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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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7 January 1994

Dear Rod,

NORTHERN IRELAND: TOUR D'HORIZON

In my letter of 5 January I promised to let you have the Secretary of State's assessment of the current state of play in Northern Ireland in relation to the Joint Declaration, and his thoughts on the way ahead. This is by way of an interim report; we have in mind a fuller strategy document to be ready for the Prime Minister's weekend box next week.

Reaction so far

Amongst the Unionist community in general there is, as always, a range of opinion but overall the mood is as good as we could have expected. The Declaration has been read and inwardly digested and while it is not seen as to the advantage of the unionist cause, many people in that community are prepared to give it a fair wind given that it holds out the prospect of peace. There remains however considerable unease about the question of self-determination and what it really means, and about the nature of the Government's exchanges with the Provisional movement.

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The two Unionist parties are playing it very differently, which may have significant longer term implications for the balance between them. The DUP continue to rail against the Declaration, as you will recall at Hillsborough; and they have now read the document! They represent it in colourful language as the "trickle of concessions begun by the Anglo-Irish Agreement turning into a torrent", while Peter Robinson just before Christmas accused the UUP of prostituting themselves to the Government by supporting the Declaration. Interestingly influential figures within the Loyalist paramilitaries are still unconvinced by the DUP rhetoric and are prepared to reach their own judgements in the light of developments. The signs are that both major Loyalist organisations would respond in kind if PIRA were to stop the campaign of violence, provided that there was no hint of hidden concessions to the Provisionals. In reaction to the Declaration, and with a view to demonstrating that the The UUP remain cautiously supportive, though publicly are taking a neutral line. They are laying the foundations for a prolonged propaganda battle with the DUP over the merits of their respective approaches to political development, the Joint Declaration and working with Government. Jim Molyneaux is adopting a high profile role in steadying his party's supporters around the Province and, much more than in the past (when Ken Maginnis and others were left to take the lead in internecine points scoring), he is prepared to "mix it" with the DUP. The UUP briefing line to party activists sets out the Prime Minister's assurances about what the Declaration does not contain; reflects general caution and unease about the Declaration and the process leading up to it; but advises against publicly debating parts of the document which cause concern as to do so would



be to play into the hands of the IRA. In his New Year message Jim Molyneaux, helpfully, focusses on increasing the tempo of Michael Ancram's talks. In an interview today in the Belfast Telegraph he asserts forcibly "There is no sell out". In private, he remains reasonably content. The main Church leaders remain as it was when the Prime Minister met. The Alliance Party remain supportive. helpful and supportive, both in public and in private. However, the SDLP obviously continue to promote the Declaration as an opportunity for peace. In private conversation, however, they remain concerned that HMG's presentation of the Declaration gives too much credence to the Unionist perspective, rendering it more difficult to persuade Republicans of the merits of taking the opportunity available to them. Naturally enough, there is a preoccupation within the SDLP over the Sinn Fein reaction to the Declaration; and with seeking to demonstrate that the Declaration's reference to self-determination "for the people of the island of Ireland alone ..." is close enough to Republican aspirations to warrant acceptance. It is this latter point which, we think, may be behind interest in publication of the outcome of the Hume-Adams dialogue. John Hume himself was on holiday over Christmas and the New Year period and on his return he published the statement, which you have received under cover of my letter of 5 January. It is a characteristic John Hume 'blockbuster' which has been well received in many quarters as a statesmanlike challenge to the Provisionals to take the political road, accept the complexities of intercommunal relationships in Ireland and work within the modern European context.



Leading SDLP members, including Seamus Mallon, have been forthright in their condemnation of PIRA atrocities, in particular the murder of Guardsman Blinco on 30 December.

So far as the churches are concerned, the mood of the main church leaders remains as it was when the Prime Minister met them on his visit. They are generally helpful and supportive, both in public and in private. However, we should not expect too much - such as their own Joint Declaration - from the three Protestant leaders given the underlying unease amongst many of their members and clergy about the long-term implications of the Declaration.

It is worth recording here that in the aftermath of the Declaration there has been a general air of restraint in most quarters. For example, despite the media's best efforts, UUP and Alliance leaders have not made a meal of comments from the Taoiseach on such matters as 'amnesties' and 'demilitarisation'; and the SDLP, while privately unhappy about the Select Committee proposals, have not allowed them to interfere with their efforts to sell the Declaration.

