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c-Eo

British Embassy
Washington

*File
ph. 12/12.*

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10 December 1996

John Holmes Esq
No 10

Dear John,

NORTHERN IRELAND

1. I had a word this afternoon with Nancy Soderberg, mainly to see what impressions she had been given of yesterday's Summit from other sources.
2. Soderberg said she had heard nothing. I gave her a very compressed account of the exchanges recorded in your letter of 9 December to Ken Lindsay, emphasising the reasons why the Prime Minister had not been able to set a date for Sinn Fein to enter the talks. She took this quite calmly. She thought that, other things being equal, the Prime Minister would like to go into the election with a new cease-fire in place and all-party talks in progress, provided Sinn Fein had met the criteria. Unless she was misreading the politics, it seemed worth making another heave to try and get Sinn Fein on board.
3. Predictably, she then picked up the idea Trimble had floated during his call at the White House on 3 December. I made discouraging noises, and reminded Nancy that British Ministers would need to make their own judgement about what criteria were appropriate and whether the IRA had met them. Soderberg said she saw no harm in placing the onus on Sinn Fein to explain what criteria they would be able to meet. She had the impression that they would continue to offer nothing on punishment beatings, but would be able to come up with a reasonable time-frame on targeting, surveillance and weapons preparation. She added that Sinn Fein now seemed ready to settle for the end of February, rather than January, if they could be sure of the date. She didn't want to make a big deal of any of this at present. I would be taking private soundings of you (and, perhaps, of John Kerr) in the next day or two, to see whether there was anything worth pursuing.
4. For what it is worth, Soderberg told me that there was no question of her taking Tarnoff's job in State: that would go to a professional Foreign Service Officer. She remained determined to leave: 4 years was enough. Madeline Albright was a close friend, but there didn't at present seem to be a

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slot for her in State Department. Hard though we might find it to believe, she really didn't know what she would be doing next.

Yours ever,

Peter.

Peter Westmacott

cc: Ken Lindsay Esq, Private Office, NIO(L)
Dominic Chilcott Esq, Private Office, FCO

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