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From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS: NORTHERN IRELAND

Thank you for your minute of 21 September.

The Prime Minister has considered the matters raised in it. She believes that all the implications of the new Irish ideas will need to be very thoroughly examined before we decide the line which we should take in discussion with the Irish Government. She does not consider it possible to react to the ideas until they have been clarified and defined in considerably greater detail.

Meanwhile she would be content for Mr. Goodall, in the meeting which I understand that he will be having with the Irish next week, to take the following line: we have not yet been able to examine the Irish ideas in any detail. We would not reject them out of hand, but we are very sceptical as to their viability. Before we can evaluate their ideas we need to know a great deal more about them and especially about the nature of the commitment to recognising that Northern Ireland was and would remain part of the United Kingdom. What precisely is this proposal, how would it be entrenched and what would its practical implications be? If the various Irish ideas were just an oblique approach to a system of joint sovereignty, they would hold no interest for us.

The Prime Minister would be grateful for a report on Mr. Goodall's next discussion and a further assessment of the implications of the Irish ideas.

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I am copying this minute, on a secret and personal basis, to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. They should of course show it to Sir Geoffrey Howe and to Mr. Prior, but the Prime Minister has asked that there should be no further circulation of this minute.

A. J. COLES

22 September 1983