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11 October 1996

John Holmes Esq  
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Dear Mr. Holmes

US/NORTHERN IRELAND

1. You spent an hour this morning with Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg on Northern Ireland.
2. You told Lake that the Prime Minister had spoken of Northern Ireland, and of the death earlier today of Warrant Officer Bradwell, in his speech to the Party Conference. Two points to note: the undertaking to introduce de-commissioning legislation and the plan to give Northern Irish Members of Parliament more scope to question Ministers.

Hume/Adams

3. You told Lake that you had received John Hume's reply to the Prime Minister's draft article. Lake said he, too, had a copy. As background, you explained that the intelligence showed that the Provisionals continued to pursue a twin-track strategy: committing acts of terrorism while professing to be interested in talks. The entire leadership of Sinn Féin/PIRA were signed up to this policy. Their decisions to resume violence, and to move it from mainland Britain to Northern Ireland, had been taken at high level. So it was far from clear that Adams either wanted, or could deliver, a new cease-fire.

4. Lake thought that Adams/McGuinness saw the advantages of seeking a negotiated settlement, but accepted violence as a means of exerting leverage. Adams hoped the British Government would get him out of the hole in which the Lisburn bombs had dumped him by accepting the revised language he had sent us through Hume. But Lake readily agreed that the new Hume/Adams text was unacceptable to us. He agreed that Hume was wildly optimistic in his (apparently genuine) belief that his latest text would be acceptable to London, but argued that, if it had been, Adams would have been able to deliver a new cease-fire. You again expressed scepticism.

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#### Cease-fire prospects

5. You said that Sinn Fein had to understand that a simple repeat of the 31 August 1994 cease-fire announcement would not do. This time, it would have to be genuine, and borne out by events on the ground. Lake interjected that at least the last cease-fire had bought 18 months of relative peace - and one could argue whether the best use had been made of that opportunity. Soderberg said that the answer was to build on any new cease-fire announcement by creating sufficient progress on the political track to make permanence a de facto reality.

6. You said that Sinn Fein needed to understand that violence did not pay. Unfortunately, they seemed to have convinced themselves that the Docklands bomb helped deliver all-party talks. Progress in the talks had to be made rapidly enough to make them realise that they were losing out by being excluded. Meanwhile, let Adams feel some pain. Sinn Fein needed to pay a price. Lake agreed: that was why he had refused to take Adams' call the day before - but was likely to give him one chance to say his piece after he, Lake, had spoken to ourselves and the Irish Government.

#### Talks Process

7. You spent some time discussing how best to move the talks forward, in order to build up the pressure on Sinn Fein to deliver a new IRA cease-fire. The Lisburn bombs, and the impossibility of admitting Sinn Fein to the talks in the near future even if there was a new cease-fire, might make it easier to "park" the difficult question of de-commissioning. Trimble claimed to be interested in moving forward. He spoke of dealing with de-commissioning in the short-term by defining carefully what the terms would be for the admission of Sinn Fein later on (ie new pre-conditions). There were dangers in this approach, but it ought to be possible to park de-commissioning in a way which both reassured the Unionists that their legitimate concerns would be met should there be a new IRA cease-fire, and left open the possibility of Sinn Fein joining later if there was one.

8. Soderberg said that "parking" de-commissioning without defining how it would be handled in the event of a new cease-fire left no incentive for Sinn Fein to join in. There needed to be a clear message that Sinn Fein would be admitted to talks after a decontamination period of, say, 3 months, provided they also signed on to Mitchell in full (ie, including parallel de-commissioning). She and Lake were convinced that Sinn Fein would eventually accept Mitchell's language on de-commissioning. You wondered whether the Unionists could live with this. Lake and Soderberg argued that Trimble should be reassured that there was no prospect of an early appearance of Sinn Fein at the table, and by the suggestion of a decontamination period. He might not like letting the Loyalists off the hook. But if the Unionists



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balked, or sought a lengthy negotiation, the two Governments should simply announce that these were their terms and move on to the substance of the three strands.

9. You left Lake and Soderberg in no doubt about the difficulty of selling such a package to the Unionists, but thanked them for the brain-storming. Ministers would be working out the next steps over the coming week. You would keep the White House in close touch as thinking evolved.

#### Other Issues

10. Lake briefly raised Loyalist prisoners. You took him through (yet again) the dangers of politicising prison issues, and being seen to discriminate between Loyalist and Republican prisoners. Lake/Soderberg also raised the timing of George Mitchell's return to Belfast. He was planning to go back on 28 October, but could it make it on 21 October if necessary. You agreed to wait and see what emerged from Ministers' deliberations issues next week.

Yours Ever

  
Peter Westmacott

cc: William Erhman Esq, FCO  
Colin Budd Esq, Cabinet Office  
Ken Lindsay Esq, NIO  
H M Ambassador, Dublin