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Ref: BO.2299

MR HOLMES

cc Ms Polley

K2
John 19/6.

NORTHERN IRELAND: OPTIONS

1. Some brief comments on your (admirable) analysis of 17 June.
2. Option 1 (withdraw the offer) would in all probability lead to substantial further violence, and would also lose us the support of Dublin and Washington, as well as Hume. Option 2 (maintain it but don't publish) would maximise the risk of Unionist accusations of furtiveness, and of the text leaking in an uncontrolled way; it would also, should there now be further violence, make it more difficult/impossible to keep the offer on the table. Option 4 (further conditions) would probably drive PIRA even further on to the warpath. Ditto Option 5 (offer open only till this evening), which they would see as a fait accompli in capital letters. Option 6 (lengthen the decontamination period) would risk losing Hume/Dublin/Washington.
3. I agree with you and the NIO that option 3, for all the difficulties, is the right one. It would maximise the chances of avoiding further loss of life, keep us on the front foot (and look the more statesmanlike, against the background of the totally unreasonable stance of PIRA), keep alive the possibility of getting Sinn Fein into the talks, and strengthen the chance that, if Sinn Fein don't come in, Washington, Dublin and Hume would then support going on without them.
4. Our aims at this stage? In my view we want both to justify our own behaviour and expose Sinn Fein and to achieve a ceasefire and bring Sinn Fein in. On the timing, I favour a statement on 19 June rather than later: delay would run the risk of further violence (see above), and the text as it stands already to a degree leaves the door open, since the window as you know is partially mobile (if you see what I mean!).
5. The only factor you don't mention in your analysis is Trimble. The NIO have for long assumed that he might well walk out, at least for a while, when/if Sinn Fein come into the talks. There must be a serious risk that option 3 would lead to his flouncing off the stage now.
6. My advice, nonetheless, is to go for option 3, with a statement on 19 June, rather than later. To do that would give us the moral high ground. More cynically, it would also give us a good chance of binding in to our position the new Taoiseach, who may later prove increasingly difficult to corral.

Colin Budd

COLIN BUDD

18 June 1997

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