

H/F

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

FROM: PUS  
8 JULY 1996

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)	- B
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B)	- B
PS/Sir David Fell	- B
Mr Bell	- B
Mr Leach (L&B)	- B
HMA Dublin	- B
Mr Lamont, RID	- B

MR THOMAS (L&B) - B

**TALKS: IRISH GOVERNMENT DELEGATION - ATTITUDE**

The less time I put in at the Talks in this phase, the more I have admired the persistence, leadership and positive attitude of both the Chairmen's Group, but even more our own delegation.

2. By contrast, reading daily summaries and file notes of proceedings, as well as from some personal observation, the more contrast I find in the contribution of the Irish Government delegation at both Ministerial and senior official level.

3. No doubt with quite different adjectives they may entertain similar feelings. But I do fear increasingly that a resoundingly negative and passive, not to say defeatist, Irish Government attitude could percolate through not only the Chairmen's group but also the party delegations if it is sustained long enough. I should welcome your and others' views on this, and whether (perhaps after we have parked the Talks for the summer recess) we need to have a high or even top level get together with the Irish Government on the future leadership of the Talks process. Their sense of disappointment and even failure at the parties' refusal to adopt the ground rules or acknowledge their authority, coupled with the grinding test to which they have been subject in generating a Talks based set of procedural rules, do not seem to me remotely to approach a case in their own, let alone in our joint, terms for reassessing the strategic objective of striving for an agreed accommodation within the principles of the Joint Declaration and in the terms of the Joint Communique etc.

4. I am very conscious of the strain on the small Irish system of the EU Presidency, particularly when it comes to Ministerial leadership in Castle Buildings through many long days and evenings. But HMG has its pre-occupations too, not least in the continuing task of governing Northern Ireland with all the strains and stresses of the marching season on top of all else.

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5. You and I have vivid memories on in earlier round of talks of the effect that a direct challenge by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Irish Government, including a demand to see the Taoiseach in a matter vital to the future of the peoples of the island, produced. While I do not think we are quite at that point, I am increasingly concerned at the corrosive effect of what I assume to be pessimistic if not defeatist advice from Irish officials to Irish Ministers about the prospects of carrying the process forward. A direct address to the Irish Government at coalition leadership level seems to me to be necessary prophylactic.

Signed

JOHN CHILCOT

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Many thanks for sending me a copy of your helpful submission and paper on this. I am sure that Ministers will find this very helpful if and when we reach policing issues in the Talks.

2. The policing issue is obviously one of enormous sensitivity not only among the political parties represented in the Talks, but also to the police themselves and the other associated institutions.

1. You may well be right about the kind of outcome you envisage: namely an endorsement of the Government's reform agenda, but with some possible novelty in respect of those issues not yet settled by it. But I am not certain about that. And even if you are there is an important point about our posture in entering discussions of these, as other, subjects. Our broad posture is that there is an open agenda and that HMS will be strongly inclined to endorse any proposal which secures agreement among the parties in Northern Ireland. The distinction between that posture and the one you envisage may be one without a substantial difference, but

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