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25 February 1987

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ANGLO-IRISH SECTION

Time 16.30 Date 25/2

17 Grosvenor Place

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cc Taoiseach
Tánaiste
Minister for Justice
Attorney General
Secretary
Mr Nally
Mr Ward
Mr Russell
A-I Section (Counselor)
A-I Secretariat

Call on the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher -
23 February 1987

Dear Eamon

I paid a farewell call on the Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher at 10 Downing Street before lunch on Monday, 23 February. I spent about 35 minutes with her. Charles Powell, the Private Secretary in her Office who deals with external relations was also present and took notes.

(When making appointments for farewell calls some weeks ago I had sounded out Powell informally on whether it would be appropriate to seek to call on the Prime Minister. He told me that this is almost never done - he could only recall one case in his time in the office - but at the same time - "knowing of her concern about the issues with which you are concerned" he thought such a call, if it could be arranged, might be a good idea and he would contact me shortly before my departure - as in fact he did - if such a meeting could be arranged).

Mrs Thatcher was personally affable to me throughout but at the same time she used the occasion to make two points very strongly: (a) her commitment to the Agreement - "the whole Agreement in all its parts"; and (b) her continuing dissatisfaction at the results achieved in our cross border security cooperation. On the latter point the theme and content of what she had to say was rather similar to what she had said in meetings with the Taoiseach - particularly in February - last year but her tone was quieter and polemic. The basic problem in her view - and she returned to this point on several occasions - is that Dublin is simply not able to commit sufficient resources to maintain the level of intensive surveillance work that is need on our side of the border.

I began the meeting by saying that while I did not have specific instructions, I was sure that the Taoiseach, Dr FitzGerald, would want me to convey his good wishes to her; and that, though I was not explicitly authorised to speak on behalf of his probable successor, I believed and hoped that the same thing would apply. We talked a bit about my imminent transfer and about the post which I am about to take up in Dublin.

Mrs Thatcher then said, very firmly indeed, that she held to and would continue to hold very strongly to the Anglo-Irish Agreement "in all its parts". It was not possible to be selective about it - it was an international agreement and as such had to be upheld. She was quite firm

about that. I said in reply that no doubt an incoming Government would want to consider their programme and policies at an early date and that I had heard Mr Haughey tell Brian Farrell in a television interview after the election which had been shown on BBC, ~~say~~ that he would want to sit down at an early date for discussion with those who are operating the Agreement. I also recalled that Mr Haughey had stated publicly some time ago that any incoming Irish Government would want to respect the international agreements entered into by a previous Irish Government unless and until they were changed or renegotiated.

I said that the negotiation of the Agreement had led to good channels of communication between the two Governments and that I thought it would be important at least to keep those channels of communication open. Mrs Thatcher considered the point for a moment and, turning to Charles Powell, said "I expect that would be a good idea". (Comment: I took this as showing, on brief reflection, a general approval of further use, in due course, of the Armstrong/Nally channel if an incoming Irish Government wishes to avail of it. On the way out to the car Powell told me that he had noted this carefully in his minute and Robert Armstrong, after a dinner which he gave for us the following evening, mentioned that he had noted this point in Powell's minute).

Mrs Thatcher, speaking calmly rather than emotionally, went on to express disappointment at what is being achieved in the field of security cooperation. She said that there is simply nothing like enough surveillance on our side of the border and that she really doubted if we had the resources available to devote to this - particularly granted the very high crime levels in Dublin. She spoke of mortar attacks across the border and of the deaths of members of the Security Forces - particular younger members of the RUC; and she claimed - a point on which we had some discussion - that violence against the security forces had been increasing rather than diminishing.

At one point, while repeating very strongly her commitment to all aspects of the Agreement, she said reflectively "I paid all the costs on my side" (ie in terms of increased violence) "I had wanted another kind of Agreement very different." I asked, in order to draw her out, whether she meant something more radical? She replied "it would have meant better security - some day I shall tell you about it".

