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PRISON ISSUES

Background

The loyalist prisoners and their representatives, including the UDP and PUP, have campaigned for early release and changes to the prison regime as a response to their cease-fires.

LIFE SENTENCE CASES

Line to take

- of the 44 loyalist cases reviewed by the Life Sentence Review Board since October 1994 more than half (27) were recommended to be given release dates;
- there are only 2 loyalists - both multiple murderers - in prison who have served more than 14 years and both of these are due for review next year;
- considering the serious nature of many of these cases there is clear evidence that the Board has been giving considerable weight to the low risk of reoffending - a factor which has been strengthened by the cease-fires;

Background

The loyalists have proposed earlier first reviews and more favourable consideration of loyalist cases on the basis of the changed risk of re-offending resulting from the cease-fire. Earlier reviews would make no difference without changes to the assessment of risk, deterrence and retribution. Risk is not the determining factor in most terrorist cases as the recidivism rate has always been low.

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OTHER RELEASES

Line to take

- the Remission of Sentences Act is a significant change to the release arrangements for those convicted of terrorist offences;
- more than 125 prisoners have already been released early under the Act;
- this legislation has remained in force despite the pressure from many for its suspension;
- that it has remained in force is largely attributable to the continuing loyalist cease-fires;

Background

The legislation does not allow a distinction to be drawn between loyalist and republican violence. More than half those released so far would be perceived as loyalists, although not all have been 'claimed' by the loyalist paramilitary organisations.

REGIME ISSUES

Line to take

- the Maze regime is already unique in the level of freedom within the prison that it allows to prisoners;
- the Secretary of State has already indicated that he would be happy to receive proposals from you for further prison regime changes;

Background

The Secretary of State met the two loyalist parties separately on 16 July. Both parties said that they would have more influence in maintaining the cease-fires if

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they could deliver prison regime changes. The Secretary of State invited both parties to offer a list of proposals. So far no list has been received.

2. However, it would be difficult to justify giving regime improvements to the loyalists and not to the republicans as in the past changes have been based on institutional behaviour not events outside. There are practical difficulties with the likely demand for television as cells at the Maze are not wired for electricity.

Personalities and Political Views

An honest, working-class Loyalist. He is currently seeking to develop his political influence, with a view to making his Party a mouthpiece for the expression of Protestant working class views on a broader forum. In private, he puts forward a political analysis which is surprisingly forward-looking, endorsing a power-sharing Assembly, and meaningful North/South institutions; but he says he has not been prepared to go public with such sentiments.

As a person - particularly in chairing the procession of the City Council - he has come across as a rough diamond; but there is more subtlety behind his approach than is immediately apparent. He was involved in helping to broker the Loyalist ceasefire, and he worked hard to bring the names in his capacity as Lord Mayor to bring together politicians who might have a mutual interest in promoting progress. Evidence of his pre-war respectability can be found in his having been invited to dine with Prince Charles, and meetings with the Prime Minister.

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