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From the Private Secretary

24 July 1997

Dear Rupert,

NORTHERN IRELAND

We spoke about your Minister's visit to Belfast, and I had a quick word with the Minister this morning. As I explained, there is no piece of paper which brings everything together in an up-to-date way, but the attached bundle of basic documents may help -

- an overview paper from May prepared for the new government;
- Prime Minister's speech of 16 May;
- Prime Minister's statement of 25 June;
- aide memoire sent to Sinn Fein on 13 June;
- letter to Sinn Fein of 9 July;
- two governments' decommissioning proposals and briefing on them;
- letter to the Prime Minister from Trimble of 30 June (to illustrate UUP views)
- NIO paper on "Plan B";
- record of 21 July meeting with UUP (for flavour).

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The present position with the UUP is that they have voted against the decommissioning proposals but not walked out of the talks, unlike the DUP and UKUP. The Prime Minister has told both the Irish and Trimble that he wants to make a further effort to provide enough cover on decommissioning and consent for the UUP to vote for the proposals in September and keep the all-party talks process alive. This may or may not work. If it does not, the substantive talks will presumably have to go ahead in September, through some form of "Plan B", ie bilateral and variable geometry talks with and between the parties. There is no reason to suppose the Unionists would not go along with this but we cannot yet be sure. The aim would be agreement in May to put to a subsequent referendum. This is a highly ambitious timetable.

Yours etc

John

JOHN HOLMES

I also attach a copy of the Joint Framework Document of 1995, which gives an outline of what settlement might look like.

Rupert Huxter Esq
Office of the Minister without Portfolio