

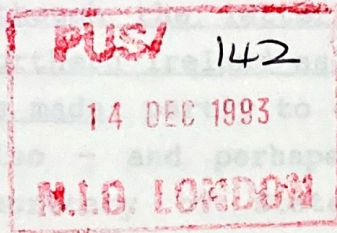
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FROM: P N BELL, AUS(L)
10 December 1993

Copy No 7 of 26

PS/Secretary of State (L&B)[1&2]

cc PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) [3&4]
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) [5&6]
PS/PUS (L&B) [7&8]
PS/Mr Fell [9]
Mr Thomas [10]
Mr Legge [11]
Mr Deverell [12]
Mr Watkins [13]
Mr Williams [14]
Mr Wood (L&B) [15&16]
Mr Brooker [17]
Mr Dodds [18]
Mr Maccabe [19]
Mr Rickard [20]
Mr Beeton [21]
Ms Jude [22]
HMA, Dublin [23]
Mr Archer, RID [24]
Mr Caine [25]
File [26]



JOINT DECLARATION - REVISED HANDLING PLAN

I attach a copy of a revised handling plan for the period before and immediately after the making of a Joint Declaration by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, which builds on that circulated by Mr Beeton on 9 December.

2. The handling plan has been revised in the light of advice received from officials both in London and Belfast, including the Information Services, at a meeting which I convened this morning, in response to Mr Beeton's submission and having regard to a possible Declaration next Tuesday, followed by a Parliamentary Statement on Wednesday (or, as now seems more likely, a Declaration and a Statement on Wednesday on which the - flexible - plan is now based). Our collective task, we agreed, was, without overselling the JD, to maximise its impact on the Republican movement in particular while reassuring what is likely to be a troubled Unionist community; and, at the same time, to ensure the most favourable reception whether in GB or abroad - although we recognise that those two audiences are much more likely to be universally benevolent and supportive.

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3. The attached 'handling plan' is meant to be self-explanatory, but it may be worth spelling out one or two points raised at this morning's meeting:

- a. it was forcefully argued by Belfast colleagues, with whom I agree, that the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister (though the latter seems improbable) should be present in Northern Ireland as soon as practicable after the Declaration is made: partly to ensure the right basic note is struck, but also - and perhaps even more important than enabling the Secretary of State to field the inevitable barrage of requests for interviews etc - to demonstrate that he is there, in Northern Ireland, and able to apply the maximum possible balm to what could be a febrile body politic - if both Declaration and Statement are on the same day, the Secretary of State obviously cannot go to Belfast between the two events, but the basic argument - Northern Ireland is where the Secretary of State should go as soon as he can - still holds although our handling plan envisages other Ministers standing if the Secretary of State cannot make it;
- b. advance briefing for the Chief Constable and GOC should take account of the need for them to brief their own people adequately in advance of the Declaration being made. This would be important not least because of the especially difficult position many police officers and Royal Irish soldiers could find themselves in following the Joint Declaration;
- c. Similar considerations would apply to Civil Servants (of all Services including those NIO staff working for the Police Authority), and they should have both information and reassurance;

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- d. it would be essential to find a positive selling point for the Declaration - if the IRA were to say that having heard it they would end the violence this need would be answered, but it could not be guaranteed in advance. The question "what are you doing this for?" would have to be addressed.

On the one hand, care must be taken not to oversell the JD as the 'Solution' to the problems of Northern Ireland, or as 'Peace in our Time' - though a clear indication from the IRA/Sinn Fein that they were making some response, even if only a ceasefire, would be welcome. On the other hand, the Government needs to be able to explain positively that, together with the Irish, they believe that the principles enunciated in the JD, which reaffirm fundamental policies without calling on either side to sacrifice deeply held values, should justify the cessation of violence. It demonstrates that the two Governments are at one on the basics, and it is now up to the terrorists to respond by a complete and permanent cessation of violence. If they do not, it will simply renew the determination of the two Governments to co-operate in terms of the fundamental principles enunciated in the Declaration. (We shall be working to provide 'snappier' positive bull points);

- e. a difficult political judgement needs to be exercised about when Dr Paisley should be briefed, and how much he should be told in advance of the Declaration being made. If he is not approached in advance, he will certainly make capital out of being "excluded".

3. Additional consideration is also being given to other points raised at my meeting, and will be reflected in subsequent advice and briefing material, in particular, about:

- a. how local opinion formers should best be 'recruited'. Central Secretariat in collaboration with PAB are working up a list of Northern Irish names, including influential 'non politicals' clergymen etc; and

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b. Information Services are considering how our message might be most effectively directly sold (as opposed to influencing opinion) eg by a Ministerial broadcast (were the broadcasters amenable) or advertising - concentrating on the positive messages. (You will now have seen Mr Wood's helpful minute to me of today's date, which will - as he points out - need revision if Wednesday becomes 'der Tag'.)

4. I also attach after the handling plan a short draft letter for you to send Roderic Lyne should you judge it appropriate to give him an indication of our developing work.

(Signed PNB)

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