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FROM: MR D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
10 JULY 1996

cc	Mr Leach	- B
	Mr Bell	- B
	Mr Steele	- B
	Mr Wood (L&B)	- B
	Mr Cornick	- B
	Mr Lavery	- B
	Mr Perry	- B
	Mr McKervill	- B
	Miss Harrison	- B
	Mr Whysall	- B

MR THOMAS

TALKS: POSITIVE PRESENTATION

It may be particularly important in current circumstances for the Secretary of State to give the House of Commons an upbeat but realistic report on the talks process at "top" tomorrow.

2. I attach a revised set of "Bull Points" (the 2nd, 3rd and 4th are new) which he might be encouraged to draw on. I should be grateful for any quick comments which you or copy recipients may have.

Signed

Mr Perry
Mr McKervill

D J R HILL
CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIVISION
10 JULY 1996

NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
10 JULY 1996

Bull Points

- HMG firmly committed to the search for a widely acceptable and comprehensive political settlement in relation to Northern Ireland, which satisfactorily addresses all those issues of concern to all the main protagonists;
- impressed by the positive attitude of virtually all the participating parties and encouraged by their growing readiness to engage constructively with others both in open discussion and bilaterals;
- particular tribute to the determination and commitment of the SDLP delegation and to the constructive and principled approach taken by the UUP delegation;
- current distractions do not call into question the validity or the viability of the talks process. Although the UUP has not been in a position to field a negotiating team this week I draw the House's attention to the fact that they have not withdrawn from the Talks. I look forward to an early resumption of full dialogue in the Talks, with a very real prospect of significant forward movement.
- success not dependent on Sinn Fein participation. The two Governments and the participating political parties between them represent the views of the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland/the island of Ireland/these islands. They are perfectly capable of reaching an agreement on a settlement which could marginalise the men of violence and underpin a lasting peace;
- Sinn Fein's absence and the reasons for it are regrettable on many grounds. IRA terrorism is morally wrong and completely unjustified. It also means that Sinn Fein are missing the boat: IRA actions have denied Sinn Fein the opportunity to

participate in what I trust will turn out to be an historic process;

- decommissioning: an important substantive issue which has not yet been reached. The Government's position is clear - ready to work on the basis of the compromise approach set out in the Mitchell report;
- the initial concentration on procedural issues is perfectly understandable. All participants need to feel comfortable and to know that they are working on a level playing field;
- Ground Rules: Government remains fully committed to the ground rules as set out in Command Paper 3232, which also constitutes the legal descriptor of the negotiations. However the Ground Rules themselves make clear that in certain respects they only constitute the "best judgement" of the two Governments and the Government has been working with the other participants to develop free standing rules of procedure which would enable the negotiations to be taken forward without reference to any other document;
- no outcome is either precluded or predetermined in advance or limited by anything other than the need for agreement.