



10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

8 December 1996

Dear Ken,

SUMMIT WITH THE IRISH: US AND IRISH VIEWS

A sick Tony Lake rang me from Washington on Saturday to convey a further thought before our talks with the Irish. He said he was picking up an idea put forward by Trimble during his Washington visit (you may remember John Kerr described it as rash at the time!). The essence was to change the order of the scenario they had previously proposed.

The aim would be to secure private assurances from the IRA about how they would go about preparing to eliminate paramilitary activities after a ceasefire, and how long this would take; and perhaps also about their commitment to parallel decommissioning. This would help to give us and the UUP the confidence to set a timescale for Sinn Fein's entry to talks, assuming they did what they promised.

On this scenario, the IRA would declare a strong ceasefire first, before we had to commit to a timescale. This would avoid leaving us exposed for any period before an IRA ceasefire was declared. We would then be able, within say 24 hours, to be more positive about a timescale for Sinn Fein joining the talks. Sinn Fein would be aware in advance that we were going to do this.

Lake was not at his most lucid and, despite several attempts, I am still not sure I have entirely understood what he has in mind. But this seemed to be the gist. He was clearly hoping that we would discuss something like this with the Irish.

I said that we would certainly give the idea some thought. I appreciated the thinking behind it, to avoid us having to make an exposed first move. But I was non-committal beyond this. You may like to ensure that all concerned on Monday have had the chance to reflect on this latest US proposal. It is not clear to me whether the Irish are aware of it, but we should assume that they are, at least in outline.

Meanwhile the Irish were quiet over the weekend until this evening, when Paddy Teahon rang me. He confirmed that he saw little point in a telephone call

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between the Prime Minister and Taoiseach in advance of tomorrow's meeting, and that the Taoiseach saw advantage in a restricted session on Northern Ireland before the wider lunch (Taoiseach, Tanaiste, Prime Minister, Sir Patrick Mayhew, plus Teahon and myself). The Taoiseach wanted to be clear about when the Prime Minister could see Sinn Fein joining the talks, and under what conditions. There had to be a shared understanding about this if the present situation was to be taken forward successfully.

Teahon also suggested the following formulation for joint public use with the press:

"There has to be a convincing IRA ceasefire. The republican movement have to tell us that they wish to see an enduring end to violence. Action on the ground clearly needs to be consistent with a genuine ceasefire. In those circumstances and given that we wish to see Sinn Fein in an inclusive talks process, we can see no reason why Sinn Fein cannot be in the talks after the Christmas break. The onus is on them to establish that they have met the necessary conditions."

I said that I saw no difficulty with most of this, but I inevitably paused over the explicit reference to the Christmas break. I added that we had in turn worked up some possible language for the Prime Minister to use with the press, which he might like to consider. I have since sent him the attached text, which is the product of our discussions on Friday.

Again, you might like to ensure that those concerned reflect on the merits of the Irish text. For myself, I am still not sure we should go down a joint text route. On the substance, as well as the difficulty about explicit reference to the Christmas break, I have doubts about the reference to the republican movement "wishing to see an enduring end to violence". It seems to me that we need a stronger formulation, eg "The republican movement have to tell us that they intend to end violence for good", or better still: "The republican movement have to tell us clearly that their violence has ended for good".

We might have a word early tomorrow morning.

I am copying this to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), and by fax to Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin.

Yours Sincerely
John Holmes

1p. JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq
Northern Ireland Office

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File 25

**PRIME MINISTER'S LINE AT
9 DECEMBER PRESS CONFERENCE**

I set out the Government's position on the possibility of Sinn Fein joining the Belfast talks in a statement on 28 November.

It is perfectly clear. There is an absolute requirement for an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. Both Governments are quite clear about that. It is spelt out in the Ground Rules for the talks.

The same Ground Rules also require all parties taking part in the negotiations to establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and show that they abide by the democratic process. Both Governments are agreed that these requirements must be satisfied before Sinn Fein can join the talks.

What our statement of 28 November did was to make clear what we shall be looking for. We are not interested in a phoney or tactical ceasefire, to be discarded again when it suits. So what is needed is for any ceasefire to be declared in terms which can convince us that this time it is meant to last, and that Sinn Fein are indeed genuinely committed to the democratic process and exclusively peaceful means.

We also need more than words. Actions on the ground need to show that the IRA are adhering to both the ceasefire and the Mitchell principles, in particular through the absence of the kind of paramilitary activity which continued throughout the last ceasefire - targeting, surveillance and weapons preparation - and which is simply not compatible with a dependable and genuine ceasefire intended to be for good and with exclusively peaceful means. This is no more than common sense.

We have said sufficient time will be needed to establish that these criteria for a genuinely unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire are being met. But how soon Sinn Fein can join the talks after a ceasefire depends on the IRA and Sinn Fein and what they say and do. So we cannot fix a date for Sinn Fein to enter the talks which pays no regard to what is said or done. What matters is whether the criteria are met, not the time period.

We are not looking to delay Sinn Fein's entry into the negotiations by a day longer than necessary, if we can be satisfied that the requirements I have set out are being met. Suggestions that we will be insisting on a long period of some months have no basis in reality. An invitation to Sinn Fein to join the talks can issue within a relatively short timescale if, and I emphasise again that this is the crucial point, if the requirements are convincingly met.

That is not in our hands but in the hands of the IRA and Sinn Fein. The sort of timescale the Taoiseach has talked of early next year is certainly possible. But it all depends on the IRA and Sinn Fein. The only way forward is for them to declare a ceasefire as soon as possible and convince us that this time it is genuine, dependable and lasting. A ceasefire now would give everyone time over the natural Christmas break to reflect on the new situation.