



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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25 September 1996

Dear Mr Holmes

HUME/ADAMS: INFORMATION HANDLING PLAN

As promised, I attach a handling plan for publication of the text being sent to John Hume.

Now that Mr Trimble has been briefed without raising objections, the plan assumes that Hume will be sent the text this week (indeed, Michael Ancram told Hume yesterday that he would receive a response this week). I understand that it is likely the Prime Minister will write on Thursday morning.

On the timing of publication, the end of next week is the latest we suggest. We have no objections to the middle of the week - say, Wednesday or Thursday - providing there are a few days between Hume receiving the letter and publication.

As for the means of publication, a signed article seems the most likely and practical option at this stage. A simple press release risks the full version being published nowhere and papers 'cherry-picking' from the release - not necessarily to our advantage. We shall provide further advice on which paper would be

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appropriate, but the Belfast Telegraph looks the best regional choice, with the Financial Times (which follows Northern Ireland closely) a possibility if a national paper was to be chosen.

There is a choice over whether the article should be signed by the Prime Minister or my Secretary of State. An article by the Prime Minister carries more weight, and we know that the Sinn Fein leadership attaches particular importance to what the Prime Minister says. But that also raises the profile for what is, after all, simply a restatement of existing policy. On balance, since Hume has been in contact with the Prime Minister, we think there is a case for the Prime Minister signing the article, but my Secretary of State will happily do so if the Prime Minister prefers.

The attached handling plan sets out how we might approach our presentation of the text as well as suggesting the key points we will want to get across.

A copy goes to Colin Budd and Jan Polley.

Yours sincerely
Joanna Nixon

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INFORMATION PLAN

Reply to Hume

- 24 September: Trimble briefed
- 25/26 September: PM writes to Hume
- in parallel: briefing of US Government (Michael Ancram in Washington) and Irish Government, possibly via Paddy Teahon [If letter issued on Thursday, important to ensure this is done before Irish meet Sinn Fein to avoid Sinn Fein briefed and Irish not].

Publication of text

- Day before publication: brief Hume, Irish and US Governments on timing of publication
- Day before publication: brief Trimble, Cardinal Daly, Government supporters opposition spokesman etc on content and time of publication

- Day before publication: briefing to issue to posts abroad;

Publication by weekend 5/6 October:

- either as part of Government statement in negotiations

- or, if not possible, signed article

- NIO Press Office to advise on choice of newspapers

- Secretary of State (more low-key) or PM (more weight with Sinn Fein) to sign?

- After publication: low key follow-up interviews by NIO Ministers, as necessary

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- USA: offer "popularised" version of text as possible article to coincide with Secretary of State's visit (6/7 October) - Embassy to advise
- to unionists that HMG is sticking to established policy.

Possible leak - contingency plan

4. We want to avoid any impression that HMG's policy hangs on Sinn
- if asked about approaches from Sinn Fein: neither Ministers nor officials have had contact. Aware of approaches from a number of independent figures asking HMG to set out policy on key issues - ready to set out established policy, but not negotiate. Sinn responses include seeking clarification of the text or a meeting. We should emphasise there will be no
- if asked about text: publish quickly, with previous correspondence emphasising
 - no negotiations at any specific questions where there is genuine uncertainty
 - duty not to turn back on possible ceasefire, but treated with scepticism
 - clear for all to see Sinn Fein's cannot back up their words of peace with actions

Approach to information handling

1. The statement is established policy, so low-key presentation is appropriate.
2. There is no imminent prospect of a ceasefire, so we should avoid creating expectations.
3. We want to use the statement positively and pro-actively to show:
 - to world opinion that HMG has not turned its back on the peace process;

- to nationalists that there is no political reason why there should not be an IRA ceasefire now;

- to unionists that HMG is sticking to established policy.

4. We want to avoid any impression that HMG's policy hangs on Sinn Fein. The best approach is to emphasise the negotiations - already underway; Sinn Fein can join after a ceasefire; but they will carry on whether or not Sinn Fein are there.

5. Possible Sinn Fein responses include seeking clarification of the text or a meeting. We should emphasise there will be no negotiations but avoid being manoeuvred into spurning apparently reasonable requests:

eg clarification: look at any specific questions where there is genuine uncertainty

meeting: stick to existing line, no meeting with Ministers but consider any request to meet officials in light of all circumstances including events on ground.

