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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
TEAM

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ON IRELAND

9 September 1996

From the Private Secretary

Dear Sir,

NORTHERN IRELAND: IRISH VIEWS

Paddy Teahon rang me several times over the weekend, before leaving for Washington with the Taoiseach. His main initial purpose was to alert us to a sudden increase in activity/communications among IRA activists, which Irish intelligence had detected. They were not sure what lay behind this, since such evidence as there was pointed in different directions. But there were three main possibilities, not mutually exclusive:

- (i) preparation for a further attack on the British mainland;
- (ii) preparation for a new ceasefire;
- (iii) preparation for, or even perhaps the holding of, the expected IRA General Army Convention.

Teahon himself speculated that the IRA might have in mind a mainland spectacular as a prelude to a new ceasefire, perhaps set in a new political context. Teahon could not be more specific about this but said that Sinn Fein at least were very interested in the position they increasingly held as the major political representatives of the nationalist community, at the expense of the SDLP. A new ceasefire could consolidate this, give Sinn Fein the overall high ground with the Irish and US governments, and prepare for a new situation following the British elections.

I expressed some scepticism about all this. I did not need convincing that the IRA would like to attack on the mainland again. But we had seen little or no evidence of IRA readiness for a new ceasefire. Teahon admitted that he had little evidence, beyond Sinn Fein hints and an odd reluctance to talk to Irish officials, but (not for the first time) is still convinced that a new ceasefire is on

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- 2 -

the cards. I mentioned to him the renewed approach from Hume (my letter of 6 September) and subsequently sent him the Hume/Adams draft text, on a strictly personal basis (i.e. not for showing to the DFA).

Teahon sent me in return the enclosed form of words which Bruton will use in Washington and which reflects a recent approach to the Irish by the loyalists. In an interesting parallel to the Hume/Adams approach to us, Ervine told the Taoiseach that saying something on these lines would help to preserve the loyalist ceasefire.

I am not sure what to make of all this, but report it for what it is worth. I would be interested if there is any collateral for Teahon's theories. I checked with the Security Service that they were aware of the burst of IRA activity referred to by Teahon. They confirmed that they had already been in close touch with their Irish counterparts to compare notes.

I am copying this to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and to Veronica Sutherland in Dublin by fax.

Yours ever



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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