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Ref: BO.2176

## PRIME MINISTER

cc Sir Robin Butler

Meeting of NI on Thursday 17 October 1996 at 11.30 am

1. The full NI membership (Deputy Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Northern Ireland Secretary, Defence Secretary, Lord Privy Seal and Attorney General) will attend, as will the Chief Whip, the Ministers of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler and Michael Ancram) and the Permanent Secretary (Sir John Chilcot).

Papers

2. The Northern Ireland Secretary has circulated two memoranda: NI(96)9 records the present situation, following the Lisburn bombing, on security measures, the talks and information strategy; NI(96)10 deals with the Hume/Adams initiative.

Objectives

3. The main objectives of the meeting are:
- to take stock of the situation and the prospects in Northern Ireland following the Lisburn bombing;
  - to decide how to respond to Mr Hume's latest text.



Background(a) Hume/Adams

4. NI(96)10 sets out three options: to end the Hume/Adams initiative now; to use the initiative to get consensus around clearer conditions of entry for Sinn Fein to the talks; or to require evidence of serious intent from the IRA before going further. The Northern Ireland Secretary recommends a combination of options 2 and 3: publishing a text which takes account of changes proposed by Mr Hume, insofar as they are consistent with existing policy, without necessarily using his language; incorporating in it the conditions for Sinn Fein's entry into the talks if they call a new ceasefire (primarily, a three month period during which a judgement would be made as to whether the new ceasefire was genuinely unequivocal); and, while co-opting Irish and US support for this approach, asking Mr Hume what evidence there is from the IRA of serious intent.

No - just giving Hume a further text at this stage.

5. The Northern Ireland Secretary's option 2 offers some prospect of achieving what are arguably our key objectives. It would enable us:

- (a) to secure a ceasefire if one is genuinely available;
- (b) to keep all the constitutional parties (especially the UUP, SDLP and the loyalists) engaged in the talks;
- (c) to be on the front foot in terms of public presentation, and deprive Sinn Fein of opportunities to regain the propaganda initiative.

6. In the current climate of opinion, we could almost certainly recruit both the Irish and the United States Governments to such a plan (though the Irish might press for a

They want no more than 6 weeks.



shorter decontamination period for Sinn Fein), thereby continuing to make it impossible for Sinn Fein to establish a nationalist consensus against the British Government.

7. Option 3 can certainly be added to option 2, and is on one analysis eminently reasonable. It is however worth noting that it risks being interpreted by Sinn Fein/IRA as a further precondition, and might frighten them off.

8. While in some ways attractive, option 1 would carry the risks identified in paragraph 20 of NI(96)10.

9. Whichever option is chosen, an extremely careful information strategy will be required: an obvious task for the new Northern Ireland Strategic Information Committee (NISIC).

(b) Other issues

10. NI(96)9 is primarily a factual report. On security measures, Annex A to the paper describes the additional precautions which have been taken in Northern Ireland since the Lisburn bombing. The general approach has been to maintain proportionality in responding to the threat, while ensuring that further measures are in an advanced state of preparation and can be introduced quickly if necessary. The paper does not deal with the breach of security at HQNI which led to the bombings; the Defence Secretary may wish to speak on that.

(he has been pre-warned)

11. Paragraph 9 of the paper deals with Mr Trimble's support for making intercept material admissible in criminal cases. This has been the subject of detailed interdepartmental consideration over several years, and wide differences of view have remained among departments, the agencies and the police. The Home Secretary is in favour of making the change, but there are no plans for legislation at present. This was one



of the issues considered by Lord Lloyd in his report on the future of counter-terrorism legislation which is due to be published later this month. Lord Lloyd recommends that the prosecution should have the ability, in a case where it wishes to do so, to adduce intercept evidence. His proposal will need careful consideration, and we are not in a position at present to give Mr Trimble any firm commitments about the content of any future legislation on the subject. His attention might however be drawn to Lord Lloyd's recommendation.

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(You can tell him when he calls.)

