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FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
8 NOVEMBER 1996

DESK IMMEDIATE

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 Office (via IPL) - B

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

TALKS: GAMEPLAN FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING 11 NOVEMBER

Objectives

These might be to:

- utilise the forthcoming bilaterals to promote convergence on agreed conclusions from the debate on decommissioning;
- (perhaps) table revised "suggested conclusions", if possible by 10 am on Wednesday 13 November but otherwise by the end of the week;
- bring the "Hume/Adams initiative" to a satisfactory conclusion.

Background

2. There are a few mildly encouraging features in the present situation. This week's debates have exposed the Irish Government to the full force of Unionist concerns about the conditions on which Sinn Fein might be invited to join the talks, and about the need to secure at least parallel decommissioning. If they were listening and being honest with themselves, they may have come to an uncomfortable realisation of the weakness of their own arguments and the inconsistency of their present position with their previous statements.

3. The SDLP demonstrated both a more sympathetic appreciation of Unionist concerns and a readiness to work constructively to find a way through the decommissioning impasse. The UUP and SDLP have agreed to hold bilateral meetings and both showed interest in the Alliance party's ideas which were close to our own fallback exit strategy and which would involve separating decommissioning out and giving responsibility to an Independent Commission formed by reconstituting the International Body.

4. Separately, the Irish signalled a readiness to re-open the question of at least designating members of the proposed Independent Commission and to respond to Ken Maginnis' clear desire that General de Chastelain should have a key role in this area. If the current speculation about Senator Mitchell's future role is borne out it may give more scope to resolve the various chairmanship issues.

5. Although the two Governments are playing hardball on the terms of Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations, relations remain good. It is potentially useful that the Irish have been manoeuvred into brokering texts with Sinn Fein and are starting with a disposition to secure commitments to permanence and to the principle of consent from the Republican Movement. They might get further than we would,

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especially as they can utilise direct official contacts, and if they fail to secure anything satisfactory they may be more ready to join us in taking the talks forward without Sinn Fein. (On the other hand, Mr Spring's reported suggestion that such talks could not lead to an accommodation is distinctly unhelpful.)

Timetable

6. Participants have agreed to devote Monday and Tuesday to bilateral meetings and the preparation of concise papers setting out the conclusions or principles they would draw from the debate so far. These papers are to be submitted by 10 am on Wednesday 13 November, for consideration at a further plenary meeting to commence at noon on Monday 18 November. The Wednesday deadline is therefore somewhat artificial and we could probably submit further papers up to the morning of Monday 18 November.

7. It may also be relevant that Ministers will be fully engaged on Wednesday morning, meeting Dr North and his colleagues on the Parades Review.

Handling

8. Discussions on the "Hume/Adams text" will follow their own timetable. There may well be a need for meetings with the Irish, the UUP and perhaps others at short notice. Officials are preparing explanatory/defensive material against the possibility that any text will be deployed shortly and against the possibility that the two Governments will be unable to reach agreement and that the Irish or Sinn Fein will start briefing against HMG.

9. On the decommissioning debate, the two Governments have already tabled some suggested conclusions to the decommissioning debate and one option would be to leave these on the table. It may be more constructive, however, for the two Governments to signal a readiness to adjust their position. The options are to

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- build on the Irish side's readiness to revisit the possibility of creating an embryo Commission and to re-open the distribution of Chairmanship functions to give General de Chastelain a greater role in relation to decommissioning;

- persuade the Irish side to consider something on the lines of our fallback exit strategy. The best tactic here might be to encourage that suggestion to emerge from bilateral (or even trilateral) meetings between the UUP, SDLP and Alliance party.

10. That might point to a pattern of activity on the following lines

Early Monday - a bilateral with the Alliance party to encourage them to promote their concept in exchanges with the UUP, SDLP and DUP (who we should try to get on board if at all possible);

Later on Monday - a substantial bilateral with the UUP, perhaps after they have spoken to the SDLP, to encourage any signs of convergence on possible agreed conclusions. (It is helpful that the Secretary of State has already drawn Mr Trimble's attention to the Alliance party concept);

Monday/Tuesday - bilaterals with the SDLP, DUP/UKUP and any other parties who wish to see us;

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Tuesday

- a substantial bilateral with the Irish to explore the scope for movement on the two Governments' "suggested conclusions" in the light of progress in the bilaterals.

11. If Ministers are content we might aim to set up the proposed meetings with the Alliance party, UUP and Irish Government as soon as possible and fit the others in around them.

Briefing meeting

12. We may be able to cover some of this ground at this afternoon's discussion on the VCR at 3 pm: otherwise I gather it would be convenient to take stock briefly at about 11.02 am on Monday morning.

(signed)

D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
OAB 210 6591

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CPL/8871/CAO