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**From: John Holmes**  
**Date: 10 February 1997**

**PRIME MINISTER**

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**cc: Mr Barton**

**NORTHERN IRELAND: US POLICY**

I am not sure whether you saw the attached piece from Saturday's Times. I spoke to John Kerr about this today (in the process of congratulating him on his new job). He confirmed that the departure of Lake and Soderberg, and the continuation of IRA violence, had caused the Americans to take a lower profile over Northern Ireland. But the suggestion of a decisive shift in policy, or future lack of interest from President Clinton and the NSC, was overdone. President Clinton was bound to continue to take an interest, and the NSC would therefore retain the lead role.

It is nevertheless true that Berger and his deputy, Steinberg, have no personal interest in Northern Ireland. They have shown no disposition to raise it with me so far, and I have not taken the initiative to raise it with them. It is also the case that Madeleine Albright is seeing Paddy Mayhew, at US initiative, and that the State Department want to take a greater interest than in the past. John Kerr had no idea whether the stories about Jean Kennedy Smith are true, but thought it was possible she might herself want to go.

So the picture is not as rosy as Michael Binyon suggests. But there is no doubt that we are in a positive phase in our relations with the Americans, and this is likely to continue at least as long as there is no IRA ceasefire. In any case, we should keep our heads down publicly, and let the Irish (and Sinn Fein) worry.



**JOHN HOLMES**

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