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From the Private Secretary

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See Ken.

NORTHERN IRELAND: CONVERSATION WITH CLINTON

1. The Prime Minister spoke to President Clinton this evening. The conversation was mainly about Zaire, but the Prime Minister took the opportunity to raise Northern Ireland as well. Clinton remarked that he had just been talking to George Mitchell, who thought there was a chance of a breakthrough in Northern Ireland, although he put it at only one in five.

2. The Prime Minister said that his assessment was about the same. There was a lot of talk about a new ceasefire,

In any case we could not pay any policy price to achieve a new ceasefire, beyond the kind of statement we had already offered. Sinn Fein wanted to leapfrog straight into the talks in the event of a new ceasefire. This could not be sold to Parliament or public in Britain after the bombs. In any case, there would be no one to talk to since the Unionists would certainly walk out. The Unionists argued, with justification, that the last ceasefire had been a fraud. The IRA and Sinn Fein would have to convince all concerned this time that it was not just another tactical ploy.

3. The Prime Minister continued that he had met John Hume several times, and knew that Hume had been talking to Adams. He had suggested to Hume some language which the IRA and Sinn Fein might use which would make it easier to convince us that a new ceasefire was for real and for good, and that the IRA and Sinn Fein were exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic methods. If they came up with the goods, then we might be in business. But there had been no response so far.

Clinton simply said "Good".

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I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and to Sir John Kerr in Washington (by fax).

Yours



JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office

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