

cc: EO  
JH.

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From: HM Ambassador  
British Embassy, Dublin  
Date: 4 December 1996

File  
JH 10/12.

John Holmes Esq - By fax  
PS/Prime Minister  
No. 10 Downing Street

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B  
PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B  
PS/PUS (B) - B  
PS/Sir David Fell - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Thomas (L&B) - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Hill (L&B) - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Stephens (L&B) - B  
Ms Barucha, IPL - B  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
Mr Hallett, RAD (via IPL) - B  
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office - By fax

#### DEALING WITH THE TAOISEACH'S DEPARTMENT

1. I have taken a few days to reflect on the events last week which led to bruised feelings on the part of the Taoiseach and Paddy Teahon, as described in your letter of 29 November on the Hume/Adams Statement: Irish and US views.

2. Such feelings in response to perceived British slights are a regular feature of the British/Irish relationship, c.f. the twin-track process, Irish Steel and Drumcree. They stem in part from the Irish fear of being ignored or side-lined, particularly on issues related to Northern Ireland. There is little we can do about some of these sensitivities beyond patiently explaining our position in the hope that eventually the Irish will learn that we do not deliberately set out to insult or ignore them. We can however try to do something about practical aspects of recent difficulties, including those where we might inadvertently have given some cause for offence.

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Recording Key Messages

4. As a variation, however, could we adopt the practice that any record of a conversation with Paddy (or indeed other officials from the Taoiseach's Department) sets out the key messages intended to have been imparted. We in Dublin should then ensure that they have been correctly received, and indeed reinforce them. The same would also apply in reverse and we could send back to London our understanding of Irish key messages. Of course we already do this as the occasion arises, but perhaps we need to be more systematic. If such a system had been in place recently, we might have avoided the situation in which Paddy felt let down because he believed he had had inadequate notice of the Prime Minister's statement; and in which he, for his part, had failed to make plain the seriousness with which the Irish were treating the possibility of using the Christmas Recess to facilitate Sinn Féin's entry into the talks.

Personal Messages to the Taoiseach

5. We should also consider whether a more structured use might be made of personal messages from the Prime Minister to the Taoiseach.

It might on occasion be helpful if I were instructed to deliver a letter from the Prime Minister, identifying points of particular importance. In fast moving situations this may not always be possible, but where it is, it might help to pre-empt misunderstandings. Certainly, on a couple of occasions last year I was able to help defuse potentially explosive situations, including by speaking directly to the Taoiseach.

Meetings of Officials

6. Another suggestion regularly put forward by Paddy himself is that a Butler/Teahon or Chilcot/Teahon Group might be established. I accept that regular meetings of such a Group might not be a directly effective way of tackling these problems. Nevertheless, occasional gatherings of this sort could help to cement professional relationships. I would also welcome more frequent visits by NIO and Cabinet Office officials, when time permits, and have already made some suggestions to the NIO. These should not of course cut across the traditional NIO/DFA links, which have a reliable record of accurately imparting information.

7. I should be interested to have your comments.

(Signed)

Veronica Sutherland  
HM Ambassador

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