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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

No. 2121 P. 2/7

cc: JH.



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
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John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street

27 November 1996

Dear John

HUME/ADAMS: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

The picture is changing fast, but these seem to be the key developments:

we are under increasing pressure to publish quickly and, short of dramatic developments, think it would be right to proceed to publication tomorrow afternoon;

in the meantime, at least on this side of the water, Adams has already rolled the pitch for his point of view: the story here is that the Government will reject an opportunity for peace, with Adams emphasising the lack of certainty over when Sinn Fein would enter negotiations after a ceasefire, claiming it could be as long as 18 months;

the Irish Government have prepared their position and will claim that we have ignored their advice both on what to say and when to say it;

we now have the US initiative, which we cannot afford to be seen to ignore. We should respond to President Clinton before publication.

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We have concluded that we should press on to publication tomorrow, but that we need to combat what is now the clear impression here that it is the British Government which has brought this initiative to an end, and on a basis which now looks unlikely to secure Irish or American support. If we can find a way of hitting the ball back to Sinn Fein so that it is they who are seen to bring the initiative to an end, and at the same time if we can co-opt the Irish and Americans, then we achieve our presentational objectives and may yet achieve a ceasefire which the last few days have suggested is a serious possibility.

We think the key problem, confirmed by Irish accounts of Sinn Fein's thinking, is uncertainty: even if the IRA and Sinn Fein do all that we ask, our text offers no certainty as to when Sinn Fein would enter negotiations. It is entirely open ended as to the time that might be required. From their point of view, for all Sinn Fein know, it might well be as much as 18 months.

We know the reasons for leaving it open ended, but in practice we have said to ourselves (including NI Committee) that we could envisage Sinn Fein joining negotiations when the talks resume in the New Year, possibly on the back of a long Christmas recess extending close to the end of January. This is the essence of the American proposal and, if they successfully co-opt the Irish Government and Sinn Fein to it, then it represents a very significant climbdown from their previous insistence on immediate entry and offers the possibility of a scenario which we could accept. If we can set out our stall in a way which demonstrates its consistency with Lake's scenario we may stand a very good chance of bringing the Americans and the Irish on to our side of the argument and leaving Sinn Fein exposed to pressure from all sides to go along with the arrangements we have in mind.

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With this in mind, we have re-drafted the short covering note to accompany the text which you helpfully sent us yesterday and added a few paragraphs which make clear that we can envisage Sinn Fein's entry into negotiations on the sort of timescale Lake is suggesting, depending upon what the IRA and Sinn Fein say and do. This achieves several purposes:

- it provides an effective counter to Sinn Fein's claim that they have no idea how long the delay period might be;
- it can be presented to the Irish and US Governments as reflecting their own ideas, while not adopting them in their entirety;
- it puts the ball back, in public, into Sinn Fein's court to come up with the terms of an IRA ceasefire which could allow for greater certainty;
- none of this involves any change to the substantive policy position set out in the text.

My Secretary of State recommends that the text with this covering note be issued tomorrow. The Prime Minister might draw attention to it in reply to a question from Andrew Hunter at Prime Minister's Question Time. Our offices are in touch about handling arrangements. Obviously we will need to brief the Irish and Lake before publication. We will let you have tomorrow a draft letter as speaking note to use with Lake but the essence of the message might be:

- the pressures to publish the text, giving Hume's hyping up of this initiative, are irresistible;

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- we note Adams' reservations concentrate on the lack of certainty and have moved to cover that angle;
- the resulting overall position is very close indeed to Lake's proposed scenario. (In particular we interpret the second tiret of Lake's paragraph 3 as implying that there does indeed need to be an absence of IRA targeting, weapons preparation and surveillance during any "cooling off" period if HMG is to proceed to issue the necessary invitation within the indicated timescale after an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire.)
- the publication of the text and our covering statement deliberately leave the door open for the Administration to pursue the remaining elements of the possible scenario, which we very much welcome. (Our only hesitation is over the involvement of Senator Mitchell in Sinn Fein's early affirmation of commitment to the Mitchell Principles: that could be seen as too close an association with the talks process.)

Copies go to Sir Robin Butler and Colin Budd.

Yours sincerely
David Kyle
Sir W K LINDSAY

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DRAFT STATEMENT**NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Government wishes to set out the facts about recent contacts with John Hume and explain its position on the possibility of a new IRA ceasefire. ✓

Mr Hume has suggested to the Prime Minister over the last few months that a new IRA ceasefire, which would this time be permanent, is available if the Government clarifies its position on various issues, including the nature of the Belfast talks, decommissioning and possible future confidence-building measures. ✓

The Prime Minister has consistently made clear the Government's position that we would welcome a new ceasefire but that we are sceptical about how credible it would be. The Prime Minister has also said from the start that there could be no question of changing our policy, or negotiating with Sinn Fein, to achieve a new ceasefire, which should be declared without further prevarication. However, he is prepared to re-state existing policy if that would help. ✓

The Prime Minister accordingly gave Mr Hume in July the terms of a possible re-statement. In September, Mr Hume suggested different words which did not, however, properly reflect the Government's position. The same month the Prime Minister set out again to Mr Hume a more detailed re-statement. On 10 October - three days after the IRA attacks on Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn - Mr Hume gave the Prime Minister a further text. This text again failed to reflect existing Government policy. The Prime Minister therefore sent him a further text on 23 November. This text included our views, in the light of IRA attacks, on the terms and process of entry to apply after a restored IRA ceasefire. ✓

This British Government text is attached. It describes a policy which we believe to be fair, balanced and reasonable. [It makes clear that, beyond the unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, the negotiations are without preconditions.]

It is open to the IRA to declare a restoration of the IRA ceasefire in the next few days in terms which are convincingly unequivocal and indicate the intention that this ceasefire should be lasting. If this was reflected thereafter in an absence on the ground of paramilitary activity, including targeting, surveillance and weapons preparation, then the Secretary of State would expect to invite Sinn Fein to participate in the negotiations on an equal basis with other parties when the talks resume in the New Year. (NO.)

Equally if, for example, the terms of any restoration of the ceasefire were equivocal or suggested a tactical ceasefire, or paramilitary activity continued, any invitation would have to be further postponed.

The statement attached neither rules out nor rules in Sinn Fein's early entry into negotiations. That is in the hands of the IRA and Sinn Fein. The Government has no desire to erect new hurdles: the requirements are set by the legislation passed in April and the Government can neither add to them nor take away from them.

There is a need for certainty and trust on both sides. We do not know in what terms any declaration of a ceasefire would be expressed. If we did, it would enable us to state more clearly when an invitation would be possible.

If the IRA and Sinn Fein are genuine about their desire for peace, there is absolutely nothing standing in the way of a new ceasefire. We call on them to declare one as soon as possible and to make clear that this time it will be for real and for good.