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Ref: BO.2439

MR HOLMES

cc Ms Polley

1345

L20 11/12.

SINN FEIN AND THE CEASEFIRE

You copied us your letter of 28 November to the NIO in which you asked for their comments on firing a shot across Sinn Fein bows prior to the Adams meeting next week; I understand the NIO are still reflecting. In the meantime we agree that this is worth doing. You and others have already mentioned to several people on various Irish sides the "rumours" we were getting of a possible breakdown in the ceasefire; the PM did this to Hume. I assume therefore Sinn Fein will be by now aware of these contacts. In that case it would be worth sending the same message to Adams himself, as well as Clinton and Ahern as you suggested.

2. However, the implication in your letter that we might be seeking a way out of the Adams meeting could be unhelpful. Sinn Fein always shy away from what they see as pre-conditions. And if they refused to give a cast-iron assurance before the meeting, for whatever reason, would we then be prepared to cancel it?

3. However we believe the same message could be put across in slightly different terms, with the intention of increasing the pressure on Adams and providing a defence against future criticism of the meeting:

- The PM is looking forward to his meeting with Adams/you, which has been widely recognised as an historic moment.

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- But there are uncomfortable rumours, whose reliability is hard to judge, that the IRA are planning to breach the ceasefire before much longer.
- Were this to happen it would destroy all that has been achieved in recent weeks. It would certainly nullify any value in next week's meeting.
- The PM is reflecting on the prospects for next week's meeting in that light. He assumes that there is no reason why he and Adams/you should not maintain their/your plan to meet, and would welcome confirmation of this.

M Pakenham

MICHAEL PAKENHAM

2 December 1997

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