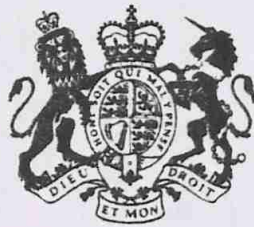


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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

File
FAXED

*NIO + Dublin
13/2 09:00*

From the Private Secretary

12 February 1997

Dear Gen,

TALKS: IRISH VIEWS

Paddy Teahon rang me today to touch base about the prospects for a soft landing of the talks, following the telephone agreement between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach that we should keep in touch. He said that the "Sean O'hUiginn view" was that the talks should be suspended on the basis of a very short statement, presumably from the Chairman, saying only that the talks had been suspended and would resume on a particular date.

The Taoiseach was however inclined to wonder whether there might not be a case for a joint statement from the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach. I asked what the substance of such a statement could be. Teahon said that this was of course the problem. The Taoiseach hankered after something which would refer to Sinn Fein joining the process when it resumed, on the assumption of a credible ceasefire. Teahon was not himself convinced that this was worth pursuing, unless I could tell him anything different.

I said that we were looking at this issue, in the context of the questions from John Hume, but had not come to any conclusion. He would appreciate that this was not simple for us, given the line we had taken in November and December. Teahon did appreciate this, and volunteered that he did not believe that the Sinn Fein leadership could deliver a ceasefire, in present circumstances, although anything we could do to advance the position on Sinn Fein's participation would obviously be helpful and welcome.

After further discussion around these issues, Teahon and I agreed to be in touch again on 17 February. It would be helpful to have any thoughts from your end before then. The idea of a joint statement does not immediately appeal, but this may depend on where we are with Hume and his questions.

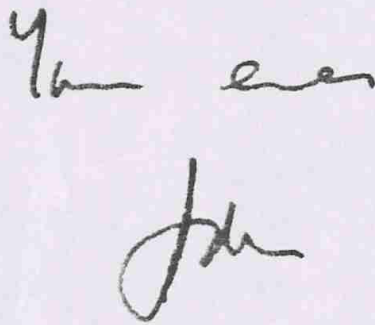
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Teahon told me incidentally that the Taoiseach was not now going to reply to Adams' letter. Following his latest articles and interviews, Sinn Fein could not really claim they did not know the Irish position. I said that our current intention was to send a short reply and described its main lines. (Do you want to change your advice on a reply now that the Irish are not replying, and in the light of tonight's shooting?)

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and to Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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