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See later

texts,

R.Y.

mus/ki

From: John Holmes
Date: 21 November 1997

PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND: HEADS OF AGREEMENT

I attach

- (i) Trimble's thoughts;
- (ii) a letter from the NIO setting out their thoughts;
- (iii) my own very hasty draft Heads of Agreement.

You said you wanted to reflect on all this over the weekend. I am afraid that, as you will see, there is a real difference of view between us and the NIO. The NIO are suggesting that we should effectively ignore what you agreed with Trimble, and instead table in the talks our own ideas. I understand their reasoning, but I do not think we can go down their route, not least since the Irish are also pursuing separate discussions with Trimble, and agree with us that we will have to make progress outside the talks first.

My own version of the heads of agreement tries to take some account of Trimble's language (but it is hard to do so, except on Strand I) and to incorporate the best and least green bits of the NIO suggested paper. The order is designed to suit Trimble.

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I think we will have to sit down with Mo and officials early next week and thrash out how we are going to tackle things in the next couple of weeks, in particular how to articulate our efforts with those of the Irish and what is going on in the talks. This is a difficult conundrum, hardly made easier by the intelligence elsewhere in the box, and we must talk it through properly. We cannot afford to get it wrong.



JOHN HOLMES

The wider context

It should be agreed for change in the Irish constitution's territorial claim on the UK.

but there is not yet agreement on the substance of such change:

it is anticipated that the Irish government will demand some unspecified change in the British constitution.

There should be agreement for more co-operation with the Republic of Ireland

to be decided whether there should be a framework for such co-operation;

whether such framework should operate on an all-Ireland basis or include the wider context;

the institutional arrangements, if any, for such co-operation;

the sources of authority for such co-operation and its transparency and accountability.