

*See letter regarding the meeting.*

*File  
John 6/5.*

From: John Holmes

Date: 6 May 1997

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND

cc Jonathan Powell  
Pat McFadden

Mo Mowlam, Paul Murphy and a few key officials are coming for an internal meeting at 1600 tomorrow. She has sent the attached minute with NIO ideas in advance. I also attach again a note I did for you over the weekend with a few options.

The essence of the NIO proposal is that Mo should write to Adams, that officials should meet with Sinn Fein, and that we should be ready to offer them a date for entry into talks in the event of a satisfactory ceasefire. The idea of trying to get a ceasefire and Sinn Fein into talks, including the offer of an entry date, is right. But there is nothing at all here for the Unionists, especially if we make three moves towards Sinn Fein like this. The Unionists will not be much mollified by eg. repetition of the consent principle, especially when police and prisoners reforms and implementation of North are also on the agenda. The NIO answer amounts to "tough" – you are in a position to take that view, but not if you want to reassure the Unionists as a priority and avoid trouble.

The position would be slightly better if you were telling Sinn Fein the train will go without them if they do not declare a ceasefire. We need a balancing element of this kind. But, as we began to discuss, what does it mean? It would be unwise and unrealistic (and the Irish would never agree) to say they are out indefinitely – and how realistic is it to set an arbitrary period of exclusion (e.g. a year) during which a settlement could be reached without them?

*This is  
where  
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help  
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my view  
of military  
nature  
of negotiation*



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So the first question to Mo is what the NIO have to offer the Unionists. Two possibilities might be delayed implementation of North and Irish readiness to move on the Constitution. But we still need more. Perhaps we could have a word before the meeting with Mo in any case.

*get him  
for  
15  
mins*

You are seeing Bruton on Thursday afternoon, and we have promised Trimble you will speak to him before then (he would like a short meeting but a telephone call would do). I have told the Irish that the meeting with Bruton is an informal get-to-know-you session, but the signs are that the Irish will push hard for a rapid move towards Sinn Fein. My strong advice is that you should not get into specifics with Bruton – anything you say will leak, and the worst of all worlds for the Unionists is an unprepared apparent Anglo-Irish move towards Sinn Fein.

Other issues for the meeting are

- your first visit to Northern Ireland: best to wait until after the local elections on 21 May, and until we have agreed a clear way forward?  
3 June for the beginning of the talks?
- possible speech by Mo or you to announce a policy once we have one – could be during your visit?
- what to say to Trimble.

  
**JOHN HOLMES**