

CONFIDENTIAL

Northern Ireland

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1. Mr Haughey said he found the situation in Northern Ireland depressing. Despite the resources invested, the situation remained unsatisfactory. It was in many respects deteriorating, for example with the upsurge of tit-for-tat sectarian killings. Mr Brooke and Mr Collins had made great efforts in respect of the political talks, but the process had stalled. Comments by the Unionists indicated that there was little hope of progress. There was not much to be achieved through improved security cooperation: despite a series of proposals by the former Prime Minister there had been little improvement in the situation. The two Governments should therefore agree to conduct a general review covering the totality Anglo-Irish relations in order to see whether anything could be done at inter-Governmental level to achieve political progress.

2. The Prime Minister stressed that there was no doubt about HMG's commitment both to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to the three-stranded talks. The Unionist leaders had made it clear to Mr Brooke that they were prepared to continue the political dialogue, and to do so quickly. There was thus a real possibility of fresh talks prior to the General Election. On security, the improvements that had taken place were most welcome. But there were areas where further developments were possible. Examples were the formation of a Garda anti-terrorist squad, an increase in covert surveillance, a common automatic fingerprint recognition system, and direct radio communications between the Garda and the British Army. The Taoiseach's proposal for a general review by the two Governments would generate unnecessary suspicion among the Unionists. An alternative, which could be immediately announced, would be for the Heads of Government to agree to meet half-yearly, alternating between London and Dublin. This would not arouse the same fears among the Unionists. Any subject could be discussed at these bilaterals.

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3. Mr Haughey agreed to the proposal for half-yearly meetings, and asked whether one would take place in the first half of next year. The Prime Minister said he would wish to consider the position post-Maastricht. There was also the prospective General Election to consider.

4. Turning to the specific security proposals made by the Prime Minister, Mr Haughey made it clear that the answer on direct radio communication between the Garda and the British Army would be as before (no). ~~The other proposals could be considered,~~ although there could be minuses as well as pluses in them.

B/ 5. Invited to comment, Mr Brooke welcomed the proposed half-yearly meetings for the discipline they would exert on Mr Collins and himself to progress matters, including in the social field, and to report back to the Heads of Governments. Mr Collins added that "speciality" would also need to be included. /B

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