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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

27 November 1996

From the Private Secretary

Dear Gen.

HUME/ADAMS

I spoke to Teahon twice during today. This was partly to establish when a telephone call between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach might be possible, and partly to prepare him for the likelihood of publication by us on 28 November.

A telephone call today was not possible because the Taoiseach was moving around so much. I pressed for an early morning call tomorrow, but Teahon said that this looked impossible. The Taoiseach would not be back in Dublin before midnight tonight, had then to get up early to vote in a referendum, and then had Cabinet business. He would not be free for a phonecall before about 1230. We left it at that. I may have to revert to Teahon in the morning.

On the substance, Teahon said that Irish officials would be meeting Sinn Fein again tomorrow evening. They were not optimistic, but did not rule out getting something better out of Sinn Fein. For the rest, the Irish now believed that the way forward was to use the lengthy Christmas break in the talks. The talks would have to be adjourned anyway, because they were going nowhere. The two governments should then agree that Sinn Fein would be allowed in on, say, 30 January, provided that the IRA declared an unequivocal ceasefire and Sinn Fein signed up to the Mitchell principles. This could be announced at the Summit on 9 December.

This would not be ideal from our point of view, but it was not what the Irish had wanted either. It effectively offered a two-month cooling off period. On this basis, the Irish would be willing to accept virtually all our existing text, except the reference to "if this process were successfully concluded" in the third tiret on page three. This appeared to give the Unionists a veto if bilateral

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CONFIDENTIAL

consultations with them were not successful. I explained that this was not at all the intention. The process referred to was the overall process of assessment of IRA/Sinn Fein words and actions. The decision would continue to lie with Sir Patrick Mayhew. Teahon said that he could accept this, but Sinn Fein, and indeed Irish officials, had lighted on this point as soon as they had read the text.

Teahon said that Sinn Fein might well not buy the process he had suggested. But if not, the Irish Government would be in a comfortable position side by side with us. If, on the other hand, we went ahead with publication, Hume would no doubt publish his version. Rows of all kinds would follow, and violence could well break out. He very much hoped we would not publish. I said that the pressures on us to spell out what our position was had become virtually irresistible, and I did not see how the Government would be able to stand out against them.

I also talked to Lake, having finally received the American "scenario". I said that we were grateful for this, and could see that there were helpful elements in it. I had only just seen it and could not comment in detail, but I had some initial concerns. I was extremely sceptical of the suggestion that an initiative of this kind would not leak, and that US fingerprints on it could be avoided. I wondered how Mitchell could call a lengthy break in the talks without his motives being too transparent. I also had difficulty in seeing how we would be prepared to say that, when plenary talks resumed in late January, Sinn Fein would be invited to attend, assuming that there was an immediate unequivocal ceasefire. How could we explain such a statement? Obviously it would be good if the Americans could extract some real commitments from Sinn Fein, the Irish having failed to do so. But I wondered whether a pre-digested, secret scenario of this kind could really run in Northern Ireland circumstances. I added that, in any case, we were under extreme pressure to spell out our own position, since everyone else had gone public on theirs. ✓✓

Lake said that the Americans had given a lot of thought to their proposals. They had the President's endorsement. He believed they were worth a try, and could well work. The Americans did not want to be obviously involved at all, and would keep their fingerprints well off it. If we agreed to the approach, they would pursue it principally through the Irish. Lake would simply weigh in behind, telling Adams bluntly that if the IRA and Sinn Fein did not accept the proposal they could forget their links with the US Administration.

Reacting to my comments, he said that he believed it was possible to avoid leaks, and a pre-digested scenario was the only way to avoid the chicken and egg difficulties we had found ourselves in previously. He did not see that Mitchell declaring a lengthy break would be difficult, since the talks were clearly going nowhere. He also did not see why we should not refer to a late January entry for Sinn Fein, since we would only be doing so on the

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

understanding that an unequivocal ceasefire would follow shortly afterwards. Lake pleaded with us not to publish our draft statement. He believed it would lead to the failure of the whole process, and perhaps a return to full-scale violence. If we did make our statement, he had to say that the US would have difficulty issuing their normal supportive statement. If we were going to publish, he hoped we would alert him so that he could warn the President, who might want to call the Prime Minister.

We went round this course several times. I emphasised that, if we went ahead with publication, I did not see that as incompatible with the approach Lake was suggesting. I did not see why our statement needed to lead to the end of any process. We could not move away from the kind of criteria for Sinn Fein's entry we had set out. Lake disagreed. Our statement would in his view lead to breakdown, and an approach based on criteria could not go anywhere. The Unionists would always argue that the criteria had not been met.

I concluded that we had heard his message and that I would stay in touch. But I repeated that pressures on us to spell out our views, in Parliament and the press, could not in my view be resisted further.

As you can see, I stopped short of telling either Teahon or Lake in absolutely explicit terms that we now intended to publish our statement, to preserve our freedom of manoeuvre. But I do not think either of them would have been in any doubt at the end of the conversations that this was the likely outcome.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and by fax to David Logan (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

Jan eve
John

JOHN HOLMES

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