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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
9 13 DEC 1993

FROM: P N BELL, AUS(L)
10 December 1993

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PS/Secretary of State (L&B)[1&2]

- cc PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) [3&4]
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) [5&6]
- PS/PUS (L&B) [7&8]
- PS/Mr Fell [9]
- Mr Thomas [10]
- Mr Legge [11]
- Mr Deverell [12]
- Mr Watkins [13]
- Mr Williams [14]
- Mr Wood (L&B) [15&16]
- Mr Brooker [17]
- Mr Dodds [18]
- Mr Maccabe [19]
- Mr Rickard [20]
- Mr Beeton [21]
- Ms Jude [22]
- HMA, Dublin [23]
- Mr Archer, RID [24]
- Mr Caine [25]
- File [26]

JOINT DECLARATION - REVISED HANDLING PLAN

I attach a copy of a revised handling plan for the period before and immediately after the making of a Joint Declaration by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, which builds on that circulated by Mr Beeton on 9 December.

2. The handling plan has been revised in the light of advice received from officials both in London and Belfast, including the Information Services, at a meeting which I convened this morning, in response to Mr Beeton's submission and having regard to a possible Declaration next Tuesday, followed by a Parliamentary Statement on Wednesday (or, as now seems more likely, a Declaration and a Statement on Wednesday on which the - flexible - plan is now based). Our collective task, we agreed, was, without overselling the JD, to maximise its impact on the Republican movement in particular while reassuring what is likely to be a troubled Unionist community; and, at the same time, to ensure the most favourable reception whether in GB or abroad - although we recognise that those two audiences are much more likely to be universally benevolent and supportive.

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3. The attached 'handling plan' is meant to be self-explanatory, but it may be worth spelling out one or two points raised at this morning's meeting:

- a. it was forcefully argued by Belfast colleagues, with whom I agree, that the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister (though the latter seems improbable) should be present in Northern Ireland as soon as practicable after the Declaration is made: partly to ensure the right basic note is struck, but also - and perhaps even more important than enabling the Secretary of State to field the inevitable barrage of requests for interviews etc - to demonstrate that he is there, in Northern Ireland, and able to apply the maximum possible balm to what could be a febrile body politic - if both Declaration and Statement are on the same day, the Secretary of State obviously cannot go to Belfast between the two events, but the basic argument - Northern Ireland is where the Secretary of State should go as soon as he can - still holds although our handling plan envisages other Ministers standing if the Secretary of State cannot make it;
- b. advance briefing for the Chief Constable and GOC should take account of the need for them to brief their own people adequately in advance of the Declaration being made. This would be important not least because of the especially difficult position many police officers and Royal Irish soldiers could find themselves in following the Joint Declaration;
- c. Similar considerations would apply to Civil Servants (of all Services including those NIO staff working for the Police Authority), and they should have both information and reassurance;

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b. Information Services are considering how our message might be most effectively directly sold (as opposed to influencing opinion) eg by a Ministerial broadcast (were the broadcasters amenable) or advertising - concentrating on the positive messages. (You will now have seen Mr Wood's helpful minute to me of today's date, which will - as he points out - need revision if Wednesday becomes 'der Tag'.)

4. I also attach after the handling plan a short draft letter for you to send Roderic Lyne should you judge it appropriate to give him an indication of our developing work.

(Signed PNB)

P N BELL
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