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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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N.I.O. LONDON

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31st January 1991

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Dear Dominic

~~MEASURES AGAINST~~

Thank you for your letter of 17 January enclosing a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister received from David Trimble MP.

An article by journalist Chris Ryder in the Daily Telegraph on 8 January spoke of "often self-motivated intermediaries" working to persuade the IRA to cease their campaign of violence. In his letter Mr Trimble significantly misrepresents the Daily Telegraph article which makes no mention of intermediaries "who carry messages back and forth". Following on from a subsequent Question asked during Prime Ministers' Questions on 15 January, Mr Trimble now seeks an assurance that there is, and will be (to quote his Question), no "indirect negotiations and contacts taking place between the Northern Ireland Office and Sinn Fein." Mr Trimble would undoubtedly see this as a form of surrender to the IRA and a reward for terrorism. The implication is that the NIO would do a deal with Sinn Fein and the IRA in which a ceasefire or other cessation of IRA activities would be repayed by some loosening of the Union - and the ultimate 'betrayal' of Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland.

There have been no direct discussions or negotiations between NIO officials and Sinn Fein. But, as my letter of 21 December Charles Powell pointed out, we have been made aware that there are

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those in the Provisional movement who may wish to engage in a dialogue with HMG (and with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland). There are self-appointed people working to bring this about. Our stance continues to be that there will be no negotiations with those who commit acts of terrorism.

Ministers and officials unavoidably have contact with Sinn Fein councillors during their visits to local Councils since Ministers have decided that the presence of a Sinn Fein councillor would not of itself be sufficient reason to preclude a visit to that Council. In addition, officials have contact in dealing with local programmes and projects, and also with constituency matters. There are agreed internal guidelines on these contacts. This is to ensure that no person in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein voter or not, is disadvantaged in his daily affairs. The way these contacts are handled is a matter of public record.

I attach a draft response for the Prime Minister's signature.

As to contacts with terrorists, HMG takes the view that there cannot be - and there have not been - talks or negotiations with people who use or threaten violence to advance their arguments. I reaffirm my determination that terrorism will not be rewarded.

Yours etc,
PAWSON

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