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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

26 November 1996

Dear Sir,

HUME/ADAMS

It may be useful if I round up various conversations and developments during the day.

I have had several conversations with Paddy Teahon. The Taoiseach is on his travels around Europe at the moment, and I suspect this is making Teahon more tentative than he would be otherwise. But he has stressed that we should not move to publication of the text as long as there is a chance that Sinn Fein will come up with better language. Irish officials are due to meet Sinn Fein again at the weekend, and the Irish want us to hold off until after that. Teahon has also made clear that the Prime Minister and Taoiseach should speak to each other before any irrevocable steps are taken. The Taoiseach is in Denmark, Luxembourg and Rome tomorrow, which is likely to make a call difficult, to say the least. Thursday morning may therefore be more likely.

I have repeated to Teahon several times the difficulty of holding off publication beyond the end of this week. I also made the point, after Adams' press conference, that this did not suggest Sinn Fein would come back with anything positive from their end. It also further increased the pressure on us to make clear what our position was.

John Hume rang me this afternoon to warn me in advance that Adams was going to give his press conference. Adams said this was because of the media pressure on him, particularly following Frank Millar's story in today's *Irish Times*. Adams had stressed to him that what he was going to say would not be his definitive response to our statement. Hume was nevertheless gloomy about Adams' plans.

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Hume also said that he was going to recommend language along the following lines to Adams:

"Our firm intention is to do everything in our power to take the gun out of politics. Our resolution to bring about a negotiated settlement has been persistent and our determination to do so is enduring. Our commitment to a lasting peace is abiding."

He asked me whether I thought language along these lines would help. I said that it might be helpful in terms of mood music, but was not specific enough to be much good.

Finally, the Americans came back into the picture. I attach the text of a message from President Clinton to the Prime Minister received this afternoon. Lake duly called me this evening. He said that the Americans were concerned that the detailed texts we had been looking at were making life harder rather than easier. The Americans therefore thought it would be better to get back to simpler formulae, and to find a way for each side to know the other's minimum requirements. For example, we needed a period of time to judge a new ceasefire. Sinn Fein needed to have their "parity of esteem".

The Americans had therefore tried to work up a scenario which could help. They had discussed it with Mitchell, who (although he had not been centrally involved in any of this) thought it made sense. The Irish were also keen to see a way through. If we could agree to what the Americans proposed, the Americans would take the scenario to Sinn Fein. They would tell Sinn Fein that if they agreed, progress could be made. If they did not, they could forget their relationship with the US Administration for the foreseeable future.

Lake said that the main idea was for Mitchell to suspend the talks until the end of January. This would not be explicitly described as a cooling off period for Sinn Fein but that is what it could be in practice. This might allow all sides a way forward.

Lake concluded that the US initiative was a break with precedent, and they were only advancing it because they feared that the present situation was not going to lead to progress. The idea would be to keep American fingers firmly off what was proposed, as far as the public was concerned. They were not grandstanding, and not mediating. They were simply trying to be helpful. He would send me the proposed scenario overnight.

I made clear that I was doubtful whether American involvement could or would be kept secret; that the implication that the Americans were intervening to bring together two equally unreasonable positions would not go down well here; that we could not hold off publication of our draft statement much longer,

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given the pressures, the speculation and Adams' latest statement; that I was therefore doubtful whether a US initiative at this stage could help; but that nevertheless we would of course look carefully at what Lake sent us.

Nothing has so far (2300) arrived in writing from the Americans, but I will let you have it first thing in the morning. The Prime Minister's initial reaction to news of a US initiative was that it was not acceptable and too late anyway. But clearly we will have to look at what the Americans say and respond to Clinton's message before we go public.

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

Yours ever



JOHN HOLMES

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