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FROM: D J R HILL
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM
20 NOVEMBER 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 Leach - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - 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
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B

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

TALKS AND IGC, 20 NOVEMBER: THE HANDLING OF DECOMMISSIONING

I attach briefing which should serve for any meetings during the day on this issue, especially the proposed meeting with the UUP, and for the IGC.

2. It will, obviously, need to be read with the separate briefing from IPL on the "Hume/Adams text"/conditions of entry for Sinn Fein.

3. If there is any need to update the briefing before the IGC, a replacement for the relevant annex will be provided.

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4. In addition to the proposed meeting with the UUP during the day, the Chairmen have asked to see both Governments, at around 12 noon (once they return from attending - at the invitation of the artist - a small ceremony at City Hall to unveil a portrait of the previous Lord Mayor painted by Cedric Wilson!). They may wish to

- pass on General de Chastelain's thoughts about the handling of the decommissioning issue, and/or
- seek advice on arrangements for next week. [I understand Prime Minister Holkeri has signalled that the next plenary will be "not before" noon on 25 November.]

(signed)

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TALKS AND IGC, 20 NOVEMBER: THE HANDLING OF DECOMMISSIONING

Objectives

These might be to

- secure from the UUP some indication of whether they would be prepared to consider something on the lines of our fallback exit strategy;
- persuade the Irish to retain an open mind on the proposal in the paper we sent them on 14 November.

Background

2. The handling of decommissioning in the talks is intimately bound up with both the terms on which Sinn Fein might join the talks and the outcome of discussions on the "Hume/Adams text".

3. The UUP find it difficult to tackle the issue in isolation and may be unwilling to commit themselves on the handling of decommissioning without knowing the score on conditions of entry. At yesterday's meeting Michael Ancram took them through the aide memoire at Annex A (without handing a copy over). Their general position was that if a satisfactory position was reached on conditions of entry it might well be possible to reach an understanding on the mechanisms for handling decommissioning. In that context they showed no antipathy to a model in which an inchoate Commission and a Liaison Committee would operate in parallel, but did not respond to the suggestion that the Commission might "offer a judgement" on when decommissioning should start. Pressed to be more specific on whether as part of an agreement on the handling of decommissioning they might be able to drop their undeliverable requirements [for a tranche of prior decommissioning and prior commitment to a schedule of decommissioning] there was the

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hint of a suggestion from Reg Empey that they might be able to proceed if the principle of decommissioning during the talks could be established, but subsequent contributions (eg from Peter Weir) resurrected the original requirements.

4. We encouraged them to discuss their proposals with the SDLP to assess whether they could carry "sufficient consensus". When I spoke to Reg Empey last night he said they had had to agree to differ on the question of entry conditions, but had agreed to continue working together (and with the Alliance Party) on possible mechanisms for handling decommissioning in the talks. This is encouraging so far as it goes.

5. Mr Empey said the UUP would not be ready for an early meeting today but when I reminded him that we would like to have at least some indication of the UUP reaction to our proposals before the IGC he undertook to be in touch during the course of the day.

6. Meanwhile we understand that Mr Trimble and Mr Maginnis will be seeing the Prime Minister tomorrow: it may be that no-one from the UUP will be authorised to offer any views on the handling of decommissioning until that meeting has taken place.

7. So far as the Irish reaction to our paper of 14 November (Annex B) is concerned, they have come down off the ceiling but have yet to be convinced of its merits. In a wide ranging two hour meeting yesterday afternoon at official level we again set out the rationale for our proposed approach, saw off various misperceptions and exposed the lack of alternative exit strategies. Ultimately the Irish side

- agreed to give the paper serious consideration, especially if we could indicate that the UUP would be prepared to go along with it, but warned that it would probably be unacceptable to the Irish Government as likely to reduce the chances of bringing Sinn Fein in;

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- noted the possibility of going some way in our (and Ken Maginnis') direction by agreeing to the establishment of an inchoate Commission, limited to the technicalities of developing, implementing, and verifying any decommissioning scheme (Mr O'hUiginn);
- raised the interesting possibility of giving the responsibility for "offering a judgement" on when decommissioning should start to the Independent Chairmen (a rather more imaginative, though probably unscripted, contribution from Wally Kirwan of the Taoiseach's Department).

Analysis

8. This is not a promising scenario but our proposal continues to represent a highly defensible "signing off" position for HMG; no-one has adduced any knockdown objections to it; and (crucially) no-one has any better ideas. We should continue to pursue it.

Handling

9. Obviously our leverage on the Irish would be much greater if there were any indication from the UUP about the approach to decommissioning which we have put to them could be acceptable and might enable them to withdraw their two undeliverable requirements. The meeting with the UUP could therefore be significant but in the circumstances a break through is unlikely.

10. With or without any indication of a positive reaction from the UUP, Ministers might aim at the IGC to persuade Irish Ministers to at least keep an open mind on our proposal. They might also draw out the lack of any credible alternative and the urgent need to find an agreed basis for handling decommissioning in the talks.

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11. If the Irish side shows any disposition to develop the Wally Kirwan variant, that should be encouraged.

12. Summaries of the points which might be made to, respectively, the UUP and Irish Ministers are at Annexes C and D.

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