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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
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John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
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21 November 1996

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Dear John

HUME/ADAMS: NEXT STEPS

Action Plan

The action plan outlined by Michael Ancram when he spoke to you this afternoon was:

- take Mr Trimble through the key elements of the conditions of entry at today's meeting;
- check that NI colleagues are content with the revised text overnight;
- send this text to the Irish and US Governments tomorrow making it clear that, in the light of Sinn Fein's refusal to come forward with terms of the ceasefire declaration, this text has to represent our final position;
- give it to John Hume as well on the same basis on Saturday;
- we also retain the option of considering next week a possible meeting between Sinn Fein and officials, if Sinn Fein still want one after they have seen the text;
- we show Trimble the final text early next week using it to secure support for our decommissioning approach;

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- publication would then follow at the end of next week (or, if we wanted to publish it in a talks context, possibly at the beginning of the following week).

A couple of points on this action plan:

- we must allow a serious interval of some days between giving the text to the Irish Government and to Hume, and publishing it. The shorter the interval, the more open we are to the criticism that we failed to respond to Sinn Fein's text for six weeks and then peremptorily demanded a response to our own within a matter of hours. Unless we allow enough time for the IRA plausibly to have considered it and reached a decision, others will conclude our only purpose was to wrong-foot them;

- as you pointed out, we need to be clear as to whether there are any circumstances in which we would be prepared to reconsider the text. If the Irish Government or Sinn Fein said, having seen the text, that they could now obtain the terms of a ceasefire declaration then we think we could not refuse to consider this given that this is the position we have already taken with the Taoiseach. It would be wise therefore not to show the text to Trimble until late Monday at the earliest. But, short of that, we cannot think of other circumstances in which we would reconsider the text.

Letter to the Taoiseach

Assuming NI members are content, the plan is for the Prime Minister to write to the Taoiseach tomorrow.

We suggest this channel because we want to convey the clear political message that this is our firm position, and because we want to take maximum advantage of the Taoiseach having failed to deliver any language from Sinn Fein.

I attach a draft letter (slightly amended from versions you saw earlier this week). This letter has to achieve several purposes:

- set out, against the possibility that we might have to publish the full exchanges at some point, a strong defensible account of how we have handled the initiative and reached the current position;

- in particular, we should set out - again, with an eye to the public record - that the Taoiseach volunteered to obtain language of an IRA ceasefire declaration and that Sinn Fein has failed to come forward with any. This also sets us in a strong position for explaining why we must now come forward with this firm text;

- we also want to show the Irish Government that we have made some attempt to take serious account of their own ideas, while making it clear that Sinn Fein's immediate entry is simply not politically credible;

- we must also set out the planned timing for publication;

- and, finally, there is the request, conveyed through the Irish Government, for a meeting between Sinn Fein and British Government officials to which we owe the Irish Government some response.

The attached draft attempts to do all these things. On the subject of a meeting with Sinn Fein, there are two points to bear in mind:

- at yesterday's IGC, the Irish side thought the fact of a meeting would be taken by Sinn Fein as a sign of seriousness and good faith. They could not promise other significant

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benefits to a meeting. But they did warn of a significant downside if the request was refused. They consider that, having sounded out the Secretary of State in advance and been given some encouragement (but no commitment), Sinn Fein would view the rejection of their request as a deliberate humiliation and sign of bad faith;

- there is a widespread assumption in Northern Ireland that contacts of some description are in any case going on. The direct contacts which the Irish Government and John Hume have acknowledged have not caused any other party to refuse to have dealings with them.

The Irish Government advised that some response should be given to Sinn Fein's request before the weekend when they think an important Sinn Fein meeting will be taking place. (We know of such a meeting, but its purpose is unclear.) The suggested response says that we are giving the request serious consideration; sets out the terms upon which any meeting would have to be based; and says that a firm decision will be reached next week. So any meeting would take place after Sinn Fein had the fresh text - which may, of course, cause them to give up on the whole initiative.

Letter to Hume

We also need to write to John Hume in similar terms to the Taoiseach, if only to show that we have kept him informed and want to secure his support. A similar draft, with a few adaptations, is also attached.

Tas
Jared Kyle
W K LINDSAY

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DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

John Bruton TD

November 1996

I have been reflecting ~~carefully~~ on the position we have reached following our phone conversation on 6 November.

