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FROM: D J R HILL
CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION
6 JUNE 1997

CC JEH
AC

cc: (see attached list)

PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Secretary of State (L&B)

Rig
Jun 10/6.

TALKS: GAMEPLAN FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING 9 JUNE

Objectives

These might be to:

- (a) finalise agreement with the Irish on the substance of the set of "possible conclusions" to the debate on decommissioning;
- (b) reach agreement with them and the Chairmen on the tactics of playing the paper into the talks (perhaps aiming to do so on Monday 16 June) and working towards a determination;
- (c) take a range of preparatory steps designed to exert the maximum possible positive and negative pressure on Mr Trimble and the UUP to acquiesce in and support the proposals. This might include;
 - Ministerial and Prime Ministerial meetings with the parties, especially the UUP;
 - preparations to mobilise Unionist public opinion, the business community, the Protestant Churches, the minor parties etc in encouraging Mr Trimble to reach an honourable compromise on

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5. The plenary will meet at 2 pm on Tuesday, the anniversary of the start of the multi-party negotiations. (In Mr Murphy's absence on Cabinet Committee business I hope the Secretary of State will be able to attend.) The DUP might expect an opportunity to make an "opening statement", otherwise the main business will be to hear an interim report from Mr Holkeri (in Senator Mitchell's absence) and fix a date for the next plenary - ? Monday 16 June at noon. It would be highly desirable if the two Governments were able by Tuesday afternoon to signal a decisive move on the decommissioning issue for the following week.

6. That would require prior agreement with the Irish on both the substance and the tactical handling of our proposition, which might be possible by Tuesday. Otherwise we should work to achieve such agreement before the end of the week, assuming a reasonably clear outcome to the Irish General Election. (There may be about a week's slack if absolutely necessary: what follows assumes that we are able to reach agreement on the paper with the Irish by the end of next week.)

7. If on course to table the paper on 16 June, it would be desirable to plan and probably initiate a range of measures intended to encourage Mr Trimble to respond positively to it.

Negotiations with the Irish

8. Irish officials responded very warmly to our paper on 4 June but will need to get (probably bipartisan) political cover before giving an authoritative response. However, they hoped to achieve this by Tuesday at the latest. They had reached the psychologically significant point of deciding to show the paper to Sinn Fein, which may suggest that they accept it is the best deal on decommissioning which can be obtained and that an adverse Sinn Fein reaction would be seen as evidence of the Republican Movement's lack of serious intent or lack of realism, but we cannot rule out the possibility that such a reaction would lead to the Irish seeking significant changes to the paper. We can in any event expect them to chip away at some elements

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of the paper in ways which would reduce the prospects for securing UUP acquiescence in it. A Ministerial level engagement, ideally before Tuesday's plenary, may be necessary to finalise agreement on the paper and on the tactics for playing it in. However, the Irish may not field any senior Ministers and the Secretary of State and Mr Murphy will not be available for the talks on Tuesday morning anyway so it may be more realistic to plan on a meeting, perhaps in London (or Dublin), later in the week. //

9. If there are any outstanding points of difficulty between the two Governments I know that Senator Mitchell would be happy to "facilitate" an agreement if necessary, but he will not be present next week and neither Mr Holkeri nor General de Chastelain could speak with the same authority. However, it might be possible to engage Senator Mitchell by fax and conference call.

10. It is also for consideration whether we should brief the US Administration and ask them to encourage the Irish (and indeed Sinn Fein) to adopt a reasonable line on this issue; but this could backfire as they may support the Irish viewpoint. It might be worth doing if we knew we had Senator Mitchell on board. //

11. More generally we might continue to encourage direct contact between the UUP and the Irish Government, whether at Castle Buildings or more privately - so far as the political situation in Dublin permits. Both sides profess to want greater contact but have so far failed to achieve it. If the Irish could be convinced that the UUP were serious about wanting to achieve a political settlement and had real concerns about decommissioning, it would make them more receptive to our propositions.

Tactics of playing the paper in

12. Although Senator Mitchell would be happy to table any paper agreed between the two Governments, Seamus Mallon and John Hume told the media last Tuesday that the two Governments were working on a paper which they would table within the next week or so and that is the main burden of Irish briefing in today's Irish Times. While

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the Unionists might have a shred of extra cover if any paper was formally in the name of the Chairmen, it may now be best to recognise reality and put it forward in the name of the two Governments (as currently drafted).

