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MR HOLMES

cc Ms Polley
Mr Fittall
Mr Sanderson

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N. [unclear] 16/5
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LIAISON GROUP WITH THE IRISH ON 16 MAY

1. I attended the pre-lunch talks (2½ hours), but not lunch itself. The Irish side was the usual mixture of DFA and Taoiseach's office, led by Sean O hUiginn.
2. I gather from Quentin Thomas that the Irish let off a good deal of steam over lunch about the Prime Minister's speech, which they had been given at the end of the morning. They predictably disliked the emphasis on the Union being here to stay, and (especially) the challenge to them to amend their constitution before the end game. But Quentin's view overall was that their reaction could have been worse. HM Ambassador Dublin was due to call on Paddy Teahon this afternoon, and will be reporting in due course.
3. The morning talks went round and round in circles for a long time about decommissioning. Sean O hUiginn said many times that so long as the Unionists used the subject in order to prevent Sinn Fein getting into the talks, it would be impossible to make progress. Quentin Thomas interjected as necessary that we had to try to find a way forward consistent with Mitchell and capable of commanding consensus. At the very end O hUiginn threw out an idea which he could have more helpfully produced at the start: the suggestion that the two governments might jointly say that they had registered the seriousness of the decommissioning question, and that they thereby gave an undertaking that this key agenda item would in due course be taken forward by the two governments on the

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basis of Mitchell, and would be resolved as part of the talks process. Quentin noted that to satisfy the Unionists there would of course also have to be a commitment to establish from time to time the extent of progress on that front.

4. After much hesitation the Irish finally committed themselves to produce a paper on decommissioning in response to ours, in time for discussion at a further liaison group on 27 May. There was talk of a possible meeting between Dr Mowlam and the Tanaiste on 30 May (which would fit well with the planned meeting of IN on 29 May).

Colin Budd

COLIN BUDD

16 May 1997

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