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From the Private Secretary

18 July 1996

NORTHERN IRELAND: FUTURE POLICY OPTIONS

Given the fragile state of the present peace process, for a variety of reasons, we could be faced before long with a dangerous situation where violence is increasing and we appear to have no more than a policy of containment. We therefore need to start thinking now what our options might be in such circumstances. It would therefore be helpful to have a short paper setting these out, with their pros and cons. What I have in mind is not a long and detailed analysis, but a brief review of the main possibilities, including for the sake of a view of the complete range even those which appear to hold few attractions. As always, there is a particular premium on new and imaginative thoughts, if such things exist in this field.

It would be useful to have a paper of this kind by the middle of next week, before summer holidays start in earnest. I realise this is a tight deadline, given all your other preoccupations, but it should at least help in keeping it "quick and dirty", which is what I am looking for at this stage.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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