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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

13 February 1998

See Another.

NORTHERN IRELAND

You will appreciate how important it is to maintain US support for our position over Sinn Fein, both within the Administration and on the Hill. I fear you will need to work hard both to convince them that we would not have reached our conclusions about IRA involvement lightly and without good evidence, and that we are not in some way treating Sinn Fein unreasonably. One of their fears will be that, on the assumption that there is a struggle in the republican movement between the hard liners and the "politicians", we are giving the former a weapon against the latter, and thereby making more likely a full-scale return to violence and an end to the evolution of the movement into a purely political force.

We need to turn this argument on its head. We need to make clear that if the three Governments and the Irish-American community do not make it absolutely clear that any continuing IRA violence is unacceptable, we will in fact be weakening the hand of Adams within the movement, since the advocates of violence and the twin track strategy will be able to argue that they can pursue such a strategy without losing support politically. In other words, we can turn the current situation into an opportunity to show the IRA once and for all that their violence has no supporters anywhere – but only if we are united in this message.

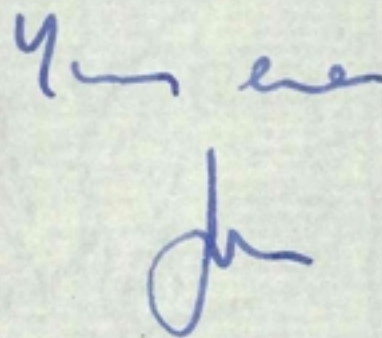
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The Prime Minister believes that it is essential that we ram home this argument with all our interlocutors, Irish and American. As so often in Northern Ireland, the battle is presentational as much as real.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Ken Lindsay (Northern Ireland Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).



JOHN HOLMES

Sir Christopher Meyer KCMG
Washington

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