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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

5 November 1996

From the Private Secretary

Dear Gen,

HUME ADAMS INITIATIVE

Paddy Teahon rang me, following receipt of our latest text. He came straight to the point. This text would not run, in the Irish view, under any circumstances. Quite simply, it had no chance of leading to a ceasefire and giving it to Hume would be very dangerous. It would simply lead to recriminations about what had or had not been on offer, and bring the exercise to a rapid and accrimonious end.

I explained our thinking. We had responded to the concerns raised in the areas of inclusiveness, decommissioning, a time frame and confidence-building measures. We had also taken out any specific reference to a time period during which Sinn Fein would have to qualify to join the talks. Our approach had been straightforward throughout. We had not misled the Irish Government, or John Hume, about what we were able to say and do, although I could not of course vouch for what Hume might have said to Adams. Our text was a reasonable account of our position.

Teahon did not dispute this, and made clear that he was not accusing us himself of bad faith in any way. However, he simply wanted to tell us that this text would not achieve the objective and to ask us not to give it to Hume. I said that Hume was pressing us for a text in response to his latest effort. If he wanted a text quickly, this was what we could offer. I asked Teahon what it was the Irish objected to in particular.

Teahon made clear that he was conveying not so much the Irish Government's objections to the text as their judgement of the likelihood of achieving the objective of a ceasefire. But the problem lay in any suggestion that Sinn Fein would have to wait to join the talks. The Irish continued to believe that only their formulation or something akin to it would lead to a

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ceasefire. I said that we had made absolutely clear that any such proposal would not run with us. We might be prepared to be more flexible if Sinn Fein and the IRA could come up with some really convincing wording at the time of a ceasefire. But what Hume offered so far came nowhere near this category.

Teahon said that the Irish agreed with us that the IRA needed to come up with some really strong wording about a new ceasefire. He believed that this should now be the object of the exercise and that there was a chance of achieving something worthwhile. So we should put pressure back on Hume to achieve something new and different, rather than giving him the text we had, which would simply take all the pressure off Sinn Fein. I made clear again that we were open to further formulations from Sinn Fein. But they would need to be genuinely convincing and strong. Moreover, we could not sit around while negotiation continued at length, particularly given the leaks there had already been.

Teahon repeated that Hume had to be told to try to obtain a better text from the IRA and Sinn Fein. He suggested that the Irish would be weighing in in this sense themselves. He also suggested that the Irish would send us back later today a version of our text which they thought would have the desired effect.

We left it at that, with no give on either side, on the assumption that your Secretary of State and Dick Spring would be meeting this afternoon to go over this ground again. This meeting has since been postponed.

I should also record that John Hume was on the phone to me again this morning pressing hard for our new text in response to his. I said that we hoped to get it to him very soon but made no specific promises. I told him that the formulation on a ceasefire he had given me yesterday did not go anything like far enough in our view. He did not dispute this. He said that he himself had suggested to Adams a stronger formulation, to the effect that it was the intention of the IRA/Sinn Fein to bring the conflict to an end. I said that would be helpful, but I still doubted it would be enough. I also asked him about wording from the IRA/Sinn Fein on bilateral decommissioning and the consent principle, as he had discussed with the Prime Minister. He simply said these were covered in our text, which Sinn Fein would in effect be accepting.

Comment:

This is the Irish reaction we had expected. We will need to decide quickly whether to give the text to Hume notwithstanding. It is of course open to Hume not to pass the text on if he chooses not to do so, but at least he would be aware of it if we had given it to him. In any case we may need to explain the position to him frankly.

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I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the British Embassy

2 November 1956

Dear Polley,

Yours ever,

JH

Following our discussion last night, I have the revised text for plan to send to John Hume and subsequently to the IRA. As I said, we now wish to move fast and would like to give Hume the text as soon as possible. Publication should follow shortly afterwards.

You will see that we have altered the text we last received from Hume in various ways to ensure it conveys our policies, but have tried to keep changes to a minimum. There is a new paragraph on what would happen after a ceasefire to replace the one discussed between an earlier. Your concerns have been taken into account. I trust you will be able to support the result.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay, Esq.
Northern Ireland Office

text to John Hume, we would accompany it with a letter making clear again that the timing of Sinn Féin's entry into negotiations in the event of a ceasefire is dependent on the words used and the actions which follow. We are bound to take time to evaluate any new ceasefire - paragraph 8 of the Groundrules makes that clear in any case.

You should be aware that this text is the product of much consideration and represents just about the limits of what we are prepared to say, given our overall approach, and the present circumstances. As we discussed, the kind of words Hume has suggested might be used by the IRA/Sinn Féin in the event of a ceasefire, on the question of "permanence", do not seem to us to change the position. And there is no indication of any move forward on other issues such as parallel decommissioning or the consent principle.

Yours ever

JH

JOHN HOLMES

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