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3.6.82

Visit by Mr. Alan Goodison, Under-Secretary, Foreign Office
by David Neligan, F/A.

1. After preliminary courtesies, Mr. Goodison stated that his visit would enable him to make an assessment of the state of Anglo-Irish relations. He appreciated that certain differences in policy that had arise between us in recent weeks might suggest that this was not a particularly favourable moment to attempt such an assessment. However the general election here had followed very closely upon his appointment to the Foreign Office and he obviously had had to postpone a familiarisation visit here as a result.

2. I responded by saying that a visit such as Mr. Goodison's was always welcome and that in ways a moment when there were differences between our two Governments was a particularly appropriate time for an exchange of views. I said that the state of Anglo-Irish relations was not wholly reflected in the differences of approach in Brussels and in the South Atlantic. Ongoing bilateral cooperation on various economic matters continued and meetings, including meetings at the Ministerial level, would take place depending on the requirements of such bilateral cooperation. There had been in the previous week a clustering of such meetings, which appeared to suggest to certain Unionist spokesmen a conspiracy to develop political contacts, but this was fortuitious and dictated by interest on both sides in the matters discussed. (Some comment from both sides on the satisfactory meeting about natural gas followed, the British Ambassador However observing that press comment on our side seemed to be a little "bullish", suggesting that little remained except to initial an agreement on the subject).

3. I went on to say that beyond ongoing cooperation, Anglo-Irish relations at the high political level would in our view have to await a meeting between the two Heads of Government before new general directions and new progress could be plotted. We recognised that in the present uncertain position for the British Government resulting from the Falklands crisis

it would be difficult to foresee a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher in the short or early medium term. The Taoiseach was interested in a meeting with Mrs. Thatcher but we were not pressing that this should be brought forward. Mr. Goodison agreed that such a meeting could not be envisaged during the summer. In his view bilateral contacts with any country could not be arranged in July given the inordinate amount of parliamentary and cabinet time that would have to be devoted to the Falklands. At a later point in our discussion, Mr. Goodison referred to a meeting in the autumn.

4. Mr. Goodison then raised the question of the Falkland Islands in a general way. He could not conceal that they had been disappointed and surprised by our policy on the continuation of European Community trade sanctions against Argentina. In particular, since we had agreed to the imposition of sanctions in April at a time when the British Task Force had already set sail, they wondered what we thought the Task Force intended to achieve. Of course the sanctions were intended to increase pressure for a diplomatic solution, but such a solution would have to include the removal of the Argentinian invasion force from the Islands. Mr. Goodison said that the intention not only to deploy but to use force on the Islands had been clearly signalled from the start.

5. I said that notwithstanding such signals we were entitled to believe, as we did, that a negotiated settlement would have priority. Statements about the intention to use force were to be expected if the credibility of the British action was to be ensured but we were justified in supposing that the Task Force would operate by imposing a blockade and reducing the Argentinian garrison by those means. Moreover, we had from the beginning (e.g. statements in the Security Council and by our Minister) envisaged that the peace-making and peace-keeping role of the United Nations, as usual through the action of the Secretary General, would be brought into play. Since that was

our view of the situation and of the way forward, the horror felt by our people and by the Government when the General Belgrano was sunk could readily be pictured. This was not how we envisaged the solution of any international problem. We knew the importance which any nation was disposed to attach to a principle - and the British obviously saw in the Falklands the principles of sovereignty and self-determination as having to be upheld against armed aggression - but we were unable to dissociate the means employed from the end in view. This question, I said, was one which involved the whole tradition and outlook of our country in international affairs. We were not a member of any military alliance, we were neutral by tradition and our approach to international conflict was to initiate and to help in implementing international peace-keeping efforts, usually of course through the United Nations.

6. Mr. Goodison and the British Ambassador argued further the inevitability of the warfare which had in fact arisen. A blockade of the Islands, such as I had referred to, required enforcement; it was enforcement of the blockade which had caused the sinking of the General Belgrano. (In regard to this incident, Goodison remarked that the casualties had been unusually high because the sailors had not known how to abandon ship. Amb. Figg expressed the view that the General Belgrano had been heading for South Georgia at the time it was intercepted. Both pointed out that the Belgrano's attendant destroyers had made off without picking up any survivors.) Mr. Goodison inferred in further remarks that the British aim was now to throw out the Argentinian forces and to re-occupy the Islands. The attitude of the British public would be that the Islands had been purchased with the blood of British troops and it would obviously be a long time before any British Government could take up again the sort of contacts and negotiations with Argentina about the future of the Islands which had been in progress before the invasion. There would be extreme distaste in Britain for any early contacts on any subject with Argentina.

