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M: F S WOODS
ACTING DIRECTOR, INFORMATION SERVICE
19 August 1997

ASST SEC 133/8
20 AUG 1997
CENT SEC

Leslie
19 AUG 1997
CENT SEC

- CC PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
- PS/Mr Murphy (B&L)
- PS/Mr Ingram (B&L)
- Mr Thomas
- Mr Leach
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Hill
- Mr Ray
- Mr Perry
- Ms Bharucha
- Mr Burnett
- Ms Jude
- Ms Mapstone
- Mr Warner
- Ms Healy

Mr
20/8
1. cc Mr Leach
2. B&L with my Mr.
for Friday's mtg. Mr.
U.S.

MR STEELE

CEASEFIRE MONITORING - MEDIA HANDLING

Whether we opt for the long or the short announcement, the Secretary of State's decision if positive, will be a major news story - the prelude to Sinn Fein's historic entry into substantive political negotiations with both Governments and other parties. If the decision goes the other way interest will be little reduced, most of what follows will still hold good.

2. There will inevitably be considerable media pressure on us to expand on the grounds for the decision.

The story will run for some time and will inevitably include a variety of views, by no means all of which will be favourable to the Secretary of State's decision; It will therefore be important that we put the right perspective on the announcement from the outset and attempt to set the tone for subsequent debate.

3. I would therefore favour the longer version of the announcement circulated by Ms Mapstone which puts more of the rationale on the record from the beginning, on the grounds that:

- (i) it is better to volunteer supporting information than appear to have it forced from us
- (ii) it will be the main vehicle for getting our views on the record for the print media;

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Making the announcement by way of a Secretary of State news conference has attractions of completeness, ensuring a good response to questions from the writing press, and recognising the importance of the issue.

On balance however I feel that it would also serve to put too high a perceived importance on the entry of Sinn Fein into talks playing into Sinn Fein hands and annoying Unionists; we should therefore make the announcement by way of a written statement by the Secretary of State.

5. I also believe it is presentationally and psychologically important that the Secretary of State should be in Northern Ireland when the announcement is made and should do the immediate round of interviews here.

6. If at all possible we should avoid a Friday announcement since:

- (i) this leave us trying to assess reaction, respond if necessary and generally follow-up over the weekend - and more important without the Secretary of State whose leave starts on Saturday;
- (ii) it would reverse the natural sequence whereby the Secretary of State would be in Northern Ireland for some part of Thursday, returning to London on Friday to brief US correspondents and undertake US media interviews, on the announced decision (an important consideration on the eve of Sinn Fein's US visit).

7. In terms of the remaining detail of media handling I propose that we should aim to:

- (i) make the announcement early, if possible, for the lunchtime bulletins and the Belfast Telegraph;
- (ii) be prepared to undertake separate radio/television interviews to balance the no-doubt strident views of some Unionists and the inevitable Sinn Fein spin on events; Press Association might sit in on one of these interviews to ensure that the flavour of the Secretary of State's remarks gets to the writing press;

A naturally occurring doorstep opportunity would mop up a number of these interviews, but an 'invited doorstep', as for Drumcree, would set the tone almost as badly as a formal news conference.

- (iii) have background briefing material available, eg comparison with last ceasefire (and ensure it is available on our Internet site);
- (iv) ensure that the RUC and Army are fully briefed on the announcement and the handling of follow-up queries;
- (v) ensure that posts in the USA have in advance all the material they will need to play a full part and that we take account of their advice, eg the Op-Ed Article for New York Times; suggestions for key interviews; briefing of US correspondents in London, etc;

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Several interviews for the American network are already planned.

- (vi) identify and prepare some champions of our views around the community who could be expected to secure media space for their supportive opinions;
- (viii) consider a follow-up article by the Secretary of State for a Sunday newspaper looking forward beyond the ceasefire and taking account particularly of Unionist concerns.

8. The preparation of lines to take, Q&A briefing, etc will be dealt with in the overall handling plan being drafted by Ms Mapstone.

9. While it is the Secretary of State's announcement of her judgement, No 10 will almost certainly be asked for comments; this would be extremely helpful support and should be positively factored into the arrangements.

10. If agreed, the proposed Belfast Telegraph article (my minute to you of 15 August and your response of same date) could make a useful contribution to rolling the pitch. Notwithstanding the need to avoid any question of pre-judgement, it may be worth considering the possibility of some discreet briefing to prompt an informed forward look, by at least the News Letter and Irish News and perhaps one or two of the more helpful National newspaper.

11. All of this falls to be considered by your Ceasefire Monitoring Committee before proposals are offered to the Secretary of State. In view of the possible logistic issues surrounding announcement day, however, I have copied this note to PS/SOS, Mr Murphy and Mr Ingram for early warning purposes.

(Signed)

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