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2 July 1997

Dear John,

**PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE TAOISEACH: 3 JULY**

1. The Prime Minister is meeting Mr Ahern tomorrow, their first meeting since Ahern become Taoiseach. Mr Ray Burke, the Minister for Foreign Affairs will accompany him; Dr Mowlam will attend from our side. We have not received any notification of which Irish officials will be present but they are likely to include, at a minimum, the Ambassador, Paddy Teahan, Sean O'hUiginn and Martin Mansergh. The Ambassador, Sir Robin Butler, Sir John Chilcot and Quentin Thomas are available to attend.

Introduction

2. We would expect this to be a reasonably frank and business-like meeting, in the pragmatic style for which Ahern is known. The issue most likely to upset the equilibrium is Drumcree, depending on the latest developments.

3. Ahern attracted attention during the run-up to the Irish election for his comment that the job of the Irish Government is to represent the interests of Northern nationalists, on the basis that the British Government is predominantly attentive to unionists. Although on the face of it this suggests a significant shift of emphasis from the Bruton era we very much doubt that, in practice, there will be a demonstrable change.

// I think there will be.

4. Ahern has already had a short meeting with Dr Mowlam, when he was in Belfast for a Trade Union Conference earlier this week. As far as tomorrow's meeting is concerned, he will want the Irish people to see that he is taking a close interest in Drumcree, the talks and Sinn Fein. In return, the Prime Minister can use the occasion to ensure that Ahern understands, and is supportive of, the Prime Minister's strategy on talks and Sinn Fein and that the two Governments therefore remain in step. It will be important to send a signal to the Northern Ireland community at

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large, and to the Republic and Americans, that in this early stage of the new Irish Government, London and Dublin continue to stand together.

#### Broad objectives

5. These might be to -

- Get the relationship, both formal and personal, off to a good start.
- Emphasise HMG's desire for a close working relationship with the new Government.
- Bring home to Mr Ahern that HMG remains wedded to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Joint Declaration and Framework Document.
- Review current events, particularly in **Northern Ireland**, but also regarding **Europe** and the **East/West** relationship generally.
- Ensure that the Taoiseach understands, and **supports HMG's strategy** for the talks, decommissioning and Sinn Fein.
- Reach provisional agreement on the timing of a future **Summit**.
- Agree what is said afterwards to the press.

#### Northern Ireland

6. There is broad agreement between the 2 Governments on the talks process, decommissioning and handling Sinn Fein although differences remain in some areas. As this is the first meeting with the new Government it would be helpful if the **Prime Minister ran through the key principles in his Belfast speech and statement to Parliament -**

- The **commitment to consent**, the Agreement, Joint Declaration and Framework Document.
- The **commitment to the talks process**, established with the Irish Government, which, by offering comprehensive negotiations on broad agenda, holds out the best prospect of producing a lasting agreement.
- The determination to make **progress in the talks**, in September, preferably with Sinn Fein, but without them if necessary.
- The decision to **reach out to Sinn Fein**, which led to the clarification in the aide memoire.

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- The commitment to implementation of all aspects of the **Mitchell report**, as a way of resolving decommissioning to the satisfaction of all participants.
- The Government's determination to take steps to **build confidence** in both parts of the community (incorporation of the ECHR, etc)

7. The idea behind the Prime Minister taking the Taoiseach through the key aspects of our policy would be both to **reassure him** that HMG remains wedded to the established elements of co-operation - the Agreement, Joint Declaration, Frameworks, etc - which it would be very important for Mr Ahern to hear - and to make sure that Mr Ahern has no misunderstandings about HMG's strategy, and supports it.

#### Sinn Fein

8. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach will want to have a substantive discussion on Sinn Fein and the IRA. Adams' article in Today's Irish News makes it clear that Sinn Fein will be looking to the Government to provide greater clarity on a range of issues, not least decommissioning (given their concern that decommissioning should not be allowed to block progress in the talks) and confidence building measures, including prisoners. We can expect a letter to follow. *- now arrived.*

9. Adams' article is clearly designed to keep the nationalist community in general, and the Republican movement in particular, informed about the leadership's response to the aide memoire and decommissioning paper. As such, it appears to be intended to keep the movement united and could be preliminary positioning in advance of a ceasefire. He has used the tactic before.

