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## CABINET

## MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON NORTHERN IRELAND

## HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Background

1. Our long term objective remains the securing of a comprehensive agreement to encourage or underpin a cessation of violence. Our medium term objectives include:

- (i) to secure an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, as a foundation to building a lasting peace. We do not seek a ceasefire at any price, nor can the political process be hostage to Sinn Féin, but a credible ceasefire would be a significant benefit;
- (ii) to avoid HMG being blamed for any failure of either the talks process or the peace process.

Our immediate objective however is to keep the talks going, because without talks there would be a fullscale return to violence on both sides and no political process to fill the vacuum, and an end in practice to the Government's strategy of the last six years.

2. The talks are currently in danger of stalling over the issue of conditions of entry for Sinn Féin and how to tackle decommissioning. We have to find a way through which at least keeps the UUP and the SDLP in the negotiations, and retains the cooperation of Dublin and Washington. We are currently considering ways in which the decommissioning issue might be resolved in a manner satisfactory to Unionists and acceptable to Dublin and the SDLP. I will report on these when they are more fully developed.

3. The Hume/Adams initiative fits in to this for two important reasons:

- it offers, although unlikely, the prospect of an IRA ceasefire - the value of which would depend on the nature of it;

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- but, of more practical importance, if the SDLP, Irish or US Governments conclude that HMG have forestalled such a ceasefire, then their cooperation in taking the talks forward without Sinn Féin will be lost with the likely consequence that they will collapse.
4. So showing we have responded to the Hume/Adams initiative, in terms which those other parties consider reasonable, is important to achieving our first objective of keeping the talks going, whether or not Sinn Féin are in them.
5. For this reason, when we last discussed the initiative on 17 October, we agreed to seek Irish and US support for going back to Hume with a revised text incorporating a three month delay period between a ceasefire and Sinn Féin's entry to the negotiations.
6. This approach remains correct in substance. But both the Irish and US Governments will not support an explicit 3-month delay which is presented as a "punishment" or "decontamination" period, judging that this would be viewed by Sinn Féin as a wrecking tactic.
7. So the right presentation is critical so as to maximise support, put the greatest possible pressure on Sinn Féin and, whether or not there is a ceasefire, keep the talks going.

#### Reaction from the Irish, US and Hume

8. The Prime Minister put the text setting an explicit 3-month delay period to both the Irish and US Governments, and had a further meeting with Hume this Tuesday.

- The Taoiseach, in a good conversation with the Prime Minister over the weekend, was adamant that setting an explicit three month delay period would cause Sinn Féin to conclude we had rejected the initiative. It is clear that the Irish Government will not support an explicit three month delay period and will criticise us if we proceed to set one unilaterally. It seems as much a matter of the presentation as the period itself. The Taoiseach believes Adams is nonetheless serious about a ceasefire. Irish officials have been told by Adams that one would follow within 24 hours of a text acceptable to the Provisional leadership being published.
- The US Government (Tony Lake) say they understand the thinking behind a three month delay period but are also concerned about the presentation and about us proceeding without Irish backing. We could lose their support if we take no account of this.
- Hume, in a positive meeting, remained convinced that Adams is for real and that a ceasefire is there for the taking. He also said that Adams had been authorised by the IRA at a meeting last Friday to say that restoration of the ceasefire would follow "immediately" on publication of the proposed text, and that it would be described as

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"unequivocal". But he warned that the window of opportunity will not last for long. The Prime Minister emphasised the need for some time to elapse after any ceasefire, but without being specific; and recognised that there were words and actions which could shorten the time. Mallon, however, has told the Irish that supporting an explicit three month delay period would be electoral suicide for the SDLP, who fear Sinn Féin will make significant gains at their expense next year.

9. We have independent confirmation that there was a significant meeting of the IRA leadership last Friday (although no confirmation of any discussion of a ceasefire) and that Adams did indeed give Irish officials the message the Taoiseach reports. There continues, however, to be no intelligence of the leadership preparing the movement for a ceasefire, and much evidence that further and possibly imminent attacks are in advanced preparation.

10. As to the UUP, a three month delay period - or even longer - may well not of itself secure significant forward movement from them, so as to allow the talks to advance beyond the issue of how to handle decommissioning, whether or not Sinn Féin join them. David Trimble says it is not the time period that matters so much as the criteria a ceasefire must satisfy - although the UUP seem intent on setting criteria they know Sinn Féin will not meet. Nevertheless, it clearly remains vital to take as much account as possible of the UUP position and it will be important to keep David Trimble fully briefed.

#### The way forward

11. Under the legislation setting up the negotiations, when I consider there to be an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire I am required to invite Sinn Féin to the negotiations as soon as practicable. I remain of the view that whether or not any restoration is unequivocal can best be judged over time. I cannot see that period credibly being much less than three months - unless there is some incontrovertible signal from the IRA that the ceasefire is permanent.

