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32. For its part, the Government believes that it is on the basis of working constructively to implement all aspects of the report that the issue of decommissioning should be advanced, and it will work with all participants to achieve this.

ANNEX C

(25 October)

A POSSIBLE RIPOSTE TO MR MCCARTNEY

I should like to allude briefly to Mr McCartney's lengthy initial statement. It was powerfully argued but based on so many false premises and unfounded assertions that I see a genuine opportunity to convince him that a different analysis of the situation is possible and that this political process is one to which he can give his full support. I have the greatest respect for Mr McCartney's personal integrity and the political principles on which his party is based and I crave colleagues' indulgence as I spend a few minutes attempting to harness his considerable political talents to our common cause.

2. The caricature of the talks process which Mr McCartney drew during his remarks had only the most tenuous links with reality and I think I can demonstrate that by making four brief points.

3. First, the British Government, for its part, is totally committed to the search for a political accommodation in relation to Northern Ireland which is acceptable to substantial majorities in both parts of the community, and more widely. The criterion of "widespread acceptance" has been a feature of British Government policy from the very outset of "the Troubles". Together with the Irish Government we proposed the doctrine of "sufficient consensus" in the Ground Rules paper published as Command 3232 and we supported its elaboration in our rules of procedure. We also fully acknowledged the point Mr McCartney made early on in these proceedings about the need for any potential agreement to be capable of securing the breadth of support necessary to ensure its political

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efficacy; and we supported his party's resolution to that effect. We will not depart from that principle. Not only is it right in an absolute sense: any other approach would in practice be doomed to failure. Given our commitment to the principle of widespread acceptance - a commitment shared, I believe, by every other delegation around this table - I hope Mr McCartney will accept that the various conspiracy theories he propounded in his statement have simply no basis in reality.

4. Second, much of Mr McCartney's argument was based on the alleged fear that the Union was under threat as a result of these talks or of the peace process more generally. The principle of widespread acceptance to which I have already referred should answer that concern, but he can surely also take comfort from the unanimous support of all the parties represented around the table for the specific proposition that there could and should be no change to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people who live here. That is also the clear view of all the parties represented in the Westminster Parliament and of all the parties represented in the Dail. This was clearly reflected in the report of the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation which was endorsed, on this point, by every participating party except Sinn Fein. More recently, the Taoiseach made the position of the Irish Government absolutely clear in the Dail on 10 October.

5. I should like to encourage Mr McCartney to study the whole of Mr Bruton's statement, but it may be helpful to quote one or two extracts from it now. Mr Bruton said:

"We, the people, in the Republic have no agenda of a progressive takeover of Northern Ireland, against the wishes of a majority of people there. If there ever was such an agenda or mentality here, it has certainly gone..... There probably are still quite a number of unionist-minded people in Northern Ireland who have not grasped this sea-change that has occurred, not only in the policies of all constitutional parties in this

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State, but among the population at large. But if those people had been present at the debates and discussions in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, they would have seen that Irish nationalists are far from constituting a hostile monolith.

"There is no pan-nationalist front, intent on pursuing a malign agenda to undermine the identity or heritage of Unionists or their involvement in the UK. Any Government I head would never be part of any such agenda. And, to be fair, I do not believe that such an agenda would be followed by any Government that could be formed from any combination of the parties that are represented in this House.

Mr Bruton quoted from paragraph 5 of the Downing Street Declaration, which included the following passage:

"The Taoiseach, on behalf of the Irish Government, consider that the lessons of Irish history, and especially of Northern Ireland, show that stability and well-being will not be found under any political system which is refused allegiance or rejected on grounds of identity by a significant minority of those governed by it. For this reason, it would be wrong to attempt to impose a United Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland."

Mr Bruton continued:

"..... all parties in this House and all constitutional nationalist parties throughout this island, as well as others, supported that position taken by the then Government.

"That multi-party agreement was fully replicated in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, where constitutional parties sat down with Sinn Fein to see how far could agreement be reached on the realities, principles and requirements of a path to a

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political settlement. Apart from Sinn Fein, all the parties held absolutely firm to the principle of consent."

6. The idea that the British Government should feel able, or wish, to challenge this consensus and hold out to Sinn Fein the prospect of early moves towards Irish unity in defiance of this principle is frankly preposterous.

7. My third point concerns the sustained efforts which have been made in recent years, including by the British Government, to bring Sinn Fein into normal politics on the back of an IRA ceasefire. In a typical flight of hyperbole Mr McCartney characterised this as a denial of democracy and made clear that he regarded the phrase "taking risks for peace" as nothing more than a fig leaf. In a passage which chilled me he conceded that the IRA ceasefire was a "bonus" for those hundreds of individuals who were now alive and unscarred as a consequence, but warned that it was a development with potentially serious - but unspecified - adverse consequences for the Unionist people. I shall restrict myself to saying that, from the British Government's perspective, the saving of any life is not a "bonus" - it is worth any expenditure of time and effort. Any attempt to buy off those ready to deploy terrorist violence would be wrong in principle and probably doomed to failure in practice. But working, on terms consistent with principle, to demonstrate that there is a basis for ending terrorism is a worthwhile and honourable task and I make no apology for it.

8. It is all very well for Mr McCartney to point out that the IRA and other terrorist organisations should never have resorted to terrorism and the true democrats should have nothing to do with the perpetrators of terrorism. It is certainly much more comfortable to rest on moral absolutes like that. But Governments and some political leaders in Northern Ireland have not felt able to avail of that luxury. They have taken the difficult path. They have taken risks for peace - the risk of being misunderstood, the risk of being misrepresented, the risk of facile criticism from those who do not acknowledge the burden of political responsibility.

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9. But I reiterate - and this is the key point - that all our efforts to make it possible for Sinn Fein and the Loyalist political parties to join the political process have been within a framework of key principles, set out publicly in the Downing Street Declaration of December 1993. Nothing has been said or done which is inconsistent with total adherence to the principle of consent and to the need for any political settlement to be acceptable to broad majorities in each part of the community in Northern Ireland.

10. The search for a widely acceptable political settlement, achieved by agreement among constitutional political parties and the two Governments, is worthwhile in its own right. Political stability, a functioning political accommodation between the two main political traditions in Ireland and an end to the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland are highly desirable objectives. But if, within the principles on which such a settlement must be founded, we can also persuade terrorist organisations of all hues to turn from violence and embrace democratic politics, we would maximise the prospects for a peaceful and secure future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

11. That leads on to my final point which challenges Mr McCartney's apparent belief that these negotiations are inherently and inevitably a zero - sum game in which any political advance by one side is necessarily a retreat or defeat for the other. This is patently a false premise. This process has the potential to bring about political stability and a permanent peace in Northern Ireland; to establish new institutions to reflect the totality of relations within these islands; and to do so on a basis which is consistent with the principle of consent but accommodates the differing national identities of the two parts of the community in Northern Ireland. Such an outcome could win the allegiance of broad majorities on both sides of the community and provide a foundation for social and economic advances from which everyone could gain. Such an outcome would not represent a defeat or a reverse for any participant, but a victory for all of us. Mr McCartney has nothing to fear from this

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