

6



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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John Holmes Esq
PS/Prime Minister
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15 May 1996

Dear John,

NORTHERN IRELAND: NEXT STEPS: A GAME PLAN

You asked for a new Gameplan for future action on the Talks process to be drawn up.

This is attached at Annex A and is, I believe, reasonably self explanatory. You may, however, wish to draw the Prime Minister's attention to our view that it would be best not to deploy the non-paper, once it has been agreed by NI, to the parties before 30 May. The Secretary of State does, however, believe that we should be prepared to deploy a draft agenda with the parties before then. This is, of course, an addition to any special action we take in respect of Mr Trimble, which is covered in the Gameplan.

You also asked the NIO to look at the idea of the British and Irish Governments agreeing a statement which the Irish could put to Sinn Fein in order to reassure them about both Governments' intentions and thus hopefully help pave the way towards a ceasefire. Officials here have drawn up a text, a copy of which is attached at Annex B. However, we believe that on balance, the dangers inherent in this approach outweigh the possible advantages. The Government would be

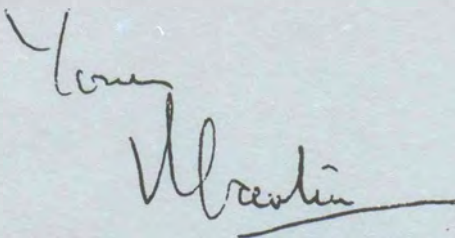
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placed in a very difficult position if it were to emerge that documents were being passed to Sinn Fein in what might be perceived as a "back channel". Having said that it might be useful to have available a short exposition of the Government's position available which could, for example, be used as a speaking note at the forthcoming Liaison Group meeting. The Secretary of State believes it might be sensible to take a further view of that in the light of the NI meeting tomorrow.

In the meantime, the Secretary of State thinks it would be best if the Irish were to draw Sinn Fein's attention to statements made by the Government on the record - for example, the Secretary of State's doorstep on Monday morning and the Prime Minister's proposed newspaper article, which you have confirmed will now be appearing in the Irish Times and Belfast Telegraph tomorrow.

A copy of this goes to William Ehrman (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Colin Budd and Jan Polley (Cabinet Office).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Howard', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

MARTIN HOWARD

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APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS: GAME PLAN

Assuming that NI on 16 May endorses the comprehensive approach set out in the two papers before it (NI(96)4 & 5), the key next steps would involve Mitchell, the US Administration, de Chastelain, the Irish, the UUP, and other parties. The main action points are as follows:

Mitchell

Objective: To explain his proposed appointment as Chairman of the plenary session, with authority delegated from the two Governments and also having responsibility over the sub-committee on decommissioning (which de Chastelain might take on), and to note that once this has been formally agreed with the Irish a formal joint approach would be made. Also a strong possibility of appointment to chair Strand 2 (with the Business Committee delegated to de Chastelain?) but UUP reservations about his neutrality are a complicating factor. To suggest to Mitchell that he take the initiative in contacting Trimble to offer appropriate reassurance.

Action: Michael Ancram to see Mitchell in the US on Thursday (post-NI).

US Administration

Objective: Explain general strategy for the negotiations and proposed use of Mitchell. Stress need for US to keep up pressure on Sinn Fein, not only to restore the ceasefire but also to give their unqualified commitment to Mitchell principles and make a serious address to the decommissioning proposals at the opening plenary.

Action: Michael Ancram to brief administration during visit to US.

de Chastelain

Objective: Update and explain proposed role in negotiations.

Action: Michael Ancram to telephone during US visit.

Irish

Objective:

- i) Report NI decisions, and indicate that we are sending non-paper (Annex A to NI(96)4) to them for discussion at Liaison Group on 17 May;
- ii) Alert to Ancram's US visit (noting that he will see Mitchell for informal briefing, but offer of appointment will be joint once two governments have formally agreed proposals (at IGC on 22 May?));
- iii) Agree draft Agenda, but not before substantive discussion with Mr Trimble;
- iv) Seek agreement on procedural rules for negotiations.

Action:

- i) Holmes to brief Teahon on NI conclusions following meeting on 16 May. "Non-paper" will be transmitted through Secretariat;
- ii) Holmes to cover with Teahon, 16 May;
- iii) Further draft agenda to be discussed in Liaison Group (subject to Ministerial approval) and then to be discussed by Michael Ancram with David Trimble on 20 May. No final agreement to be sought at this stage;

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iv) Will be progressed in Liaison Group.

[NB. Secretariat will also repeat Holmes/Teahon messages on NI, Ancram visit and text for Sinn Fein.]

UUP

Objective: Discuss non-paper and draft agenda - after these have been further discussed with the Irish. Secure UUP acquiescence in Mitchell/de Chastelain appointments, in light of expected US reassurance on Mitchell independence.

Action: Secretary of State or Michael Ancram to meet Mr Trimble next week (NB a further Prime Ministerial meeting to be avoided if possible since other parties already becoming jealous of degree of UUP access to No 10 during election period).

Other parties

Objective: Consult and (where appropriate) seek to secure main parties' agreement to draft agenda; procedural rules; chairmanships; handling of opening plenary and approach to decommissioning.

Action: The Irish will handle Sinn Fein. We could send the proposed agenda to the other parties next week, in parallel with UUP, but not the non-paper. The latter could raise dangers that DUP and others might treat the handling of decommissioning and other sensitive aspects of the opening plenary as a source of political advantage during the election (thus imperilling any UUP acceptance of a more moderate line). In addition, if the papers are sent only to the main parties, HMG could be accused of pre-judging the poll; but if they are sent to all parties contesting the election they will almost certainly leak. Propose therefore to defer sending the non-paper for consultation to the other parties until after the 30 May election (when we shall know which have been successful). UUP's

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

SOFS/31367

CONFIDENTIAL

key position continues to merit special treatment - but should be balanced as far as possible by increased contact between NIO Ministers and other parties (so far as appropriate during an election period). Ministers could engage with parties on the proposed agenda before 30 May.

CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

SOFS/31367

DRAFT STATEMENT OF HMG'S POSITION ON DECOMMISSIONING

1. As the 28 February Communiqué, and the Ground Rules, make clear, the International Body's proposals on decommissioning must be addressed at the opening plenary session. They make clear that confidence building would also require that the parties have reassurance that a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered to address the legitimate concerns of their traditions and the need for new political arrangements with which all can identify. The two Governments also commit themselves to use their influence to ensure that all items on the comprehensive agenda are fully addressed in the negotiating process and to doing so with a view to overcoming any obstacles which may arise.

2. HMG's approach to the discussions on decommissioning will be based on its acceptance of the International Body's proposals. Accordingly it will seek to secure agreement to parallel decommissioning, as envisaged by paragraph 34 of the International Body's Report, and for a scheme to be developed in accordance with the Body's guidelines on the modalities of decommissioning. At the opening plenary, it will look for sufficient progress on decommissioning, against the background of the other confidence building measures, to establish good intent from all participants to participate in a process leading to physical decommissioning during negotiations.

3. If such progress is secured, HMG will be ready to support a proposal that the issue be remitted to a dedicated sub-committee, operating under the supervision of the independent chairman, for further progress to be made in parallel with the three-stranded discussion of political issues. The independent chairman would periodically brief the participants in the political negotiations on the progress made on decommissioning.