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26 November 1996

From the Private Secretary

Dec Adm A.

HUME/ADAMS

I spoke to Paddy Teahon this morning to get a read-out of the meeting Irish officials had had with Sinn Fein the night before. Teahon said that it had not been a very clear meeting. Sinn Fein had been "around the place". They had originally been coming to talk about the Irish version of our statement, and the Irish believed that they had been preparing to say something about the kind of strong language they could use in declaring a ceasefire. However, Sinn Fein had since seen our text and were clear that it would not work. They needed certainty about when they would get into the talks.

Teahon said that the Irish side had continued to urge on them the need for a strong IRA statement about a ceasefire, and the British requirement for this kind of comfort. Sinn Fein had asked in response whether, if they spelled out the kind of language they would use, we would be prepared to change our statement. The Irish had said that they could not answer that question. The discussion had gone around in this kind of circle without reaching clear conclusions.

Teahon concluded that it was nevertheless clear that what we were proposing would not work unless there was some certainty about when Sinn Fein would get into the talks. That did not have to be on day one, following a ceasefire, as long as there was a definite timescale and talks were not going on in the meantime. I said that we had, on very strong advice from the Irish, moved away from the idea of a timescale. We had instead set out a process, the period of which was in the hands of the IRA and Sinn Fein. This was the best we could offer.

I repeated to Teahon again that the pressures on us to put all this in the public domain were becoming irresistible. Teahon said that they hoped to meet Sinn Fein again later in the week to get a more definitive view. Meanwhile, he

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drew my attention to the front page of today's *Irish Times*. He also implied that the Irish felt we should have consulted them before issuing our latest version of the statement - they had not expected this. I said that we had signalled clearly that we were looking again at the text of our statement, to take account of Irish concerns. We had been told clearly by the Irish side that Sinn Fein would not come up with language until they knew definitely what we were going to say. We had responded to that in the most constructive way we could.

Teahon and I left it at that. He was not in his office at the time, and we agreed to speak again later.

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



JOHN HOLMES

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