or threats of violence, from wherever they come; but it will make sense to take the implementation at a measured pace, and to give people as little as possible on which to whip up opposition and

emotion. From this point of view we are particularly concerned about the Secretariat: it will take time for people to get used to there being a presence of your Government in Belfast.

5. Geoffrey Howe, Tom King and I have been thinking about this and discussing it since I received your message, and I very much hope that you will find the conclusions we have reached and the proposals I now make a reasonably satisfactory compromise between the need to get the agreement working effectively and as soon as possible and the importance of avoiding unnecessary points of confrontation for those who do not share our objectives.

6. First, we are at one with you in the view that the Intergovernmental Conference should normally meet in Belfast (though we would not wish to preclude occasional meetings elsewhere, such as Dublin or London, if that was convenient); that there should be a Secretariat with British and Irish co-secretaries to serve the conference on a continuing basis; and that, since the Conference will normally meet in Belfast, it is sensible that the Secretariat should be there as well.

7. Second, we remain of the view that it would be preferable not to hold the first meeting in Belfast. However in view of the strength of your feelings on this, we are prepared to agree that the first meeting should be held in Belfast, probably about a fortnight after the exchange of notifications has brought the agreement into effect. We would have to come back to you on this if, after the agreement is signed, the reaction to it were to be much worse than we at present expect.

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8. Third, as to the location of the conference and the Secretariat in Belfast. There simply is not room to house the Secretariat in Stormont House or Stormont Castle, and we agree

that a Portakabin solution would be adequate neither in standard nor in security. We had thought that it would be easier to protect your people if they were in the secure perimeter at Stormont; but we have now concluded that to house the Secretariat in Stormont would be peculiarly liable to attract attempts to attack it which would put not only your people but also ours at risk.

9. We have therefore looked as a matter of urgency for an alternative Government building reasonably near Stormont for which we can provide the necessary security. Indeed, we have now identified an existing Government office close to Stormont which will provide office accommodation for both sides of the Secretariat, and possibly residential accommodation for the Irish side of the Secretariat. It is free-standing in several acres, overlooking Belfast Lough, and preferred by the Royal Ulster Constabulary on security grounds. Ministerial meetings could still be held at Stormont; but Sub-Committees should meet in the Secretariat building. We expect the building to be available in a few weeks' time; but it is at present on short lease to us, and we may have to negotiate purchase. Subject to these points, it seems as if it would be very well suited for our purpose. It will provide good accommodation at a proper standard for the Conference and its Secretariat in conditions which can be made reasonably secure; it will facilitate rapid and easy communication between the two Secretaries who will be the normal channel of contact, as well as easy access to the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments when it is necessary for other officials to be involved. Representatives of the two sides will wish to examine how best the building could be adapted (it would require changes for permanent residential purposes); but this could be done in advance of the Agreement being signed without breach of confidentiality.

10. Until the building can be ready, we shall have to make the best temporary arrangements we can. I hope that you will be able during this time to keep to an absolute minimum the number of officials who need to be in Belfast on a continuing basis, even if that means people travelling to and from Dublin more than is really convenient. It may well be that anybody who stays overnight will have to be put up in a hotel (as many of our own people were in the early months of direct rule and still are when making short visits). We should of course be responsible for their protection. On that basis I am satisfied that we shall be able to find office accommodation, from the time of the first meeting of the Conference, to enable the Secretariat to serve the Conference effectively and do what is necessary.

11. As to the two Heads of the Secretariat, we agree that they should be of a rank compatible with the importance of the agreement. Ours is in fact likely to be slightly less highly graded than yours; but, operating as he will be in Belfast and close to the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland departments, he will not need to be quite so highly graded. He will nonetheless be a senior official of proven calibre and competence, in whom all three of us have confidence.

12. I [REDACTED] hope that on this basis you will be ready to go forward with our plans ^{to} for sign^{ing} the agreement shortly.

[REDACTED]

We both know that it is not going to be all plain sailing: as the new arrangements settle down during the coming months we shall need on both sides patience and forbearance, as well as the understanding and goodwill that have been built up

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during these long months of negotiation. They will be forthcoming on our side, I assure you.

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during these long months of negotiation. ~~The Cabinet has given its blessing in principle to the agreement, and with your help we mean to make a success of it.~~

*They will be
forthcoming on our side, I assure you.*

SECRET AND PERSONAL



bc Mr. Russell

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70 WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AS

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO

Ref. A085/2879

11 November 1985

Dear Jim,

Anglo-Irish Relations: Northern Ireland

At the Prime Minister's meeting on 9 November I was instructed to prepare a draft of a message for the Prime Minister to send to the Taoiseach in reply to his message of 7 November, conveying the conclusions and decisions reached at the meeting.

I enclose a draft message herewith, on which I should be grateful for your Secretary of State's comments, and those of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, before I submit the draft to the Prime Minister.

There is great urgency about this. The Irish have indicated that it would be helpful if they could have the Prime Minister's reply by 6.00 pm this evening, no doubt with a view to their Cabinet meeting tomorrow. The Prime Minister will not be able to consider the draft after 4.30 pm this afternoon. It would clearly be preferable that she should have a draft which has been seen and approved by the two Secretaries of State. I must therefore ask for clearance of the draft, and any comments and alterations which the Secretaries of State may wish to suggest, by 2.30 pm this afternoon.

