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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 March 1981

ANGLO/IRISH JOINT STUDIES: MEETING WITH  
MR. HAUGHEY

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The Prime Minister had a brief meeting in Maastricht last night with the Taoiseach. The only subject discussed was the interview which the Irish Foreign Minister, Mr. Lenihan, gave to the Sunday Tribune on 22 March.

The Prime Minister told the Taoiseach that each of them had done everything to protect the other's position. The joint studies had, in all the circumstances, been going well. But Mr. Lenihan's interview might well have "undone" everything. (The Prime Minister pointed out to the Taoiseach some of the more damaging remarks). She did not know whether the situation could be pulled back. She had had to ask Mr. Atkins to issue a unilateral statement earlier in the afternoon: a joint statement in the present situation would not be helpful. If the Taoiseach himself felt able to issue a statement, that might be useful.

The Taoiseach did not respond to the Prime Minister's suggestion that he might make a statement. He agreed with the Prime Minister that the joint studies had been going well. Mr. Lenihan's interview had opened everything up. The Dublin initiative was now beginning to look "very tattered". The question which he and the Prime Minister faced was "how to pull things back". He thought the best thing to do would be to reflect on the situation overnight. The Prime Minister agreed. The two Heads of Government parted with expressions of mutual esteem and regret!

Neither the Taoiseach nor any member of his party in fact came up with new proposals this morning. I discussed the situation with Mr. Nally. We agreed that the only thing to do was to keep as low a profile as the circumstances permitted. I said that the Prime Minister's attitude in interviews and at Question time would be, in general terms, to express regret at what happened. However, she would, of course, have to make HMG's position clear if pressed. Mr. Nally took the point.

I am sending copies of this letter to Roy Harrington (Northern Ireland Office), John Halliday (Home Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

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