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From the Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service
Sir Robin Butler GCB CVO

Ref. A093/3179

21 October 1993

Dear John,

Discussions with the Irish Government: Briefing of the
American Ambassador

As we agreed yesterday I saw Ray Seitz this morning. No one else was present.

I started by saying that I was relying on his discretion about using what I was proposing to tell him. In particular, I should be grateful if he would be careful in relation to his Dublin colleague. It was most important that the Irish Government did not get to hear that I had spoken to him.

I then said that we might be approaching a rocky period in our relations with the Irish Government. I said that we had both been working together, separately from Hume/Adams, on a statement which would preserve the British Government's guarantee to the people of Northern Ireland but which would be expressed in sufficiently sympathetic language to the Nationalists to induce PIRA to use it as an occasion for giving up the armed struggle. Our intelligence indicated that PIRA were contemplating such a move, which would of course be of enormous value to us. There was therefore no difference between us and the Irish Government about the goal. However, in the atmosphere created by revelation of the Hume/Adams dialogue, we had reluctantly concluded - and told the Irish Government - that a statement expressed in language which would appeal to the Nationalists would be interpreted by the Unionists as having its origin in the Hume/Adams dialogue. We assessed that, in the atmosphere of suspicion which had been created among Unionists, there would be a very violent reaction, that the loyalist terrorists would intensify their activities and that PIRA, whatever their original

/ways of exploiting

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intentions, might be drawn back into sectarian violence to defend their own people. The Irish Government had been disappointed by our reaction, even though there might be some understanding of it. We had expressed our willingness to discuss with them other ways of exploiting the present opportunity for ending violence, and the Secretary of State would be meeting the Tanaiste on 27 October, and the Prime Minister would be meeting the Taoiseach on 29 October. We would be working very hard to keep alongside the Irish Government, but if there was an adverse reaction from them, or from John Hume, we wanted Ray Seitz to know the background and our point of view.

Ray Seitz said that this was enormously helpful. His first reaction was that he would not use the information at all for the time being but would keep it as background to use when and if any tension in our relations with the Irish Government or John Hume broke publicly. If he wanted to draw on the information ahead of that time, he would consult me. He commented that the President was aware that Northern Ireland was a "no-win" situation as far as he was concerned, but he would nonetheless come under heavy pressure from nationalists if difficulties between us and the Irish Government emerged.

I am copying this letter to Timothy Daunt.

Your own,

Robin