13. Senator Mitchell has always operated on the basis of a model in which the two Governments would each "square" what he sees as their respective client parties - the UUP and SDLP. This was never a helpful model and is now quite inappropriate, as I have explained to Martha Pope.

14. The mechanics of achieving "sufficient consensus" require the tabling of a paper on decommissioning which is at least capable of securing "sufficient consensus" so that once parties have had an opportunity to discuss it and debate possible amendments (which would probably fail to secure sufficient consensus support) they are faced with a choice of supporting it or being responsible for the effective collapse of the talks process. The paper as currently drafted represents our best judgement of what could secure sufficient consensus support, based on months of discussion and negotiation. In a sense, therefore, there is no objective need to have a round of discussion with the UUP (or anyone else) on the substance of the paper, but as the Irish will undoubtedly show the paper to the SDLP (and Sinn Fein) it would be important to show the paper to Mr Trimble and talk him through it before it is tabled. If we are on course to table the paper on 16 June, the meeting with Mr Trimble should take place before the end of next week (see also below). The Secretary of State may be in a position to show the paper to Mr Trimble at Tuesday's dinner.

15. I would also favour a meeting with the SDLP before the end of next week to talk them through the paper, to ensure they get our perspective as well as the Irish Government's. It is for consideration that Mr Murphy should brief Lord Alderdice too.

Preparatory steps

16. The following proposals reflect the need to

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- maximise the positive and negative incentives on Mr Trimble to go along with our paper on decommissioning;
- counter the further pre-emptive briefing we can expect the Irish Government, SDLP and Sinn Fein to engage in if we remain on course to table the paper on 16 June. They will want to emphasise the lack of any requirement for prior decommissioning; assert that the issue is to be "addressed" alongside the substantive negotiations; point to the lack of any need for firm prior commitments to actual decommissioning; and replay the "consider" heresy - all points which will raise Unionist fears and reduce the likelihood of UUP acquiescence at the end of the day.

17. Against that background, we should aim to

- convince Mr Trimble that there are no alternative easier ways forward, for example by excluding Sinn Fein permanently from the talks, or proceeding with devolution for Northern Ireland alongside Scotland and Wales leaving other "strands" (especially North/South institutions) to be tackled later - or not at all. This might be a major objective for Tuesday evening. It might also require a meeting at Prime Ministerial level before the end of next week. [If we remain on course we will let you have a minute and briefing midweek, but the Private Secretary may like to alert No 10 to the possibility now];
- settle Unionist concerns about aspects of the talks process. There is a draft article on the stocks which tackles Mr McCartney's main thesis; the draft replies to the Questions for Oral Answer on Wednesday include one which seeks to put the Joint Framework Document in context and others, on the "political"/ "peace process", reiterate the Government's focus on the talks process and its commitment to proceeding on the basis of agreement - these can be press released;

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- maintain the climate of expectation, building on the bull points in last Tuesday's press release: commitment to make real early progress in the negotiations; need to resolve decommissioning soon; determination to facilitate a resolution of this issue; confidence that a way can be found. Later in the week we may be able to warm that up;
- assemble and begin to deploy the whole range of reasons why the UUP should go along with the propositions in the decommissioning paper. We will not be able to finalise this until we have agreed the paper with the Irish and may not be able to deploy all the arguments publicly until the paper has been tabled in the talks; but it could be a useful resource throughout next week. CPL will circulate a first draft later today;
- plan to mobilise influential voices within the Unionist community in favour of a reasonable compromise on decommissioning and in support of positive leadership from Mr Trimble. Yesterday's Newsletter editorial and the G7 initiative provide a good start. Mr Murphy might tip off Archbishop Eames and other church leaders, and the G7 that it would be helpful if they gave Mr Trimble every encouragement to respond positively to any initiative. The minor parties can be expected to rally round any paper on the lines envisaged and we should make plans to ensure that that is brought out;
- begin discreet press briefing on the nature of any compromise proposals on decommissioning, emphasising the ways in which legitimate Unionist concerns would be met. This would need to be carefully judged as to content and timing and would need to avoid detail in order to minimise accusations of breaching talks confidentiality. CPL will provide a suitable briefing note. I should be grateful for Press Office advice on the mechanics: an unattributable briefing for specialist journalists might be considered;
- (if necessary, at the end of the week) brief the official Opposition, in line with the Government's expressed commitment to a bipartisan approach.

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Briefing meeting

18. I understand that a briefing meeting has been arranged for 12.30 on Monday, on the VCR (Stormont Castle/Millbank).

(Signed: David Hill)

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