

19 SEP 96

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HUME/ADAMS: INFORMATION HANDLING PLAN

As promised, I attach a handling plan for publication of the text being sent to John Hume.

Now that Mr Trimble has been briefed without raising objections, the plan assumes that Hume will be sent the text this week (indeed, Michael Ancram told Hume yesterday that he would receive a response this week). I understand that it is likely the Prime Minister will write on Thursday morning.

On the timing of publication, the end of next week is the latest we suggest. We have no objections to the middle of the week - say, Wednesday or Thursday - providing there are a few days between Hume receiving the letter and publication.

As for the means of publication, a signed article seems the most likely and practical option at this stage. A simple press release risks the full version being published nowhere and papers 'cherry-picking' from the release - not necessarily to our advantage. We shall provide further advice on which paper would be

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appropriate, but the Belfast Telegraph looks the best regional choice, with the Financial Times (which follows Northern Ireland closely) a possibility if a national paper was to be chosen.

There is a choice over whether the article should be signed by the Prime Minister or my Secretary of State. An article by the Prime Minister carries more weight, and we know that the Sinn Fein leadership attaches particular importance to what the Prime Minister says. But that also raises the profile for what is, after all, simply a restatement of existing policy. On balance, since Hume has been in contact with the Prime Minister, we think there is a case for the Prime Minister signing the article, but my Secretary of State will happily do so if the Prime Minister prefers.

The attached handling plan sets out how we might approach our presentation of the text as well as suggesting the key points we will want to get across.

A copy goes to Colin Budd and Jan Polley.

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INFORMATION PLAN

Reply to Hume

- 24 September: Trimble briefed
- 25/26 September: PM writes to Hume
- in parallel: briefing of US Government (Michael Ancram in Washington) and Irish Government, possibly via Paddy Teahon [If letter issued on Thursday, important to ensure this is done before Irish meet Sinn Fein to avoid Sinn Fein briefed and Irish not].

Publication of text

- Day before publication: brief Hume, Irish and US Governments on timing of publication
- Day before publication: brief Trimble, Cardinal Daly, Government supporters opposition spokesman etc on content and time of publication
- Day before publication: briefing to issue to posts abroad;
- Publication by weekend 5/6 October:
 - either as part of Government statement in negotiations
 - or, if not possible, signed article
 - NIO Press Office to advise on choice of newspapers
 - Secretary of State (more low-key) or PM (more weight with Sinn Fein) to sign?
- After publication: low key follow-up interviews by NIO Ministers, as necessary

- USA: offer "popularised" version of text as possible article to coincide with Secretary of State's visit (6/7 October) - Embassy to advise

Possible leak - contingency plan

- if asked about approaches from Sinn Fein: neither Ministers nor officials have had contact. Aware of approaches from number of independent figures asking HMG to set out policy on key issues - ready to set out established policy, but not negotiate
- if asked about text: publish quickly, with previous correspondence emphasising
 - no negotiations
 - duty not to turn back on possible ceasefire, but treated with scepticism
 - clear for all to see Sinn Fein's cannot back up their words of peace with actions

Approach to information handling

1. The statement is established policy, so low-key presentation is appropriate.
2. There is no imminent prospect of a ceasefire, so we should avoid creating expectations.
3. We want to use the statement positively and pro-actively to show:
 - to world opinion that HMG has not turned its back on the peace process;

- to nationalists that there is no political reason why there should not be an IRA ceasefire now;
 - to unionists that HMG is sticking to established policy.
4. We want to avoid any impression that HMG's policy hangs on Sinn Fein. The best approach is to emphasise the negotiations - already underway; Sinn Fein can join after a ceasefire; but they will carry on whether or not Sinn Fein are there.
5. Possible Sinn Fein responses include seeking clarification of the text or a meeting. We should emphasise there will be no negotiations but avoid being manoeuvred into spurning apparently reasonable requests:

eg clarification: look at any specific questions where there is genuine uncertainty

meeting: stick to existing line, no meeting with Ministers but consider any request to meet officials in light of all circumstances including events on ground.