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From the Private Secretary

Dear Gen,

### HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

Tony Lake rang me this afternoon to give me the US reaction to the paragraph I had faxed to him last week. He started off by recording US admiration for the fact that we were prepared to go on working on this exercise despite Lisburn. As far as the text was concerned, he had two main comments:

- (i) the timeframe was obviously the biggest issue. In the US Government's view, a period of three months seemed reasonable enough. The US Government would be prepared to argue for it on that basis. However, as I had already warned him, the Irish wanted a shorter period. If the Irish wanted this because in their judgement only a shorter period could bring about the desired result, this would affect the US view. The important thing was the end result. One informal suggestion he had was that, if we wanted a longer time period without seeming to do so, one way would be to run a time period up against the likely recess in the talks over Christmas.

I explained the reasoning behind our proposal for three months. This seemed to us the minimum credible period, given what had happened. We were also concerned to keep Trimble on board. If the talks were to make progress, the terms of entry for Sinn Fein would have to be fed into the talks, and Trimble would have to be able to live with them. Lake saw the force of this. He was well aware that Trimble had asked for a six month period. But the priority had to be the ceasefire.

- (ii) Lake was also worried about the specific language we had put in about areas such as surveillance and targeting. He feared this would be hard for Sinn Fein to swallow, and they would be likely to see it as a new pre-condition. He knew why the language was

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there, and supported the thought behind it. But he feared it was not saleable. It would also be a potential hostage to the Unionists: they might always be able to point to some specific incident of paramilitary activity to argue that Sinn Fein should be disqualified on that account.

I said that the language had been carefully chosen to allow flexibility and room for manoeuvre. The judgement was up to us, and it did not say that every act of this kind had to stop, although we would obviously want this. Lake understood this but remained concerned.

Lake raised two further points. First, did we intend to publish the text anyway, even if it became clear that it would not do the trick? I said that this was our current intention. We would not negotiate secretly with Sinn Fein. The terms of the ceasefire would in any case have to surface in the talks context, as I had said.

Lake's second point was to wonder what we might be prepared to do vis a vis Sinn Fein during the three month (or whatever) period. Would British Ministers be ready to meet Sinn Fein, for example? This could be a useful sweetener to make the deal seem more attractive. A similar question arose in the US case. Although he talked to Adams, this was not overt and there had been no meetings. Again, an offer of a meeting might be an incentive. I said that I could not give him a specific answer, but it was perfectly possible that we would be prepared to meet Sinn Fein before the end of the three month period. There would be practical reasons for doing so, if we thought Sinn Fein were likely to enter the talks after the three months were up.

Comment

This was a predictable US reaction but is not without interest. We can play on the fact that the Americans regard three months as reasonable in itself. And there is food for thought in Lake's idea that a Ministerial meeting with Sinn Fein before they join the talks might be an incentive.

Perhaps I could add as a postscript that John Hume has continued to ring me during the week. I told him this afternoon that, although the Prime Minister could have met him on Thursday afternoon, this timing would probably not be good either for Hume (because of his European Parliament interest in Northern Ireland funding), or for us, since we were not quite ready. Hume accepted this readily enough, albeit with his usual concern that it might be overtaken by another IRA attack. I told him that we would look for a date early next week. I also said to Hume that, while a letter from him, as he had suggested, would not really take us much further forward in establishing Sinn Fein's credibility, it

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was possible that a letter from Adams might help. He latched onto this immediately and said he would pursue it.

Finally, I should record that I have heard nothing so far from the Taoiseach's office, and have not rung myself to avoid seeming over-eager. However I plan to speak to Teahon shortly, if he does not ring me himself.

*Yours ever*

*John*

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