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From: John Holmes
Date: 2 December 1997

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
Philip Barton

NORTHERN IRELAND

I attach two letters from Mo, one about heads of agreement, and the other about Sinn Fein. The sub-text of both is "get off my patch".

The first letter reports a long chat between Trimble and Murphy earlier today about the draft heads of agreement, and makes suggestions about how the text might be amended in the light of this. The implicit message is that we should leave negotiation with Trimble to them. The revised text is in fact not bad, although I am not sure how far Murphy will have got the right steer from Trimble. You may well have talked to him yourself at the Buckingham Palace do for the Brazilian.

In any case, we need to talk through the next steps in the morning. The NIO remain keen to avoid agreeing a detailed text with Trimble before we float anything with the Irish/SDLP. I think they are wrong. If we float something without having at least the broad consent of Trimble, we will simply get into serious difficulty. And I do not think they have the relationship with Trimble to achieve the right result.

The second letter rejects the suggestion I made, following our discussion at the end of last week, that we should seek further assurances from Adams (and/or Clinton and Ahern) about the ceasefire before going ahead with a meeting. Mo argues that this will not in practice get us anywhere and that cancelling the

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meeting would be disastrous. She has a point. But it does not seem to me impossible to say something to Adams ourselves about stories we have heard about a possible breakdown of the ceasefire; to make clear that were this to happen, the consequences would be very serious; and to add that we assume there is no reason why the plan to meet should not be maintained and would welcome confirmation of this.

It is true that this would not give us much defence if the ceasefire did break down quickly, but it would at least make it harder for Adams and reinforce our position with the Americans and the Irish. Again we might have a word about this in the morning.

**John Holmes****CONFIDENTIAL**