

CONFIDENTIAL covering SECRET

Philip
To see Phil's
comment
below.

From: John Holmes
Date: 26 March 1997

John
H/H.

Philip Barton

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

file
1997 4/4

Your comments on the Wilmshlow bombs played well all day, and succeeded in putting Sinn Fein on to the defensive - see the attached interview with McGuinness.

The NIO view is that today's bombs do not change the likelihood of an IRA suspension either way. I attach their latest analysis, for the benefit of NIO and suggested lines to take if a suspension is announced. I think these have the combination of regret at the absence of a lasting ceasefire, welcome for a first step in the right direction, and caution about future prospects. But we should have to look at what was said by the IRA at the time before finally deciding our own line. Any comments in the meantime? *No. Contact*

I do not incidentally agree with the NIO claim in their analysis that a suspension now could be turned into a "permanent ceasefire". I have seen absolutely no evidence that the IRA/Sinn Fein are ready to abandon the dual strategy of politics and violence. Obviously we want to turn any temporary ceasefire into a permanent one - and some members of the Sinn Fein leadership may share this aim. But that is rather different.

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Michael Ancram saw John Hume today and explained why the answers to Sinn Fein's questions from Paddy Mayhew were all he was going to get. He also explained why the content of the revised version of the answers given to us by Hume at the weekend (with apologies for the bulk of paper, text also attached - as you will see it is actually a letter from Adams) did not correspond to our policy. He is following up in writing so that Hume cannot misunderstand. I have followed this process very closely and am satisfied NIO are playing straight.

**John Holmes**