PUBLICATION OF HMG STATEMENT: BRIEFING

1. BACKGROUND TO STATEMENT

Key Points: [statement/article] been issued now?

Key Points:

- this restates existing policy. It merely repeats and reaffirms our approach on key issues to ensure there can be no doubt or uncertainty on the part of Sinn Fein or anyone else about the Government's position on these issues. None of the material is new.
- we are not interested in putting any obstacles in the way of an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Quite the opposite. We wish to demonstrate that there is no reason for the IRA not to restore the ceasefire. The Irish and the US Governments have also been calling for a restoration.
- the Government will not negotiate a restoration of the IRA ceasefire. No price will be paid, no secret deals cut. This text restates established Government policy. It has not been negotiated with anyone: it sets out our policy in our words.
- the talks are intended to be inclusive. They should be as representative as possible and we would like to see Sinn Fein involved in the process on a proper basis. That can only come about after an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire. Sinn Fein know well what they have to do to get into the talks.

Is the publication of this statement linked to rumours of an IRA General Army Council?

Not at all. Its publication at this stage is to ensure there can be no misunderstandings about the Government's position on the talks.

Q AND A: SUPPORTING MATERIAL

1. BACKGROUND TO STATEMENT

Why has this [statement/article] been issued now?

We have recently received a number of approaches asking us to set out Government policy on the key issues to do with the talks and peace process, so that there can be no doubt what Sinn Fein needs to do to join in the negotiations. Our policy is clear and has been set out on a number of occasions. But in case there was any genuine doubt or genuine uncertainty, we have set it out in public for all to see. It demonstrates for all to see that there is no block in the way of the IRA restoring its ceasefire.

Will this statement make any difference?

If there are any remaining doubts in any quarter about the Government's position, this statement should remove them. The IRA should restore the ceasefire unequivocally and without further prevarication.

Has the Government shown this text to anyone prior to publishing it?

We consulted with various parties [and have shown the text to a number of key individuals in the past week], but we have not negotiated the text with any other party. It is the Government's text; it sets out our policy, in our terms.

Is the publication of this statement linked to rumours of an IRA General Army Council?

Not at all. Its publication at this stage is to ensure there can be no misunderstandings about the Government's position on the talks.

Do you expect a ceasefire?

There is no reason why there shouldn't be a renewed ceasefire, but we don't have any evidence to provide confidence that there will be one. Indeed, preparation for further attacks continues, as the recent large arms and explosives find in London amply demonstrates.

Following the arms and explosives finds in London could any new ceasefire reasonably be regarded as genuine?

We will clearly need to satisfy ourselves that any new ceasefire is truly unequivocal, particularly in the light of the recent arrests and finds in London. It will inevitably be necessary to look at any announcement carefully, to look at the IRA's actions as well, and to consider all the circumstances.

2. DETAIL OF THE TEXT

What is meant by unequivocal?

It must be clear and obvious to all concerned that the August 1994 ceasefire has been restored. All parties need something they can depend upon. We shall have to consider carefully the words used by the IRA, their actions on the ground (which must be consistent with their words) and all the circumstances at the time.

Does the reference to an open agenda mean the union is on the table?

Anyone can raise any issue and get a fair hearing. But both Governments and all the current parties in the negotiations are committed to the principle of consent - Northern Ireland's status will not change without the consent of its citizens.

Will some decommissioning be required at the outset?

Both Governments have committed themselves to implementation of all aspects of the Mitchell Report, including its compromise approach under which "some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations". As Mitchell said, progress will be possible on this issue only in the context of an inclusive and dynamic process in which mutual trust and confidence is built as progress is made on all the issues of concern to all participants.

3. POSSIBLE SINN FEIN RESPONSES

Will you clarify parts of the text?

The statement gives a clear account of the Government's policy. We will not negotiate, or change our policy, to secure a ceasefire - that would reward violence. But if anyone has specific questions about areas of genuine uncertainty, we will look at them.

Will you meet Sinn Fein to discuss the text?

Ministerial dialogue with Sinn Fein will only be resumed once there has been an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.

There has been no meeting with officials since 26 February. As on that occasion, we will consider a request for a meeting with officials in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground.