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*File
12/7*

From: John Holmes

Date: 16 July 1997

PRIME MINISTER

**cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell
Philip Barton**

NORTHERN IRELAND

You are seeing Trimble at 1400 tomorrow. He will probably bring Taylor, Maginnis and Donaldson with him. Mo and Paul Murphy will be with you. We are having a pre-meeting with Mo and Paul twenty minutes beforehand, to discuss how to handle Trimble.

Trimble is very unhappy about our contacts with Sinn Fein, and what he regards as deceit on Mo's part about them. Mo is giving him tomorrow a copy of Quentin Thomas's letter to McGuinness. He will no doubt not like this, but there is nothing really incriminating in it.

In any case, Trimble's real problem remains decommissioning. He told Paul Murphy a week ago that his overriding concern was that the mechanisms to enable decommissioning to go ahead should be in place when the substantive talks started. The clarifications he received today in the talks effectively give him that. But he is clearly not satisfied (and the DUP and UKUP temporary walk-out today will increase the pressure on him), and is implicitly threatening he will have to vote against the two Governments' joint paper next Wednesday. As I said this morning, that will effectively collapse the talks, since they cannot move on without some form of agreement on decommissioning. In any case, the patience of the other participants (not just the Irish and the SDLP but also the Alliance and the small parties) is at an end.

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Trimble's essential worry is that the substantive talks will start without any real prospect of decommissioning. So he would like a timetable, or at least an assurance that decommissioning will start at the same time as negotiations start. But both these are simply undeliverable, and we will have to face Trimble with that. There may be a little bit of room at the edges to give him something more, but this would have to be in the form of a unilateral statement about our own views. The Irish will not go any further with us in Trimble's direction. And there is always the danger of losing Sinn Fein just at the moment when a ceasefire begins to look likely.

I am afraid you must familiarise yourself with some of the ghastly detail on all this. I strongly recommend you plough through the attached three papers: the joint British/Irish proposals on decommissioning; Trimble's letter to you requesting clarification; and the clarifications given in the talks today.

On tactics, you will want to appear to understand Trimble's concerns and take him seriously and into your confidence. But you cannot and must not promise him much. He will have to make his mind up whether he wants to stay in the process or not, despite all the external and internal pressures on him. If he does not in the end go along on decommissioning, he is bound to attract odium from virtually all quarters. He may also be faced with a peace process which he will like even less, since he will not have the same influence on it through the rule of sufficient consensus - and decommissioning is likely to be even harder to keep on the agenda. This is a point to be made with some delicacy, since we do not wish to reveal to him that we have a Plan B or what it consists of, but he does need to

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know that the alternatives to the present process are likely to be worse from his point of view.

Attached immediately behind are the kind of points you might make to him. The trick is to persuade him to keep his eye on the big game of a settlement, not on the side show of decommissioning.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'John' followed by a stylized surname.

John Holmes

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