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From: THE ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ PRIVATE SECRETARYc-~~PB~~

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PHONE CALL FROM TAOISEACH

I understand that you are expecting the Taoiseach to ring the Prime Minister on the afternoon of 13 March. This was trailed by Paddy Teahon during your meeting with him last week.

We assume that the Taoiseach's main interest will be in the political talks. There will clearly be scope here for the two Prime Ministers to share some warm language about the way in which the process was kept going into March, was suspended on an agreed basis and without too much recrimination, and achieved an agreed date for a resumption.

It seems pretty clear that the Taoiseach has and will continue to let his mind run over the possibilities for injecting new life into the political process. Yesterday in the Dail he refused to discount the possibility that a new initiative could be forthcoming before the election. This may have been a tactical position but I doubt if any of us would be surprised if at some point he returned to the idea of launching an initiative over the heads of the parties.

During a meeting of the British Irish Interparliamentary Body in Dublin on 3 March he also got close to Sinn Fein language when he said that, after the talks resume, it will be important that "significant progress is made within a finite period... a timeframe and calendar, agreed among the participants... would be a sensible

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and worthwhile way to achieve that". In other words, he may look for ways of engendering more momentum within the process, as well as outside it.

This would be a good opportunity for the Prime Minister to encourage the Taoiseach to concentrate on the talks process and not get drawn into public speculation about other alternatives. Of course, if he has particular ideas for engendering momentum within the process we would be very happy to consider them with him. But as of now, the two Governments should keep their eye firmly on the ball of the talks process.

This would also be a useful opportunity for the Prime Minister to note, and add his encouragement to, the Taoiseach's recent comments about the need for unionist consent to any future agreement. Mr Bruton has clearly gone out of his way to challenge Sinn Fein to accept the principle of consent, and to demolish Sinn Fein's argument that the two governments were idle during the ceasefire. The more of this he does the better.

Paddy Teahon did not mention these issues when you met last week but we assume that the Taoiseach will want to touch base with the Prime Minister on the North Report, Bloody Sunday and Roisin McAliskey. All of these are likely to come up at today's IGC in Dublin and so we may need to give you a further read-out, but defensive material is attached.

From the Prime Minister's point of view, a further point he can raise is the current exchanges over Hume/Adams. Following last week's meeting of NI Committee we are close to the point of giving John Hume answers to his questions. Michael Ancram is hoping to do this when he and Hume are in the States next week, possibly Tuesday

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(I attach a note of those Northern Ireland politicians whom we also expect to be in the States for St Patrick's Day.) We will be writing to you with further details about our handling arrangements, including the timetable for publication, but our present thinking is that if we give Hume the answers on Tuesday we might hold back publication until Saturday (or a little longer if they look like having a positive effect and Sinn Fein need extra time to engineer a ceasefire.) As agreed by NI, we would brief David Trimble before publication.

We expect that Michael Ancram will brief the Americans while he is in Washington; he has a meeting with Sandy Berger and Jim Steinberg pencilled in for Monday. We will want the Americans to row in hard behind us in support. Likewise the Irish; the Prime Minister might therefore tell the Taoiseach that we hope to respond to Hume very soon, that we do not have high expectations of the exercise but are nonetheless treating it seriously, that we will keep the Irish properly briefed and hope that they too will add their weight after we have replied. The Prime Minister might also emphasise that any public speculation about this exercise before Hume has got the answers and Sinn Fein has had an opportunity to consider them, would be bound to be damaging.

I attach some speaking notes to cover these points, in addition to the defensive briefing. We assume that the FCO will provide you with a note about President Robinson's decision not to seek a further term.

I am copying this letter to Foreign Secretary's office, Ambassador Sutherland and Jan Polley in Robin Butler's office.

W K LINDSAY

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