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13 October 1996



JOHN HOLMES AT THE NSC

Conf. cc. PST
PSS
Mr Teahan
Mr Dalton
10/10

Dear Secretary

1. As reported orally, John Holmes from Prime Minister Major's Office was at the NSC on Friday for discussions on a range of issues, including Bosnia, NATO, and the situation in Russia. He also discussed Northern Ireland.

Hume/Adams amendments

2. The discussion on the North inevitably focussed to a significant degree on the Hume/Adams amendments to the proposed British statement clarifying London's position on the talks process. However, as both the British and the NSC had only recently received the new document, the discussion did not get down to serious consideration of the specifics of the text. In this regard, the U.S. side made the point to me that they would need to be taken through the text in detail before they would feel comfortable about conveying specific suggestions, and they asked if I could facilitate them on this in the near future. (As well as receiving the text from Holmes on Friday, they had, I believe, also received it from Hume. I might add that Hume apparently went to great lengths to warn them of the fall-out if the initiative leaked).

British reaction to amendments

3. The overall British approach was that, while sceptical about the initiative in the light

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of Lisburn, they were willing to go forward with it if a reasonable text could be agreed. However, the amendments went further than they could deliver in a number of areas. These included decommissioning, the timeframe issue (which was being "pushed too far"), the reference to the "creation" of a police force and, very critically, the inclusion of language that would enable Sinn Féin to enter talks once a ceasefire was called. Although Holmes emphasised that they had not fully analysed the text, these were the main stumbling blocks to agreement; there were also other difficulties, such as the proposed deletion of a sentence referring to the talks operating on the basis of consensus, but these were less substantive.

Decommissioning

4. Much to the White House's irritation, the decommissioning issue continues to bedevil the process. Lake and Soderberg are at present reflecting on the best way forward, and intend teasing out the possibilities with George Mitchell in the near future. The basic question is how to park the issue so that, when reactivated, it will not again pose insurmountable problems for Sinn Féin. Soderberg feels also that it might just become somewhat easier for Trimble to show flexibility if the talks make progress on the substance - though past experience in relation to the Unionist Leader was none too encouraging! The reality however was that, until there was some resolution on decommissioning, it was going to be hard for Adams to deliver.

5. A further complication at present is that, following Lisburn, there are those who would argue that the decommissioning bar should be raised even higher. As the NSC read it, the emerging British view on this seems to envisage a trade-off between, on the one hand, avoiding any attempt to harden the decommissioning terms and, on the

other, the timing of the entry of Sinn Féin into the talks. I understand that Holmes may have mentioned in passing a period of some months - which would allow the Republican movement to prove itself - but there seems to have been nothing particularly hard and fast about this. If there is to be such an interim period before Sinn Féin would be allowed to participate in the talks, the White House feels that the three Administrations could be helpful to the party through, for instance, the use of some form of shuttle diplomacy. Overall, it was an extremely difficult and sensitive area, given the deep Unionist concern about Sinn Féin being allowed to go directly into talks following a ceasefire and, on the other hand, the danger that Adams and his colleagues would see any delay as simply another (and possible unacceptable) precondition to their participation in the process.

John Hume

6. The NSC spoke to John Hume following the meeting with Holmes, and gave him a general sense of the British reaction. He appeared somewhat "downbeat" as a result. The NSC believe it extremely important that we work with Hume on the text as soon as possible, adding that he has asked to see the British on Monday. I said that you would be with him over the weekend. (They also made the point - albeit lightly - that, given that the devil is often in the textual detail on these issues, it can at times be frustrating to deal with John given his unwillingness to get down to detail).

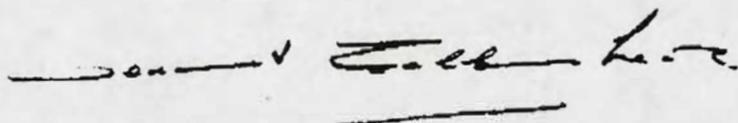
Summary

7. To sum up, the British are at present thinking their way forward, and are willing to deliver if a reasonable text can be agreed. However, what is on offer at present goes too far for them in a number of important areas, and is not deliverable. That said, the

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strong White House view is that the current text "goes a long way" and, with the necessary work, a compromise paper can be agreed. This may, however, take a while.

Yours sincerely



Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

PS While the White House will continue to do everything possible to help secure a further ceasefire, and remain fully committed and engaged, they mentioned privately that, given the President's commanding lead in the polls, there is no longer any electoral pressure to deliver on the issue. (They also emphasised the absolute importance of this read out of their meeting with Holmes remaining strictly private and confidential to us).

DAF

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs