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FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
31 OCTOBER 1996

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Steele - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Lavery - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Priestly - B
Mr Cornick - B
Mr Whysall (L&B) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Clarke, Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott, W'ton via RID - B
Mr Oakden, No 10 - B
Ms Collins, Cab Office (via IPL) - B

PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B
PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

TALKS: GAMEPLAN FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING 4 NOVEMBER

Objectives

These might be to

- participate constructively in an exploration of each participant's initial presentation on the issue of decommissioning;
- pursue the "Hume/Adams" initiative to a constructive conclusion on the lines approved by NI;

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- begin to canvass support for a possible alternative exit strategy from the debate on decommissioning.

Handling

2. The plenary has scheduled meetings from 1pm to 8pm on Monday 4 November and 10 am to 6pm on Tuesday and Wednesday. We will need to liaise closely with the Irish, especially the DOJ, over the two Governments' responses to questions on decommissioning.

3. If the Hume/Adams initiative is still "live" it could generate a considerable requirement for meetings with the Irish, and possibly John Hume, and the UUP. Whatever happens it would probably be desirable to brief Mr Trimble early in the week: the weekend press will probably set several hares running.

4. Meanwhile the UUP is also keen to have a meeting to consider ways of avoiding or handling the "crunch" on decommissioning, which they expect to come during the following week. Our proposed alternative exit strategy will in any event need to be canvassed with them and with the Irish.

5. This looks like generating a busy, complicated and inter-related programme of activity during which we may need to divide our forces. Officials from both the Political and Security Directorates will be available to provide support in plenary and bilateral meetings and to maintain contact with relevant Irish colleagues.

The debate on Decommissioning

6. Senator Mitchell has already shown that he is quite capable of structuring a debate even without the assistance of a Business Committee, though Unionist pressure for a substantive meeting of the Committee will not go away. It would be desirable to have a meeting

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with Senator Mitchell before lunch on Monday to find out how he intends to proceed. We can support any sensible proposals for ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to develop their understanding of each other's positions, while avoiding the implication - which the Irish fear - that particular delegations will be "put in the dock".

7. Briefing folders will be available at Castle Buildings on Monday containing

- our own paper, speaking note and suggested conclusions;
- the draft Decommissioning Bill and defensive briefing on the issues raised by the Bill (forensic examination, amnesty, extension to GB etc);
- copies of all the papers tabled so far by other delegations.

8. During this phase of the debate Ministers might stick to the line reflected in the paper and speaking note of 30 October - explaining and seeking to win Unionist support for the approach set out in the "suggested conclusions", while signalling a readiness to reflect on what is said by others. Our overall objectives in the debate might be to

- present the "suggested conclusions" in the most Unionist-favourable light;
- ensure that everyone understands the reality and the nature of the impasse which currently faces us on decommissioning.

9. Mrs Owen has already signalled her anxiety that the two Governments should keep in step during this phase; and we may need to spend time liaising with her and her officials.

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10. Additionally, Ministers have yet to deploy the material in the "Riposte to Mr McCartney": an opportunity may arise during the week.

"Hume/Adams"

11. This will probably be a constant background preoccupation. Obviously the issues, especially the criteria and timeframe which should apply to Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations after any purported ceasefire, are very relevant to the decommissioning debate and may well be raised in that context.

12. If the "Hume/Adams" initiative is brought to a rapid conclusion the text might be deployed in the Talks. Separate advice will be coming forward on the possibility of utilising a forthcoming speech opportunity to bring out the key messages and package them for public consumption.

13. Any further IRA atrocity could also have a decisive effect on the decommissioning debate by confirming Sinn Fein's effective exclusion from the process for the immediate future.

A possible alternative exit strategy

14. Senator Mitchell has advised us to begin working on a new exit strategy. A possible alternative, building on Mr Thomas' suggestion that decisions might be handed over to an Independent Commission, has been worked up and will be submitted by IPL shortly.

15. We might aim to discuss the tactical options on Monday morning but it may be most straightforward to recruit the UUP first: if they accept, it will be easier to recruit the Irish who are in any event likely to have less difficulty with it. The proposal will most likely need to be pursued in bilaterals throughout the week, for possible deployment the following week.

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Logistics

16. I understand that it would be convenient to hold Monday's briefing meeting at 10.30 am. That would allow time for a meeting with the Independent Chairmen (and the Irish) and lunch before the plenary commences at 1 pm.

(signed)

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