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No. 0399 P. 2/16
NO.140 P001

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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Private Secretary to the
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See revised version

File 19/9

17 September 1996

Dear John,

HUME/ADAMS: DRAFT NI PAPER

Thank you for your letter of 13 September. I attach a draft Paper for the NI meeting to be held this Thursday.

The draft deliberately does not say a great deal about the UUP's general attitude and approach - my Secretary of State will be in a better position to report on that orally after this week's negotiations in Belfast.

We suggest two changes to the draft response attached to your letter:

- in the letter to Hume, to avoid a possible hostage to fortune if the letter ever became public, we might say "any further attack risks reducing their credibility to zero";
- in the draft text in the last sentence of the fourth paragraph, add the words "or limited by anything other than the need for agreement". This language appears in the Prime Minister's previous letters to Hume. It is language inserted into the

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No. 0399 P. 3/16
NO.140 P002

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agreed rules of procedure by unionists and its omission risks, if anything, raising some unionist suspicions.

Both these changes have been incorporated into Annex C to the NI Paper.

We aim to circulate the final NI Paper on Wednesday morning.

John Hume
Ken
W K LINDSAY

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17. Sep. 1996 15:04
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17 September 1996

CABINET
MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN IRELAND

A POSSIBLE RESTORATION OF THE IRA CEASEFIRE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1. John Hume has told the Prime Minister, on the basis of conversations with Adams, that the IRA will restore their ceasefire if they receive certain reassurances from HMG in advance.

Hume's approach

2. Hume's claim, put in a series of approaches in July, was that the reassurances sought were all matters which the Government had already said in public. The Prime Minister told Hume he was sceptical that further words could make any difference but, to test Adams' sincerity, set out in a text for Hume the Government's position on the key points (Annex A).
3. Hume has shown this text and letter to Adams. He has now returned with a much longer text (Annex B), cleared by Adams and, he claims, the IRA. If we made this statement, Hume says the IRA would respond shortly afterwards, at a time specified in advance, with a renewed 'total cessation'.
4. Both the Irish and US Governments know of the approach.

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Sep. 1996 15:05
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No. 0399 P. 5/16
NO.140 P004

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Background

5. Under the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996, I am required to issue Sinn Féin with an invitation to the negotiations "as soon as practicable" once I consider there is "an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994".

6. If they joined negotiations, Sinn Féin would be required to make a total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles and to engage in addressing the Mitchell proposals on decommissioning.

7. Hume's approach coincides with some significant parallel developments:

- renewed Sinn Féin confidence post-Drumcree. Despite a recent opinion poll in the Irish Times which suggests the contrary, Drumcree is generally reckoned to have boosted Sinn Féin's support among nationalists and to have helped them to acquire some of the high ground over unionists. It means that they feel, politically, in a position of strength;

- the loyalist ceasefire is under pressure. Despite continued punishment beatings and the death threat against two prominent paramilitaries for opposing the ceasefire, the loyalist ceasefire remains intact. But it is under severe pressure and would collapse if the IRA resumed violence in Northern Ireland, or continued their attacks on the mainland. When the loyalist parties associated with the paramilitaries met the Prime Minister on 22 July, they stressed their desire to see a genuine restoration of the IRA ceasefire, and Sinn Féin's rapid entry into negotiations, as the surest way of maintaining the loyalist ceasefire;

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Sep. 1996
11/03/96

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No. 0399 P. 6/16
NO.140 P005

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- an understanding is emerging among the key participants on how to address decommissioning in the negotiations. The early signs are that the UUP accept that a cut and dried resolution of decommissioning before political negotiations start is unrealistic. They seem ready to settle for discussion of the issue, assurances from both Governments on their approach (including timescale and content of the necessary legislation), and the establishment, in parallel to the launch of the three strands, of a procedural mechanism to secure some decommissioning during the course of the negotiations. Such an outcome might be acceptable to Sinn Féin as well;
- an IRA general army convention seems imminent. The purpose of this rare event is not clear to us, but inevitably it will debate the key issues of peace and war.

Prospects for a restored IRA ceasefire

8. Among the IRA leadership, there appears to be a desire for a further ceasefire, but much evidence suggests that the rank and file is more interested in war than peace. Its intensive preparations for a return to full scale violence and further mainland attacks continue, as do punishment beatings. Most of the internal pressure is for a resumption of violence in Northern Ireland, not a ceasefire.
9. But a plausible political case, from the point of view of the IRA leadership, can still be made for a renewed ceasefire:
 - any strategic analysis which underpinned the August 1994 ceasefire - that violence no longer furthered their objectives, which could instead be pursued in political negotiations - remains valid;

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No. 0399 P. 7/16
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decommissioning was the fundamental block. If unionists sign up to a way forward on that with which Sinn Féin and the IRA can live, that obstacle will be removed;

Drumcree means a ceasefire could be declared from a position of political strength, rather than in response to pressure;

if signs of growing co-operation between the SDLP and UUP come to anything, there is a risk of a deal being struck in Sinn Féin's absence;

a ceasefire followed by Sinn Féin's rapid entry to political negotiations could be the best way to fend off internal pressure for a full resumption of violence.

10. Even on this scenario - by no means the only, or necessarily the most likely one - the IRA could still be looking for a further mainland or continental "spectacular" before a ceasefire was declared.

