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FROM: D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
9 September 1996

Ms Mapstone

cc Mr Leach
Mr Stephens
Mr Whysall (L&B)

Ms M N.

DECOMMISSIONING: EVIDENCE OF GOOD FAITH/OPENING STATEMENT

You will recall that at an earlier stage our gameplan (and draft plenary agenda) called for participants to demonstrate that they were committed to pursuing the Mitchell approach to decommissioning (ie of some decommissioning during talks). Having shelved the idea of giving Senator Mitchell a role in judging the parties' commitment, our most recent wheeze was that everyone should formally commit themselves using a set form of words, rather like the original statements of "total and absolute commitment" to the Mitchell principles.

2. We drafted and, as I recall, secured Ministerial endorsement for the following form of words:

"The participants in the multi-party negotiations aimed at securing a comprehensive negotiated settlement have discussed the International Body's proposals on decommissioning including the approach referred to in paragraphs 34 and 35 in which some decommissioning would take place during the negotiations, rather than before or after. They confirm their commitment to work constructively and in good faith to implement all aspects of the Report of the International Body, in the context of the process as a whole, building trust and confidence as progress is made on the issues".

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3. This was not taken any further (eg we did not show it to the Irish) but in any event it may have been somewhat overtaken by events. Something on these lines may still be necessary to meet unionist requirements (and with Sinn Fein's potential participation in mind) but I would be inclined not to press the idea. Let the unionists take the lead if they want too; but in those circumstances it would be helpful to have a form of words available to put forward if necessary.

4. Could you please review the wording and see whether it needs to be adapted in the light of developments; and also give some thought to the analysis above - am I right to be so relaxed about it? Should we aim to clear any formula with the Irish in advance, or wait until the need arises?

5. The outcome might be a revised form of words which we could hold for use on a contingency basis and, if necessary, a short submission to Ministers inviting their views on the circumstances in which it might be deployed.

6. I suppose we could in theory need to have a form of words available within the next couple of days, so it would be helpful to have an initial response tomorrow.

Opening statement on decommissioning

7. I see you have circulated a revised version of the paper on decommissioning which HMG might table when the "address" to decommissioning starts. Stephen Webb had circulated a speaking note which Ministers might use in introducing it: is that still up to date?

(Signed)

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