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From: John Holmes

Date: 18 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Oakden o/r

Mr. Haslam

HUME/ADAMS

- ... As predicted, the NIO recommendation (attached) is that we should go back to the Irish with a revised text of our statement. They believe that it does not go beyond the line agreed in NI but at least shows willing to the Irish and would therefore help to preserve our public position. You were not attracted to this over the weekend, following the failure of the Irish to secure any new language from Sinn Fein. (Weekend bundle attached.)
2. Other developments over the weekend do not make it more attractive. As you know, Trimble reacted badly to Paddy Mayhew's speech on Friday. I attach the text, and a Trimble interview illustrating his frame of mind. The speech is in fact reasonably balanced in detail but the "body language" towards McGuinness is not what we would have wanted.
3. Trimble rang me this morning to say that he was now profoundly concerned. It was not just Paddy's speech, but Paddy's whole demeanour, e.g. in a bilateral last Thursday. He believed Paddy was trying to make a deal with PIRA/Sinn Fein which ran contrary to what he had been led to understand was the Government's position. I explained (again) where we stood: no deals were being done; the reason we had not gone public on our view of the entry conditions for Sinn Fein in the event of a new ceasefire was to ensure we stayed on the right side in the PR battle etc. Trimble remained suspicious.

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4. I mentioned this to you. You are now seeing Trimble after PMQs in the House. I have not yet told the NIO about the meeting but must do so tomorrow morning. I fear you had better do it without Paddy there.

5. To be fair to the NIO, their recommended approach is ingenious and can be seen as compatible with NI's conclusions. And none of the alternatives to the NIO recommended approach is ideal either:

- do nothing;
- tell the Irish to try harder (e.g. in a message to Bruton);
- publish our previous text;
- spell out in the talks our conditions for Sinn Fein's entry but without publishing our text;

6. There is therefore a case for revising our text one last time (perhaps not as far as NIO suggest) and giving it to the Irish as positively our last offer. But the tactics of this remain unappealing, and we will still get into an argument with the Irish about the text. The NIO objective of bringing the Hume/Adams initiative to a conclusion in a situation where the Irish and the SDLP support^{us} is in my view unattainable.

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I think the way forward is for you to see Trimble (without NIO Ministers there) tomorrow afternoon, and then to have a discussion with NIO Ministers, ideally tomorrow evening (there seems to be a possible slot around 1830?). You have not discussed the position with them for some time and I think it does need talking through. They are very keen to have a position before they meet the Irish on Wednesday. But this may not work anyway given the possible need to consult NI again (although you have discretion from NI, as long as you are operating within the agreed policy).

Content to see Trimble and then discuss with NIO Ministers?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John'.

John Holmes

fhumeadam.as

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15. Nov. 1996 10:06

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722
From: The Private Secretary

No. 1783 P. 2/4



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

15 November 1996.

John Holmes Esq
PS/Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

File
JH
21/11

Dear John,

HUME/ADAMS INITIATIVE

It may be helpful to bring members of NI Committee up to date with developments since the meeting on 31 October.

NI Committee agreed then that we should continue to pursue the initiative to an early conclusion, with a view to securing the support of the Irish and US Governments for our position without alienating Unionists. With this in mind, the Committee agreed a revised text saying that sufficient time would need to be taken between a ceasefire and Sinn Fein's entry to negotiations to form a well founded judgement on the nature of the ceasefire, but without specifying the length of such a time period.

The Prime Minister discussed this approach in some detail with Mr Trimble (but without showing him the specific text) and my Secretary of State has subsequently kept Mr Trimble informed. He did not dissent from the approach, while continuing to press for rapid progress in the talks without Sinn Fein. This depends most of all on agreement between the UUP and the SDLP, which is not ours to deliver and seems rather uncertain.

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The revised text was put to the Irish and US Governments (but not Hume at this stage) on 5 November in an effort to secure their support for our position.

The Irish Government responded quickly. On the basis of contacts between their officials and both Adams and McGuinness, they were convinced that a ceasefire was genuinely available; that the intention was to make it permanent (although it would be very difficult for the leadership to say so); but that any delay period in Sinn Fein's formal admittance to negotiations would make it impossible for Adams to deliver a ceasefire. They therefore proposed that Sinn Fein should get immediate access to the negotiations but only for the purpose of making their declaration of commitment to the Mitchell principles. The negotiations would then move into bilateral consultations for some weeks, so delaying the point at which Sinn Fein and the other parties would actually sit down for real negotiations.

The Secretary of State rejected this proposal. The Prime Minister subsequently discussed it with the Taoiseach last Thursday. The Prime Minister made clear the political reality that Sinn Fein's immediate entry into the talks was not credible and would not run. However, he also suggested that if there was real evidence that the IRA and Sinn Fein were ready to use very dramatic and clear cut language about the permanence of any ceasefire, and about the other key issues of the principle of consent, and parallel decommissioning, this could help to persuade us that any ceasefire was credible. The Taoiseach undertook to see if such language could be secured. He has yet to respond.

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We know that Irish officials have pressed Adams and McGuinness hard on this, but that, while the latter are apparently considering the wording of an IRA ceasefire statement, they cannot accept the kind of language we would want, and are in any case unlikely to regard our proposed statement as good enough to justify a ceasefire. Their real intentions remain unclear. The meeting of the PIRA General Army Convention on 1/2 November seems to have resulted in a strengthening of the more military-inclined wing of the leadership without unseating Adams and McGuinness. It does not seem to have considered a new ceasefire as such but reaffirmed the twin political/military strategy. But the runes remain hard to read.

There is in any case every sign that the IRA continues to prepare and plan further attacks, some of which may well be imminent. The hardline element which would like to see a resumption of the full military campaign do not appear to have got their way at the GAC. But significant and rapid developments in either direction are possible. For the moment, the ball remains firmly in the Irish court.

A copy of this letter goes to the Private Secretaries of all NI members and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours ever,

Ken

W K LINDSAY

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