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From the Private Secretary

21 May 1996

*Den Martin***NORTHERN IRELAND: US VIEWS**

I finally managed to speak to Lake late last night. I explained to him where we stood in our discussions with the Irish on parallel decommissioning and on chairmanships. We had made clear to the Irish that we could not move away from the Mitchell report, which proposed some physical decommissioning during the negotiations. On that basis we would make a further attempt to agree some language with them. On chairmanships, we believed Mitchell held the key, through chairmanship of the plenary. Strand 2 would be less appropriate for Mitchell and less important. It was also doubtful whether Mitchell chairing Strand 2 as well would run with opinion here, still less with the Unionists. (Lake agreed with the latter point, following his own conversation with Trimble.)

Lake was essentially in listening mode and said relatively little. But he did not try to challenge our position on parallel decommissioning, or argue the toss on chairmanships, except to say that Mitchell was at the end of the day a free agent. He said that he was reasonably encouraged by recent developments, including Adams' latest statement on Mitchell. Like Teahon, he did not see this as a deliberate attempt to distance Sinn Fein from the IRA or meaning necessarily that there would be no ceasefire. On the latter point, again like Teahon, he remained categorical that there could be no question of Sinn Fein getting into the talks without a ceasefire.

I said that I had heard Trimble had not been entirely reassured about Mitchell by his conversation with Lake. Lake seemed a little surprised. The conversation had gone well. Trimble could not expect a letter from the President and Lake did not propose to write to him either. I said that we were proposing to put Trimble in direct touch with Mitchell. Lake saw no difficulty with this.

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This was a reasonably positive conversation as far as it went, although Lake did not give much away and hinted at some bad feeling over our dealings with Mitchell. I assume the Embassy in Washington are in close touch with Lake and the NSC (Mary-Ann Peters also listened to the conversation) to ensure our message keeps getting across.

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

*Yours ever*  
*John*

**JOHN HOLMES**

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