

C O N F I D E N T I A L

FROM: PUS
23 JANUARY 1997

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Leach - B
Mr Ray - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Brooker - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

HUME/ADAMS - PUS'S MEETING WITH MR HUME, 23 JANUARY

I saw John Hume this morning, and spoke to him as agreed, on the basis of Mr Brooker's very helpful note of 22 January, together with guidance from the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram.

2. I sense in John Hume a yearning for formal text and statements, but I think he has got the message from his conversations with Michael Ancram that this is not going to be a productive approach. He was very ready to fall in with the approach of identifying issues on which Sinn Fein sought reassurance to enable Adams (assuming that to be his intention if he can bring it off) to lead the movement into an unequivocal ceasefire, with HMG restating its present position as laid down in 28 November statement so as to remove misunderstanding or doubt where that existed.

3. Still on process, John Hume said that he too had thought that it might be a better approach for him rather than Adams or Sinn Fein) to raise questions with HMG (against the background of his knowledge of and where necessary consultation with, Adams' concerns) so that HMG could reply to him, Hume, without the difficulty, awkwardness and rigidities associated with public exchanges between HMG and Sinn Fein. I said that if that were to be the basis on which we went forward, he might well want to seek support (eg with drafting) from the Irish Government (in effect Sean O hUiginn) as we had understood been the case during the 'clarification' exercise which had in the event been successful. Again, John Hume said he thought that was a good idea and would have no objection if we were to signal this to the Irish Government.

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4. Turning to the key issues, I took him through Mr Brooker's paragraph 6 points, and on the certainty of date issue laid particular emphasis on 'not 18 months' rather than hinting at anything more definitive at this stage. He did however make himself the point that as with the lost opportunity (as he would see it) of the Christmas period, the General Election campaign would provide another natural break with quite a lot of time built into it. For the rest, he said his own thoughts coincided very much with ours as to the issues set out in paragraph 6 and I checked that he understood the points where we for our part needed reassurance from Sinn Fein on the genuineness and unequivocalty of a ceasefire, support for good words from deeds and actions on the ground, and the acceptance of the basis and conduct of negotiations.

5. For his part, John Hume laid particular emphasis on the decommissioning block. I said that it was very clear from the basis of the talks process that prior decommissioning was not a pre-condition of entry. Decommissioning on the basis of the Mitchell compromise during the talks process remained the British Government's approach, and the parties themselves had yet to agree on the way forward through the decommissioning obstacle; but it was not a pre-condition as matters stood that decommissioning by the IRA should commence before Sinn Fein could qualify for entry into the talks process at whatever stage it had then reached.

6. At Michael Ancram's suggestion I told John Hume that it would be helpful if he could talk to Michael Ancram over the weekend and this he agreed to do.

Signed

JOHN CHILCOT

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