#### Clarification

10. The Prime Minister can repeat what he said to the Taoiseach during their telephone call last week, that if there remain genuine points of uncertainty about the Government's position which Sinn Fein need to be clarified before a ceasefire could be called, then he would be prepared to offer it. Obviously the Prime Minister would not want the Taoiseach to

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get the mistaken impression that HMG was prepared to offer clarification willy-nilly; it has already bent over backwards to make its position clear. But further, limited clarification may be possible, perhaps, like Adams, through the medium of an article and/or a letter at official level.

#### Decommissioning

11. The Prime Minister's telephone call revealed a potentially significant gap between the two Governments on the interpretation of the Mitchell report. The Taoiseach took the line that Mitchell had said that decommissioning "should happen", rather than it would definitely have to. Although this looked like a firm position there is some uncertainty as to whether what the Taoiseach actually meant was that he had no serious expectation that arms would be handed over alongside the talks, whatever anyone said.

12. Either way, the Prime Minister will need to **tackle him directly on this**. If the Taoiseach continues to argue that the Mitchell report never intended that actual decommissioning would take place alongside the negotiations then the Prime Minister could point to the Senator's remarks during an interview with David Frost on 22 June. As far as we are aware, this represents the Senator's most forward position on the "Mitchell compromise"; we doubt whether he would be drawn out any further. In response to a question about whether he regarded it as still possible that a deal could be done on decommissioning "in parallel with, or alongside, the main talks rather than before them"? He said -

"I think it is the only possibility. The two positions that we were asked to assess were that there would be disarmament prior to negotiations beginning on the one hand, and the other position was there would be no disarmament until after these movements are completed and an acceptable result achieved. It was obvious that these were irreconcilable positions and **the only logical commonsense compromise was the middle ground of 'lets proceed with talks and have decommissioning in parallel'**. I think it is the **only basis**. Both Governments have now embraced it".

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13. These comments are fully in line with paragraph 34 of the Mitchell report which says that -

"The parties should consider an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all party negotiations, rather than before or after as the parties now urge. Such an approach represents a compromise".

14. The Taoiseach will be aware of Mr Trimble's long letter to the Prime Minister seeking clarification on decommissioning. The Irish have been briefed on it but not given a copy, and much of the substance of it appeared in today's Newsletter. We will be providing more detailed advice in due course but the Prime Minister might wish to indicate to the Taoiseach how he proposes responding to the letter.

15. Our advice to the Prime Minister is likely to be that he should invite Mr Trimble to an early meeting to discuss the letter; that at the meeting he should reinforce Mr Burke's comments at yesterday's talks when he said that sensible amendments to the paper could be considered; but that the Prime Minister should also make it very clear to Mr Trimble that this paper represents the essential deal as we see it and that neither Government will be backing away from it. In essence, therefore, we would be asking Mr Trimble to decide whether or not his party were in the market for the central propositions in the paper.

16. As part of this discussion, the Prime Minister could usefully bring out to the Taoiseach the way that, as a result of us publishing the aide memoire and the decommissioning paper, we have created a **balance of pressure on Sinn Fein and the UUP**. Sinn Fein and the IRA have to make up their minds on a ceasefire and whether Sinn Fein are going to join the talks; the UUP have to decide whether they can sign up to our decommissioning proposals, which will require unpalatable decisions on the likely timing of the handing over of armaments, and a decisive break from the DUP and UKUP.

17. Having created this balance of pressure, our hope is that, through careful management, Sinn Fein can be brought into the talks and that the Unionists will come to an agreement on decommissioning and thus remain

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in the process. It is pretty obvious, however, that the chances of realising these two possibilities are far from certain. A point worth bringing out to the Taoiseach, however, is that if the IRA fail to call a ceasefire then there will still be a chance of the talks continuing in September without Sinn Fein, whereas if the UUP fail to reach agreement on decommissioning then the talks process will effectively come to an end.

