

SECRET

HCS/12/22

FROM: SIR K P BLOOMFIELD  
DATE: 10 DECEMBER 1990

PUS (L&B) - B

A MODEST PROPOSAL

1. I have been reflecting carefully on the view of the GOC that, in the right circumstances, an introduction of internment on both sides of the Border could do much to bring the PIRA campaign to an end. When this was discussed, I shared the general Office view that Irish agreement was in foreseeable circumstances most unlikely, and that a unilateral internment by us - whatever short-term impediment it might place in the way of terrorism - was only too likely to reinforce sympathy for republicanism in Ireland and revive dormant anti-British feeling abroad, particularly in America.
2. We are in a situation, however, in which we should try to visualise currently unforeseeable circumstances (if that is not an Irishism). Our own last comprehensive exposition of the Office perception, the "Defeating Terrorism" document, looked for an end to the campaign much more to a recognition of its unwinnability by PIRA than to a classic military defeat. Some of the other circumstances in Ireland are favourable to the application of moral pressure to the Provisional movement. The election of President Robinson and the installation of Archbishop Daly are bringing a new mood to the country. The Secretary of State's "Whitbread speech" has positioned us to take advantage of that mood.
3. Yet PIRA remain replete with weaponry and far from short of

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N.I.O. BELFAST

1. *Interfriction, or release,*  
2. *ticks at a distance*  
3. *only ff?*  
4. *fring - pl den*  
*According to how*  
*it stalled, or*  
*failed (Cousin fear)*  
*or 20 points - ha*  
5. *but fear. Election*

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skilled men and women. With all its vast superiority in numbers, the Army reflects a growing pessimism. We are more than 20 years into "the troubles"; there is no end in sight.

4. If our assumption is that PIRA will crumble one day and withdraw from the battlefield, then we need give no special thought to prisoners other than as criminals who will serve out their sentences subject only to the normal processes of review. But if, on the other hand we seek to persuade PIRA to disengage without militarily crushing them, the position of prisoners is crucial.
5. We have declared that there can be no question of talking to PIRA/Sinn Fein while violence continues. I do not think this can be allowed to mean that dialogue at a distance is inconceivable. ✓
6. In our relations with the Irish we see little sign that they are willing to join with us in any action which would radically change and substantially improve the situation.
7. What, then, if we were to speak to the Irish as follows? The violence in Northern Ireland has been going on for over two decades, and we do not believe it can be permitted to continue indefinitely. Will you, then, join with us in presenting to PIRA a final opportunity to get themselves off the hook of violence? We could say to them jointly, and through the Conference; "You are impeding progress towards a resolution of the problems in Ireland. We call upon you to stop the violence. If you respond positively to this call, and we are satisfied that violence has stopped, after [one month] the UK Government will begin to release prisoners, giving priority to the cases of those who were youngest when sentenced and whose crimes did not result in death or serious injury to others. A continuation of this violence-free period will lead to a progressive review of

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other cases, with a view to the ultimate release of all prisoners sentenced by Diplock Courts [save those who have been found guilty of murder]. But if there is not a positive response from PIRA to this call for the ending of violence, both Governments will regard PIRA as being in a state of war against Irish people North and South, and will use to the extent necessary in both parts of Ireland powers of executive detention."

8. A very high risk strategy? Of course it is. But if we cannot envisage the military defeat of PIRA by means which do not include internment, and if we cannot envisage introducing internment in the face of opposition from the Irish Government and international opinion, by what means do we persuade or force PIRA to desist?

(SIGNED)

K P BLOOMFIELD

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