I am sending copies of this letter and the draft message to Len Appleyard.

Yours as

Robert Armstrong

J A Daniell Esq

SECRET AND PERSONAL

DRAFT MESSAGE TO THE TAOISEACH

Thank you for your message of 7 November. I entirely agree with you that, as we move towards the conclusion of an agreement, contact at political level is essential so as to make sure we avoid misunderstandings.

2. I am glad that at the meeting that Dick Spring and Peter Barry had with Geoffrey Howe and Tom King they were able to reach a clear understanding on the matter of security co-operation between us. As you know, it is one of the important selling points with the unionists that we should be able to say that the agreement provides the basis for effective and sustained co-operation between us in combatting terrorism, particularly along the border.

3. As to the Intergovernmental Conference and the Secretariat, I recognise and agree with the importance you attach to arrangements that make possible close and clear communication between our people and yours in pursuit of the purposes of the agreement. You can be sure that all of us, not least Tom King as the joint Chairman of the Conference, are determined to make the agreement work and to set up arrangements which will enable the conference to carry out the tasks which the agreement gives it.

4. We also want the agreement, and the arrangements set up to give effect to it, to be durable. There will be plenty of people who want to see it fail, and will be looking for opportunities to undermine it. You know as well as I do that it will not be welcome to the unionists. We shall make it clear that we are firm in our purposes, and are not prepared to see the agreement frustrated or destroyed by acts or threats of violence, from wherever they come; but it will make sense to take the implementation at a measured pace, and to give people as little as possible on which to whip up opposition and

emotion. From this point of view we are particularly concerned about the Secretariat: it will take time for people to get used to there being a presence of your Government in Belfast.

5. Geoffrey Howe, Tom King and I have been thinking about this and discussing it since I received your message, and I very much hope that you will find the conclusions we have reached and the proposals I now make a reasonably satisfactory compromise between the need to get the agreement working effectively and as soon as possible and the importance of avoiding unnecessary points of confrontation for those who do not share our objectives.

6. First, we are at one with you in the view that the Intergovernmental Conference should normally meet in Belfast (though we would not wish to preclude occasional meetings elsewhere, such as Dublin or London, if that was convenient); that there should be a Secretariat with British and Irish co-secretaries to serve the conference on a continuing basis; and that the Secretariat should be located where the Conference normally meets, that is to say in Belfast.

7. Second, we agree that the first meeting of the Conference should be held in Belfast, probably about a fortnight after the exchange of notifications has brought the agreement into effect. We would come back to you on this only if, after the agreement is signed, the reaction to it were to be much worse than we at present expect. We shall plan for and expect the meeting to be held in Belfast.

8. Third, as to the location of the conference and the Secretariat in Belfast. There simply is not room to house the Secretariat in Stormont House or Stormont Castle, and we agree that a Portakabin solution would be adequate neither in standard nor in security. We had thought that it would be easier to protect your people if they were in the secure perimeter at

Stormont; but we have now concluded that to house the Secretariat in Stormont would be very provocative to the unionists, and would be peculiarly liable to attract attempts to attack it which would put not only your people but also ours at risk.

9. We are therefore looking as a matter of urgency for a building reasonably near Stormont for which we can provide the necessary security. Indeed, we think we have identified a building reasonably near Stormont which will provide office accommodation for both sides of the Secretariat, a meeting room for the Conference, and residential accommodation for the Irish side of the Secretariat. The building will not be available for some weeks; but it seems as if it would be very well suited for our purposes. It will provide better than adequate accommodation at a proper standard for the Conference and its Secretariat in conditions which can be made reasonably secure; and it will facilitate rapid and easy communication between the two secretaries who will be the normal channel of contact, as well as reasonable proximity to the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland departments when it is necessary for other officials to be involved.

10. Until the building can be ready, we shall have to make the best temporary arrangements we can. I hope that you will be able during this time to keep to an absolute minimum the number of officials who need to be in Belfast on a continuing basis, even if that means people travelling to and from Dublin more than is really convenient. It may well be that anybody who stays overnight will have to be put up in a hotel (as many of our own people were in the early months of direct rule). We should of course be responsible for their protection. On that basis I am sure that we should be able to find temporary office accommodation, from the time of the first meeting of the Conference, to enable the Secretariat to serve the conference effectively and do what is necessary, until the long-term

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where?

accommodation is available and ready.

11. As to the two Heads of the Secretariat, we agree that they should be of a rank compatible with the importance of the agreement. Ours is in fact likely to be slightly less highly graded than yours; but, operating as he will be in Belfast and close to the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland departments, he will not need to be quite so highly graded. He will nonetheless be a senior official of proven calibre and competence, in whom all three of us have confidence.

12. I ~~very much~~ hope that on this basis you will be ready to go forward with our plans ^{to} ~~for signing~~ the agreement shortly. ~~We are embarking on something entirely new, and exciting in the hopes and possibilities it contains for making life better for all the people of Northern Ireland.~~ We both know that it is not going to be all plain sailing: I am sure that as the new arrangements settle down during the coming months we shall need on both sides patience and forbearance, as well as the understanding and goodwill that have been built up during these long months of negotiation. They will be forthcoming on our side, I assure you. ~~The Cabinet has given its blessing in principle to the agreement and all that goes with it, and with your help we mean to make a success of it.~~

IRELAND : Relations : A11

