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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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Prime Minister

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TAM

Roy L. 19/4

Roderic Lyne Esq CMG
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
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19 April 1994

Dear Roderic,

NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL SITUATION

The Prime Minister told Michael Ancram that he would welcome a (short) update on the political scene in Northern Ireland.

7 pages!

Summary

2. The situation is steady and by no means unhelpful. We are past the initial excitements (and over-reactions) caused by the Joint Declaration and the parties have begun to settle into their positions in the run-up to the European elections. There remains an overwhelming desire for peace but most people are realistic about its achievement in the short term. We would not rule out another, possibly longer, ceasefire in the run-up to the European elections.

3. Our common approach, with the Irish, to the Joint Declaration and the associated issues of ceasefires and clarification continues to hold. The good news is that they have now produced a draft of the 'framework document'. This may allow us, at last, to start working on a way back to round table talks. Michael Ancram continues his discussions with the Northern Ireland parties.

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4. The major lessons from my Secretary of State's recent visit to North America are the importance of both Governments continuing to be seen to stand shoulder to shoulder, and the need to avoid being perceived as inflexible on the issue of clarification. ✓

Political Talks

5. Over the past two weeks, there has been a **steadying of nerves in the political parties**: partly because they have worked out their positions on the Declaration; partly as they put increasing energy into the European elections. Dr Paisley intends using the elections as a vote against the Declaration; the **UUP are less volatile** following the publication of their Blueprint for Stability. ✓

6. Following the DUP last week, when Dr Paisley was on his best behaviour, it is the UUP's turn (including Mr Molyneaux) to be in the US this week including for meetings with the Administration at which my Secretary of State has urged the latter to be as forthcoming as possible. **The SDLP remain bilious** because of the Boundary Commission proposals, the new NI Select Committee and speculation that the Government is set to increase the powers of District Councils. But, as far as Talks are concerned, they remain friendly. ✓

7. Michael Ancram met both the SDLP and UUP last week on our "notions" paper. **The UUP gave a constructive response.** While insisting publicly that they are not participating in three-stranded talks, they told Michael Ancram that they wanted to see progress before the European elections so as to isolate the DUP. However, they may envisage progress on ✓

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Strand 1 only, which would not be acceptable to the other parties. They also explained that it would help them to be helpful if we could make it clear that our discussions with them were about Strand 1 as well as Strand 2. (They prefer, by the way, the term "relationship" to "strand".)

Certainly, this would pose fewer problems than the suggestion which Jim Nicholson made to the Prime Minister in Northern Ireland that we should publish details of Strand 1 (your letter of 1 April). This would merely provoke an immediate and strong reaction from the Irish Government and the SDLP who would see it as pre-empting agreement in the three stranded talks. *(Not quite what Nicholson said!)*

8. The SDLP took the "notions" paper away for more detailed consideration. Even John Hume, who seems increasingly out of step with his more realistic Parliamentary colleagues, described it as a "reasonable agenda". ✓

IRA Ceasefire

9. The three day ceasefire won more publicity for the IRA than its brevity deserved. The two Governments held firm on the line that it was only a permanent cessation that mattered. But the Taoiseach gave the unfortunate impression - which does not seem to have been picked up - that a longer ceasefire might have been more successful in producing a response from the British Government. Unhelpfully, but not surprisingly, John Hume called on the Government to do whatever was necessary to secure peace, including sending a back-bencher to talk to the IRA or engaging in face to face talks. Cardinal Daly and Kevin McNamara also began to wobble. ✓

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10. There are lessons in this for the future. Our line of refusing talks or negotiation in the absence of a permanent cessation remains absolutely right. But there could be problems if the IRA go for another, longer ceasefire in the near future of a kind one could not rule out in the run-up to the European elections. We are, however, in a stronger position than ever before given the way my Secretary of State has demonstrated on the record that Sinn Fein have never, for all the opportunities they have been given, spelt out what it is they want clarified and despite what was made absolutely clear in the Declaration itself and what has been said about it since.

Irish Government

11. It has been interesting to watch the position of the Irish Government. The Taoiseach has invested a great deal in "peace" and the longer Sinn Fein have delayed the more he has come under pressure, domestically, to explain where he goes from here. He has been at one with us in spelling out that the Talks process goes on despite Sinn Fein and, in the absence of good news about the ending of violence, has increasingly returned to the Talks process. Indeed, the Taoiseach's major speech last Saturday could be construed, in a curious Irish way, as an attempt to woo unionists - although, before a party audience, he still felt obliged to express a belief that a united Ireland by agreement was a realistic long term option, and he still kept an eye on Republican opinion.

12. This may have had a bearing on the fact that the Irish finally produced, last Friday, their long-awaited draft of a document designed to lead to a 'shared understanding'. This is welcome in itself for the serious commitment it shows to

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the Talks process, although its details are flawed and not thought through - especially in regard to North/South institutions. It does provide a basis for further negotiation. Officials discussed it in the Liaison Group on Monday. The Irish are now, however, seriously engaged, and there will be a further discussion on Thursday (21 April) before the IGC on 25 April.

US Visit

13. My Secretary of State found a growing understanding and support for the Government's position among opinion-formers in the US and Canada. The Joint Declaration has transformed the attitudes of much of Irish America towards the British Government's policy in Northern Ireland. There were generous and warm tributes to the Prime Minister's vision and courage. The most powerful card to play was the continued unity of purpose of both Governments.

14. A number of influential Americans, however, raised genuine concerns about 'clarification'. They understood and supported our refusal to negotiate or talk with Sinn Fein in advance of a permanent renunciation of violence but, when told Sinn Fein had yet to say specifically what needed clarification, pressed strongly for their bluff to be called. When pressed whether, if Sinn Fein did specify what needed clarification, the Government would respond, the Secretary of State took the line that we would look to see if such points had already been dealt with. If not, we would consider our course of action 'in the light of all the circumstances'. (See, for example, the attached interview extract.) The Secretary of State sees this as an opportunity to put further pressure on Sinn Fein by keeping open the possibility that the Government will deal with

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genuine requests, but without any direct talks or negotiations. He feels that no other answer to that direct question would now be sensible. Sinn Fein may, of course, seek to rise to the challenge.

Outlook

15. We will continue to emphasise the ever strengthening demand for peace and the opportunities afforded by the Declaration. At the same time, we will continue working with the Irish Government to finalise the 'framework document' and to agree with them how it should be played in to the best effect in the Talks process. If difficulties emerge, the Prime Minister's forthcoming meetings with the Taoiseach could help. Should we succeed in reaching early agreement on the framework document it might be possible to restimulate the parties before the June elections; there could be advantage in that, in terms of preventing Dr Paisley from dominating the political agenda. However, we are likely to be beyond the June election before we are ready - or have a shared understanding with the Irish - to start manoeuvres back towards round table talks.

16. I should also mention that, although Mr Molyneaux has authorised his team to carry on talking to Michael Ancram about all three relationships, in public the UUP deny that their Talks are part of the 'three stranded process'. It would not suit our purposes to highlight the contradiction. For reasons of self-protection, against the DUP, the UUP are having to say that they are not participating in the three stranded talks on the basis of the 26 March 1991 Statement.

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The essential thing, however, is that they are continuing to talk to us - and about all three relationships. And that is good news.

17. I am sending copies of this letter to John Sawers and Melanie Leech.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Rogers

for JONATHAN STEPHENS

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