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From the Private Secretary

15 March 1997

Mr Paddy Teahan,

Thank you for sending me draft words on which both governments could draw, following the conversation between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach. As we have discussed, I am afraid presentation in this kind of way would cause us considerable difficulty, since it would arouse great suspicions that the two governments were preparing to impose a framework and solutions of their own. This would not encourage a constructive atmosphere when the talks resume.

As the Prime Minister said to the Taoiseach, there is also an awkward conjunction with what may be said publicly about Sinn Fein's entry when the exchanges with John Hume became public.

It would therefore be much better to avoid any suggestion that the two governments have agreed a specific range of issues to be worked up between them. We will respond more substantively on the ideas the Taoiseach raised in due course, for example at next week's Liaison Group, but meanwhile I attach, in case it is helpful, a suggested approach. If the Taoiseach were to speak on these lines publicly in Washington, this would cause us no problem. You will see that there is no mention of Strand 3. It seems to us that the usefulness of discussions on this issue are likely to be in inverse proportion to any publicity given to them.

The Taoiseach may of course want to be more explicit in talking to President Clinton. I see no difficulty in him telling the President what he has suggested to the Prime Minister and indicating that our preliminary response was cautiously positive. But I hope he will also make clear that the wrong kind of publicity can only harm, not help, the peace process.

JOHN HOLMES

Mr Paddy Teahan