

21/24 JUL 96

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

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23 JUL 1996

ASSISTANT SEC

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Desk Immediate

22 July 1996

From the Private Secretary

cc PS/SJS (LTS)

PS/M Anwar (LTS)

PS/Sir J Wheeler (LTS)

PS/PS (LTS)

PS/Sir D Bell

Mr Thomas (LTS)

Mr Legge

Mr Bell

Mr Ray

Mr Hill (LTS)

Mr Stephens

Dear Mark,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Paddy Teahon rang me on 20 July to report on Irish officials' latest 2½ hour meeting with Sinn Fein (Adams, McGuinness and McLaughlin) earlier that day. Most of the discussion had been about the Apprentice Boys, and how to prevent trouble not only in Londonderry but also in Belfast - Sinn Fein argued strongly that, given the tensions eg on the Ormeau Road, a formulation going wider than just the route through Londonderry was needed. O'hUiggin and others from the DFA are likely to get involved, and the Irish are keen that the NIO should be too.

The meeting also covered the prospects for a new IRA ceasefire, and the Hume initiative, rather more explicitly than before. Adams said that if there could be a meeting with the British Government at official level, even an entirely private one to start with, and if we were then prepared to make a three-part statement on the lines proposed by Hume, Sinn Fein would then be ready to go for a new ceasefire. The timing of this would be after the Apprentice Boys were (safely?) out of the way, with a slight implication, no more, that the second anniversary of the first ceasefire might be important.

It was clear from what Adams said that Sinn Fein need a talks process in being for their policy to work, and that, perhaps for this reason, they do not necessarily endorse the SDLP insistence on getting through the opening plenary before the summer break. The Irish were struck by the seriousness of Adams about all this, and his readiness to speak about it in front of others such as McGuinness. Adams also said at one point that if what he was proposing was no good for HMG, he was ready to look at other ways forward.

Like us, the Irish find it difficult to explain why the proposed HMG statement should make so much difference, and to reconcile this initiative with

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the IRA's active preparations for more violence and other evidence. Adams was unwilling to be drawn on this. The Irish can only speculate that Sinn Fein see an opportunity to capitalise on the present situation to take the high ground, and displace the SDLP as the recipient of Nationalist votes.

These discussions also incidentally cleared up one piece of confusion about the proposed statement, namely the insistence we have heard at times on a "timescale" for the talks. According to Teahon, this is clearly linked to decommissioning, and to that part of the statement. In other words, Sinn Fein want to be assured that there will not be endless discussion of decommissioning before the rest of the talks can get going. What they seem to be looking for is some cut-off point or review date.

All this is useful corroboration of the main elements of what Hume has been telling us. Hume incidentally rang again this morning to enquire about progress, and to say that, although he would be avoiding public engagements for the time being, on doctor's orders, he would continue to be in touch about this private business. I said I hoped we would be able to respond in a day or two.

The Prime Minister remains uneasy about seeming to dance to Adams' tune, but has agreed to consider a form of words with which we could go back to Hume. I attach a possible draft, based heavily on the language you sent with your letter on this issue earlier today. This could be sent to Hume, with a short covering letter, on the assumption that he would immediately pass it on to Adams. I would be grateful for any comments by tomorrow morning. I will show it to the Prime Minister in parallel overnight.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely

John Holmes

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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DRAFT**SINN FEIN**

1. The British Government have received accounts of Sinn Fein's position about a renewed IRA ceasefire and entry to all-party negotiations.

2. From these accounts, the Government's understanding of Sinn Fein's position is as follows:

(i) Sinn Fein seeks certain assurances from the British Government. These are:

- that the negotiations will be serious and comprehensive;
- that decommissioning will be tackled in parallel with the negotiations and will not dominate the agenda to the exclusion of other issues; and
- that the British Government will do all in its power to promote confidence-building during the talks.

(ii) If Sinn Fein were told in advance that the Government would give these assurances in public, then they would undertake (before such a public statement was made) that the IRA would respond to the statement by declaring a genuine and unequivocal ceasefire. Such a ceasefire would be for good this time.

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(iii) Once allowed to enter the negotiations following the establishment of such a ceasefire, Sinn Fein would affirm their total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles.

3. It is vital that there be no misunderstanding on these vital issues.

4. If the Government's understanding of Sinn Fein's position is correct, the assurances Sinn Fein seeks of the Government are consistent with the Government's public position and can be repeated, along the following lines:

- the negotiations which started on 10 June are to secure an overall political settlement and will address all the issues relevant to that. Any participant can raise any issue. No outcome is predetermined or excluded in advance. The Government cannot answer for any other participant but, for its part, along with that of the Irish Government, it is committed to ensure that a comprehensive agenda is addressed with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise. The Government is determined to see these negotiations through successfully, as speedily as possible;

- the negotiations will also address the International Body's proposals on decommissioning. At that stage, the Government, along with the Irish Government, will be seeking the commitment of all participants to work constructively to implement all aspects of the International Body's report, including its proposals for some decommissioning during the negotiations. The Government wishes to make urgent progress in this area, so that the negotiations on political issues can proceed in parallel with decommissioning;

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we are committed to raising confidence through the Talks process. The International Body's report itself proposes a process of mutual confidence-building and we are committed to this as to all aspects of the report. Confidence-building is a two-way street. Against the background of the recent serious setback to confidence we hope that all parties will play their part in making it possible for future marches and parades to be handled without confrontation.

6. The British Government has also been told that Sinn Fein wants a meeting with British officials. (In line with the Irish Government, any Ministerial meeting with Sinn Fein could only follow an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.) If Sinn Fein believe a meeting with British officials for the purpose of confirming and explaining the position set out here is needed, the Government would be prepared to consider such a request in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground.

23 July 1996

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