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OM: Noel Cornick  
Head of Communication Strategy  
7 November 1996

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SEC *30/11*  
1 NOV 1996  
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- cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir David Fe... - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Ms Mapstone - B
- Ms Bharucha - B
- Mr Clarke - B
- Mr Jagelman - B

*1. Mr Portillo - b*  
*note visit, pl.*  
*2. Mr Lacey (M 141)*  
*Mr Wiggins*  
*11.11*

**C**

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

**BRIEFING FOR THE DEFENCE SECRETARY**

We have been asked, through the NISIC network, by MOD colleagues to prepare up to date briefing for the Defence Secretary's forthcoming visit to Northern Ireland. Because of characteristic MOD criteria I have not been divulged the date of Mr Portillo's visit, nor will this week's WIS make reference to it. I am nevertheless informed that it will take place fairly shortly.

I attach a self-explanatory draft letter to Mr Portillo's Private Secretary, and supporting briefing material provided by colleagues elsewhere in the Department.

(Signed)

NOEL CORNICK

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DRAFT LETTER FROM PS/SECRETARY OF STATE TO

The Principal Private Secretary  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
LONDON  
SW1A 2HB

**DEFENCE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND**

Our officials have been in touch, through the NISIC machinery, about your Secretary of State's forthcoming visit to Northern Ireland. I understand that Mr Portillo's purpose is primarily to visit military units in the Province, but that he will meet journalists at some stage in his programme.

Mr Portillo is familiar, from recent discussions in NI Committee, of the latest political developments, and it is, of course, possible that events may move quickly next week. Should that be the case we shall ensure that up to the minute briefing is available to him.

In the meantime, if he is asked by media representatives about the political process he might wish to emphasise the Government's firm view that the discussions taking place between representatives of the people of Northern Ireland, involving the two Governments, offer a genuine opportunity to find a lasting political settlement which can underpin peace, and that the Government will not be diverted from this course by callous and premeditated acts of violence.

Your Secretary of State will wish to repeat that HMG and the Irish Government are agreed that Sinn Fein will not be admitted to the political talks unless and until there is a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the PIRA ceasefire, and that in the event of any such restoration, the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein would need to show the people of Northern Ireland, by their deeds as well as their words, that such a ceasefire was indeed unequivocal.

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Supporting material, which reinforces these key messages and covers one or two additional issues is attached.

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IE TALKS PROCESS

The Government's aim in Northern Ireland is to secure a comprehensive and widely acceptable political settlement which satisfactorily addresses all those issues of concern to all the main participants.

Recent security events only reinforce the urgent need for dialogue through the multi-party talks process. The Government will not be deflected from its search for a lasting political settlement.

Progress in the talks has been slow - painstakingly slow at times, but these are complex and difficult negotiations.

The Government welcomes the progress to date; it shows that the determination to advance the process is there. But, there is still a long way to travel.

The talks participants are currently engaged in a substantive discussion of the important and sensitive issue of decommissioning.

Without the talks, there is no hope of constructive advances and if such hope is taken away, the consequences may be very bleak.

There is a heavy responsibility on all the participants not only to continue the talks but to move on to the substance of the issues.

For its part the Government is absolutely determined to press on with the talks which offer the best opportunity to make real progress towards a lasting settlement.

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Sinn Fein

Participation in Talks

The current talks process, preceded by an election, was designed to include all parties which gained a mandate from the voters at that election. Sinn Fein did gain a mandate, but both the British and Irish Governments took the position that Sinn Fein could not be invited to take their place at the talks until there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

We always wanted an inclusive process. But clearly a party which reserves the right to resort to violence if its demands are not met cannot be permitted enter democratic negotiations. Sinn Fein must demonstrate to everyone that they are committed to peaceful methods before they can join the talks. A democracy demands no less.

Entry requirements for Sinn Fein

Both Governments are in agreement that there must be an unequivocal IRA ceasefire before Sinn Fein may enter talks. This has been our position since February this year. In judging any new ceasefire declaration, we would take into account all circumstances, including events on the ground. It would obviously take time to establish that any ceasefire was genuinely unequivocal. After the murderous attacks we have seen, there could be no question of the IRA declaring a ceasefire one day and Sinn Fein joining the talks the next.

But if they can satisfactorily demonstrate to us that they are wholly committed to peaceful methods, it would be right to bring them in to talks. That will maximise the chances of securing a widely-accepted political accommodation and a lasting peace.

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Fight against terrorism

We will continue to fight terrorism with every constitutional means at our disposal. Our response to the security situation is always under constant review. There has been no let-up in our vigilance. I am encouraged by recent arrests and successes in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland.

Bomb at Thiepval Barracks

The bombing of HQNI (7 October) was a cowardly act by PIRA who intended the bomb to kill (1 killed, 37 injured). Greatly regret the death of a fine soldier (WO Bradwell) who gave his life to protect others. To plant two bombs, to blow up as they did, without warning is yet another indication of the depths to which PIRA will stoop. Will only stiffen the resolve of Government, security forces and the citizens of the UK.

Security Force Response

Immediately re-introduced such security measures considered appropriate, eg number of patrols increased, snap vehicle checkpoints set up, some town barriers closed at night, increased vigilance. Army presence on the streets more evident. We look forward to a time when such measures can once again be relaxed.

Chief Constable's Comments (more PIRA attacks)

No reason to disagree with Chief Constable's comments. PIRA have clearly shown they are prepared to prolong the suffering and misery of the people of Northern Ireland. The security forces will, of course, continue do all in their power to deter further attacks and protect the community.

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Contacts with Sinn Fein/IRA

We have had no meeting with Sinn Fein or the IRA. Nor do we anticipate any in the absence of a ceasefire. Our position on the talks and a settlement are absolutely clear and on the record and not open to negotiation with Sinn Fein or the IRA. We do, of course, have regular discussions with all the Northern Ireland party leaders about all these issues. But we say nothing in private that we are not prepared to say in public.

Likelihood of an IRA ceasefire

The British Government, the Irish Government, the US Government and of course, the people of Northern Ireland, overwhelmingly desire a ceasefire. If Sinn Fein are interested in democratic and peaceful politics, as they say they are, further violence is counter-productive, as well as morally indefensible.

Sinn Fein and Decommissioning

If Sinn Fein come in to talks they will be treated in exactly the same way as all other participants. That means they will have to accept the principles of democracy and non-violence specified in the Mitchell Report. And they will have to address the Mitchell Report's proposals on decommissioning. These proposals on decommissioning were compiled by an independent international body. They are being discussed by all the parties at the talks at the moment. It is the participants at the talks who will decide precisely how these proposals will be implemented.

Loyalist ceasefire

Despite recent provocation, the Loyalist ceasefire continues to hold. The whole community has much reason to be thankful for their restraint and self-discipline in maintaining their ceasefire.

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Future

Main priority is for PIRA to restore their ceasefire and begin to rebuild damaged confidence. Government has made clear that we will not be deflected by terrorism from our determination to work towards a peaceful settlement supported by both communities.

PIRA Ceasefire

No evidence of PIRA calling a ceasefire. Recent actions suggest PIRA remain unwilling to give up violence. PIRA terrorism is morally wrong, completely unjustified, and counter-productive to Sinn Fein's declared wish to join the multi-party talks.

In a recent poll 92% agreed PIRA should call a ceasefire now (Irish News 11 October).

Mitchell McLaughlin is correct - Sinn Fein do lack credibility (BBC 10 October).

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