

FROM: PUS
31 JANUARY 1991

SECRETARY OF STATE

MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH - AIDE MEMOIRE

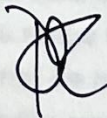
You may like to have the following points in mind when you see the Taoiseach today:

- (i) both governments see the possibility of peace as a major prize;
- (ii) one very significant point is bringing the issue forward in the Provisionals' thinking has been the momentum of the political development initiative, and their fear that exclusion from normal political life would marginalise them permanently;
- (iii) there is in HMG's view no necessary conflict between the pursuit of the political development process - all three strands - and keeping open the possibility of peace if the Provisionals do bring about a cessation of violence;
- (iv) but the timescales are different; both because of
- (v) grave doubts about the deliverability of a general and long term cessation of violence, and
- (v) the need for a substantial period - at least several months - of effective ceasefire before the political parties in Northern Ireland could even be asked to contemplate a readmission of Sinn Fein into normal democratic political life (this goes for the Alliance and some at least of the SDLP, as much as for Unionists);

31 JANUARY 1991

SECRET AND PERSONAL

- (vi) a premature move now would carry a very high risk of losing the Unionists from the process - and in circumstances which would allocate blame elsewhere, as well as sacrificing all the gains of the past year. This would relieve the pressure on the Provisionals;
- (vii) there is less risk in entering substantive talks on political development even if in the end they did not bear immediate fruit (though it is HMG's hope and firm intention that they can and should);
- (viii) the Prime Minister will see substantive progress on political development as the right basis for a meeting with the Taoiseach; as long as we are not yet able to come to a conclusion, there is no real occasion for such a meeting;
- (ix) all this points, as do public and political expectations, to getting ahead with substantive talks, and using the momentum of that to apply renewed pressure for a cessation of violence by the Provisionals;
- (x) it is clearly essential for the two Governments to keep in step on this, given the political risks for both, and the value of the prize.



J A CHILCOT

31 JANUARY 1991

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