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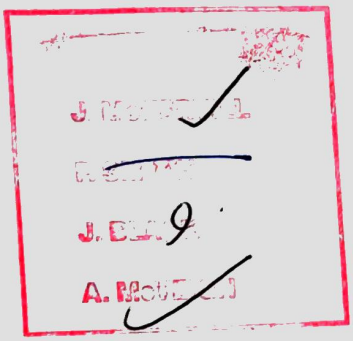

From : EDWARD OAKDEN

To: MARTIN HOWARD

Subject: HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Date: 26/7/96

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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

26 July 1996

Dear Martin,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

John Hume telephoned again this afternoon. He had two purposes. First, to confirm that the position remained as he had described it to me earlier this week: Adams had taken our wording away, and was discussing it with "his people". Second, to say that the Prime Minister's letter slightly misrepresented Sinn Fein's position, in three respects:

- it should have spelled out that decommissioning should not constitute a precondition to progress in the multi-party negotiations (Comment: a sensitivity no doubt heightened by the present difficulty on this point in the Belfast talks);

- a fourth assurance to Sinn Fein should have been added to the three set out in i. of page 1: namely that there would be a timeframe for the talks. Hume admitted that he had conceded to us at the time that this would be extremely difficult for us (I said that somewhat understated it);

- the drafting of the two assertions in the first substantive paragraph of page 2 - that Sinn Fein/IRA should restore their ceasefire and that there is no justification for continued violence - implied that he disagreed with them. This was not the case. He strongly supported them, and had done so for over 30 years. There was no intention of publishing the letter? I confirmed that we regarded it as private.

I said that, while we were on the subject, could I be clear on exactly what he had given Adams? Did the latter have only the proposed wording, or had he seen the letter too? Hume confirmed our suspicions that he has only given Adams the wording.

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I said that, to avoid misunderstandings, were there any other points in the Prime Minister's letter which, in Hume's view, inaccurately represented the position? In particular, had we correctly described the basic idea and procedure, as set out in point ii. on page 1?

Hume's initial reply was that the letter did correctly describe the position. But when I suggested we go through the text line by line, Hume corrected himself. What point ii. should have said, according to him, was roughly:

> "If Adams (Comment: rather than Sinn Fein) were told in advance that the Government would repeat publicly their position on these points, he would undertake (before such a public statement was made) that he would try to persuade the IRA to respond to the statement by declaring a genuine and unequivocal ceasefire. Such a ceasefire would be for good this time. If Adams was successful in persuading the IRA, the way ahead would be clear, according to the procedure set out in the letter. If he was unsuccessful, then he or Hume would revert to us with drafting suggestions."

Hume added that he thought Adams would want to take up the offer in the last paragraph of a meeting with British officials, in order to cover this ground more fully.

In discussing decommissioning, Hume also made one other point worth recording. He said that both sides should be clear that all we were expecting Sinn Fein/the IRA to do on decommissioning was what Mitchell required, namely "to discuss this in parallel with the other subjects". I noted that this was not in fact what Mitchell had said. He had specifically suggested some actual decommissioning during the talks, not simply discussion of this, as a half way house between the Government's insistence at the time on some prior decommissioning before the talks started and the Sinn Fein/IRA refusal to countenance any decommissioning until a final settlement. "Oh" said Hume, "is that what Mitchell says"?

I said that some of these points were in fact substantial qualifications to the position as we understood it. In some respects, they seriously undercut the prospect of agreement. To avoid future misunderstandings, was there not an argument for at least showing Sinn Fein the Prime Minister's letter, to ensure they knew what was proposed? Hume simply said that he did not think that this would be conducive to progress. The authoritative statement of Sinn Fein's position was as set out in Adams' letter. We should await Adams' response. Maybe he would not have many comments. Hume would be in touch again next week.

Comment

Here we go. This is rather what we feared. The arrangements we thought we had start to unravel. It is not clear to what degree Adams is prenegotiating the text with the IRA as well as with Sinn Fein, to the extent that the distinction is meaningful. But against the evidence pointing in the opposite direction, it is hard to see why this language should be decisive in enabling Adams to convince the IRA of the need for a new ceasefire. Certainly we will need to pin Hume down further on whether agreement on the language means a new IRA ceasefire or whether it will simply enable Adams to have another go at arguing for this - rather a different proposition. Hume clearly thinks it is the former - but his words today imply the latter. Hume's apparent misunderstanding of the Mitchell requirement for some decommissioning during the talks does not bode well either.

Nothing much more that we can do for the moment, however, until Adams reverts to Hume and Hume to us. Hume hoped this would be early next week.

Yours ever,

Edward Oakden

EDWARD OAKDEN

Martin Howard Esq
Northern Ireland Office