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FAXED *Via Conlan
22/8/97
(subjected at back door)*

From: Philip Barton
Date: 22 August 1997

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
John Holmes

NORTHERN IRELAND: THE WAY AHEAD

I attach a minute from Mo Mowlam to you on where things stand and the way ahead. She has broadly agreed this, but the final version will not arrive until Tuesday. (I am also attaching Trimble's letter to you of 30 June and the Agreement on the decommissioning commission for ease of reference.)

The minute strikes me as a good description of where we have got to, with sensible suggestions for the way ahead. There are, however, two areas to which I think the NIO might give further thought:

- (i) Trimble – I am not sure the draft reply from you will help that much. If anything it accentuates how little we can give him on decommissioning. It may therefore be better not to send it. But this will depend on whether he continues to press for a response when he returns from his holiday (due back at the weekend). At the same time, it would seem to me to be a mistake to wait for Trimble to tell us what he needs to stay in the talks. This will simply lead him to ask for more than we can deliver. I would have thought it would be better to put some concrete proposals to him.
- (ii) There must be a chance that when they are confronted with the Mitchell Principles on 9 September, Sinn Fein will use some clever words, which the Unionists will interpret as equivocal, while the Irish (and probably also

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the Americans) argue that Sinn Fein have gone far enough. This would leave us torn in two directions and the NIO should probably give some thought in advance to how we would handle such a situation.

I should add that these are only preliminary thoughts following a quick read of the papers. John and Jonathan will no doubt have their own considered views when they are back next week.

As regards the IRA cease-fire, Mo plans to meet the Chief Constable and others on Tuesday morning to discuss it before minuting you. She then intends to announce the outcome, in Belfast, on Thursday afternoon, after her meeting with you that morning, before returning to London to do some more press work on the Friday.

Philip

PHILIP BARTON

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