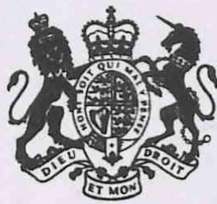


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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

18 July 1997

Dear John,

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Prime Minister initial views, following the meeting with Trimble, are as follows:

- We are in real danger of losing the Unionists altogether, and must make a further effort to keep them in, despite the difficulties;
- This should be put to the Irish today in the IGC (the problem after all arises largely because of their unwillingness to use words about Mitchell which we would regard as the natural interpretation of what Mitchell said). What ideas do they have to solve the problem we now have?
- The Irish should be disabused of any notion that we can move smoothly to a Plan B where Unionist concerns will not matter, or not so much. Without the support of the main political parties, no Plan B will get off the ground. And even if there is a ceasefire, we may not be able to get any meaningful talks process going.
- We should make a renewed effort to find a formula about actual decommissioning with which both we and the Irish can live, and which will reassure the Ulster Unionist Party. Might a statement deployed by both governments in the talks, without changing the documents, be just enough to keep the UUP in?
- We need to press the Irish further on having decommissioning scheme(s) in place by 15 September.
- Is there any mileage in getting Mitchell to clarify his meaning in the talks (I know we have looked at this before)?

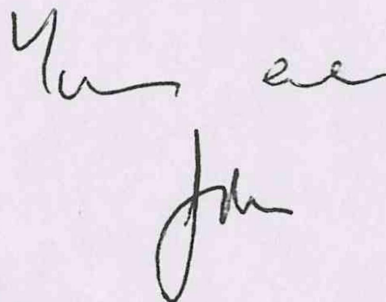
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Other ideas will of course be gratefully received. The Prime Minister will in any case need to speak to the Taoiseach after the weekend. He might perhaps send him a written message first, eg this evening in the light of the IGC. Can we be in touch this afternoon about this?

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

John McKervill Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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