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From the Private Secretary

10 June 1997

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**NORTHERN IRELAND: CONVERSATION WITH
 PRESIDENT CLINTON, 10 JUNE**

The Prime Minister spoke to the President this evening about Northern Ireland. I am recording separately the rest of the conversation covering politics and developments in Europe.

The Prime Minister said that we were proposing to come out with an initiative next week to try to get Sinn Fein into the talks. But he was very worried that the IRA were carrying on their terrorist activity. There had been shots at an armed patrol today, and a large van bomb 10 days ago. Neither attack had succeeded, but it was clear that more attacks were on the IRA agenda. This could wreck the initiative. Making a move towards Sinn Fein without losing the Unionists was a difficult enough balance already. Violent incidents in the meantime would make it even more complicated. He therefore hoped President Clinton could send a very strong message to Sinn Fein that, while we were trying to put together an approach to bring them in, they seemed to be acting in bad faith, and were certainly making things more difficult.

The Prime Minister continued that at the moment Sinn Fein had the best of both worlds. They were keeping their people happy through limited terrorist activity, while posing as peace makers and blaming the British Government for keeping them out. He feared that they had come to enjoy this situation. He even feared that they might be frightened of the offer we were about to make, and were trying to stop it happening. We were moving as fast as we could, but we also wanted to keep the Unionists in the process. If there were casualties from IRA violence while this was going on, our efforts would be hopeless. Sinn Fein should appreciate that, however they had treated the previous Government, they could not treat him the same way. He would deal with Sinn Fein straight, and expected straight dealing in return.

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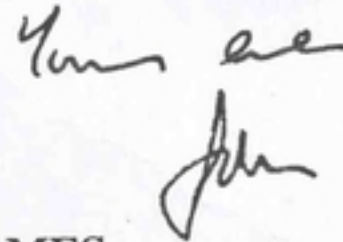
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Clinton said that he did not understand what Sinn Fein and the IRA were doing. It seemed to be crazy. It was in any case wrong. He would get on to this immediately and make sure that a strong message was delivered as soon as possible. He asked whether the Prime Minister had met Bertie Ahern. The Prime Minister said that he had, and got on well with him. John Bruton had done a good job, but he did not think that Ahern would be very different in practice. He attached a lot of importance to keeping the American and Irish Governments with us. Clinton said that the Administration had managed to work well with the British Government, once the row over the visas had been got out of the way, and he wanted to continue this. We should "keep the hammer down". So he would certainly do what the Prime Minister asked. The right message would be delivered, both publicly and privately.

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

**JOHN HOLMES**

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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