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clever little devil, isn't he?

But is it genuine?

From: John Holmes
Date: 23 February 1997

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PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND: ADAMS ARTICLE

As Howell may have mentioned to you, Adams published an article in the Irish Times yesterday. Text attached. It was a big story in Dublin but made no impact here at all. ✓

Most of it is familiar stuff. But there is a greater emphasis on the need for, and possibility of, a new ceasefire than in recent months. This has no doubt been prompted by the reaction to Stephen Restorick's death and John Hume's article last week. Adams is trying to get back on the PR front foot, and throw the ball back into our court – see particularly the penultimate paragraph of the article. ✓

On specifics, there is more apparent readiness to “address” all aspects of the Mitchell Report than in the past, although there is also the usual emphasis on removing the decommissioning precondition. There is also a lot of rhetoric about commitment to peace, peaceful methods and the Mitchell principles. But the bottom line, which comes out early in the first column of the article, is still “when Sinn Fein will be admitted into substantive talks”. ✓

In parallel, John Hume gave John Chilcot on Friday afternoon Adams' answers to the questions we gave Hume 10 days ago. I have not yet seen the texts, but I understand they are very much the same language as in the Adams' article (which Hume warned Chilcot would appear soon.) ✓

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Sinn Fein also told the Irish Government that Adams' article was of great significance. Meanwhile hints about the possibility of an early ceasefire have again begun to appear, including from Hume. Like us, Teahon and the Taoiseach are highly doubtful, to say the least, that the IRA really are ready for a ceasefire. But they continue to believe that we should call Sinn Fein's bluff. I know from talking to Paddy Teahon that the Taoiseach remains keen that we should give a signal about our readiness to let Sinn Fein in when the talks resume after the election, if the right ceasefire (words and deeds) is there. The Taoiseach knows that a move from us at the moment is unlikely, but is wondering whether you might be freer to say something about Sinn Fein's entry once the election campaign starts. I have not encouraged this thought, although I see the logic behind it.

The NIO will be looking at the article and the Adams' answers and will give us advice over the next few days. I have told Teahon that we are in no rush to respond, and that our basic views have not changed.

All this is for information only at this stage. But it obviously has a bearing on whether to publish the draft article in this weekend's box and if so when. It would be easy to include a sentence or two which sound not too negative, without saying anything new, to keep the PR advantage. I will reflect on this and consult the Northern Ireland Office.

JOHN HOLMES**CONFIDENTIAL**