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FAKED
Via Concer
Washington 17/11
Dublin

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

17 November 1997

Dear Gen,

NORTHERN IRELAND: IRISH VIEWS

Paddy Teahon spoke to me over the weekend in preparation for a short bilateral between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in the margins of the Luxembourg Jobs Summit. He said that the Taoiseach wanted to cover both the talks, including progress in the three strands and decommissioning, and the need for wider-confidence building. Teahon said that the Irish were getting more worried about what was going on inside the IRA and Sinn Fein, not least following recent meetings with Sinn Fein, including one between Ahern and Adams – the dissidents were playing it cleverly, including their use of the press. The Irish therefore thought there was a need for more movement on prisoners. Action on Bloody Sunday would also help. The Taoiseach was therefore likely to press on these lines.

I commented that we had not ourselves detected a further more worrying level of dissent in the republican movement, and we had as usual to be wary of claims that we had to do more to keep Sinn Fein on track. Teahon acknowledged this but said that Sinn Fein were looking for more action from the Irish Government, not just from us. It was not that the Sinn Fein leadership or the Irish expected an imminent breakdown of the ceasefire, rather that the dissidents were mounting a medium-term effort to take over the organisation, perhaps on a timescale of a few months. Adams did not seem unduly alarmed yet, but Ahern had thought he seemed worried when they had met.

Teahon also told me incidentally that Ahern and Trimble would now be meeting on Thursday in London not Brussels. It was supposed to be discreet, but Trimble seemed to have revealed it in an interview already (!).

CONFIDENTIAL

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- 2 -

Comment

I would be grateful for your views, by close of play on Wednesday, as part of briefing for the meeting with the Taoiseach, on how far these Irish concerns should be taken seriously, and how far they are an attempt by them (or Sinn Fein) to put pressure on us over prisoners and Bloody Sunday where previous efforts have so far proved fruitless. I would also be grateful for advice on what more if anything we might be able to do to help reassure nationalists. I have already asked for advice on reducing the visible security presence in Northern Ireland – presumably a meeting with Sinn Fein at Downing Street could be part of this agenda too (you will have seen the fresh round of media speculation about this over the weekend).

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Yours ever
John
JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

Paul
PAUL ALLEN
Private Secretary