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From the Private Secretary

18 March 1998

See Mem,

ST PATRICK'S DAY IN WASHINGTON

I spoke briefly to Sandy Berger about President Clinton's meetings with the Northern Ireland parties. He said he thought that they had gone reasonably well, and the President believed that the fact that all the parties had been in Washington at the same time, and often in the same room, was helpful. They had had lots of press attention, as well as attention from the Administration, and should have gone away feeling that they were part of something historic. This was certainly the sense the President had been trying to get across.

Berger said that he had had the impression from Adams, to a greater extent than in the past, that he would not walk away from a settlement even if he was not entirely happy with it. The toughest meeting had been with Trimble. Berger felt that Trimble had perhaps not yet "crossed the Rubicon" in his own mind, although he said that he had. Clinton had pressed him hard to meet Adams, and to come to a reasonable accommodation on Strand II. Berger thought that Clinton might have made some impression on the latter point, but saw little chance of the former in the near future.

More generally, Berger said that all the parties had expressed a good deal of confidence in the Prime Minister, which was helpful. Some had also said they wanted Mitchell to take a more prescriptive role. Berger had talked to Mitchell, who had said he was ready to do so. (I am not sure I like the sound of this). Overall, the parties had seemed ready to move forward, but were still too focused on watching their own backs, and still too inclined to see the issue as zero sum game.

Berger added that Clinton was very focused on the issue. Despite his forthcoming trip to Africa, he would be ready to do anything we wanted to help. Equally, he would be careful to avoid doing anything unhelpful.

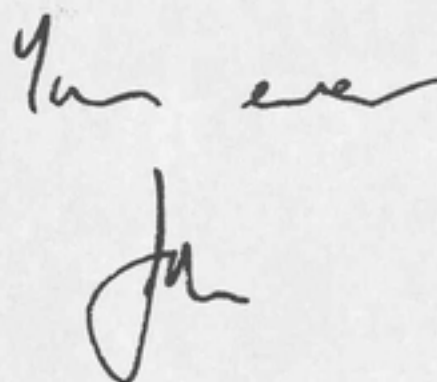
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I would be interested to know how these brief impressions from Berger compare with those from yourselves, and the Embassy in Washington.

I am copying this to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington) and Veronica Sutherland (Dublin).

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'John Holmes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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