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FROM: QUENTIN THOMAS  
Political Director  
6 November 1997  
QT/CJ/258

*for Mr. [unclear]*

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE(L&B)

cc PS/Mr Murphy(L&B)  
PS/Mr Ingram(L&B)  
PS/PUS(L&B)  
PS/Mr Semple  
Mr Steele  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Bell  
Mr Leach  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Hill  
Mr Brooker  
Mr Perry  
Mr Priestly  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Beeton  
Mr D Ferguson  
Mr Whysall  
Mr N Warner/Ms A Healy  
Mr N Sanderson Cab Office-F  
Mr D Cooke Cab Office-F  
Mr G Fergusson RID/FCO-F  
HMA Dublin-F  
Mr Holmes No.10-F

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# MEETING WITH THE UUP

The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy, accompanied by me, met Mr David Trimble and Mr Geoffrey Donaldson in the House of Commons this morning to take stock of concerns about the talks process.

## Summary

2. In a meeting which was relatively restrained in manner, but strongly felt, the UUP expressed a number of concerns: HMG's approach in the talks does not reflect understandings achieved with the Prime Minister at Chequers; HMG seems still attached to the Frameworks documents; and is ready to compromise on Northern Ireland's

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dated

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constitutional status. The UUP explained that their non-engagement in Strand One and Strand Two so far followed the advice of the Prime Minister to stand pat while he sorted out Strand Three with the Irish Government and the SDLP; while the lack of progress so far in bilaterals with the Irish Government and the SDLP was their fault. UUP make a further attempt to get the constitutional issue (including Articles 2 & 3) settled in advance. Mr Trimble is to see the Prime Minister to seek reassurance; while Mr Murphy arranged the further discussion with Mr Donaldson to go through some of the details.

Detail

3. Mr Trimble began the meeting by saying that the UUP wondered if there was any point in talking to the NIO. He had agreed with the Prime Minister significant departures from the Framework documents, but these did not seem to be reflected in the approach the Government team took in the talks. The Prime Minister had advised the UUP to "lock up" Strand One and Strand Two while he sorted out Strand Three with the Irish Government and the SDLP. The UUP had followed this agreed path but the Government had not. Surely the NIO had been given a proper record of his agreements with the Prime Minister?

4. Moreover the papers tabled by the Government showed that the NIO was not sound on the constitutional issue. I interjected to apologise to Ministers for the terms of the sentence in the paper tabled on Item 4 of which Mr Trimble had complained at the last meeting\*. I said it was a mistaken formulation which I should have spotted. But I rejected the idea that there was any conspiracy in the NIO to compromise Northern Ireland's constitutional position. Mr Trimble said that he did not believe me. The paper should be withdrawn.

\* The sentence read: "What follows is written on the assumption that, under a comprehensive agreement, new political institutions would be established within Northern Ireland, new structures within the island of Ireland and new or revised arrangements would be made to cater for relationships between the peoples of Great Britain and Ireland and their respective Governments."

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5. Developing his theme, Mr Trimble went on to explain that the NIO had been working to a particular agenda for several years. The risk was that the Government's approach would drive the UUP into open opposition. It was up to the Prime Minister to sort things out. It seemed to him that the NIO was following an approach of Frameworks plus. The SDLP also gave the impression to the UUP that they did not need to engage because they had the assurance that if the talks failed the default position would be the imposition of something sympathetic to nationalists' interests by the two Governments.

6. Mr Donaldson explained that historically the SDLP had always declined to negotiate with the other parties on the basis that a better deal would be secured from the two Governments. Their worry was that the Framework for the process was Ireland. At the centre were strong North/South institutions. The UUP wanted emphasis on East/West architecture. In answer to a question, Mr Trimble said that the UUP had given the Government a detailed paper about the Council of Ireland some weeks ago.

7. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy reaffirmed the constitutional guarantee and their sympathy to the idea of building up the East/West aspect of the talks' outcome.

8. Mr Trimble said the constitutional issue had to be settled upfront. In 1992 he had sent off the two Governments to sort out the constitutional issue. But the result, in the Framework documents, was a failure. The language proposed by the Irish Government for reforming Articles 2 and 3 was hopeless while the British Government had promised in return significant and substantive changes. Frameworks as a whole were a failure by the NIO (though negotiated, I explained, by or on instructions from Ministers, including the then Prime Minister).

9. In response, the Secretary of State suggested that the UUP might want to write a paper expressing its own views on the constitutional position. Mr Trimble responded by saying that this was better done outside the process and in advance.

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Returning to an account of historical dissatisfactions, Mr Donaldson said that he had been closely consulted by Michael Ancram in the lead-up to the Frameworks and given many assurances. Every one of those assurances had been broken by the terms of the Framework document when it appeared. Against that background the UUP would have no confidence in the Government's approach until the papers they tabled reflected a more Unionist friendly approach. ("We have been lied to by better liars than you.")

10. On the Strand Three liaison meeting, the UUP expressed disappointment that the Governments had not got further. I interjected that the Governments had produced a paper which was in effect a series of questions to the parties. They had done that precisely to avoid the complaints of their tendency to sew things up between them and to present the parties with something cut and dried. The Government still hoped parties would respond to this paper. Mr Donaldson showed some interest in this and asked if he could see the paper again. It was agreed that he and Mr Murphy would have a more detailed discussion about the Government's approach to the talks, about ideas on Strand Three and all related matters.

11. In a discussion about format, the UUP appeared to indicate that they would support the move into bilaterals, though without great hope from others. I canvassed the possible utility of a quadripartite meeting involving the two Governments, the SDLP and the UUP. Mr Trimble showed some interest in this though he said such a meeting should be properly prepared and might be helpful at the right time, but not quite yet. I made clear that I made the suggestion because such a meeting might remove misunderstandings, if they were held, about the extent to which HMG had sewn up a pro-nationalist position.

12. On confidence building measures, Mr Donaldson said he thought a further letter to Mr Trimble was outstanding. He then expressed some concern about the parades legislation: emphasising a point about the code of conduct; the level of penalties and the composition of the Commission.

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13. Mr Trimble asked if Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's enquiry on victims was making progress. Why has he not consulted anyone? The Secretary of State explained that he had only recently been appointed and was beginning his exercise.

14. Mr Donaldson asked if there were any nasty surprises coming down the slipway. The Secretary of State said that there were not. In response to a question she explained that she would have to do something on Bloody Sunday before the anniversary but the UUP would be given notice.

(Signed)

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