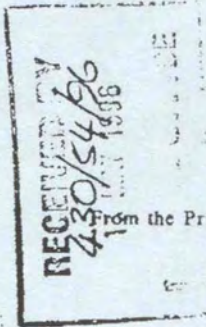


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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

10 May 1996

Dear Martin,

IRISH VIEWS

I spoke to Paddy Teahon on the telephone on 10 May. He gave me two interesting bits of news.

First, the Taoiseach and David Trimble had just had a meeting in Dublin. Teahon did not yet have a detailed read-out (he promised me one on Monday) but it had apparently been positive, with a good chemistry between the two men. They had agreed to meet again soon. The Taoiseach's objective had been to persuade Trimble that he had nothing to fear from Irish Government views. They had not been talking in detailed terms about issues like decommissioning, but might get on to these in a subsequent meeting. I believe news of the meeting has already leaked, by accident.

Second, Teahon gave me a read-out of the latest meeting between Irish Government officials and Sinn Fein. They met for over two hours on the evening of 9 May. Adams and McGuinness were there on the Sinn Fein side, together with a number of others including [redacted] who Paddy Teahon thought might be a significant figure. Teahon's clear impression was that those present on the Sinn Fein side had decided they wanted a new ceasefire. They still had to persuade the IRA hard men to agree, but their body language and their speech suggested that they expected to be in the negotiations. However, reassuring noises from the Prime Minister, along the lines discussed, would be very important, and there was still the question of decommissioning.

On decommissioning, the Sinn Fein view had been that if the issue was remitted to some kind of separate strand on the basis of paragraph 34 of the Mitchell Report, they would co-operate with that. Their formal position remained that decommissioning could only take place in parallel with the solution, but the Irish had told them they would need to go further than that.

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Teahon thought that, if Sinn Fein could get some reassurance on these points next week, they would be ready to go to the IRA to ask for a new ceasefire. It was obviously anyone's guess as to how long this might take. Meanwhile Sinn Fein had made clear that they were beginning to get their act together on acceptance of the Mitchell principles. The Irish had told them clearly that they would not be able to quibble about these.



Comment: Teahon was noticeably more optimistic about the possibility of a ceasefire in this conversation than previously. This fits in with other indications that we have had and, I understand, with the mood of the Irish side at the Liaison Group today. But we still have a long way to go on decommissioning.

I am copying this letter to Jan Polley (Cabinet Office) and to Veronica Sutherland in Dublin by fax.

Yours ever
John

JOHN HOLMES

Martin Howard, Esq.,
Northern Ireland Office.

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