I replied to all of this by speaking of the channels and the arrangements for police liaison set up under the Agreement and the need to use them fully to convey information about any problems and to smooth out any difficulties. I said that the Government, and indeed any Irish Government, had always been ready to commit what was necessary by way of resources for security. I had heard the Taoiseach and Ministers express their puzzlement in the past however at hearing on occasion criticism such as she had just voiced which did not appear to fit with other comments about good security cooperation and which did not seem to be substantiated in the exchanges at the police and operating levels. I also spoke of the different conditions on the southern side of the border and the fact that the police and security forces, being more acceptable to the local community than their opposite numbers on the other side, do not need to blacken their faces and hide in the undergrowth to keep track

of what is happening. I mentioned also that, while I was not privy to the details of exchanges in the security field I believe there had been a good deal of discussion between the two police forces over the past year about practical aspects of their work including surveillance methods. I also spoke of the attitude to the police in certain areas north of the border and said that the fact that attacks on the security forces took place in these areas was often due to that rather than to the use of our territory; and I used a phrase sometimes used by John Hume "the border is the same length on both sides". She took this up in a somewhat different sense than intended and used it again to make the point that we simply did not - and probably could not - commit enough resources or manpower on our side to do what was needed. On their side there were 7,000 RUC and thousands of soldiers and it still did not seem to be enough - those involved in violence had become extremely sophisticated and a very sophisticated operation was needed to deal with them. "If the people downstairs (we were sitting above the Cabinet Room) had divided it differently when they came to divide it, we would have a defensible border by now". (This was a reference to the original decision on partition).

Mrs Thatcher's reference to the problem for us, as she saw it, of a lack of resources for security purposes on our side of the border, led her on to refer to the high crime rate in Dublin and to economic difficulties and high immigration which would no doubt continue to preoccupy the Irish Government. She spoke of the increased flow of immigrants to this country - especially young people - and of the welfare burdens which they impose. In reply I acknowledged that we do indeed have increased immigration but that a more important and more significant aspect of it is that, as a recent BBC TV programme showed - many highly qualified young people are taking jobs abroad in this country and on the Continent. I said I thought that the movement of young newly-qualified engineers and computer scientists was what was significant rather than that of welfare recipients although no doubt there has been some increase in that.

She said that, thankfully, one good thing about our recent election had been that Sinn Fein had not done too well. I agreed with this and quoted the figures for their percentage support and total first preference votes to show how they had fared.

Clearly Mrs Thatcher's two main themes at present, repeated many times during our discussion, are the need to hold to all aspects of the Agreement and a fairly rooted belief that, while she does not in any way regret the Agreement, it is her Government and security forces in Northern Ireland who have taken all the "kicks" while we on our side have been unable - and possibly may never be able, to give an adequate response by way of security cooperation. At one point, moving away from the security issue, I acknowledged our disappointment at what seemed to be the quite unreasonable fears on the unionist side and their rejection of efforts to get talks on devolution under way. Her comment was "all fear is unreasonable"; and she repeated the old point that the SDLP, granted the existence of the Agreement through which Dublin Ministers speaks on their behalf, have now no incentive to get into talks on devolution themselves. I replied strongly on this point that I was sure that serious and active politicians would always want to avail of the opportunity to speak for themselves and their own constituents rather than have someone else do it on their behalf.

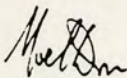
COMMENT

Something more than half of our 35 minute discussion was devoted to the security issue and on the substance of this point Mrs Thatcher was very critical not so much of the will as of the capacity to make an adequate response on our side. At the same time I should emphasise that her tone throughout was not sharp and that, as the phrase has it, she appeared to be speaking "more in sorrow (or indeed in resignation) than in anger". She several times interrupted the flow of what she had been saying to speak relatively warmly ^{and personally} to me about my time here; and towards the end of our discussion at one point she said "don't take it all too badly - I always say it and I shall go on saying it".

As I mentioned above Robert Armstrong touched briefly on the previous days meeting after a dinner which he hosted for us the following evening. He expressed a certain amused sympathy for me, knowing from his reading of the minutes of the meeting that Mrs Thatcher had gone on a bit on the security issue but he was reassuring about her basic attitude to the Agreement. I said that while I was not privy to all the detail of the exchanges on the security front and had not in any case wanted to be too argumentative in my farewell call on the Prime Minister I had thought difficulties and criticisms had been sorted out at police level by now. While there was no opportunity to get into detail on the point he did mention that he thought there may have been some problems at senior police level recently.

Overall I think it would be well in reading this report not to take Mrs Thatcher's, criticisms as expressed to me, too badly - or rather, in assessing what she said, to allow fully for her style and temperament. She remains fully committed to the Agreement - and committed to the full Agreement - but, granted that, as we know, she does not have a very deep historic sense of the whole problem, she is disappointed that so far it does not seem to have achieved the peace and stability which she had hoped for.

Yours sincerely



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Ambassador

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