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FAXED

0830 5/7/97
to PM at Home
NS.

L. J. Holmes

From: John Holmes

Date: 4 July 1997

PRIME MINISTER
✓

REPLY TO SINN FEIN

We spoke. I attach the NIO's draft reply, together with the original letter from McGuinness.

Making due allowance for the state of my brain at this time of night, I think the reply is not bad at all. It is a bit diffuse, but does not have too much Anglo/Irish gobbledegook. It also avoids saying things which we would not wish to appear in public, or appearing to pander too obviously to Sinn Fein's concerns. If it were a letter from you, I would redraft it to make it much shorter and crisper, but this is less important for a letter from Quentin.

I have made some suggestions in manuscript - the passages in square brackets would be deleted. I have agreed my alterations to the paragraph on prisoners with the Home Office.

If you are broadly content, I could float the text past the Irish and the Americans quickly tomorrow, so that we could get the reply to Sinn Fein before the end of the day, with a bit of luck. But this is ambitious, particularly given that it is a weekend and the Irish in particular may have comments. There is therefore a case for not consulting them on this occasion, but simply passing them copies at the same time as we reply to Sinn Fein. I see no great harm in this. We have tried to take account of their concerns, as Ahern put them to you. And this letter

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is not in the same category as the aide memoire, which we did clear with the Irish and Americans in advance.

On one point of detail, you suggested attaching your HOC statements on decommissioning. My version just refers to them, but they could be attached if you prefer.

Holding to discuss in the morning.

John

JOHN HOLMES

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