In PR terms, the Declaration has put the Provisionals onto the back foot; in public they have come across as uncertain and confused. Their general line seems to be - no final decision - need time to consult - want clarification - the Declaration does not give us what we want. They have been between describing the Declaration as a worthless document and more reasoned language in which the door is left open. One inference to be drawn from all this is that they are



desperately trying to manoeuvre themselves into a position where they feel that they can justify a decision to continue the campaign of violence in the face of the Declaration and the hopes that have been raised in so many quarters. They fear the prospect of becoming increasingly isolated and irrelevant. They are looking for a British 'blunder'.

The key issues on which Sinn Fein are currently majoring are self-determination and the need for clarification of the Joint Declaration as is apparent from Gerry Adams' statement of 3 January, a copy of which accompanied my letter of 5 January.

The Provisional IRA have of course continued their campaign of violence since the Joint Declaration, interrupted only by the traditional 3 day Christmas ceasefire. While the public may still perceive their actions as subject to some restraint, in fact the level of incidents involving the security forces has been comparable to that which pertained for most of last year.

Overall, our assessment has to be that opinion within the Provisional movement is hardening against accepting the Declaration as a basis for a permanent cessation of violence. If that is the case, there are a number of ways in which their decision would become manifest ranging from outright rejection, through fudge, to some form of time-limited ceasefire during which they would seek more concessions.



Presentation

One presentational issue to which we will give more and urgent thought is how to handle the demands for clarification of the document. The Secretary of State remains firmly of the view, and has reiterated today, that the Declaration stands alone and means what it says. However, it might not be so easily understood in a number of quarters if it were to appear that, but for clarification of one issue, peace would have been within our grasp. We will revert on this.

In the current situation, presentation is crucial. The Secretary of State is looking to proceed on the basis of a balance between Unionist and Nationalist preoccupations, stressing business as usual and creating an atmosphere in which it will be seen that a 'No' can only result in total isolation for the Provisionals - a road to nowhere. Also important is the skirting of issues which might give them an excuse to say 'no'.

Political Talks

We are well placed to back up this presentational approach by deeds. The Secretary of State has written to the parties in Northern Ireland proposing that Michael Ancram's round of bilateral talks with them should begin in the course of next week. Meetings with the UUP and Alliance are now firm and the SDLP will probably follow the week after. It remains to be seen whether the DUP will come in on the basis that the talks would be based on Peter Brooke's statement of 26 March 1991.

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In parallel the Secretary of State has written to Dick Spring stressing the importance of the two Governments re-dedicating themselves to the talks process and moving out of the current bilateral exploratory phase back into all three strands. To this end, the letter proposes resumption of work with the Irish on the 'framework' document to form the basis of further multi-lateral talks.

A meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference is planned for the end of January. Clearly, political development will feature prominently, but there will also be other issues to discuss, including security cooperation and economic and social issues. We shall take the opportunity again to stress the importance which we attach to speedy legislation on extradition.

Possible Contingencies

In the Secretary of State's view, the approach outlined above should dovetail into whatever scenario we face once we have a response from the Provisionals. In the event of a 'Yes', then the political agenda continues and within "three months" we engage Sinn Fein in exploratory dialogue, inter alia about how they might be brought into the process. In the intervening period we might want to consider movement on such issues as broadcasting restrictions and exclusion orders. Should a positive response not be forthcoming, then it will be all the more important to press on with demonstrating the futility of their position and exploiting the positive atmosphere created by the Joint Declaration. While there would be widespread disappointment at a negative response, the Declaration can still be presented as a major step forward.

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My letter of 29 December to Alex Allan set out in some detail the security options open to us should the Provisionals reject the declaration. However my Secretary of State does not believe that implementation of those initiatives which could be put into effect quickly would be likely to have a dramatic impact presentationally or in operational terms. For that reason and because, as I said in my earlier letter, he does not want to give the impression that we have been lenient on terrorism up to now, he would not want to give the impression that there was an impending 'crackdown'. Rather it would be a question of continuing to use all our policies, security and otherwise to put pressure on the terrorists and isolate them from the rest of the community. We would of course seek to accelerate our agenda for security co-operation with the Irish in such circumstances.

Sir Patrick believes that this represents 'where we are at'. We are continuing urgently with our contingency planning and will report further next week.

Yours,

Jonathan

JONATHAN STEPHENS
Private Secretary

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