

PERSONAL - IN CONFIDENCE

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MESSAGE VIA CABINET OFFICE FROM JOHN HOLMES, 10 DOWNING STREET TO THE HONORABLE TONY LAKE, THE WHITE HOUSE
23 SEPTEMBER 1996

You will have seen the press reports of today's success by the security authorities here against an imminent further attack by the IRA. Apart from the arrests, some ten tons of home made explosive was found, including two huge Manchester-size prepared vehicle bombs, together with a large amount of other bomb-making equipment, including AK47s ready for use. All this was very good news from a security point of view. You will no doubt receive more details on other channels.

The discovery of these preparations did not of course come as a surprise. As we have discussed, it has been obvious for some time that intensive IRA planning for further attacks has been continuing, and that the pause in attacks since Manchester was an accident, not a deliberate political message.

In case you have not seen it, I attach a copy of the Prime Minister's statement on today's find.

I hope one result of today will be to increase the pressure for a new ceasefire, although I fear many in the IRA may draw the opposite conclusion. We will obviously continue for our part to press for a complete end to violence, which will give the Belfast talks the best chance of success.

These developments do not increase our faith in the approaches we have received from John Hume, which we have also discussed. But we are continuing to consider how we can respond as positively as possible without getting into any kind of negotiation about the "terms" for a ceasefire. This would be inappropriate and indefensible. I hope to be in touch about this again later in the week.

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Meanwhile, I have not forgotten your invitation to visit Washington but have been having trouble identifying mutually convenient dates. Would 11 October be any good for you?

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