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PRIME MINISTER

From: John Holmes
Date: 24 November 1997

cc: Mr Powell
Mr Campbell
Mr Barton
Mr McFadden

NORTHERN IRELAND MEETING, 1430

Mo, Paul Murphy, Quentin Thomas and Jonathan Stephens will be there. The aim is to agree on the next steps.

The NIO have produced the attached revised version of the Heads of Agreement, which has rather more new material than the "twiddles" suggested by Jonathan this afternoon. Our version attached for comparison. The main new material is "issues to be resolved" for each head. Most of it is reasonable in itself, but I am not sure it makes agreement on a text more likely, or that it is really necessary to include "issues to be resolved" at this stage. The NI also want to omit our first tiret on the consent principle.

I suggest the following agenda for the meeting:

- Intelligence picture: gloomy JIC assessment elsewhere in the box – but John Chilcott shared my caution about the report you saw when I spoke to him earlier today. The political context still does not seem right.
- Action to prevent a breakdown:
Contacts with the US/Irish; moving along the talks; positioning ourselves publicly.

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- Confidence-building:
demilitarisation, prisoners (Balcombe Street Four), Criminal Injuries,
Bloody Sunday.
- Heads of Agreement:
What text?
- Next steps:
show to Trimble, then Irish/SDLP? Relationship to Trimble/Ahern
discussions? Relationship to Belfast talks/review plenary? Role of
Mitchell?



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