No. 1214 P. 2/12

23. Oct. 1996 18:45 S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722



SECRETARY OF STATE OR NORTHERN IRELAND

John Holmes Esq Private Secretary to the Prime Minister 10 Downing Street LONDON KALWINK -SWIA 2AA

own text as it stands with Box HUME ADAMS INITIATIVE: POSSIBLE PHONE CALL FROM THE TAOISEACH

have no reason to challends that ass

this Trish response, is all part of a "talk peace-soge war" As you know, discussions with the Tanaiste and Irish officials in Belfast this week have established the Irish Government's reaction to the text you sent Teahon last week. The key points are:

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2AZ

23 October 1996

the Irish Government is convinced there is a serious prospect of an IRA ceasefire, although they cannot given any guarantees;

they assess that setting a delay period of three months would kill off any such prospect and would be interpreted by Sinn Féin as a formal signal of rejection;

the Irish side could not support the text we had given them, in particular the three month period: their advice is that it would be better to do nothing than send a text paster for sime pain to of this kind.

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The Secretary of State and Michael Ancram argued strongly that three months was the minimum realistic period and offered the only basis on which we could offer a positive response to Hume. This was not something we could negotiate on, although we recognised the possibility that the two Prime Ministers might want to have a word.



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We have no clear word yet of any US response, but we need to decide how to respond to the Irish position, particularly in the light of a possible phone call from the Taoiseach.

Proceed without Irish support?

We could simply table our own text as it stands with Hume and proceed to publication. We have to be wary that Hume/Adams, and this Irish response, is all part of a "talk peace-wage war" strategy. We could expect widespread support at Westminster and among unionists for the need for at least a three month delay in which to assess whether any ceasefire was indeed unequivocal. But,

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we have the firm Irish assessment that it would lead Sinn Féin to conclude that we have <u>rejected</u> the initiative. We have no reason to challenge that assessment - indeed, everything we know about the state of republican opinion suggests that it will in any event be extremely hard for Adams to secure support for a ceasefire;

more importantly, if we published the text we now have to expect that the Irish Government would make clear that they did not support it. The Americans might well line up with them. That would make it easier for Sinn Féin to reject it, for <u>nationalists generally to blame the British</u> <u>Government</u> for further intransigence and shifting of the goal posts, and

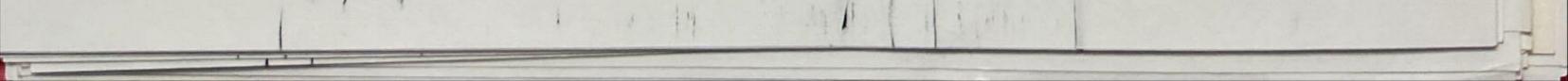
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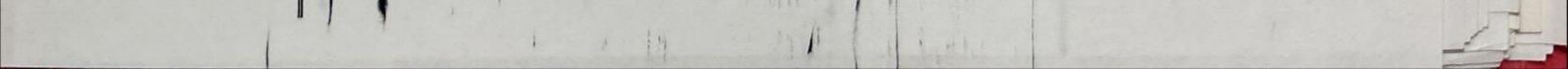
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others to claim there could have been a ceasefire if it were not for the British position, so taking pressure off Sinn Fein; ts would seek to bid us down from this figure. MI

all of this would make it extremely difficult to persuade Hume and the SDLP to proceed with the negotiations on the basis that Sinn Féin were definitely not going to participate. The talks would run the risk of stalling, with consequences for the loyalist ceasefire. back to Huge on this begin and sim bein still spurn it, then side for t

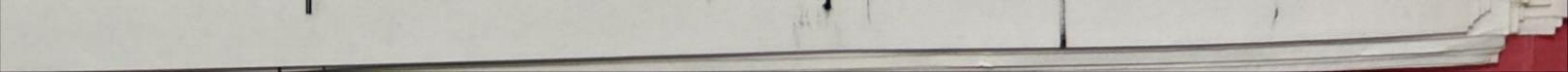
In short, this risks giving us the worst of both worlds: no ceasefire, but no Irish or SDLP support for making progress without Sinn Féin. that in this be offered this last chance to join

und of nogotiations with a delay of 2% months but, otherwise, A delay of 23 months?

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of a blog progress in the talks with or without Sinn Fein. Our objective remains to make progress in the talks, with or without Sinn Féin. But we need both unionists and nationalists support to achieve that. As far as nationalists are concerned, Hume's support depends upon persuading him that we have made a reasonable response to his initiative.

Irish officials have recognised the case for a delay period of four weeks. My Secretary of State thinks that if we were prepared to accept a period of two and a half months, ie until the talks are reconvened in the New Year, this would be an offer which would be harder for the Irish Government to resist. If they are prepared to support such a delay period, then that makes it easier to attract Hume's support and, if Sinn Féin subsequently spurn the offer, to make progress without them.