12. The Northern Ireland Secretary will wish to bring the Committee up to date on progress in the talks and the handling of the decommissioning issue, following the agreement reached by the parties on the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary. The Committee may welcome some indication of the likely timing of the publication of the draft decommissioning Bill and its introduction into Parliament. Although the Committee agreed at their meeting on 19 September that the draft Bill should be published, subject to the agreement of the business managers, the Northern Ireland Secretary has not yet sought detailed policy approval. We understand that he will be advised to write to colleagues in NI and LG on this fairly shortly.

13. On information strategy, Sir John Wheeler chaired today the inaugural meeting of NISIC, which was established with NI agreement following discussion at the July meeting. The NIO have been slow off the mark in setting up NISIC, as the Lord Privy Seal for one has noticed; it would therefore be helpful to emphasise the importance of NISIC's task, and to invite Sir John Wheeler to report on the first meeting.

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## Issues

14. Discussion might cover the following areas:

- despite general scepticism about Sinn Fein/IRA intentions on a ceasefire, should the Hume initiative still be given a chance, just in case the ceasefire offer is genuine?
- is the Northern Ireland Secretary's proposal defensible to public opinion generally and unionists in particular if in the event there is no ceasefire? Any benefits in seeking further evidence of IRA intentions?
- what would be the consequences of abandoning the Hume initiative? Are we reconciled to the absence of a ceasefire for the foreseeable future? Would all participants remain in the talks (ie the SDLP and, eventually, the loyalists)? What would be our information strategy?
- conditions for Sinn Fein's entry: agreed that we should not either explicitly or implicitly rule out their future participation? If so, should a fixed decontamination period of three months or so be an explicit condition? Any other realistic conditions which might be imposed?
- timing: how urgent is it to take action quickly in order to keep the talks on track? Any benefits in delay; what are the key dates/events in the process?
- how best to ensure that we maintain the best public presentation of our position?

- how to relate whatever we do in Hume/Adams as a <sup>5</sup> ceasefire condition, with whatever we do (w the parties do between them) in the talks.



Handling

15. You will want to invite the Northern Ireland Secretary to introduce his memoranda. It may be convenient to take any

① comments on the background paper before turning to Hume/Adams specifically. On the former, the Defence Secretary may wish to comment on the security aspects relating to the armed forces. On information strategy, you could ask Sir John Wheeler to report on the first meeting of NISIC; the Lord Privy Seal may wish to intervene. You could then turn to the

② Hume/Adams issue and invite views on the options.

Conclusions

16. Subject to the discussion, you may be able to sum up that the Committee:

- agreed that, despite their scepticism about whether Sinn Fein and the IRA genuinely intended to deliver a ceasefire, it would be difficult to defend rejecting the latest approach out of hand since the gap between Mr Hume's text and the Government's policy position was relatively small; and that the balance of advantage lay with a challenge to Sinn Fein to deliver on their promise;
- agreed that clarification of the conditions for Sinn Fein's admission to the talks should be given in the response to Mr Hume, and that these should include a trial period of [an appropriate length of time] following the declaration of a ceasefire;

*Our opening bid should be four months, in my view, though we should settle for 3.*



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- invited the Prime Minister and the Northern Ireland Secretary to seek support from the Irish and US Governments for this strategy and to keep Mr Trimble informed;
- invited the Northern Ireland Secretary to develop an appropriate and robust information strategy in support of this plan, consulting colleagues as necessary.

Colin Budd

COLIN BUDD

16 October 1996

Mr. Kelly - 2  
Mr. Stephens - 2  
Mr. Sharkey - 2  
Mr. Pugh - 2  
Mr. O'Neill (SGL) - 2  
Mr. Collins, Cab Off (via 101) - 2  
Mr. McKinnon, TRO - 2  
Mr. Brown, RIB PCO - 2  
Mr. Dublin - 2  
Mr. Macdonald (via RIB) - 2  
Mr. Campbell-Bannerman - 2  
Mr. Quinn, No 10

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKED TUESDAY 13 OCTOBER 1996

The Chairman circulated to the parties last night papers they had received from the UUP and Alliance Party on the consideration of the International Body's proposals on decommissioning.

In examining the UUP paper, it would appear to be the paper that has published earlier on decommissioning and the