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*Prime Minister*  
*I hope this is self-explanatory in bringing you up to date.*

12 June 1997

12/6

From the Private Secretary



*JEH*  
*seen on regional tour.*

*Angus.**16/6.**Dear Ken,***NORTHERN IRELAND: NEXT STEPS**

I should record the contacts that I have had today with the Irish and the Americans about the aide memoire we sent to President Clinton and the Taoiseach last night.

Mary Ann Peters from the NSC called me this afternoon to say that they were grateful for sight of the text in advance. They were very impressed by the openness of our approach, and applauded it. It looked like a very reasonable offer. She had one question, which was whether it was necessary to mention the six week period, which would sound like a "decontamination period" to Sinn Fein. Why could we not simply talk about a ceasefire in mid-June and entry into the talks at the end of July?

I explained that the reference to the six week period was to allow a rolling deadline for a ceasefire followed by entry, at least until September. Mary Ann seemed content with this explanation. She asked a couple more questions about the mechanics of the process we envisaged. She said that she would pass what I had said on to others.

On the Irish side, the Taoiseach has just sent the attached letter in response to the Prime Minister's letter. I also spoke to Wally Kirwan, in the absence of Paddy Teahon. He made clear that the main Irish concern was the point towards the end of the Taoiseach's letter about parallel decommissioning. I said that we had already spotted that this might not be the best formulation. I thought that we might be able to amend it in a suitable way. Kirwan had little to add to the Taoiseach's letter otherwise except for a suggestion that we should delete the words "including a more independent complaints system" from the paragraph about Confidence Building Measures. This would imply a more open agenda of

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reform. I said that, by the same token, it would cause more alarm on the other side. Kirwan acknowledged this.

I added that I did not think we would be able to shorten the six week period. It was already perilously short in many ways. Kirwan suggested that the Irish had few illusions about this.

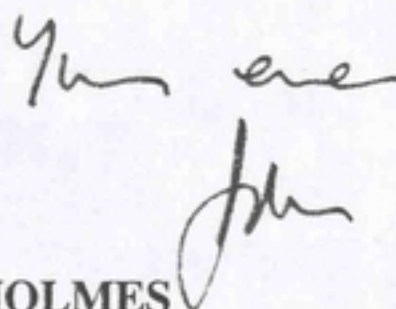
Kirwan said that the Taoiseach had shown the aide memoire to Ahern, and spoken to him about it on the telephone. Kirwan did not know what exactly had been said but Ahern had apparently not made any negative noises.

Finally, Kirwan said that the Taoiseach had now authorised a further meeting between Irish officials and Sinn Fein, which could take place as early as Friday evening. The aim would be to tell Sinn Fein that the moment of decision had arrived. I said that the Irish should not show Sinn Fein any text unless we had already passed it to them. I promised that we would let the Irish know as soon as we had done this, which I expected to be in the course of Friday.

Comment

So far so good. As agreed, we need to check that the Americans are not going to come back with further comments. I assume you will let us have a revised text of the aide memoire tomorrow morning, to ensure that we are content. It would also be helpful to have a first draft of the proposed Parliamentary statement by close tomorrow, so that we can work on it in Amsterdam.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.



JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office

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