

RESTRICTED - POLICY

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File

From: John Holmes
Date: 13 December 1997

PRIME MINISTER

BLOODY SUNDAY

she may be right. Is her statement an article or what. R- also with go v file on 29th Dec

As you know, Mo is increasingly agitated about this and desperate to say something soon. Her latest plan is to make the attached announcement on 29 December. She has talked of doing so in an interview. She could obviously not use these exact words in an interview. She could perhaps give an interview and release the text at the same time. In any case, she will do whatever you want by way of wrapping as long as she can say something along these lines.

The thinking behind making a statement before we know where we are [redacted] although we will never satisfy the Irish and the Republicans whatever we do, this both shows willing in terms of the apology, and shows that we do not rule out further action if the investigations under way make this desirable. It will go down better than an apology at the point where we have already decided that no further action can be taken.

You told the Irish yesterday that you were reluctant to make a move until there was some further progress to point to in the talks. There will clearly be nothing significant of this kind before 29 December. The NIO argument has always been that the Unionists themselves will not react too badly to an apology – what they dislike most is the idea of a new inquiry. There is something in this, but they will still complain. And there is also the question of MOD sensitivity.

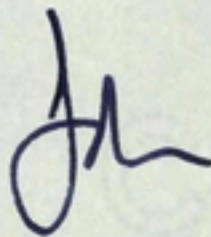
This is a fine balance. Jonathan is inclined to think that Mo's arguments have some merit. Alastair is worried about how such a statement will go down, although I think his worry applies whenever we do it.

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I have argued against doing anything on Bloody Sunday until we know exactly where we are. But the present draft is cleverly constructed and I am more convinced than I was about the possible benefits of doing something soon. There is in any case a risk of Mo doing something unilaterally in her New Year interviews if we are not careful.

Mo is on holiday for a few days, but will want to have an answer before Christmas. What is your current thinking about this? Happy to discuss.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'JH' or 'John Holmes', written in a cursive style.

JOHN HOLMES