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FROM: J A STEPHENS
IPL DIVISION
17 SEPTEMBER 1996

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L,B&CB) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Whyeall - B

Ms RN

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L,B&CB) - B

LETTER FROM GERRY ADAMS

You asked for urgent advice on the implications for the draft NI Paper of the letter from Adams attached to No 10's letter of 17 September.

2. As John Holmes observes, the letter is consistent with what Hume says but sets a down beat tone. My initial reaction is that it adds nothing, either way, to what we know of the Hume approach and the account of it in the NI Paper. I see no need to amend the NI Paper - if the Secretary of State wished, he could refer to the letter orally at NI on Thursday.

3. As to what may lie behind the letter, I can only offer some speculation:

- it comes against the background of the weekend speculation which Sinn Féin has not welcomed. It enables Adams to say he has left HMG under no illusions about Sinn Féin's position;

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- it could be written with the intention of publication. That would have the effect both of diminishing speculation about an IRA ceasefire and putting some public focus back on HMG and whether we will reply.
4. As to our response, we have three broad options:
- no reply;
 - a short, dead bat reply saying that what is required is an IRA ceasefire. That would need to come either from John Holmes or an NIO official;
 - if we wished, we could use the letter as a means of playing back to Adams what Hume tells us about Adams' position - again, in a letter from a No 10 or NIO official. That would require a slightly longer letter and could appear to be opening up dialogue with Sinn Féin. On the other hand, it provides a means of checking Hume's account.
5. I think it desirable to make some reply since this avoids an easy propoganda score for Sinn Féin and, whatever the content, sends the message that communication remains open.
6. If you agree, I suggest that more considered advice might await the outcome of NI on Thursday.

SIGNED

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