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From the Private Secretary

11 September 1996

Joe Ken,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE: US VIEWS

Tony Lake telephoned me yesterday to discuss the current position in Northern Ireland. His main point was that he had just talked to Adams. On Lake's account, he had taken a tough line with Adams. He had said that the most recent noises coming out of the talks in Belfast had been reasonably encouraging and that, despite the events of the summer marching season, Sinn Fein and the IRA could not stay where they were. They had to face the choice of marginalisation or accepting the responsibility of being a political force in Northern Ireland. This had to mean declaring a new ceasefire. Lake claimed to have made clear to Adams that Irish America was overwhelmingly with the Administration, not with Sinn Fein, and that Clinton was in a comfortable position vis-à-vis Irish America. Adams should not therefore be under any illusion that Clinton was going to move in his direction. Lake described this part of the conversation as "coolish".

Lake was also well aware of the latest approach to us from Hume and had received a copy of the draft text. He had discussed this with Adams. Adams had sounded very serious about this initiative. He had confirmed that the three main issues for Sinn Fein were no pre-conditions to talks, particularly on decommissioning; the need for a time-frame for the talks; and confidence-building measures, ie prisoners. Lake had pressed Adams about whether a statement by HMG on the lines proposed would trigger a ceasefire. Adams had been a little evasive but had made clear that the initiative had been fully discussed with the IRA. He had added that Sinn Fein/IRA would want private assurances from the US that the British were serious about what they were saying.

Lake did not press me on how we proposed to respond, other than the generalised hope that all concerned could show some flexibility. But he suggested that I should keep him informed and let him know beforehand if and when we proposed to respond. He could then spell out to Adams that a ceasefire had to be the result, or else he would lose all credibility.

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Comment

I doubt whether Lake's conversation with Adams was quite as he described it to me. But it is useful to know that the Americans are fully informed about what is going on and at least not lining up explicitly with Sinn Fein/Adams. I do not think this changes the nature of the problems we face, on which we await your advice, but it does illustrate further the need to keep both the Americans and the Irish with us in our response if at all possible.

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever
John
JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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