11. Issues of peace and war seem to be under real debate now in the IRA. We do not know the outcome, nor whether it will reflect a purely tactical judgement or a strategic one defining the IRA's long-term approach. The likeliest outcome is endorsement of a free hand for the leadership to call a ceasefire when they judge the conditions are right. A restored ceasefire - even within a matter of a few weeks - cannot be ruled out; nor can a full scale resumption of violence. We must be ready for either but, to the limited extent possible, seek to push the IRA towards a restoration of its ceasefire. (It is relevant that, in separate conversations last weekend, Michael Ancram received clear suggestions from both Cardinal Daly and the Taoiseach that restoration of the ceasefire was a real possibility. At the same time, while the Taoiseach's information was that the pro-ceasefire faction would have the upper hand in the general army convention, he also feared that the IRA might seek to precede any restoration with a major attack.)

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Sep. 1996 15:06
17/09/96 15:45

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Response to Hume

12. The approach Hume reports may be a genuine one. But we must also be alive to possible traps, such as being enticed into a protracted negotiation with Sinn Féin when they have no intention of delivering a ceasefire, or dismissing out of hand what could be presented in public as a genuine offer of a ceasefire on reasonable terms.

13. We should therefore continue to adopt a response which keeps open the possibilities of a genuine ceasefire, while protecting us against possible tactical manoeuvres. That points to:

- not spurning what may be, or may be presented as, a genuine offer of a ceasefire;
- not accepting the draft text as it stands, which in several key areas is either vague or goes beyond existing policy.

14. We should respond by repeating our readiness to restate existing Government policy if that will lead to a renewed ceasefire, but not to pay a price, in terms of changing policy, to achieve one. That points to revising the draft text to bring it into line with existing policy - as in the draft response at Annex C, which also contains a clear warning that any further IRA attack risks reducing the credibility of any ceasefire to zero.

Draft text

15. The text sent back by Hume is obviously unacceptable as it stands. But Hume has picked out three key issues for Sinn Féin and the IRA:

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7. Sep. 1996 15:06
11/09/96 15:43

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No. 0399 P. 9/16
NO.140 P008

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- there should be no preconditions to negotiations. We have said this already - although it is also important to be clear that on entering the discussions all participants must make clear their total and absolute commitment to the International Body's principles of democracy and non-violence, as well as addressing its proposals on decommissioning. Decommissioning is the real issue here, but Hume claimed Sinn Féin accepted the parallel approach in the Mitchell report. Paragraph 5 of the revised draft makes it clear we are seeking a commitment to the Mitchell approach under which some decommissioning takes place during negotiations in the context of political progress;
- a timeframe for negotiations. Sinn Féin want reassurance that the negotiations cannot be strung out endlessly - they have talked in public of 6-9 months. Hume thought that in practice they might accept a review of the negotiations after 6 months, and a similar proposal has already been made in the negotiations. Paragraph 9 of the revised draft emphasises the Government's commitment to completing the negotiations speedily and also says that we would support any agreed timeframe adopted by the participants in the negotiations - which would be an entirely different matter from an imposed timeframe;
- confidence building measures, by which Hume says was meant prisoners. Sinn Féin wanted to be sure that there would be movement on this issue, and others on the republican 'wish list', if there was a new ceasefire. Paragraphs 10-13 of the revised statement repeat existing policy, recall the measures we took in response to the last ceasefire but make no commitments on future policy, while calling for confidence-building measures from the IRA.

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7. Sep. 1996 15:07
11/02/96 15:43

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No. 0399 P. 10/16
NO.140 P009

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Direct contact with Sinn Féin

16. We have said that Ministers will not meet Sinn Féin until the ceasefire is restored. But we have publicly kept open the possibility of officials meeting Sinn Féin before the ceasefire is restored - one such meeting was held, and acknowledged, on 26 February. The Prime Minister told Hume that we would be prepared to consider any request for another such meeting "in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground".

17. No formal request has been received. But we should continue to keep open the possibility of such a meeting - not least because it may be the only means of verifying for ourselves Hume's account of Sinn Féin and the IRA's position.

Unionist reaction

18. Although the Irish and US Governments know of the approach, Hume claims to have told no one but us.

19. The terms for Sinn Féin's entry into the negotiations, set out in legislation, are well understood by unionists. The more positive stance of the UUP since negotiations resumed on 9 September can be interpreted, in part, as a desire to make as much progress as possible before Sinn Féin get into the negotiations.

20. We shall need, at the right time, to bring the UUP into the loop - both to prepare them against any possibility of an IRA ceasefire, and to protect ourselves in case of any leak.

21. I shall report to the Committee on progress made in intensive discussions with the UUP this week on the way forward on decommissioning, and on the negotiations. This may give clues to their likely response to a ceasefire. Both we and the Irish Government will be showing the UUP the necessary enabling legislation each Government has prepared to make decommissioning

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No. 0399 P. 11/16
NO.140 P010

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possible. Subject to the UUP's reaction, I should be grateful for contingent approval from colleagues to publication of our Bill in draft at the appropriate moment, as a confidence-building measure for unionists. They attach much importance to this.

Conclusion

22. Hume's approach has to be taken seriously: even if it is not genuine, it could be publicly presented as such (as the line taken by the Cardinal indicates). We cannot afford to dismiss it out of hand; but nor can we accept the suggested text as it stands.

23. I propose that the Prime Minister responds along the lines of Annex C with a re-drafted text which simply repeats existing policy commitments.

24. At the right time, unionists will need to be brought into the loop. Meanwhile, contingency work on how to respond to any renewed IRA ceasefire should continue. There remains the prospect of further IRA mainland attacks, and the possibility of a full scale resumption of violence in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, intensive deployment of the security forces' efforts continues to be necessary.

PM

Northern Ireland Office

17 September 1996

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