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From the Private Secretary

9 June 1997

Dear Gen,

NORTHERN IRELAND: NEXT STEPS

The Prime Minister has seen Dr. Mowlam's minute of 6 June. They are meeting to discuss it tomorrow morning. The Prime Minister thinks the strategy is now beginning to come together. In advance of the meeting, he has commented as follows:

- We should discuss the issues with Sinn Fein and know what it is that they want. But we should not negotiate a text with them.
- His own preference would be for a speech, rather than an article, or possibly a statement to the House. If it is a speech, it should be set in a wider framework, and also include more general points which will be reassuring to the Unionists.
- Before any speech, we would need to line up the best possible, and most rapid, support from the US, Irish, John Hume, the business community and church leaders.
- The Prime Minister is prepared to accept a period of time to evaluate an IRA ceasefire as short as six weeks, on the basis that nothing of substance would happen until September, and that we could use this point presentationally.
- We should set next May as a terminal date for the talks, and the expected date for agreement on a settlement.

One issue we will need to talk through further is how to handle the text of any speech with the Americans, Irish and Sinn Fein. The fundamental difficulty of showing others a text well in advance and asking for their comments, while

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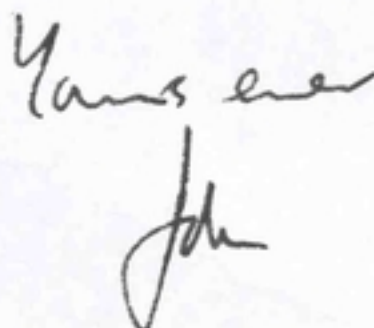
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saying at the same time that the text is not negotiable, remains. Is this necessarily less confrontational than simply presenting an offer publicly, with warnings in advance that it is coming and what its rough lines will be? A middle way would be to give all concerned far less time to look at any text than is suggested.

One other factor we need to have in mind is the Prime Minister's own movements. The proposed timescale of action in Dr. Mowlam's minute does not sit easily with the Prime Minister's absences next week in Amsterdam and Denver. Acting before next week will not be easy. On the other hand, leaving it a further week increases the risks of some kind of IRA action before then, which could seriously complicate our approach. The Prime Minister is seriously concerned about this.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized, cursive script.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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