7. I again expressed the view that the Irish Government's approach, and indeed that of our people, to solving disputes was

very different from the attitude revealed by our interlocuteurs. The Irish approach was not that of a martial people. We could not contemplate either participating in or appearing to give backing to the sort of approach to the Falkland Islands invasion just presented to us. In our view the apparently logical basis on which Mr. Goodison had described the step by step involvement of the Task Force could not conceal from us the basically destructive nature of the British approach. Because we were unable to back such an approach - and this was, as I hoped the British Ambassador would confirm, a question of popular Irish reaction rather than solely a matter of Government policy - we had been obliged to refrain from continuing economic sanctions against Argentina. Our strong view from the start had been that such sanctions were solely justified as an aid to diplomatic and United Nations efforts. While we had for a time considered that such a stipulation might enable us to continue to apply sanctions after 17 May, the Government had in fact decided otherwise and that decision had been reconfirmed the day before (24 May). I put it to the British visitors that the Community was now continuing sanctions against Argentina with the exception of two countries which for national reasons were unable to do so. In our case the national reason depended on our clearly acknowledged and clearly evident difference, since Ireland was a neutral country, from the other member States of the Community. We noted that there had been much criticism of Ireland's stance in the British press, but we did not see why our stance should be criticised rather than Italy's, indeed since Italy is a member of the Atlantic Alliance the position might reasonably be the opposite of what it was.

8. Mr. Goodison said that of course his Government did not associate itself with the wilder forms of press criticism. They were however disappointed at our reaction and, viewing the whole course of events since the Argentinian aggression were unable to understand it. He could appreciate and note what I had been saying about our Government's attitude and that of Irish people's opinion, but he could not accept it as a convincing reason for a diplomatic action which his Government found unhelpful.

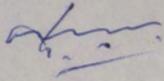
As regards our approach at the United Nations - the British authorities hoped that nobody would vote for the Irish resolution then being suggested by our Permanent Representative. The notion of a ceasefire without Argentine withdrawal could not be accepted. I understand that Mr. Goodison developed this argument at some length with the Political Division during and after lunch. I found Mr. Goodison's dismissive view of our first draft resolution to be strangely in contrast with Ambassador Dorr's report of Sir Anthony Parson's attitude in New York which seemed to be one of discreet encouragement to us to put in our draft. My personal impression was that perhaps the British wished us to put forward a draft even though they knew they would have to reject it because such an operation would at least occupy the time of the Security Council, postponing a vote there and so enable their Forces in the Falklands to consolidate and advance their position in the meantime.

9. I next raised the question of the Prior proposals, and rehearsed our objections to them. Their unworkability needed little demonstration in view of the unprecedented breadth of opinion now ranged against the plan in Northern Ireland and in the British Conservative Party. As regards the attempt to provide an administration for Northern Ireland alone within the purely regional context, I pointed out the inconsistency of this approach with the wider aims which had been defined in the Taoiseach's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher when he was previously in Office. I said that this retreat from the approach of the Dublin Castle Summit was not only a rebuff to the Taoiseach's policy initiatives in Anglo-Irish relations, but was also a turning back by the British Government from the position which they had held for a decade on institutionalized power sharing. As regards the Irish dimension, there was a reluctance to proceed firmly even with the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary tier, and a general description of the prevailing situation of the two identities in Northern Ireland was no substitute for an effective Irish dimension. In our view, the whole business would be better forgotten about and relations taken up again at the highest level where they had stood at the start of the Anglo-Irish process.

10. Mr. Goodison, by way of rejoinder, referred to the public opinion poll that day indicating that a majority of both communities in Northern Ireland favoured a power sharing executive in Belfast. Might not Mr. Prior's rolling devolution idea work out in that situation? I said that the political leaders on the Unionist side in the North evidently held an opinion on this matter completely different from the generality of Protestants in Northern Ireland. If the British Government however wished to take the result of this opinion poll seriously, they should react by putting into Mr. Prior's proposals a prescribed and guaranteed form of power sharing, which was at present absent. Mr. Goodison then referred to the Anglo-Irish Parliamentary Council to say that he found it contradictory on our part to advocate the setting up of such a body with Northern Ireland political representation and at the same time to reject a proposal to establish a Northern Ireland Assembly from which such representation might be drawn. I acknowledged that this might appear paradoxical, but if so it was on account of the manner in which the proposals to establish the Assembly had been brought forward and because of their content and basis - all of which as they knew we found unacceptable. It would certainly be possible to find means of selecting Northern Ireland representatives for the Parliamentary tier when it was established.

11. In concluding our discussion Mr. Goodison returned to the question of resuming the Anglo-Irish dialogue. Assuming, he said, that we focussed upon a possible meeting between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in the autumn, how could we attempt to prepare and plan such a meeting? I said that some part of such a meeting would have to be given over to private explanation of points of view which had obviously become divergent since the last full meeting in December, 1980. Acknowledging this, Mr. Goodison observed wryly that, speaking for his own Prime Minister, he could imagine that such a conversation might take a counter-productive turn. I took up Mr. Goodison's reference to preparations and planning of the meeting, saying that this would have to be considered nearer to the time of the next meeting. If a positive result of the meeting could be envisaged - and this would obviously be a matter for the central participants alone - we would certainly

hope to see progress on the Parliamentary tier which we felt could be brought forward by the Governments on each side. Mr. Goodison noted this point and we adjourned our discussion.



D.M. Neligan
28 May, 1982