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PRIME MINISTER

File John 16/9.
From: John Holmes
Date: 9 September 1997
cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell

NORTHERN IRELAND: TRIMBLE (1230)

PLEASE READ THESE PAPERS. THERE SHOULD BE A GAP IMMEDIATELY BEFORE THE MEETING TO DO SO, IF YOU HAVE NOT READ THEM ALREADY, AND TO TALK THROUGH THE ISSUES WITH US AND PAUL MURPHY.

Td
I am not sure whether you had a chance to read my note of yesterday on how to handle Trimble. If not, my basic point was that you need not just to be persuasive with Trimble, but also tough in telling him that he must look at the big picture on the substantive issues, and that he will get no sympathy from us if he stays out.

This means you need to launch in with what you want from him, not the other way round, and the nonsensical position he will find himself in if he stays out after Sinn Fein's acceptance of the Mitchell Principles – we need him to help us put Sinn Fein to the test. NB the Loyalist parties are now saying they will follow the UUP's decision, which makes this meeting all the more crucial.

I attach an NIO brief, which is tiresomely long but which you should read. The key points are as follows:

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- we are committed to starting substantive talks on Monday, 15 September, more or less come what may. If Trimble will not agree both to talk to Sinn Fein and to accept our decommissioning proposals, actively or passively, we have no real choice but to move straight to Plan B. You (and he) need to know that – we can present this in a relatively soft way, i.e. that we want to come back to the present talks format as soon as possible, but Trimble needs to know he faces a real deadline on Monday, **including on decommissioning** (i.e. he cannot stay in the talks and expect to go on talking about decommissioning without getting on to the substantive issues);
- we have the language on consent and decommissioning agreed with the Irish to deploy with Trimble (attached) – best done by telling him that you think you can just secure Irish agreement to it if Trimble is ready to use it as a reason to come in. NB the new passage reaffirming “sufficient consensus”, which ought to please Trimble. If Trimble says it is all no good, as is only too likely, the Irish will not be prepared to agree anything beyond what they have said already. (Trimble will hate this but needs to know the score);
- we are serious about Trimble’s proposed CBMs, despite his reaction to Murphy’s letter. We will do our level best, and make clear publicly our readiness to tackle his agenda, but we cannot deliver instant miracles (there is a specific brief on the CBMs). The Business Managers are still incidentally dragging their feet on agreeing the legislative route for RUC reform, despite all my efforts, but they are not going to object to the

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principle of legislation. I suggest you simply tell Trimble so, and say that we are ready to make this public too;

- Trimble does not have to endorse formally our decommissioning proposals, although we hope he will. He could instead acquiesce in a procedural motion (flagged up behind) which simply notes that the two Governments will now implement their proposals, accepts proposals previously tabled by the UUP, SDLP and Alliance on the agenda for the substantive talks, and formally launches the 3 strands;
- we have not solved the Chairmanships issue – Mitchell is jibbing hard at the proposed fudge over Strand 2 chairmanship. So if Trimble wants de Chastelain to chair the Independent Commission, he will probably have to accept Mitchell in Strand 2. If he cannot have Mitchell at any price, the solution is for a Finnish General to chair the Independent Commission, with a new Canadian member, and de Chastelain to stay on Strand 2. Which does he prefer?
- you will need to send a letter to Trimble after the meeting to confirm what you have said – NIO draft with their brief flagged behind – we can look at the details of this after the meeting;
- if Trimble raises the specific “triple lock” point towards the end of his latest letter, you need to dodge: the reason you want to keep the current talks process going is precisely to ensure sufficient consensus. If Trimble pulls the plug, the rules will inevitably be different. (This is a key argument to keep him in.)

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Key background papers flagged, which you should remind yourself of:

- Language agreed with the Irish;
- NIO brief, including general points to make, draft procedural motion, draft letter to Trimble and points on CBMs;
- Letter from Trimble of 4 September.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'John Holmes', written in a cursive style.

John Holmes

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