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BRITISH EMBASSY
DUBLIN

1 November 1996

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JH

John Holmes Esq
No 10 Downing Street

Dear John,

CONVERSATION WITH PADDY TEAHON, 1 NOVEMBER

1. I called on Paddy Teahon early this morning.
2. Paddy started by emphasising the importance of the British and Irish Governments adopting a common position on how to respond to an announcement of an IRA ceasefire. Clearly there were at present differences between, not least whether to impose a time delay on Sinn Fein's entry to talks. The Taoiseach wanted this to be settled without publicity and had been angered by the Tanaiste's public suggestion of differing opinions earlier this week. Since then the Tanaiste had moderated his public statements.

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5. Paddy then talked about the Prime Ministerial paper which he has been discussing with you. He said the Irish Government belief was that once this had been agreed, then the way would indeed be open to a ceasefire. Indeed the Irish side (by which I think he meant O'hUiginn) had already discussed with Adams the content of the statement Adams would make in the event of a ceasefire. (Incidentally Paddy told me that Adams had been incensed by John Hume's recent behaviour. Apparently John Hume had been so excited by the complimentary manner in which the Prime Minister greeted him on Tuesday that he had failed to clarify certain points on which Adams wanted answers. Adams had therefore had urgent consultations with O'hUiginn).

6. We then turned to the specific issue of the current differences in emphasis between the two Governments. Paddy said it would be a serious mistake to insist on a three-month delay before bringing Sinn Fein into talks. The Irish view was that it would be wrong to be too precise, both about the exact length of any delay and about whether Sinn Fein were really in or out of the talks. I said that it was not quite as simple as that. The Secretary of State was constrained by legislation on entry into talks and there was very strong feeling in Britain against taking Sinn Fein statements at face value.

7. Paddy said he accepted that but even so a three-month delay would prove nothing. All it would prove is that the ceasefire had held for three-months. It could not possibly provide firm evidence that the IRA would never revert to violence. Indeed a far more powerful test for Sinn Fein would be to bring them into the talks, preferably immediately, but if not, as early as possible, and face them with the reality of accepting and implementing the Mitchell Principles. In principle, the choice was between a continuation of violence and a ceasefire which might prove to be long term. Surely the time had come to call Adams' bluff on this issue.

Comment

8. I made clear British sensitivities in dealing with a group of people who had recently perpetrated horrendous acts in Britain and Northern Ireland. Equally I came away with the strong impression that the Irish Government believes that we are at a critical point and if we miss this opportunity to secure a ceasefire and tie Sinn Fein into the political process, there will not be another chance for many years.

9. The Irish Government will come under increasing domestic pressure to define its precise position in respect of Sinn Fein's entry to talks. Given that the Tanaiste has clearly indicated

FROM: JOHN B. ...
DATE: 1 November

that there should be no new pre-conditions, and with the Taoiseach susceptible to Fianna Fail charges that he was responsible for 'losing' the first ceasefire, there is a real risk that the Irish Government will prize coalition unity (on the basis of the Tanaiste's approach) above a common front with the UK unless we show ourselves willing to find a common formula. In the event of an Irish/British split on this (and a split where the Americans are likely to side with the Irish), we would then take the blame both here and internationally for the missed opportunity.

Yours ever,

Veronica.

Veronica Sutherland
AMBASSADOR

cc: PS/SofS (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
Mr Thomas
Mr Stephens
Mr Ehrman
Ms Polley, Cabinet Office

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