

From: John Holmes
Date: 13 November 1996

PRIME MINISTER

HUME/ADAMS

The Northern Ireland Office are getting nervous about the lack of response from the Irish and beginning to think we should make a move in their direction first if we do not hear any more. With apologies for the amount of paper, I attach:

- A letter from the NIO today, setting out their view of the current state of play and recommending we float alternative statement language (see below) if we hear nothing from the Irish by the end of this week.
- A draft letter to NI, bringing them up to speed. I have suggested several changes to free it of NIO presentational traps.
- A previous letter from the NIO (which I did not show you) setting out their detailed thinking on alternative statement language.

So do I think the NIO are guilty of too much wishful thinking about the likelihood of a new ceasefire.

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In any case, the argument for us making a move in the absence of good language from Sinn Fein seems to be unconvincing, and tactically wrong (anything we offer will be pocketed by the Irish/Sinn Fein and they will return to the charge). The new NIO language is clever and may be useful at the right moment, but that moment is not yet. I have suggested in manuscript a few possible changes.

Meanwhile Trimble is restive. Paddy Mayhew's view that his briefing of Trimble last week went well is not shared by Trimble. He told Cranborne yesterday that he did not believe what Paddy told him (on any subject) and was suspicious over Hume/Adams and decommissioning. I have spoken to him today at some length to reassure him about both.

Trimble's accounts of his meetings are always highly partial and the idea of Paddy telling him lies is ridiculous. But Paddy's presentation always seems to arouse suspicions of plots with the Irish and reflects the NIO view of life rather more than mine does! Whatever the truth/justice of the situation, Trimble needs lots of TLC. Paddy is seeing him again tomorrow - I hope this will help but I am not sure.

We will need to make up our mind on our next move soon, but the time is not ripe. The NIO incidentally think the prospects for movement on decommissioning in the talks are also good, but again I suspect wishful thinking.

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updating on present situation

- Content**
- for the note to NI to go round, as amended? ✓
 - for me to tell the NIO that you are not prepared to make the first move towards the Irish, but suggest changes to the draft new text meanwhile? ✓
 - yes* - for me to continue to keep Trimble closely informed? ✓

John

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