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From the Principal Private Secretary

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Dear Jonathan

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH CHURCH LEADERS

The Prime Minister met Church leaders for about half an hour this evening at Hillsborough Castle. The cast was Archbishop Robin Eames, Cardinal Cahal Daly, Dr. Andrew Rogers and the Reverend Richard Taylor. Your Secretary of State was also present. The Prime Minister started with an account of his visit to Northern Ireland today, and of the latest state of play on the joint declaration.

In discussion about what might happen if Sinn Fein did not end violence, Dr. Rogers said he had not felt it was right for the Taoiseach to say this would lead to increased action against terrorists. That implied we were not pursuing terrorists with full rigour now.

Dr. Eames said that if after a period there was no positive response from Sinn Fein then there would be a tremendous well of support for the Government in taking action. This could include some measures which would otherwise be very difficult to secure acceptance for. He himself was against general internment, but following a rebuttal from the IRA there would be a lot of support for carefully targeted selective internment. One of the problems last time was that internment was perceived to have been very badly handled. Dr. Rogers agreed; a rebuttal by PIRA would be one of the few circumstances where this might get a fair bit of support. Dr. Eames said that, among measures short of this, he favoured increased support and back up for the RUC's terrorist finance unit. He also agreed with your Secretary of State that changes to the law of evidence proposed by the Chief Constable might be possible measures.

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There was some discussion of Dr. Paisley's reaction and role. There was general agreement that he had attracted much less support than might have been expected. It was very significant that the UDF and UFF had not followed a similar line to Paisley. Dr. Eames thought it was very significant the way that Paisley had attacked Molyneaux almost as much as Adams; his influence was diminishing.

There was some discussion about whether or not PIRA might split on the decision whether to renounce violence. Cardinal Daly said the spectre of a split was a nightmare for the Republican movement. They would be determined to avoid a repeat of past episodes where the movement had split. He thought that if Adams could not carry the party with him to end violence, he would follow them into rejecting the joint declaration.

In discussion of the position of loyalist terrorists, Dr. Eames said he thought they would definitely reciprocate if PIRA ended violence. Dr. Rogers said the feedback from Father Magee was that the loyalist terrorists were reasonably content to wait on PIRA's decision and could control their membership.

Yours

Alex

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