18. The Prime Minister could also suggest that it would encourage the UUP to reach agreement on decommissioning if they could see early action to establish the Independent Commission, especially through the early appointment of the Chairman. Informally, there are indications that General de Chastelain would be happy to take this on, and that the Irish would go along with this on the basis that Senator Mitchell would take on Strand II. The Prime Minister could encourage the Irish to work constructively with us on the new dispositions.

#### Drumcree

19. There is still no sign of a breakthrough on the Drumcree parade, due to take place this Sunday (6 July). Dr Mowlam held 'proximity' talks with both sides at Hillsborough Castle last Friday, at which there was no movement in the residents' position, and only a very slight shift in that of the Orange Order.

20. Further intensive contacts with the Orange Order leadership continue, with a view to trying to put together a package under which the Order would voluntarily forego its parade along the Garvaghy Road in return for a Government statement confirming that incorporation of the ECHR will establish for the first time in British law a specific right to freedom of peaceful assembly (from which the right to march is inferred); broadening somewhat the remit of the Parades Commission to enable it to draw to the Secretary of State's attention public manifestations of cultural tradition which it regards as offensive to either community (so correcting a perceived imbalance, in the eyes of many Unionists, in the Commission's proposed role); and explaining that legislation to enact the North recommendations will require the Commission to take the traditionality of parades into account as one of the relevant factors in reaching its decisions.

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21. We judge that these changes can be justified on the merits, but the timing of such an announcement might provide sufficient cover for the Orangemen to take a principled decision not to march. The prospects, it has to be said, are not encouraging: a meeting of the Portadown lodge tonight (Wednesday) will be a critical point.

22. No decision has yet been taken on whether or not to permit the parade to proceed in the absence of agreement. Dr Mowlam met the Chief Constable and the GOC yesterday and will see them again tomorrow night to review the situation. **The Chief Constable is minded to leave his decision till as late as possible - possibly Friday evening.** (Security cordons will start to be put in place around the area at midday on Friday.) **Dr Mowlam will come out publicly in support of the RUC at the same time.** Further advice will be provided on Thursday night. Residents have already established a 'peace camp' near the road and are mounting nightly pickets along it; they have announced a full day 'festival' to coincide with the parade.

23. Against this background it is essential that the Irish Government **says or does nothing which worsens an already very difficult situation.** Mr Ahern, who met residents groups yesterday, said that no one wanted to see a march 'forced through', though he praised the Secretary of State's continuing efforts: Ray Burke, less helpfully, said that a decision to allow the parade down the Garvaghy Road would be 'a mistake' and would have 'implications for many things on this island'. The Prime Minister should **avoid disclosing the detail of our discussions with the Orange Order or the likely timing of the decision;** instead he might limit himself to the points in the speaking notes attached.

#### Summit

20. The Irish are unlikely to want to go too long before a Summit is held. A date some time in late September/October might be useful and would fit in with the possible timetable for talks. If events demanded it, an informal meeting could be arranged earlier.

#### East/West relationship

21. The Taoiseach has expressed an interest in developing co-operation between London and Dublin on a broad footing, not just Northern Ireland. We would fully support that. It would be useful to examine ways of

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developing and giving a higher profile to a broader East/West agenda. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach might ask officials to develop some proposals which could be considered at a future Summit.

Press

22. As this is the first meeting between the two Heads of Government there is a strong case for a joint photo-call. It will be important for audiences in Northern Ireland, the Republic and the United States to see the two Governments working together in harmony from the outset.

Miscellaneous issues

23. I attach defensive briefing lines on other issues which the Taoiseach might raise - Beaufort's Dyke, Bloody Sunday, Roisin McAliskey, and other Irish prisoners.

24. Copies of this letter, which was seen in draft by the FCO, go to William Ehrman in the Foreign Secretary's office and Jan Polley in the Cabinet Office.

*Yours ever*  
*John Major*  
*PP W K Lindsay*

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