

JOINT DECLARATION INITIATIVE: ASSESSMENT

This note aims to assess the intentions of the Provisional leadership in pursuing the Joint Declaration Initiative.

Provisional Intentions

2. The run-up to Provisional pursuit of the Joint Declaration Initiative has included:

- i) the long-running 'peace' debate within the Provisional movement, culminating in (but not concluding with) Jim GIBNEY's Bodenstown address in June 1992, which attracted widespread publicity to the debate;
- ii) a succession of three openly declared three-day Christmas ceasefires by PIRA, replacing earlier undeclared ceasefires;
- iii) discussion within the Provisional movement at Christmas 1992 of the prospects of extending this ceasefire; and more recently a widespread canvass of opinion amongst volunteers, of attitudes to a complete cessation;
- iv) the HUME/ADAMS dialogue, starting in 1988 and continuing, if with intermissions, to the present time;
- v) the 1991-2 shift in the openly declared Provisional position. This replaced a demand for a declared timescale for British withdrawal with a demand that HMG declare itself in favour of a united Ireland, without timescale;



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vi) associated with the above, a softening in the tone of public pronouncements by McGUINNESS and ADAMS, which now offer greater recognition than before of the position of Unionists and promise a pragmatic approach. A notable example is McGUINNESS' interview in the Guardian on 18 September, making clear that the Provisionals do not necessarily expect their preferred outcome to be the one adopted following a 'peace process';

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3. The background to these developments is a growing sense of war-weariness within the Republican (and wider Nationalist) community; the evident inability of Sinn Fein to make any political breakthrough in Northern Ireland and still more the Republic (where it is extremely weak); the continuing pressures exerted on PIRA by the security forces in Northern Ireland; the exclusion of Sinn Fein from the political talks process, leading to fears of a settlement being reached which marginalises them; and, overall, realisation by the Provisional leadership that they are not going to win on their existing terms.

4. Against this background, intelligence indicates both widespread discussion within PIRA and Sinn Fein about the possibility that the leadership may call an end to their violent campaign.

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5. There was almost a complete absence of PIRA attacks during the week 4-10 September, ostensibly to accommodate a visiting American delegation in Belfast, but, also providing the opportunity for a dry-run for an end to their campaign. They have also in recent weeks canvassed the views of PIRA volunteers about this possibility.

6. Against this background, the following assessment can be made:

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- i) the Provisional leadership are serious about bringing an end to the violence. They have for some years pursued a policy designed to enable them to do so upon acceptable terms. The latest developments are consistent with that policy;
- ii) the Provisional leadership themselves believe that an ending to their violent campaign is deliverable. They are the best judges. But their judgement is in our view well-founded. They have already delivered a series of short-term ceasefires and throughout have taken pains to ensure that they carry the movement with them (they have needed to be able to explain their reasons in advance). Several brigades have already indicated their support for a complete ending to the campaign and there are indications that some practical steps, to be taken in this eventuality, have been planned;

7. There are very considerable risks for the leadership in raising the possibility of ending the campaign without fulfilling the expectations raised. They would not take such a risk unless they were very serious in their intentions.

8. We conclude that if the Provisionals give an assurance that organised violence will be ended if the JD is made, then that assurance is credible for the bulk, perhaps even the whole, of the Provisional Movement.

9. With regard to the possible Loyalist reaction, they have consistently stated that if PIRA were to call an end to hostilities, they would reciprocate. While there may be a few hard-liners who would not be prepared to give up their campaign, it seems likely that a significant proportion of both the UDA and UVF would be content to do so in the event of an unconditional end to the violence.

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