

JOINT DECLARATION INITIATIVE - A BACKGROUND BRIEF

In a formal sense the Joint Declaration Initiative may be said to have begun at the meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr Haughey, the then Taoiseach, in Dublin on 4 December 1991. Mr Haughey suggested that he believed there was a possibility of securing peace if the two Governments were to make a statement which built on Mr Brooke's words (in his Whitbread speech) about the British Government having no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister expressed deep scepticism but agreed that the two Cabinet Secretaries could examine, without commitment, the possible formulation of such a Declaration. X

2. It was principally through John Hume that matters had been brought to this point. The discussions Hume had had in 1988 with Sinn Fein were public knowledge, but intermittent contact evidently continued, particularly with Gerry Adams. By November 1991 the notion of a Joint Declaration by the two Governments securing an end to the IRA's campaign of violence had begun to crystallise, and - apparently encouraged by Hume - Mr Haughey made his suggestion. The discussions between the Cabinet Secretaries began later in December when Mr Nally, but not Sir Robin Butler, had a text which had been given to the Irish side by Hume. The text, headed Draft 2 (JD2), was eventually passed to Sir Robin and it was agreed that there would be a further discussion between the two Cabinet Secretaries on the basis of that text.

3. On 10 January 1992 Hume met the Prime Minister privately and asked for authority to tell the Provisionals that the British Government, like the Irish Government, saw a serious possibility of making progress with this initiative. After careful consideration it was agreed that he could report his own impression of the Government's response, but not carry any message

on behalf of HMG. The impression he might convey was that the British Government saw no prospect of political exchanges with those supporting or using violence, but that it, with the Irish Government, was naturally interested in reaching a position where all those prepared to pursue objectives through constitutional means could establish a basis for political exchange; that while the British Government had no selfish strategic or economic interest in maintaining Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom against its own wishes, any change in the constitutional status would require the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland; but the British Government had no wish to inhibit the peaceful political expression of republicanism, or the legitimate aspiration to a united Ireland. X

4. In February 1992 Mr Reynolds replaced Mr Haughey as the Taoiseach. Early in the month a third meeting took place between Sir Robin Butler and Mr Nally. Sir Robin was under instructions from the Prime Minister to the effect that he did not believe it possible to make further progress given Mr Haughey's imminent departure as Taoiseach, but that the Prime Minister would naturally wish to listen with interest if the new Taoiseach wished to return to these matters later. In the event there was a meeting with Mr Reynolds on 26 February at which he told the Prime Minister that he believed an acceptable Declaration could be drafted. Furthermore he was persuaded that those handling the initiative for the Provisionals were people who could deliver. The Prime Minister indicated that he did not wish to pursue the matter at least until after the forthcoming General Election. Mr Reynolds accepted the point.

5. Shortly before that meeting Hume had given a new text (JD3) separately to the Irish and British sides, which, he said, had the approval of the Provisional Army Council. The Provisionals were expecting Hume to broker JD3 initially with the Irish Government and not to give it to the British. The text contained some new

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difficulties - for both Governments - and may have been a ploy designed to test out the limits of the Irish Government's position, although it might equally have reflected an internal shift within the Provisionals towards a less accommodating position.

6. By this time the key elements of the Joint Declaration had, however, become clear.

- HMG would acknowledge the right to Irish self-determination.
- The Irish Government would acknowledge the need for consent of the people of Northern Ireland to the exercise of rights for self-determination.
- Taoiseach would establish a permanent Irish Convention, open to all democratically mandated, constitutional.

