

MINISTER'S MEETING WITH JOHN HUME: 2 JULY

Speaking Note

1. The two Governments stand as one. Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations requires an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.
2. The succession of IRA attacks since 10 June only undermine the credibility of their commitment to the peace process. It is now up to the IRA and Sinn Fein to demonstrate to others that they are serious.
3. Neither Government has closed the door on Sinn Fein. There is still a way into negotiations for Sinn Fein, but the IRA's actions mean that any ceasefire will be viewed with great scepticism.
4. The efforts the two Governments put into the negotiations meant that Sinn Fein could have entered them confident that they would have been genuine and inclusive. We set a firm starting date and met it. We are committed to a genuinely open agenda. We set out, on 6 June, how we planned to tackle decommissioning in the negotiations, on the basis of the Mitchell report. It is not for us to do more.
5. If Sinn Fein genuinely want to secure an IRA ceasefire, but have questions about the nature of the negotiations and how they can enter them, we will consider them. But I do not believe Sinn Fein are in any doubt about what they must do to enter negotiations: secure an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

Talks process

6. While a way is kept open for Sinn Fein, the Talks cannot be held back because of Sinn Fein's absence. Despite a bumpy start, progress has been made in the negotiations since

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June. Grateful for the constructive and helpful role played by the SDLP.

7. These negotiations were never going to be easy. It would have been better if Sinn Fein had participated but, without them, the parties must demonstrate that they can achieve a political accommodation.
8. Understand the frustration at seeing the first weeks taken up with procedural matters. Perhaps inevitable, but also an element of internal Unionist politics. It is in all our interests to keep at least the UUP inside the negotiations.
9. Believe we are on the road to achieving this without compromising fundamental principles. The two Governments have stuck to Ground Rules and to important principles such as the open agenda. But we have rightly been flexible on procedural matters, because it is important that the participants feel that these are not being imposed on them.

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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

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London

| July 1996

Dear Mr Holmes

MEETING WITH JOHN HUME

The Prime Minister is to see John Hume, at his request, on Tuesday afternoon. Recent reporting and your own recent conversations with Tony Lake suggests that he wishes to discuss a proposal for the restoration of the ceasefire.

Hume believes a restoration of the IRA ceasefire is still achievable. He may well come to the Prime Minister with some form of words or some other initiative by HMG which, he will assure the Prime Minister, is all that is required to restore the ceasefire.

It is not clear precisely what his proposal will be, or what weight it will carry. We have recent reporting (via the US Embassy) of Mitchell MacLaughlin saying that Sinn Fein was working to achieve a ceasefire, that the British Government's "refusal" of contacts with Sinn Fein was preventing them from making their case, and that they still required reassurance that talks involved an open agenda and on the principle that obstacles in one areas would not hold up progress in another (we read this as referring to decommissioning, although he refused to be quite that specific).

If, as seems possible, John Hume brings a proposal for some kind of "statement" by the Prime Minister, it may be worth reminding John Hume that there was little evidence of any helpful response, still less a resumption of the ceasefire when similar claims were made in the run-up to the publication of the article for his signature in The Irish Times.

In the context of tomorrow's meeting, we believe Mr Hume's most likely requests are:

- renewed contact by HMG with Sinn Fein, even if only at official level;
- reassurance that the agenda for all-party negotiations is genuinely "open"; and
- reassurance that decommissioning will not be allowed to block progress on political issues.

Attached
- you've
already
seen.

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It is not in our interests to suggest that test has changed: it is
The Prime Minister will be familiar with previous such approaches from Hume. There is no evidence to back up the suggestion that an IRA ceasefire could be imminent, although an intense debate among the Republican leadership as to whether, and when, to declare a further ceasefire appears to continue. Since the breakdown of the ceasefire in February, there have been a succession of demands which, it has been claimed, if satisfied would lead to a restoration of the ceasefire. These include: a fixed date for all-party negotiations; reassurance of an open agenda; a route through the decommissioning issue; Mitchell's appointment as Chairman. The "confidence building measures" referred to by Tony Lake, recorded in your letter of 29 June, are likely to be more of the same. The Irish Government were told by Sinn Fein, shortly before 10 June, that the two Governments had done all that was necessary to secure a ceasefire.

There must be inevitable, and justifiable, scepticism about any further such messages. There is also evidence that the Sinn Fein leadership are somewhat wary of Hume and now regard him as a not altogether reliable intermediary. Consequently while they very much want to keep him on side and to demonstrate to him their continued commitment to the "peace process", they may well be spinning him a line purely for this purpose.

Objectives

Against this background, the Prime Minister might aim to:

- listen politely to Hume without commitment;
- repeat that the two Governments stand together in not closing the door entirely on Sinn Fein, but the onus is on Sinn Fein to deliver an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire;
- emphasise that the talks process goes on and, with or without Sinn Fein, offers a genuine prospect of securing a political accommodation.

Sinn Fein's entry to negotiations

Hume may well ask what must be done to secure Sinn Fein's entry to negotiations.

The test established by the two Governments, and set out in the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996, stands: there must be an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

Johnna
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It is not in our interests to suggest that test has changed: it is well understood and widely supported, as well as now being set in statute. However, as Ministers - along with the Irish Government - have made clear, the recent IRA attacks mean that any ceasefire will be viewed with scepticism: it must be for the IRA and Sinn Fein to persuade others, as the Taoiseach has said, that any ceasefire is genuine and unequivocal.

That may well mean that time must lapse between any ceasefire and Sinn Fein's admission to negotiations. But the Government has so far avoided setting, as it did in 1994, a period of 3 months as the requirement. It would be best to keep this flexibility: an IRA ceasefire could change the political landscape again (at least among nationalists, the Irish and US Governments) as quickly as the Manchester bomb. If so, then they could well combine to stall the current talks while Sinn Fein waited to be admitted.

Talks Process

Having heard Hume out on the prospects for a ceasefire, it would be useful if the Prime Minister could congratulate him on the SDLP's contribution to the negotiations so far and emphasise their importance.

The SDLP entered the negotiations in a bruised state. Their vote fell in the elections, while Sinn Fein picked up support. They see the peace process, with which Hume has been heavily personally identified to the chagrin of some of his party, close to collapse. Their perception of the first few weeks of the negotiations is that the two Governments have been engaged in appeasement of the UUP and that the Ground Rules, which for the SDLP provide the basis of the negotiations, have been whittled away. Although Mallon has made clear their commitment to working to achieve an accommodation without Sinn Fein, they feel beleaguered as the only representatives of Northern nationalism and battered by the procedural wranglings of the Unionists in the first few weeks.

Some reassurance that the Government is determined to see real progress made and, while the UUP need to be kept on board for the sake of the negotiations, fundamental principles will not be sacrificed, will therefore not go amiss. Hume, who has not been much in evidence at the negotiations leaving them largely to Mallon, is likely to be scathing of the Unionist tactics.

A speaking note is attached.

Yours sincerely
Joanna Nixon

pp ROBERT CRAWFORD