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CONFIDENTIAL10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

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From the Private Secretary

9 June 1997

*Dear Gen.***NORTHERN IRELAND: IRA ACTIVITY**

I should record that I spoke to both Paddy Teahon and Jim Steinberg (in the absence of Berger) at the end of last week, to register our concern at the apparent resumption of terrorist activity by the IRA in Northern Ireland. We were at a loss to understand the political logic behind this, but whether it signified that the leadership had to offer a sop to the hard men, or that they thought we needed a bomb to sharpen our reflexes, it was unhelpful and counter-productive. It also represented a total misreading of the Prime Minister's approach. I urged both Teahon and Steinberg to use their channels to get this message across to Sinn Fein.

Teahon said he feared Sinn Fein thought we needed encouragement by more violence. This did underline the need to move quickly and put our position to Sinn Fein as specifically as possible. Sinn Fein were particularly concerned that decommissioning would become a problem inside the talks as soon as they entered. It would obviously be mad to make a huge effort to get Sinn Fein in, only to force them out again. I said that this underlined the need for us to agree on decommissioning – I was not sure the Irish side were addressing this as seriously as they should. Teahon took note. We agreed to speak again after the Irish elections.

Steinberg was very alive to the danger and promised to use contacts with Sinn Fein in the wake of the elections to make the point strongly. For his part he hoped that we and the Irish could get decommissioning sorted out quickly. There was clearly a close link between this and a ceasefire. I explained where we were, but also explained that there was no point in the two governments reaching a conclusion on decommissioning which had no hope of being accepted by the other parties. Steinberg understood but the Americans are clearly anxious about this point.

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- 2 -

The Prime Minister will no doubt be speaking to Bertie Ahern following the Irish election, and will want to make clear his concern about renewed IRA activity. He may also speak to President Clinton today to make the same point.

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.

*Yours ever*

*John*

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

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