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Washington

28 November 1996

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Dear John.

HUME/ADAMS

1. David Logan had a brief word with Tony Lake this morning. He had just heard from you that the Prime Minister was about to publish our text. He sounded a bit gloomy, but said the White House would avoid saying anything unhelpful. I then faxed him the covering statement - which hit the White House Duty Officer at the moment the Irish Ambassador was faxing Lake the Taoiseach's letter to the Prime Minister (not yet seen here).
2. I subsequently spoke to Nancy Soderberg. She was predictably unhappy. We were making a colossal mistake in publishing a text which had no chance of delivering a new ceasefire without offering an alternative way forward. As we all knew, Sinn Fein could not deliver without a firm timescale for joining the talks. Perhaps the Hume/Adams initiative had run its course - though it was a pity that our latest text was so much worse than the previous version which had been close to doing the trick. But if we had concluded that we could neither further refine the text nor delay publication pending another round of brainstorming, we should have come up with some other ideas. As it was, we were likely to be condemned for missing the one opportunity we'd had for getting the process back on course. The US Administration would not be able to issue its usual supporting statement. She felt very sad that we would be in public disagreement for the first time since the Adams visa rows.

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3. I told Soderberg that the Government Statement, and the covering note (which she had not yet seen), gave the IRA/Sinn Fein every opportunity to renew the ceasefire and get into talks, if that was what they wanted. HMG had had to insist throughout - with full US support - that it was not in the business of negotiating a new ceasefire. In fact, we had revised and refined our text numerous times, and given the Irish and Hume a final opportunity to come back to us with new ideas. They had come up with nothing - not even a text of what the IRA might say in response (Nancy muttered about chicken and egg and again complained that our text had become more rather than less difficult for the Republicans to accept). Meanwhile Adams himself had made it increasingly difficult for the Government to continue to say nothing in public. So the Prime Minister had been left with little choice.

4. But the Government's determination remained unchanged. The Americans should look carefully at the covering statement, which had been significantly revised at the last moment to take account of Irish concerns. It contained a deliberate reflection of Lake's ideas, and a clear hint that Sinn Fein could be invited to join the talks when they resumed in January if their words and actions meanwhile created sufficient confidence in their intentions. The chance was there if they wished to take it.

5. Soderberg remained unconvinced, so we left it at that. We have had separate, more intemperate, reactions from Senator Kennedy's staff. Other Irish Americans are likely to follow suit, particularly if the Irish Government goes public with its unhappiness. Clearly, we here will need to give high priority in the coming days to the presentation of our case.

Yours ever,

Peter

Peter Westmacott

cc: Ken Lindsay Esq, NIO
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