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TO: HQ, ANGLO IRISH FROM: DERMOT BRANGAN

ATTENTION: SECRETARY O hUIGINN

Please cc Dan Mulhall, Press Section

1. Today's lead editorial in the **New York Times** is, "The IRA edges toward a truce". It was written by David Unger to whom I spoke briefly yesterday. Its central message is that Britain, despite distrust of IRA intentions, should carefully but positively consider the IRA's peace proposal without undue delay and not squander a promising new opening for peace.
2. It begins with the view that there are credible reports that the IRA is moving toward a truce. Despite mistrust, the British should "carefully test the offer", as it represents the best chance for peace in almost a year. It says that IRA violent actions have made it hard for the British to believe the IRA's peace proposal and that the British are right to insist on assurances that a new ceasefire will be more durable than the last one. The IRA can go part of the way by providing these assurances by making it clear in a new ceasefire that it is abandoning the use of violence. "After that its actions will speak most clearly".
3. It suggests that Sinn Fein will have to accept Mitchell's proposals on decommissioning and that a Christmas adjournment in the multiparty talks might be used to ease Sinn Fein into the talks process and to test the durability of the ceasefire. It says that, if Unionist parties refuse to sit with

Sinn Fein in the talks, public opinion, which strongly favours peace, would eventually drive them back to the table.

4. It concludes with, "Britain is right to demand that the IRA demonstrate a commitment to nonviolence. But doing so should not require a lengthy delay in responding, carefully but positively, to the truce proposal. To needlessly squander what looks like a promising new opening for peace would not serve the interest of anyone, least of all the war-weary people of Ulster".

cc Ambassador, Washington

The I.R.A. Edges Toward a Truce

There are credible reports that the Irish Republican Army is now prepared to restore the cease-fire it broke last January, provided Britain agrees to admit the I.R.A.'s political wing, Sinn Fein, to the Northern Ireland peace talks. The I.R.A. has given the British, and everyone else, reason to distrust its word and despise its conduct. Nevertheless, its offer should be carefully tested. If genuine, it represents the best chance in almost a year to halt the violence and promote productive negotiations on Northern Ireland's future.

A deal to restore the cease-fire would recapture some of the promise that existed in January, when an international panel headed by former Senator George Mitchell presented compromise proposals for talking peace talks open to all representative parties in Northern Ireland.

The I.R.A. wrecked Ulster's hopes for peace by remaining a terrorist bombing campaign, first in London and Manchester and more recently with an attack on a British Army base in Northern Ireland itself. The I.R.A.'s terror kept Sinn Fein out of the peace talks, which were formally convened in June but have made little progress.

The I.R.A. seems to recognize that the return to terrorism hurt its cause by alienating public opinion and by shutting Sinn Fein out of the negotiations. But the string of deadly attacks has made it hard for the British Government and Ulster Protestant parties to believe the I.R.A.'s latest cease-fire proposal. They are right to insist on assurances that a new cease-fire will be more durable than the last one, and not simply a tactical move to get Sinn Fein into the talks. The I.R.A. can go part way to providing

these assurances by making clear in a new cease-fire declaration that it is abandoning the use of violence. After that, its actions will speak most clearly.

To participate in the talks, Sinn Fein will have to accept, as Britain now has, Senator Mitchell's compromise formula on the timetable for paramilitary groups to surrender their weapons. This formula calls for weapons to be turned in as the peace talks progress. It rejects both the Protestant demand for making disarmament a precondition for talks and the I.R.A.'s insistence on retaining all weapons until there is a comprehensive settlement.

As it happens, the holiday calendar provides an opportunity to test the sincerity of the I.R.A. proposal. Normally, the talks would adjourn for more than a month over the Christmas and New Year's season. Instead, Sinn Fein could be allowed to meet during the holidays with the British and Irish Governments and all Northern Ireland political parties, Roman Catholic or Protestant. By the time regular talks resume early next year, it should be clear whether the I.R.A. cease-fire is dependable and durable. Protestant Unionist parties might initially refuse to go down with Sinn Fein. But if the cease-fire proves real, public opinion in Ulster, which strongly favors peace, would eventually drive them back to the table.

Britain is right to demand that the I.R.A. demonstrate a commitment to nonviolence. But doing so should not require a lengthy delay in responding, carefully but positively, to the truce proposal. To needlessly squander what looks like a promising new opening for peace would not serve the interest of anyone, least of all the war-weary people of Ulster.

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