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*File*  
**FAX**

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" 06/11 09:00

From the Private Secretary

5 December 1996

*Dear Ken,*

**NORTHERN IRELAND:  
SUMMIT OF 9 DECEMBER**

It may be helpful if I record various telephone conversations during today.

David Trimble asked to see me on his return from Washington because he was concerned about the line the NSC had taken in his discussions with them. I met him this evening, in the House of Commons. What worried him was US pressure for a firm date to be fixed for Sinn Fein's entry into the talks, on the assumption of a satisfactory ceasefire.

I said that we had been under similar pressure from the Americans, but had made clear that we could not set a specific date. This would not be compatible with our statement made on 28 November. But we had also made clear that the kind of relatively short timescale the Americans had in mind was possible if the IRA and Sinn Fein said and did the right things. Trimble accepted this, and acknowledged that he had said something similar in Washington, although he added that he foresaw great trouble if we were actually faced with this situation.

I took the opportunity to say that the other key element in the situation was decommissioning, where we hoped a way through could be found. Trimble sounded quite upbeat about the prospects, including the possibility of an initiative to break the deadlock from Mitchell. I said that we were working hard on the Irish to bring them round more to our way of thinking.

We also discussed briefly the rather wild statements John Hume is making around the place. Trimble had had an account from Andrew Hunter of his encounter with Hume, but seemed relatively relaxed about it. I said that Hume was putting the most optimistic gloss on whatever was being said to him,

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and his remarks needed to be taken with a considerable pinch of salt. Trimble had no difficulty in agreeing.

I have also discussed again with Paddy Teahon the scenario for Monday, recorded in my letter this morning and refined in Veronica Sutherland's letter to me earlier today. I confirmed again that we did not envisage a substantive communiqué on Northern Ireland, although there might be a piece of paper on East/West relations. We envisaged instead that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach would speak at the Press Conference and take a broadly similar line, although there would be differences. The Taoiseach would no doubt want to repeat the line he had taken in the Dail. The Prime Minister would need to stick to the position he had set out last week. Paddy and I agreed to exchange possible lines to take on the key points in the course of tomorrow.

We also discussed the so-called "private understanding" between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach. I said that this private understanding could not be about a specific date but would, in our view, consist of an assurance that we were genuine about our readiness to issue an invitation to Sinn Fein, on a relatively short timescale, if they and the IRA said and did the right things. Teahon accepted this but said that the Taoiseach would also want a degree of confidence about the UUP position. We could not of course guarantee that the UUP would stay in the process, but the Taoiseach would want to feel confident that we would not be pushed off issuing an invitation by the UUP and would not behave in such a way as to encourage the UUP to be intransigent themselves.

I said I thought these issues could be covered in a telephone call at the weekend between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, with the objective of ensuring there would be no surprises on Monday. Teahon agreed, but added that there was one other area which would have to be discussed, perhaps on Monday. This was what the Irish should say to Sinn Fein about all this, and how, on the assumption that we would not be saying it to them directly.

I said that the other key element of the discussion on Monday would be about decommissioning. We needed to find a way through the present impasse to get onto the 3 strands, and create a talks process worth joining. We believed the UUP were now reasonably receptive. Teahon agreed. He thought that Mitchell was going to come forward with an initiative, which he hoped would be helpful.

Finally, I spoke to Nancy Soderberg, in Lake's absence meeting his future colleagues at the CIA. She denied that she had got a new job, when I tried to congratulate her, although she confirmed that she wanted one. I explained to her how we were approaching the Summit on Monday. She took all this reasonably well, and commented that we seemed to be trying to make the best

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of the situation and the Summit. She did not believe that the kind of approach we had in mind would be enough to bring about a ceasefire, but it was perhaps not impossible. She hoped that, if the IRA/Sinn Fein did move first, and used forward-leaning language on bringing the violence to an end, we would be ready to respond positively. Soderberg also commented that the meeting with Trimble had gone well. She had found him more constructive than in the past. He had seemed genuinely concerned to move ahead in the talks process. She thought that it was helpful that Molyneaux had accompanied him.

Comment

Following these conversations, I think most of the bases are now reasonably well covered. I will be in touch tomorrow with a draft of the kind of language the Prime Minister might use to the press on Monday, to pass to Teahon.

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

*Yours etc*

*John*

JOHN HOLMES

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Northern Ireland Office

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