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From the Private Secretary

18 June 1996

Dear Mr. Martin,

NORTHERN IRELAND: AFTER MANCHESTER

It will clearly take more time to establish the significance of the Manchester bomb, and what analysis and decision-taking within the Republican movement preceded it. But it may be helpful to set out the Prime Minister's initial views, on the most likely assumption that the bomb was not a one-off preceding a new ceasefire.

In general, he believes that we should not be thrown off course by the bomb, or further violence, if it follows. It demonstrates that we were absolutely right to insist on a ceasefire before Sinn Fein could enter talks and press on without them. Clearly they could not now be allowed straight into the talks simply on the strength of a new ceasefire. A cooling off period of e.g. a few weeks would presumably be a minimum requirement, and Sinn Fein would also have to demonstrate convincingly that any new ceasefire had genuine credibility and was not simply a tactical device, to be abandoned afresh at any moment. We should avoid setting new preconditions ourselves, such as insisting that the IRA use the word permanent, but leave the onus on IRA/Sinn Fein to convince us, the Irish and the constitutional parties that they have earned the right to be at the talks. On present form, the Irish are at one with us on all this.

Meanwhile we must press ahead with the talks aimed at a political settlement and have no truck with suggestions that they are pointless without Sinn Fein. The importance of decommissioning has been underlined. But so has the importance of getting beyond procedural wrangles to the substance of a settlement which can satisfy most Nationalist, as well as Unionist, opinion.

On the security side, obviously we need to do everything possible to catch those responsible for the Manchester bomb, and to ensure that we have the best available intelligence to forestall further attacks. It is also worth having a further look at some of the ideas for disruption of the IRA which emerged in

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

the wake of the South Quay bomb. The Prime Minister does not believe the time is right for reintroduction of internment but he notes Bruton's continuing interest in this on the Republic side. It remains a possible option in some circumstances.

In any case, we should now strike while the iron is hot in terms of bringing the Irish to take tougher action against the IRA in the Republic, e.g. over arms caches, and to cooperate more closely with us. There is no doubt that the political climate in Dublin, as well as attitudes within the Garda, is right for this. The Prime Minister proposes to raise security cooperation in general terms with Bruton, when they speak. This will need to be followed up in detail.

More widely, our aim must be to retain the political and moral high ground we currently occupy, and use Irish and American alienation from the IRA to put a harder squeeze on mainstream Republicans to move decisively away from violence. We need to turn both the security screw, via our own actions and more activity from the Irish, and the political screw, via the continuing talks, and US/Irish pressure. It may be that a split in the Republicans has now become the best option for us, although they will resist this hard and there are of course dangers for us in this too.

I have talked in a preliminary way to Paddy Teahon and Tony Lake about where we are, without of course mentioning explicit encouragement of a split. Their analysis is close to ours in both cases.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Ken Sutton (Home Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).


JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office.

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