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In recommending a delay period of three months in NI 96(10), my Secretary of State said that this deliberately incorporated some room for manoeuvre in the expectation that the Irish and US Governments would seek to bid us down from this figure. NI Committee were therefore warned of the need for some flexibility. It would be much macher to argue that we could not ignore

But, if the Prime Minister agrees that we can go down to two and a half months, we should seek to extract some price from the Irish side for this. In particular, we should seek to establish that if we go back to Hume on this basis and Sinn Féin still spurn it, then the Trish Government will join with us in making progress without Sinn Féin. In other words we would seek to agree with the Irish Government that Sinn Féin would be offered this last chance to join this round of negotiations with a delay of 23 months but, otherwise, we would proceed without them. This would help secure our objective of making progress in the talks with or without Sinn Féin. from the US Government they Adaes was ganaine could be a useful

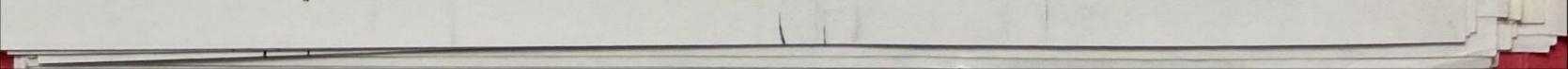
Against the possibility that the Taoiseach will ring the Prime Minister, I attach some points to make reflecting this broad approach. which we have not ruled out in

public - of a meeting botheen Simp shirl and officials.

# A letter from Hume?

Finally, there is the possibility 4

means of assessing for ourpelves whether finn F6in is for real. Your letter of 21 October - copy attached recorded Hume's suggestion that he might write a letter to the Prime Minister explaining his conviction that Adams wanted to stop violence for good. In itself, we think this suggestion adds little: Hume would simply be putting in writing what he has frequently told you and us over the phone. But it suggests other possible avenues that might be worth purusing.



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Some <u>evidence from Adams himself</u> that he was serious would be a different matter. A letter, for example, from Adams to us or to Hume or some other third party stating his assessment that the IRA would respond to the sort of text we are talking about with an unequivocal restoration of a ceasefire would be of considerable unequivocal restoration of a ceasefire would be of considerable value. It would be much easier to argue that we could not ignore such an authorative statement (although, of course, the possible use we might make of it could well make Adams extremely cautious).

An alternative to a direct reassurance from Adams himself is <u>some</u> <u>third party guarantees</u> - guarantees from Hume carry little conviction and the Irish Government seem unlikely to get into the business of offering guarantees. But we could, for example, invite the <u>US Government</u> to establish whether Adams was serious about delivering a ceasefire and to offer us their assessment. Although they might not have more to go on than us, a positive assessment from the US Government that Adams was genuine could be a useful defensive point explaining why we felt we could not ignore the approach.

Finally, there is the possibility - which we have not ruled out in public - of a meeting between Sinn Féin and officials. Obviously that would require careful thought but it offers the most direct means of assessing for ourselves whether Sinn Féin is for real. Were, for example, Sinn Féin to request a meeting in order to offer reassurances that a ceasefire was a serious prospect, that is something we would want to consider carefully.

All of these approaches carry difficulties, but each offers some means of establishing some confidence that Sinn Féin is for real.



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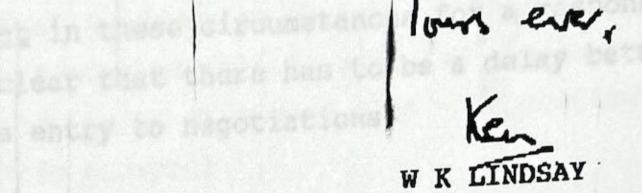
hyportisy after Linburn. Rend your consents in the Dail with

Any of them could be floated with the Irish Government or Hume if either asks us what could be done to convince us of Sinn Féin's in London and in Belfast, there is universal serious intent.

equipant that sind solla paper if the same arraight into the A copy goes to William Ehrman (FCO) and Jan Polley (PS/Sir Robin all the evidence reaching ne my that the IRA is planning for

war, not prace - I expect sorn hot a. Could not

F6in a entry to negotiations



blieve there is consensus on this daoing most parties. Note their alabars of the Government and the Opposition in the Dail have supported the head for assurances that any fresh ceasefire would be ood this tive face quotes in super).

ens text ve have given you's line i herierts this. It does not the fundamental test on which oth Covernments are agreed -2 . 15 124 gust be an unequivocal responsion of the ceauefirs. We stand

hit it makes clear that must be judged over a period of at least three months, and that we will look to ensure that actions are consistent with words.

mankly, without something like this, there is no way I could secure support for any sort of healtive response to Huma. Cannot just w a matter of what Sinn Fein Vill wear - we have to take the union ets with us.

