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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

cc: Eo



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
STORMONT CASTLE
BELFAST BT4 3ST

Tel. Belfast (0232) 520700

1274

John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

13 November 1996

Dear John,

HUME/ADAMS: WHAT NEXT?

You asked for a note reviewing what we should do next to bring this initiative to a conclusion.

The Prime Minister's conversation with the Taoiseach last week left the ball firmly in the Irish court. The Prime Minister undertook to consider any language the Irish side were able to obtain in terms of a ceasefire statement and held out the prospect that, if it were sufficiently good, we might be prepared not to go up front with our position.

Irish views: latest developments

We know Irish officials have had at least one meeting with Sinn Fein since then. We know also that they have genuinely been pressing on Adams the need for the British Government to have some "words of comfort" in any ceasefire statement which go significantly beyond what was said last time. But Irish officials have yet to come back with any specific text and, indeed, report that Sinn Fein is more inclined to criticise our own text of 5 November (which, although we have not formally sent it to Hume, both Hume and Sinn Fein have now seen through the Irish Government). Irish officials say they have deliberately not passed on Sinn

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Fein's comments on our text because they know these would be useless without the text of any ceasefire statement.

At a lunch with Irish Ministers and officials today, the Irish side continued to insist that any delay period would make a ceasefire impossible. However, they made two interesting points:

- first, they suggested that the real issue for Sinn Fein was not so much instant access to actual negotiations but equality of treatment. The Irish side noted that, if the negotiations were adjourned anyway (for example, for a long Christmas break) then a delay period might acceptably be accommodated. Sinn Fein would not get to sit down at negotiations for some weeks. But nor would we have to tell them that they were uniquely excluded from the process even though a ceasefire had been declared and put in place;
- second, the Irish side enquired about our policy towards a meeting between Sinn Fein and Government officials. Ministers reminded the Irish side that we had not ruled out the possibility of such a meeting - indeed one had been held since Canary Wharf - but that we had said we would consider any request for one in the light of all the circumstances including, crucially, events on the ground. We had not, however, received any formal request. The Irish side noted that their meetings at official level with Sinn Fein took place under the rubric that they were "to hear proposals for the restoration of the ceasefire". They wondered



how we would respond if the Irish Government were to request that we considered a meeting at official level with Sinn Fein for such a purpose. The Secretary of State said that he would want to consider such a request very carefully in line with the public position we had set out.

The first of these points shows some movement in the Irish Government's position: although they do not know how Sinn Fein would react, they would be prepared to support a delay period providing it affected the participants in the talks equally and it was not presented simply as a "testing" period (although in fact it would be this).

Where next?

As to where we go next, my letter of 8 November suggested what our next move should be - ie to play in a text which offers a process of entry to negotiations on which Sinn Fein can start straightaway but which only concludes after some period of time has elapsed and subject to no incompatible developments along the way.

attached separately.

That approach remains valid. It seems to be close to ideas which, apparently independently, Tony Lake has been floating. We expect that the Irish side will think it does not meet Sinn Fein's "equality of treatment" concern, although it may not come that far short if, in the wake of a ceasefire, the talks were adjourned for bilateral consultations (we expect, in that scenario, that the participants will in any case be so mesmerised by a ceasefire that no real business could be done before Sinn Fein's entry). Nevertheless, particularly if Sinn Fein fail

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to come up with very much, putting this proposal forward continues to put us in a good light with both the Irish and the Americans. The tactical choice is whether to wait until Teahon returns with a response, or to float it to the Irish and Americans regardless.

There are arguments on both sides. But, bearing in mind that we want to press the initiative to a conclusion and, at the same time, want to demonstrate our good faith to the Irish and US Governments, we think we should float the scheme set out in my note of 8 November to the Irish side before the end of this week, whether or not Teahon comes back with a formal response. It does not, as my letter of 8 November explained, go beyond the policy position agreed by NI Committee.

We do always retain the option of publishing our statement unilaterally. That may yet be necessary but to do it when we know the Irish Government will not support it, risks the worst of both worlds: no ceasefire and no Irish or SDLP support for moving the talks forward without Sinn Fein.

Report to NI Committee

I attach a draft of what we might send round to NI Committee later today, although we continue to wonder whether it might not be better to wait a day or two to see if we have a clearer Irish response.

attached.

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[REDACTED]

This all points to the importance of maintaining our current policy which is designed to cope robustly with either a ceasefire or securing support for making progress in the talks without Sinn Fein.

A copy goes to William Ehrman, Jan Polley and Colin Budd.

Yours ever,
Ke
W K LINDSAY

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