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Fue mhm
cc PB ✓

From the Private Secretary

21 January 1997

Dear Aern,

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paddy Teahon and I spoke on the telephone on 20 January, mainly to re-establish contact after the Prime Minister's visit to South Asia (I spoke to him immediately after the New Year, but there was nothing much to say on either side at that stage).

Teahon made three points:

- (i) The Irish side had been "somewhat bemused" by the visit of NIO officials to Dublin to have lunch with Ahearn. He would not put it stronger than that, but he could not see the Irish paying a similar visit to Tony Blair. Nevertheless, the Irish had been pleased by the subsequent meeting in the evening, when there had seemed to be a broad measure of agreement on how to take matters forward after the election, and how to use the natural break caused by the election constructively. I simply said that I was unsighted (I would appreciate a copy of any record of both discussions).
- (ii) The Irish were conscious that John Hume was in action again. They had tried to discourage Adams from taking this exercise forward with Hume. They had also told Hume that, while they might prefer that the situation was not as it was, nevertheless they did not see further refinement of the 10 October statement as a likely runner. They had noticed that Hume had been talking publicly of a further initiative, although he had most recently seemed to back away from this description. Teahon asked what we had heard about this.

I said that Hume had indeed approached us with some new language. I had only just seen this myself. It was clear, as Teahon had said, that it was not realistic. Teahon asked if he

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could see what Hume had proposed, claiming that they did not have any text themselves. I undertook to get back to him about this soon.

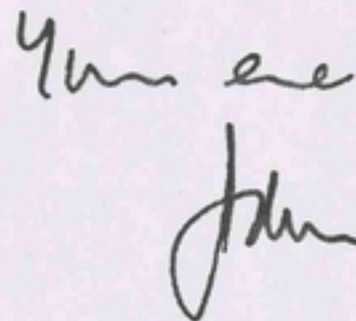
- (iii) The third presumably Loyalist attack earlier in the day was making the Irish increasingly nervous about the Loyalist ceasefire. The line that it still existed was looking increasingly fragile. I agreed. We, like the Irish and most of the other parties, did not want to push the Loyalists out of the talks unless we had to, since that could only increase the risk of Loyalist violence. But there was obviously a limit to what could be squared with this position. We could be approaching this limit. Teahon agreed.

Comment

I would like to send Teahon (and the Americans) the new language Hume has given us, if only to be consistent with what we have done throughout the earlier exchanges with Hume. The Irish may or may not already have the language from Hume, but in any case I can - if necessary - put on a caveat about not revealing to Hume that we have given it to the Irish.

For the rest, the dog that did not bark was any mention by Teahon about the Irish Government's relations with Sinn Fein, given what we know from other sources. I may take this up more directly next time I speak to him (he is in New York and Washington for the rest of the week).

I am copying this letter to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and by fax to Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).



JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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