

FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
16 JANUARY 1991

Copy no of [8]

cc. PS/Secretary of State (L)	[2]
Paymaster General (L)	[3]
Minister of State (L)	[4]
Sir K Bloomfield	[5]
Mr Pilling	[6]
Mr Deverell	- B [7]
Mr Petch	- B [8]

PUS (L) [1]

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS

The Secretary of State held a meeting on 15 January 1991 to discuss your minute of 4 January with you and copy addressees. The main elements of the discussion are set out below.

2. The overall assessment of the situation within the Provisional movement was that a significant faction were considering changing the current "dual strategy" for a political one.

3. It appeared that Provisional thinking about a new strategy had been developing over about the last two years. Despite the strong desire of Mr Adams to see an end to the political development process, it was therefore likely that the motivation for considering a change of strategy did not result simply from a fear that the process might succeed. Nevertheless, the process itself had increased the pressure on the Provisionals. A genuine strategic reassessment had probably been undertaken because the policy of using violence had not proved successful.

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7. The interaction between any dialogue with the Provisionals and
4. There could be no guarantee that a complete ceasefire could be delivered. Almost inevitably, a core of violent terrorists would wish to continue with the "armed struggle" and would probably also indulge in internecine warfare. The key factors in determining the likely size and potency of any such remaining group would be control of the weapons arsenal. As yet, there was no knowledge of who would be the likely leaders of any faction opposed to a ceasefire. There was also the possibility of a change in moving direction by the Provisional leadership if the results from adopting a more political approach appeared disappointing.
5. There was the option of encouraging the Irish Government and
5. The terms which might prove acceptable to the Provisionals were unclear, and in particular whether or not they would accept the principle of consent (the need for a majority in Northern Ireland to be in favour of unification). While the Provisionals had a formally stated agenda, there was no clear sense of what might be negotiable, although recognition of Provisional Sinn Fein would probably be essential.
6. There were a number of possible concessions or gestures that could be made in order to send the right "signals" to the Provisional movement and to encourage those who might be seeking an end to the violence. There was a range of these (set out in Sir J Belloch's minute of 31 July 1990 and the attached paper, the discussion of which was recorded in my minute of 14 September 1990). Clearly, many more measures would be possible once the advocacy and use of violence had ceased. Of the measures that might be taken without being part of any deal, removal of the broadcasting restrictions on Sinn Fein would provide a visible signal. This would be easier if violence was reducing, and could be reinstated if there were a resurgence. There could nevertheless be difficulties, as the broadcasting restrictions applied to all those who supported violence.

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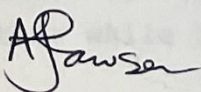
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7. The interaction between any dialogue with the Provisionals and the political development process would need to be carefully managed. There was a risk that the Taoiseach might wish to give priority to seeking a ceasefire, and perhaps seek to take a "broader initiative", such as calling for an all-Ireland convention. To enter into a dialogue with the Provisional movement would put the political development process at risk, perhaps fatally, and there was no case for doing so while the initiative was still in play with at least some chance of moving forward.

8. There was the option of encouraging the Irish Government and the SDLP to pursue a dialogue with the Provisionals without HMG involvement. The difficulty with this would be that the initiative would lie outside the Government's control. On the other hand, the involvement of HMG in any dialogue would have particular implications vis-a-vis the Unionists.

9. HMG was under some pressure to respond to the soundings that had been made. Options for a short-term response could be to say nothing, or to say that the matter was under active consideration, but that no conclusion had been reached. A further possibility was for the Secretary of State to make another speech after the next IGC, developing some of the themes of the Whitbread speech of 9 November, particularly the absence of a selfish British interest in Northern Ireland, the principle of consent and the conditions for entering the constitutional political processes. The Secretary of State agreed that preparatory work should be set in hand on this, without there being any commitment to such a speech being made.



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