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FROM: PUS
23 JANUARY 1991

Copy no .5. of [5]

cc. Mr Pilling [2]
Mr Deverell - B [3]
Mr McNeill [4]

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE [1]

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND THE PROVISIONALS

- Mr John Hume telephoned me yesterday evening from Strasbourg, and spoke with a sense of urgency and perhaps too some anxiety. His purpose was to tell us of a further conversation he had had, and to convey a request to which he seeks an answer tomorrow afternoon (Thursday 24 January), before he begins his travels (to California on Sunday, from which he may not return for 10 days or so).
2. He has had a further conversation with, I assume, Gerry Adams (he was speaking in guarded language on an open line). It was hoped HMG had noticed how quiet PIRA had been since the ceasefire ended (only relatively, as the DCI observed), and he was told great embarrassment was felt about the recent firebombings (possibly supporting the speculation, for which there is other evidence that they were mounted from Dublin and not by Northern Command).
 3. It appears Mr Hume had given his interlocutor some expectation (without, as he acknowledged, any promise of it from us) that there might be some signal eg in the course of a speech, from HMG. He had also hoped that the Dublin Government would by now have produced a first sketch of a way forward embracing the political development initiative and the pursuit of a peace process; but this was taking time, and anyway Dublin would not move before first consulting and concerting a line with HMG. He was in consequence coming under some pressure from his interlocutor - who had, he implied, nothing else to think about. (This was where I sensed some anxiety in his tone, though it might be no more than a wish to clear his yard arm of this particular set of signals before going away.)
 5. He also reported that, in a separate conversation with a journalist he believed had good connections with the Provisionals, he was told that the journalist had had confirmation from both the 'politicians' and the 'hard men' in PIRA that they were all considering actively a ceasefire option - the risk at this stage of a split at the PAC level was not showing itself.

6. Mr Hume's request was this. Could the Secretary of State find some means, eg in a speech, to say words (not necessarily new words) which could be read by the Provisionals as a signal that a possibility of process leading to peace was not opposed by HMG - he said there were paranoid fears in the minds of some of them that the political development process had in fact failed, but had been artificially resuscitated by HMG (? and Dublin) as a means of blocking progress to a ceasefire (useful confirmation of the pressure which progress on political development has applied to the Provisionals). He greatly hopes something can be arranged, and that he can be told of it on Thursday afternoon so that he has something to say to his interlocutors.

7. We are considering the arguments, and possible options, urgently and I will advise further as soon as possible. If a few minutes discussion were possible tomorrow before or after Cabinet, that might be helpful.

J A CHILCOT

23 JANUARY 1991