Since the summer when I first discussed this matter with John Hume and in my recent discussions with you, I have had two concerns. First, the IRA's murderous actions on the ground, and what we know of their future plans, are wholly incompatible with what we have been told is Mr Adams' readiness to guarantee a permanent ceasefire immediately following a Government statement which, as I have said throughout, can only repeat existing policy positions. But, secondly, I am determined that the peace process should continue because that is what the people of Northern Ireland want and deserve. ^{We have therefore kept the door open for} ~~the~~ Sinn Fein ^{to} ~~can still~~ join the negotiations if there is a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. ^{But each} ~~atrocities~~ the IRA ^{has} ~~committed~~ ^{has widened} the credibility gap to be bridged ^{the} ~~that much wider.~~ ^{the event of a new ceasefire.}

As I have repeatedly made clear, I cannot - and will not - negotiate Government policy in exchange for a ceasefire. All along, I have said I will stick strictly to what is existing Government policy as set out on the public record. The text I was given by John Hume on 10 October departs from existing Government policy in places, ~~the~~ I cannot accept it as it stands.

When we spoke following the text we showed you on 5 November, we agreed that any ceasefire declaration needed to offer more credible guarantees than the last one. ^{therefore} You ^{agreed} to ask Sinn Fein for the terms of an IRA ceasefire declaration. I said that if these were sufficiently clear and dependable, ^{we might} ~~we would~~ be prepared to re-consider the language used in our text of 5 November about ^{the terms of entry for Sinn Fein following a ceasefire.} ^{that would create a new situation.}

I made clear we would need to be

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convinced that a new ceasefire would be intended to last, and that we also wished for more commitment to the consent principle and parallel dearmament.

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I am very grateful for your determined efforts but, as I understand it, Sinn Fein ^{have} failed to respond ^{in any language.} ~~at their meeting with your officials.~~
~~last Friday.~~ I am told Sinn Fein said they were not prepared to spell out the bottom line of their language until they were sure what we would say in our statement.

Let there be no doubt I want progress and not stalemate, if that is achievable. ~~So~~ Since Sinn Fein failed to respond to your efforts, we have now reached the point where it is right for me to set out our firm position so that Sinn Fein are in no doubt of it and can respond accordingly. The attached text does this.

I believe it is a reasonable and fair position, consistent with our existing policy and with our obligations under the law. It does what John Hume originally told us would deliver an IRA ceasefire - a ceasefire which would be for good this time. It sets out key reassurances on the basis of our existing policy, ~~which is a matter of public record.~~ It takes ~~account~~ account of the suggested approach you put to us on 5 November and sets out a process of entry to the negotiations which seeks to take account of the political realities on all sides. I know you understand the political realities - created by the IRA's own actions. It is neither credible nor deliverable to ignore them.

What this text cannot, of course, do - ^{not least} because Sinn Fein have refused to tell you - is take account of what the IRA will say if they declare a ceasefire and how that will be reflected on the ground. ~~Only when we know that, can we take a final view on the credibility of any ceasefire.~~

~~on reaction to it~~ ^{If there is a new ceasefire, its reaction to it will depend mainly on both of these things.}
We need urgently now to establish, clearly and honestly, whether a genuine and dependable ceasefire will be delivered if the British Government sets out its existing policy position on the negotiations and how Sinn Fein may join them in the terms attached. It should lead straightaway to an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, which should never have been abandoned. That would greatly enhance the prospects for lasting peace and an overall political settlement.

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But if the IRA chooses deliberately to spurn the route to inclusive negotiations, it should be under no illusions ^{about} of the consequences. The IRA will not bomb Sinn Fein to the negotiating table, now or in the future - further violence will simply expose Sinn Fein's words about peace as a meaningless and cynical ^{made clear} ploy which commands no credibility. As you and I have both ~~stated~~ the talks will go forward without Sinn Fein.

[As you know, we have received an indication through the Irish Government that Sinn Fein would welcome a meeting with British Government officials to consider further the basis of an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Whether the Secretary of State could accede to this request would depend on Sinn Fein's initial response to our text.

[It is important that the terms of any such meeting should be clearly understood. It would be subject, crucially, to events on the ground. It would have to be acknowledged in public, and that it was at Sinn Fein's request.] It would need to be understood as exploratory and explanatory in nature and could not involve negotiation. There could in any event be no question of changing Government policy in exchange for a ceasefire. We assume that these terms would be the agreed basis for any such meeting if one were to happen. Officials will contact Sinn Fein next week with the Secretary of State's response to the request.]

If Mr Adams is serious, ~~then~~ the clear ~~and firm~~ position set out in the attached text offers the basis on which Sinn Fein can set out the terms of an IRA ceasefire, in which case I hope we can quickly bring this to the conclusion which we all desire. Christmas then offers a natural break over which all can reflect on the new ^{and speculation} situation. But if not, then to end the current uncertainty I believe I must set out our position in public ^{before} the end of this month.

I shall be writing shortly in similar terms to John Hume.

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