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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

16 September 1996

Dear Mr. Hume,

HUME\ADAMS INITIATIVE

As predicted in my letter of 13 September, John Hume has been on the telephone pressing further for a response. When he rang on 14 September, I explained the position to him, as set out in my letter. He accepted that we wanted more time to reflect on our response, with no more than a ritual protest about urgency.

When he telephoned today, he was considerably more agitated. He said that he had been confused and upset by the weekend publicity about the possibility of an IRA General Army Convention and the speculation about a renewed ceasefire. As we would have noticed, Adams had also been upset. I said that this was not an orchestrated campaign by the British Government. He said that he accepted this. In response to my question about the source of these stories, he said that the first correspondent to ring him had been Liam Clarke. He was based in Northern Ireland but could well have got the story from Dublin. It was worth noting that he was also a former member of the official IRA, who certainly had no sympathy with the idea of a ceasefire.

Hume said that in his view, and based on his experience, if the story about a new General Army Convention was true, this was good news. He believed that its aim would be to declare a new ceasefire. He believed that this time there was a strong body of opinion in the IRA in favour of a permanent end to violence. He therefore thought that there was a real opportunity for progress, if we moved as well.

I repeated what I had told him previously, that we got no sense from other evidence of IRA readiness for a ceasefire in the near future. They were continuing to plan for more attacks, and pressure from the grass roots appeared to be for more violence, not less. Hume did not agree. He claimed that the combined pressure of the Nationalist community, particularly its younger members, for a return to the 18 months of peace they had known, and a tough attitude in favour of a ceasefire from Irish America, had turned around IRA opinion.

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I said that we were particularly concerned by the possibility of further IRA attacks in Britain. Even if a ceasefire was in the minds of some people, the belief that a further mainland "spectacular" was necessary appeared to remain strong. Hume accepted this but commented that this only reinforced the need for urgency. The window of opportunity to achieve a ceasefire might not last long. I simply said that we would get back to him as soon as we could. He himself is in Strasbourg all week.

Paddy Teahon subsequently telephoned me. He said that the press reports of what the Taoiseach was supposed to have said in Washington last week about a new ceasefire had caused a lot of trouble with Sinn Fein. The situation had appeared to calm down towards the end of last week but the weekend reports had inflamed it again. The Irish view was nevertheless that there was now a strong current running in favour of a new ceasefire. The prospects for this were related to progress in the talks, notably over decommissioning, but the three key points in the Hume draft text were also now a consistent Sinn Fein theme (I see McGuinness repeated them publicly this morning). A clearer position was therefore beginning to emerge. He hoped we would be thinking carefully about how our response to Hume would play into this. Teahon incidentally remained encouraged by what he heard about the discussions in Belfast.

Comment

I would be interested to know whether our own assessment of the rumoured GAC and the prospects for a ceasefire are changing at all.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours
John

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

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