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FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
22 October 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill (B&L) - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Holmes, No 10

1. cc AW

JMC

2. BSM.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

LUNCH WITH TANAISTE: 21 OCTOBER 1996

The Secretary of State accompanied by Michael Ancram, Sir David Fell, Mr Thomas, Mr Bell, Mr Stephens and myself met the Tanaiste yesterday over lunch. Mr Spring was accompanied by Mrs Owen, Mr Gleeson, Mr O'hUiginn, Mr Donoghue, Mr O'Donnell and Mr Kirwan.

Summary

2. The meeting was called primarily to discuss the prospects for a renewed IRA ceasefire and also to take stock of the political negotiations. We had heard from Mr Holmes that the Irish were not keen on the suggestion of a three month interval after any ceasefire for Sinn Fein to be admitted into talks, and so it proved to be. The Irish did not want to either lessen or heighten the hurdles for Sinn Fein; they thought the mention of a time gap was not helpful and would sound as though the party continued to have to pass some tests; in particular, Mr O'hUiginn referred to a three-month scenario as unsustainable. In the meantime, the talks would be mesmerised by this prospect and would lose momentum. The Irish were firmly of the view that an unequivocal ceasefire was there for the asking but underlined the difficulties facing those in the Republican movement who were pushing for it.

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Detail

3. The Secretary of State began by saying that it was absolutely clear that HMG wanted to see a ceasefire and wanted Sinn Fein into the talks. He would only be able to invite them in if there was an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of 1994. However the new factor was the Lisburn bombings and the strong view in NI and GB that any ceasefire would be purely tactical. He mentioned the Tanaiste's speech to the Senate last week where he had alluded to the idea of a bridge across which Sinn Fein were not being allowed to pass into talks by the IRA. Equally, we wanted to be sure that they would not go back over the bridge once any ceasefire was called.

4. The Tanaiste agreed that the objective was to get Sinn Fein into the talks, but in doing so had to ensure that others did not walk out as a result. He agreed that Lisburn was a factor but in his view the bombing made it all the more urgent to encourage the calling of a ceasefire. It was important not to either lessen or heighten the hurdles necessary to get into the talks. He thought the idea of a time gap was not helpful. The Nationalist community would want Sinn Fein in as quickly as possible. He recognised that there were other factors to be considered, not least the Conservative Party and the UUP - he felt that Trimble was not ready at present to remain in the room if Sinn Fein came in. Mrs Owen was concerned that if there was a three month time gap then Sinn Fein might be coming into a process where the arrangements and agreements had already been made.

5. The Secretary of State, in response, said that an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire meant that it should be dependable. Since Lisburn in particular, the mood in GB, let alone Northern Ireland, had enormously hardened. He agreed that, in one way, it enhanced the urgency of it all because another atrocity was probably being planned. But it was harder now for the simple reason that actions and inactions had to match up to the words which were spoken. It was not a matter of practical politics to allow Sinn Fein in right away and anything less than three months would make it

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very difficult to verify that the ceasefire was for real. Michael Ancram underlined the point. Since Manchester people had been asking why they should believe Sinn Fein were for real and then Lisburn had happened. The only way they could be believed would be by events on the ground, by the absence of actions, as well as by their words.

6. The Tanaiste said that looking for inactions over a long period of time was difficult because Adams had to show that there was a process to satisfy the sizeable number of people within the Republican movement who did not want to go down this road. It was probably the last chance to bring about a ceasefire; if this one was lost, then it was difficult to see a third ceasefire coming about. To a comment from Mrs Owen about the possibility of another bomb before any ceasefire, Michael Ancram said that a bomb the day before any ceasefire would make things virtually impossible.

7. Mr O'hUiginn intervened. He said that some of the IRA and Sinn Fein leadership recognised that violence was futile. They were trying to hold the line and giving the possible ceasefire their best shot to see what would happen. But the nature of the organisation was that many other initiatives had taken place after IRA violence also. The British Government needed to say whether they could handle any ceasefire politically or not. It seemed to him that there was no way of sustaining such a test if a gap of three months was required - the talks would be mesmerised by the prospect of the end of that three months and the scenario would be unsustainable. The Secretary of State disagreed, the question was whether the background of violence ceased or continued. It was for the IRA, in the Taoiseach's words, to find the necessary words for their actions and inactions to be consistent with that. It seemed to him that there had been an acceptance of a period of verification by a number of figures in the Republic's Government.

8. Mr O'hUiginn replied that the Irish were at the corner of the stage in all of this and the decision of whether there would be a ceasefire or not was in the interaction between the British Government and Sinn Fein. The Irish Government were saying that if

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the British Government want it there was a capacity for a ceasefire. A restoration of the 1994 ceasefire was there for the taking and if it was not grasped then it was inevitable that a violent spiral would ensue. When probed by Sir David Fell, he said that it was impossible to guarantee, though Mr Spring confirmed that their information was that the internal dynamics of the Republican movement showed they would push for it. In his view it was for real and the figures could be 70/30, though the 30% was very strong in favour of going back to violence. There were no guarantees, but clearly the IRA had been stung by the finds in London and the Republic. He did not think it possible for Sinn Fein to hold out for three months. They (Sinn Fein) would want guarantees that something could be delivered in the peace process in that time. Clearly, the shorter the time gap the easier for them. Asked by Mr Thomas if the Irish Government would meet Sinn Fein at Ministerial level, Mr Spring confirmed that they would but such contact would only last two or three weeks and then they would be pushing to get into the talks proper.

12. In conclusion, the Secretary of State said there was no point
9. The Tanaiste eventually said any gap could be 28 days or even 46 days. The question was how long could we expect Sinn Fein to stay outside. Mr O'hUiginn accepted that the question of Trimble, staying or walking away was an important one to consider, as was presentation. A formula would have to be found whereby both sides had some validity in their own terms - the British Government to establish the credibility of any ceasefire and Sinn Fein, who needed some guise of activity. The Secretary of State said we could not be seen to accepting at face value the words of 1994 alone; the inactions were easier to describe generically and in effect were anything consistent with moving away from violence for political means. If there was an acceptance of the case for any period of time, then implicitly there was acceptance of the need for verification. It was for Sinn Fein to find the words and behaviour to satisfy the rest of us, as the Taoiseach had said.

10. Mr O'hUiginn, finally, said that the Republican movement did not have a very sophisticated analysis. They would act no better or worse than before the 1994 ceasefire. It was in their nature to

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play hardball. Hopefully, a ceasefire would stop the spiral of violence on both sides and many of the activists would, as happened in 1994, make life-style choices. Pressed again by Michael Ancram about whether this just involved the British Government or the two Governments, Mr O'hUigin said he was really talking about the psychology of both sides and the realism of what could be achieved - he was trying to be helpful.

11. There was a short discussion on the state of the talks. Both sides agreed that the show had to go on, in spite of parallel activity on a possible ceasefire. The debate on decommissioning was not time-limited and so the bulk of the parties still had to speak on it. The Governments should hold their fire until the cases had been made and try to draw something out of it. The Secretary of State thought it important that the Irish Government made a substantial statement about decommissioning to allay suspicion that it was a non-issue for them.

12. In conclusion, the Secretary of State said there was no point in Sinn Fein coming in if the Unionists went out. This remained the case - the over-riding objective must remain the continuance of the talks. He thought Trimble wanted the process to proceed and come through to success. It followed from that that he would park the decommissioning issue - at least for a time - though he wanted verification of what an unequivocal ceasefire actually meant and the terms of entry. The Secretary of State said he would need to come back to the Irish on this and to deal with John Hume also.

(SIGNED)

W K LINDSAY
Private Secretary

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