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(Received midday Tuesday)  
in PM's OD folder.



PRIME MINISTER

POSSIBLE PIRA REACTION TO THE POPE'S VISIT

At the OD meeting on Wednesday we shall be able to discuss the political consequences of the Pope's visit to Ireland, which may prove to be significant and beneficial. It is possible, however, that we may be faced suddenly with a situation which we have not discussed, namely a PIRA announcement of a ceasefire or of the offer of a ceasefire conditional upon certain responses by the Government. This minute sets out the line on which I suggest we should respond, so that we are not exposed to the criticism that we are losing the opportunity which the Pope has, almost magically, created.

Provisional Sinn Fein have announced their intention to hold a press conference on 2 October, at which PIRA's response is likely to be revealed. I doubt if the Pope's appeal for an end to violence is likely to be heeded by PIRA or INLA: they have settled for a long haul and will not give up without something substantial to show for it. Indeed, there has already been one attack today on the Army in Belfast, probably conducted by PIRA, which fortunately (and fortuitously) resulted only in two soldiers being slightly injured.

Nevertheless, we must be ready with an appropriate response to any move PIRA may make. I suggest that our response should be as follows:

- a. If PIRA were to declare a ceasefire (which would certainly be only for short-term tactical reasons) our response should be that we welcome any reduction of violence and that if terrorism dies then nothing could do more to encourage the restoration of political and economic progress in Northern Ireland. We should re-affirm, however, that our policy will continue to be to enforce the rule of law and that those who commit no crimes have nothing to fear.
- b. The more likely PIRA move is to declare that they will continue violence unless the British Government meets certain conditions. Our general response to such an approach must be that, as the Pope himself has said, political progress cannot be brought about by violence. If their conditions demand immediate political proposals, we must reaffirm that we shall bring our proposals to the Westminster Parliament when our consultations have been completed. If they demand moves towards "justice" (the word which the Pope himself used) such as the concession of special category status for "prisoners of war", we should emphasise that we shall discriminate neither against nor in favour of those convicted of terrorist offences. As the Pope said - "Nobody may ever call murder by any other name than murder .... the spiral of violence may never be given the distinction of unavoidable logic or

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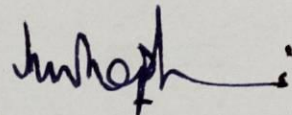
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necessary retaliation." If they demand civil rights for the Catholic minority we shall be able to stand firm on the record of successive British Governments in tackling discrimination.

c. Another possibility is that PIRA may seek covertly to negotiate a ceasefire, and there are already straws in the wind to suggest this possibility. I am re-inforcing my existing instructions to Ministerial colleagues and senior officials in my Department that such approaches are to be reported to me and that it is to be made clear in response to them that the Government is not prepared to enter into negotiations with terrorists.

If any of these situations arise, I shall, of course, consult you and colleagues most closely concerned very urgently so that we may avoid the Government being spuriously thrown on to the defensive. If, in the event, nothing emerges from PIRA before our meeting on Wednesday we can consider then how to respond to any subsequent PIRA moves of this kind.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the members of OD and to Sir John Hunt.



PP H A

(Signed on behalf of the  
Secretary of State in his absence)

1 October 1979

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