

PRIME MINISTER

JOINT DECLARATION

We are to discuss this subject on Thursday. My assessment of where things now stand, and proposals for a way forward, are at Annex A. An up-to-date intelligence assessment is at Annex B.

2. As you know, the basic proposition, which both John Hume and the Irish Government but not HMG have been involved in negotiating, is that the Provisionals would end violence in return for a suitably worded Joint Declaration by the British and Irish Governments, the latest text of which is at Annex C. The background is summarised in Annex D.

3. The Butler/Nally Group had its fourth meeting on 6 October. The British side has deliberately not got involved in negotiating text. But the Group's discussions of principles which would be acceptable and unacceptable to us have led the Irish side to improve the text considerably.

4. The Irish side have also confirmed, after the most recent meeting, that the Taoiseach would be prepared to offer four assurances: there have been no side deals or private understandings; the Irish Government remains committed to the political Talks, with which it sees this Initiative as compatible; it is not envisaged that Sinn Fein would secure, or expect, immediate talks with the British Government; and, after finalisation of the text and the necessary checks, the Taoiseach would be prepared to give his guarantee that a Declaration in these terms would bring about an end to PIRA violence.

5. For the reasons explained in paragraphs 2-6 of Annex A, my

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judgement is that we must insist that the text should include a more explicit reference to Northern Ireland's constitutional guarantee before we could let the Joint Declaration be pursued further as a possible route to peace. The Taoiseach will argue that this would make the text unsaleable to the Provisionals. This may be right, but there is a reasonable chance that it is wrong. In any case, my judgement is that such a change is a political imperative for us, both for containing loyalist and Unionist reactions in Northern Ireland, and for domestic political reasons. The Taoiseach would find it hard to say that our insistence was unreasonable, and might not hold out against a suitable form of words.

6. I have been in close touch with Jim Molyneaux, and can report orally on that. If we were to let this Initiative proceed, on the basis of inclusion of an explicit reference to the constitutional guarantee, we should try to secure his private understanding and muted public reaction. Other aspects of handling would also need to be very carefully worked out.

7. We need to move quickly. Speculation and tension have been mounting since the Hume/Adams' statement of 25 September and cannot be contained indefinitely. We now have to decide what to say to the Irish Government. For the reasons given in Annex A, I recommend that we should indicate that we are content for them to proceed, but only if an explicit reference to the constitutional guarantee is included, and the words "~~freely~~ and collectively" are removed from the penultimate sentence of paragraph 4. ✕

8. I am copying this only to the Foreign Secretary and Sir Robin Butler. You may want to consider whether the circle should be widened before decisions are taken.