JD3 introduced two fresh difficulties, however. Firstly, HMG was expected to join the ranks of those seeking to persuade the people of Northern Ireland to embrace a united Ireland, and second HMG would commit itself to a united Ireland within a period to be agreed. X

7. In May 1992 Hume reported a new draft (JD4) which appeared to have originated in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin. This draft committed HMG to the collective exercise of self-determination by the Irish people, ^{gt} and was then further amended by the Provisionals to maintain the point about HMG being one of the persuaders in the cause of Irish unity. It was with this fifth version of the Declaration that matters came to an apparent halt (this was, of course, the period during which the three stranded political Talks were taking place). X

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8. Whether Hume had been continuing to meet Adams during this period is unclear. The fact of meetings between Hume and Adams was discovered on 10 April 1993, and as a result they issued a joint statement which accepted "that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination", and that the exercise of that right was a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland. From this point Hume has publicly defended his talks with Adams and stressed his belief that they represented a real chance for peace.

9. Then, on 5 June 1993, the Taoiseach telephoned the Prime Minister, and the next day, having broken his holidays, handed to Sir Robin Butler a new text (JD6) and an aide mémoire setting out his view that the Initiative did constitute a genuine opportunity to secure peace in Ireland. He told Sir Robin that the Provisional Army Council had accepted that text during the previous week, and that he looked forward to discussing the Initiative with the Prime Minister at their bilateral on 16 June. An initial assessment of JD6 by officials was that it retained some of the unhelpful elements from the previous draft and was unlikely to form the basis of something HMG could agree in its present form.

10. On 8 June Hume told John Chilcot, PUS NIO, that he did not like JD6 and had a new version which he would put to Adams (he did not hand over a draft at this stage). On 16 June the Prime Minister discussed the Initiative with Mr Reynolds and agreed, without commitment to the Initiative, that Sir Robin Butler and Chilcot could examine the text with Mr Nally ^(former Irish Cabinet Secretary) and Mr O hUiginn ^(DFA) and "explore principles" which HMG would have to see acknowledged in any acceptable text. In late June Hume sought a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the Initiative and (presumably) to hand over the draft he had mentioned previously to Chilcot. That meeting was unavoidably delayed and on 9 July Hume handed his new text (JD7) to Chilcot.

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11. This version was very similar to JD6 except in the key fourth paragraph where there were a number of alterations attempting to reconcile the British Government's acceptance of Irish self-determination with its requirement for a clear statement of the need for consent from the people of Northern Ireland. Hume appeared to understand what might be necessary, and reported ~~to~~ his attempts to sign Adams up to something like simultaneous referendums North and South. Subsequently (on 14 July) Sir Robin Butler and Chilcot met Nally and O hUiginn, outlined the difficulties with JD6 and gave the Irish a copy of a paper containing ten principles - all drawn from public statements made by HMG - to which the British Government adhered. The same group had a further discussion on 4 August at which it was agreed that O hUiginn might pursue informal conversations with Quentin Thomas of the Northern Ireland Office when they met in the Anglo-Irish Liaison Group later that week, and that substantive discussion would be resumed on 10 September. X

12. On 7 September the Taoiseach wrote to the Prime Minister seeking his "full and enthusiastic backing" for the Initiative. On 10 September the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spoke briefly about JD6 to Mr Spring at their tete-à-tete at the beginning of that day's Intergovernmental Conference.

13. On 16 September John Hume met the Prime Minister (with Sir Patrick Mayhew and Chilcot present) and said that he was confident that a permanent end to violence could be secured by the Initiative. The Prime Minister made it clear that the Government could not enter into a negotiation, or be placed in the position of misleading Parliament.

14. On 24 September O hUiginn handed a new text (JD8) to Thomas. This text contained further improvements - particularly the absence of any timetable for withdrawal, and a softening of the degree to which HMG would be required to persuade the people of

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Northern Ireland to unity. On 25 September the Hume/Adams démarche accelerated the programme of discussions and brought a succession of revised texts (JD9-11) from the Irish responding to suggestions and probings at meetings of the Butler/Nally Group, now supplemented by Thomas.

15. On 8 October the different threads of the Initiative were in effect brought together after Hume's briefing of the Taoiseach and Tanaiste and the delivery to Mr Thomas of the current draft text (JD12). X

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