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FROM: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

CONFIDENTIAL

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*File
Murphy*

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**John Holmes Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA**

16 July 1997

Dear John,

MEETING WITH THE UUP: 17 JULY

The Prime Minister will meet the UUP tomorrow. My Secretary of State and Mr Murphy will be attending.

This meeting comes at a critical decision point for the UUP. By next Wednesday, they have to decide whether or not to support the two Governments' joint proposals on decommissioning. If they do, it will mean an open breach with the other Unionist parties, the DUP and the UKUP (although the Loyalist parties will still be on side). If they do not, then it is clear these negotiations will be close to collapse.

We want therefore, if possible, to co-opt the UUP to support the joint proposals. But we are subject to some important constraints:

- we are committed to support the joint proposals agreed with the Irish Government and we have told the Irish Government we will stand with them and take the same attitude as them towards any amendments to those proposals;
- we have also agreed with the Irish Government and given to the talks participants a detailed text of clarification on those proposals. We must not get ourselves into a position of going beyond that text or promising to offer further clarification in writing without first clearing it with the Irish;

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- quite apart from the views of the Irish Government, we do not want to disturb the delicate balance on the decommissioning issue which is reflected in the joint proposals - in particular we would not want to meet UUP concerns at the price of losing the prospect of an IRA ceasefire, especially if in doing so we lost Irish and US support for our policy.

However, the joint proposals, as developed in the agreed "clarifications" given to plenary today go a very long way towards meeting the UUP's concerns. Mr Ahern's letter to the Prime Minister of 14 July opened the way to agreement on a set of propositions which do effectively meet Mr Trimble's central political concern - that he should not be in a position of committing himself (next Wednesday) to entering potentially inclusive negotiations on 15 September with Robert McCartney and the DUP able to demonstrate that decommissioning would not be even theoretically possible at that point.

The attached points to make bring out the ways in which the joint proposals meet that concern and explain that there is no further room for manoeuvre.

Mr Trimble's mood, and that of his colleagues in the UUP, is obviously affected by his knowledge of the continuing contacts between officials and Sinn Féin, something which the DUP and Robert McCartney are exploiting to whip up feeling in the wider Unionist community.

These contacts raise genuine Unionist concerns, but they could also provide a convenient smoke screen for the UUP if they ultimately felt unable to support the joint proposals on decommissioning. There is therefore everything to be said for giving Mr Trimble a clear and unapologetic account of the contacts, confirming that they have been pursued with the Prime Minister's full knowledge and authority.

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A particular current Unionist grievance is that Sinn Féin has received a detailed written clarification in response to its concerns, which the UUP has not seen. I understand however that you agreed with the Secretary of State that a copy of the letter of 9 July to Sinn Féin should be handed over to the UUP tomorrow in advance of the meeting with the Prime Minister.

On a formal point, to which Mr Trimble may attach some importance, he has yet to receive a reply to his letter of 30 June to the Prime Minister seeking clarification on the aide memoire and on the joint decommissioning proposals. The agreed clarifications on the joint decommissioning paper have been given to the talks participants in plenary session. Mr Murphy also responded to several Unionist points on the aide memoire, but if it would help (or soothe) Mr Trimble we could offer the Prime Minister a draft letter setting that response out more formally.

I am sending copies of this letter to William Ehrman and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours ever
John McKerrill
McKERVILL

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