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MemorandumNon-meeting of Anglo-Irish Coordinating Committee: Informal Exchanges

An informal discussion took place over lunch following the more structured discussion.

Present were:

<u>Irish side</u>	<u>British side</u>
Mr M. Lillis	Mr. D. Goodall
Mr B. McCarthy	Ambassador Goodison
Mr M. Burke	
Mr B. Davenport	

Following lunch I had a private talk with Goodall during a walk around the Georgian area north of the Grand Canal. The following note may be of interest in conveying an impression of what was not in any sense a formal discussion but rather an informal, sometimes emotional (particularly on the British side), but always very friendly exchange. It summarises, without distinction, the exchanges during lunch and during the following talk.

Basically the exchanges took place under two headings which might be described as Mutual Perceptions and Summit agenda and communiqué respectively.

Mutual perceptions

In line with a commitment to speak very frankly, Goodall, at my invitation, set out his view of the perception of the Irish problem in London today. He said that in doing so he was setting aside his own interest in and sympathies for Ireland. He said he could not sufficiently stress to us the extent to which the Irish issue was not a priority issue in Mrs Thatcher's view. This is compounded by her conviction, stated repeatedly in private, that any time you try to resolve the Irish problem your efforts actually make the problem worse. He also advised that we should not underestimate a general British hostility to Ireland which was nothing new (he said that in his experience people who had lived through the war years vividly and

resentfully recalled that the Irish policy on neutrality and in particular the signature of the Book of Condolences at the German Embassy here); this had been greatly exacerbated by the Falklands episode and IRA violence in London. He recalled the scene in the Cabinet Room on the day after the murder of the Guards in London when the Guards paraded in the street and came to attention outside the window where the Government was meeting: Mrs Thatcher had called for a moment's silence while the buglers sounded a salute; the silence had been immediately followed by a general outburst of wrath on the part of Ministers which made no distinction between constitutional and unconstitutional Irish politics. This, he said, was what we in Dublin were up against. He added that we had hitherto failed to make any real breach in the ranks of the Tory members at Westminster and suggested that this should be a priority.

On the other hand he said we should not despair of Mrs Thatcher. The problem always with her was to engage herepersonal interest. Both she and the Taoiseach should make a particular effort to avoid lecturing each other or otherwise misunderstanding each other.

Goodall said that there was a feeling in London, which he shared, that the only fundamental concession which had been made during the past thirteen years had been a British concession at Sunningdale to the effect that should a majority in Northern Ireland wish to change the constitutional status of Northern Ireland London would not stand in their way.

We naturally countered fairly strongly on the failure of London to understand Irish national feeling at various points during the past thirteen years, suggesting that this failure had done more to create the IRA and exacerbate the problem politically than perhaps any other element. We also urged the view that, given the depth of Irish nationalist feeling, the Irish nationalist acceptance that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland except by the agreement of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland constituted a more dramatic and "neuralgic" concession than the British statement at Sunningdale, which was no more than an official formulation of the classic British position.

We also strongly urged the view that no "tinkering" policies would either reverse or even halt the dangerous process of alienation in the nationalist community and that any solution to work would

have to address that problem centrally and comprehensively. We suggested that Britain should show a greater sensitivity to one of our most sensitive concerns which was that we be treated as a sovereign and equal state, particularly in our relations with Britain. It was regrettable that this factor had not been given more weight in the choice of venue for the Summit.

When we said that we would hope that the British were aware of the extreme restraint and discretion we had shown in relation to Prime Ministerial and Ministerial contacts over several months, Goodall said that this was fully appreciated. At this point he somewhat ruefully told us that Paisley would be holding a press conference later in the day concerning a British document he had improperly had communicated to him.

There was a discussion of the Forum. The British were clearly somewhat encouraged by the content of the leaked document on "Fundamental Questions".

In private, Goodall was interested in the formula that the criterion for any solution would have to be that the authority of the security forces on the streets in Northern Ireland could as a result be accepted and that the arrangement should be such as would permit the SDLP to express unrestricted support for the security forces, including urging their supporters to join up. He said that security remained the dominant British concern in Northern Ireland: several Ministers would believe that it should be the only issue to be discussed in the Anglo-Irish framework.

On our side we urged on our British guests the need that both our Governments should, when we came to trying to secure some progress, together remain steady in the face of the inevitable reaction that would follow. In agreeing with this, Goodall said he felt it would be no easy task.

Summit agenda and communiqué. We had a brief discussion on these topics. I repeated the understanding that this was a matter for the Steering Committee. I suggested that at this stage it seemed that the main business of the forthcoming Summit might be "normalisation" and the demonstration of "normalisation". This is desirable in itself but also perhaps necessary from our point of view because of the Forum.

As to the communiqué, we did not express any ideas on our side nor did the British as to its possible contents. I suggested, however, that the communiqué of November 1981 might provide a useful point of departure.

M.J. Lillis

8 September 1983

c.c. Personal and Secret:

Taoiseach

Tánaiste

Minister

Secretary

Ambassador (London)

Mr. Nally)

Mr. McCarthy)

) Department of the Taoiseach