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From: John Holmes
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PRIME MINISTER

file
John 22/11

MEETING WITH THE LOYALISTS, 1445

You are meeting three of the four you met last time, with "Plum" Smith instead of Hugh Smyth from the PUP (he is in the US). The meeting is at their pressing request. Double murderer John White is coming again, but the sensation about this should be less. No photocall. Paddy Mayhew, John Wheeler and John Chilcot will be there on our side. You have an hour.

The underlying aim of the meeting is to bolster the Loyalist ceasefire. The Loyalists remain relatively constructive in the talks and continue to talk sense in general. The fact of the meeting is as important as the content, to show they gain benefits from the ceasefire and are taken seriously.

... NIO briefing is good, but voluminous - I attach a checklist. The main point is prisoners, where you can give them a few minor lollipops (which they will be expecting). The background is in the points to make! The relaxations will of course apply to all prisoners, whether they are Loyalists, republicans or ordinary criminals. We cannot discriminate. But you can present the changes as being a particular response to Loyalist requests. Their own wish list was much longer - again details in the points to make. You should look through carefully - but complex questions should be referred smartly to Wheeler or Chilcot (who chairs the Life Sentence Review Board).

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

Otherwise the main issues are decommissioning (they want to avoid any suggestion of unilateral decommissioning), the consent principle (they want reassurance - which is easy), policy towards the IRA/Sinn Fein (they want a tough security policy and tough terms of entry), and Irish Republic Articles 2 and 3 (why can't they be changed now?). Personal protection may also be raised. These are all relatively straightforward and covered in the briefing. As usual, it will be important to check the press line before the end of the meeting - an NIO draft is in the briefing below. The NIO will put out a separate press release on prisoners after the meeting.



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LOYALISTS: CHECKLIST

General

- Grateful for continuing constructive position, and efforts to maintain ceasefire.
- Loyalist ceasefire vital sign of hope. All credit to Loyalists, as have said publicly.
- Interested in your perception of talks and republican attitudes (special insight).

Prisoners

- Conscious of importance for you.
- Very difficult to move (Loyalist prisoner indiscipline, abuse of schemes, Billy Wright).
- But following changes can be made:
 - Pre-release leave: equal for male/female plus increase for both.
 - Lifers recommended for release: fortnightly home leave instead of visits.
 - Christmas home leave: up to 10 days for prisoners who have served over 11 years.
 - Medical leave: remove anomalies about unescorted leave.
 - Realise far from all you want but have made a real effort.
 - Will announce after meeting.

Consent

- Delighted to reaffirm triple lock.
- Do not believe NI will leave UK and don't want it to.

Articles 2 and 3

- Irish recognise need for change.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

- Privately they accept a united Ireland not on for foreseeable future and many don't want it.
- They are cautious but ready to move quickly in right circumstances.

Talks

- Want early progress. Not just waiting for Sinn Fein.

Decommissioning

- Our position Mitchell and nothing but Mitchell.
- Realise unilateral decommissioning unrealistic.

IRA/Sinn Fein

- Sceptical about new ceasefire.
- Not ready to pay any policy or other price for it.
- If there is a new ceasefire, no immediate entry - would look at words and deeds very carefully.
- Must be sure it is not tactical - want words about permanence even if actual word not used.

Security

- Security effort huge. Notable prevention successes.
- Real pressure on IRA as a result.
- [If raised] "Directing terrorism" particularly hard to prove.

Personal protection

- Hope decision to offer help for some individuals and HQs welcome.
- Liaise with RUC on details.
- But cannot protect everyone.

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