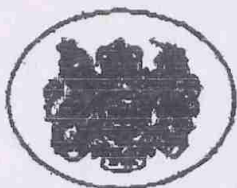


31. Jan. 1997 13:47

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No. 3352 P. 2/6

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From : THE PRIVATE SECRETARYNORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
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JH.File  
JH 31/1John Holmes Esq  
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

31 January 1997

Dear John,

## TELEPHONE CALL WITH THE TAOISEACH

You asked for briefing in your letter of 30 January. I attach the key points on the issues the Taoiseach plans to raise.

You are right that a telephone call to the Prime Minister is important to the Taoiseach in domestic terms - particularly to be able to say he raised the North Report and Bloody Sunday. The Taoiseach faces an election this year - quite possibly before the summer. But a phone call also serves our interests, if it helps the Taoiseach to understand our policy and diverts him from firing off criticisms in public. Although there are policy differences, the tone should be friendly.

North Report

We gave the Irish Government an advance copy of the Report, and briefing on our response to it, on Wednesday evening. This seems to have helped produce a measured, albeit still critical, Irish Government statement yesterday. The low key tone of their comment is in marked contrast, for example, to the Taoiseach's excitable public denunciation of our response to last year's Mitchell Report.

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Bloody Sunday

Any Irish Taoiseach has to be seen to raise this with HMG. The Prime Minister can point to his response to John Hume in the House yesterday.

Belfast Talks

The Irish Government have been openly sceptical about the prospects for progress this side of the elections. They have taken the attitude that they will consider any ideas we come up with but see no point themselves in coming forward with proposals. Ministers continue to explore with the UUP the possibility for some progress on decommissioning - despite some negative signals, Trimble has not yet ruled this out.

One way or another, this looks likely to come to a head in the next week or two. But, until we are clearer about UUP intentions, there would be obvious dangers in working with the Irish Government on the assumption that our efforts will fail (although that does seem the likely outcome). Without creating unrealistic expectations of progress, we should therefore make clear that we have not given up all hope yet.

Ceasefire

Monsignor Faul is a prominent Catholic priest and known as a doughty campaigner against the IRA (as well as a critic of HMG). His views are speculation: he is most unlikely to have access to genuine republican intentions. Sinn Fein has fought all its previous elections without a ceasefire in place. A period of restraint, or even possibly a de facto ceasefire, in the run up to the election is likely. But a unilateral declared ceasefire - without anything to trigger it - looks unlikely.

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It is possible that the Taoiseach may raise Hume's current efforts. Hume has put to us (and the Irish Government now have a copy) an amended version of the Hume/Adams text of 10 October. Both we and the Irish Government agree that this sort of approach is a dead end: the Irish tried to discourage Hume from even raising it.

We seem to have got this message over to Hume now and instead he is working on the possibility that he might ask us questions about the 28 November statement in the hope of eliciting some explanation which might provide some reassurance (eg, as the Prime Minister has already said, we do not envisage taking 18 months to assess whether a ceasefire is genuine). He is enlisting the help of the Irish Government in drafting appropriate questions. The key message to get over to the Taoiseach is that, while we do not close our minds to any such approach, we will not shift off the 28 November statement.

A copy goes to HM Ambassador, Dublin.

Yours ever,

Ken  
W K LINDSAY

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