

CONFIDENTIAL

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Content
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From: John Holmes
Date: 14 March 1997

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Philip Barton

NORTHERN IRELAND: PROPOSALS OF THE TAOISEACH

The Irish have followed up your conversation with the Taoiseach by sending the attached proposed form of words to be drawn on about the ideas put forward by the Taoiseach. I have discussed these with the NIO. We were agreed that the kind of presentation proposed by the Irish would set Unionists' alarm bells jangling, and would be seen as a prelude to an Anglo-Irish stitch-up, including the possibility of imposition of the framework document over their heads. It would therefore be best to say as little as possible in public about the details of what was discussed, while we reflected on the ideas put forward. Anything we did say in public should be low key and in the context of normal work by officials to prepare for the resumption of the talks.

I have therefore told Paddy Teahon that we cannot agree to the form of words the Irish have proposed, and that we would reflect further and come back to them with an alternative suggestion. Meanwhile, the Taoiseach can say to President Clinton that he has suggested to you work in these areas, and that your initial response has been cautiously positive. But the Taoiseach should not comment publicly in Washington, beyond saying that you and he had discussed the prospects for the resumption of the talks and the need to make rapid progress when they do resume.

Separately, as you know, Senator Kennedy made a speech calling on you and Tony Blair to say now that, if the IRA declared a new ceasefire, Sinn Fein would

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

... be allowed to enter the talks when they resume on 3 June. I attach the text. The Press Office line about this is perfectly clear – our position was set out on 28 November and has not changed. The need is for an immediate and credible IRA ceasefire. According to Paddy Teahon, the Irish response will also be unenthusiastic, but will make clear that they at least would be happy if a date for Sinn Fein's entry into the talks, assuming there is a credible ceasefire, could be set. I doubt if this will make a big splash in the British press, although it will no doubt attract attention in the Irish and American press in the pre St. Patrick's Day atmosphere.

**JOHN HOLMES****CONFIDENTIAL**