12. Nevertheless we must take seriously the concerns expressed about its presentation. To ignore them would risk:

- open disagreement with the Irish Government and the SDLP;
- which would relieve pressure on Sinn Féin who would claim support for their view that we were setting a new precondition; and
- lose any prospect of the Irish Government, the SDLP and the US Administration helping to make progress in the talks possible without Sinn Féin, because they would believe we have spurned a reasonable chance to bring them in;

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- if Adams is to be believed, losing the prospect of a ceasefire and almost certainly provoking a return to loyalist violence; and
- unionists saying that three months was unsatisfactory anyway, making it impossible for them to soften their position on decommissioning.

13. This is close to the worst of all worlds: stalled talks, even without Sinn Féin, leading to collapse and resumed loyalist violence; no ceasefire; HMG blamed by many nationalists for adding new preconditions; and unionists critical as well.

14. The key to this dilemma remains bringing the Hume/Adams initiative to a clear conclusion in which the Irish and US Governments and the SDLP stand with us in putting maximum pressure on Sinn Féin. This leads:

- either to a restoration of the ceasefire. This could bring problems of its own, including continued impasse over decommissioning and quite possibly make it impossible to continue with the talks in the short term - the unionists could impose their own delay period simply by walking out. However, it achieves a significant gain and would cement the loyalist ceasefire;
- or, perhaps more likely, to no ceasefire but with the blame pinned firmly on Sinn Féin, so persuading the Irish, US and SDLP to make progress in the talks without them.

15. We must hold to the idea of judging any ceasefire over a period of time, which simply reflects the changed political circumstances since the Lisburn attack. But we need to keep the Irish, the US and the SDLP tied in so as to put Sinn Féin under real pressure. Therefore I am asking colleagues to look again at the period of a delay and how best it might be presented.

#### Presentation

16. I believe we could secure support for the following approach under which, subject to satisfactory events on the ground, we would look to establish a delay of around three months, without being explicit about the specific period in our public presentation.

- We would make it clear that Sinn Féin could by no means expect to join the negotiations at once, unless there were some incontrovertible developments (even the UUP accept that a declaration of "permanence" by a General Army Convention or a start to decommissioning, both highly unlikely, would dramatically alter the situation); and



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- that actions, words and all the circumstances would need to be consistent with a declared ceasefire, as our proposed text makes clear; and
- that we would take the time necessary to reach a well founded judgement in this regard; and
- during that period, there would be a range of positive measures (but not new preconditions) which Sinn Féin and the IRA could take which would enhance their credibility; and, if convincing, reduce the period.

17. We would intend - but without showing our hand in public - to reach a judgment within three months on whether it could be considered an unequivocal restoration in the light of the criteria above.

- One possibility, if a ceasefire were declared in the near future would be to make use of the Christmas 4 week recess in the negotiations. This could mean Sinn Féin joining the negotiations in mid January, some two and a half months' distant.

18. This approach would deliver a delay period close to the three months we agreed upon, but without confronting Sinn Féin, the Irish Government, the US Government and the SDLP with an explicit three month period set in concrete, which we know they will simply not support.

19. As positive measures which Sinn Féin could take during this period, we could point for example to: any words indicating the ceasefire was permanent; commitment to the Mitchell principles; movement towards accepting the principle of consent and recognising the need to secure unionist agreement; an end to surveillance, targetting and arms procurement; an end to punishment beatings. These would need to be positive indications which would make an earlier judgement on the ceasefire likely - but we would need to be careful to avoid giving the impression that they were new requirements or preconditions, because that would not secure support from others.

20. In order to deliver a positive presentation of the delay period, which is necessary to secure Irish and US support, we also need to point to positive activity over this period, such as renewed official contact with Sinn Féin leading to Ministerial contact, discussion of confidence-building measures and activity to enable Sinn Féin to "catch up" with progress in the negotiations so far.

21. A revised text reflecting this approach is attached - the key change, removing the explicit 3 month period, is to the underlined

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paragraph - together with a possible covering letter to John Hume (which would not be intended for publication). The second paragraph has been added, with minor consequential adjustments, to reflect language suggested by John Hume at his recent meeting with the Prime Minister. It is consistent with well established positions and language.

22. We need now to bring this to a head quickly if the talks are not to stall in the meantime. I propose the Prime Minister puts this text back to Hume this week.

When we met on Thursday, I said I would let you have a clear response to the text you gave us on 16 October.

Throughout the time we have discussed these matters, I have had two concerns. First, the IRA's murderous actions on the ground, and what we know of their future plans, are wholly incompatible with what you tell me is Mr Adams' readiness to

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... immediately following a government statement which, as you know, can only repeat existing policy positions. But, secondly, I am determined that the peace process should continue because that is what the people of Northern Ireland want and deserve. So Sinn Féin can still join the negotiations if there is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, but each atrocity the IRA commits means the credibility gap to be bridged is that much wider.

All the evidence reaching me suggests the IRA are intent on war, not peace. This whole exercise could simply be a cynical tactical manoeuvre deliberately designed to distract us all from making real progress in the talks, if necessary without Sinn Féin. If that is so, I am determined it will not succeed. It is now for Mr Adams to show that he is serious about this initiative by setting out clearly the terms and circumstances in which an IRA ceasefire would be declared.

As I have repeatedly made clear, I will not negotiate Government policy in exchange for a ceasefire - that would be to appease violence. All I said I will stick

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