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File Jan 19/3.

Thank you

From: John Holmes  
Date: 18 March 1997

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

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St. Patrick's Day passed off not too badly from our point of view. Kennedy's call on you and Blair to say Sinn Fein would be admitted to the talks on 3 June if they declared a ceasefire did not make too many waves. Blair's position echoed our own. The US Administration did not endorse Kennedy's call, although they may support it privately. Michael Ancram is seeing Gore and Berger in Washington later today but Berger did not press me on the issue when I spoke to him earlier this week.

Michael Ancram has meanwhile given Hume our answers to the Adams' questions today in Washington.

He may be losing interest in the exercise.

There is a separate report in the Box suggesting (unsurprisingly) that Adams is not very interested in the answers and will find a way of not going for a ceasefire, almost whatever we say. We will need to confirm later in the week whether and how we publicise our answers (the NIO plan remains low-key publicity on Saturday). Michael Ancram will brief the Americans and the Irish later today, and Trimble later in the week.

Bruton also behaved himself in Washington. He did not misuse the content of his telephone call with you and, while he made clear that he would like a date to be set for Sinn Fein's entry into the talks if there was a satisfactory ceasefire, also


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said firmly, when asked whether a ceasefire or a date should come first, "a ceasefire".

For the moment, therefore, it looks as if we should avoid serious trouble or pressure over Northern Ireland. Looking a bit further ahead, one of the big questions is how well Sinn Fein will do themselves in the elections. There are no reliable polls so far, and evidence otherwise is mixed, but there is a widespread fear that they may get two seats and severely embarrass the SDLP. That would be very bad news.



**JOHN HOLMES**

18 March 1997

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