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FROM: D J R HILL
Constitutional & Political Division
23 January 1998

DESK IMMEDIATE

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
 PS/PUS (L&B)
 Mr Thomas
 Mr Steele
 Mr Stephens
 Mr Bell
 Mr Brooker
 Mr Maccabe
 Mr Ferguson
 Mr Priestly
 Mr Woods (L&B)
 Mr Warner
 Mr Whysall
 Mr Johnston
 Mr Holmes, NO 10
 Mr Pakenham, Cabinet Office
 Mr Fergusson, RID
 HMA Dublin
 Mr Clarke, Dublin

PS/MR MURPHY (L&B)

REVISED STRAND 2 DISCUSSION PAPER

As discussed between Mr Murphy and Mr Thomas this morning, I attach a revised draft Strand 2 discussion paper.

2. This attempts to provide a solid basis for discussion in Strand 2 next week while avoiding rows with either the UUP or the Irish. Essentially it restates the relevant Propositions and then poses a number of key questions for discussion, drawing mainly on the speaking note which Mr Murphy used on Tuesday but also incorporating some of those suggested by the Irish in their draft of 21 January. It ought to appeal to both the UUP and Sinn Fein by allowing all sides to argue for their preferred options and outcome under each heading. (The UUP would also have the comfort of seeing a parallel "Strand 3" paper being tabled, dealing in similar terms with other aspects of the wider relationships.)

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3. The pitch to the Irish might be that
- a) we share their concern to be seen to be working together and would like to table a joint Strand 2 paper today;
 - b) given the two Governments' very different perspectives on what is required, a minimalist paper is probably the best we can do; but the attached draft should allow both the UUP and Sinn Fein to argue for their preferred outcomes and thus facilitate substantive debate in Strand 2 which is the immediate objective;
 - c) we acknowledge and to some extent share the Irish Government's desire to deal with Sinn Fein concerns about the Propositions, but by explaining their concerns are baseless not by seeking to pre-negotiate a deal;
 - d) this draft gives the Irish full scope to argue publicly and in the Strand 2 discussions for the full Frameworks model, and makes clear that both Governments remain committed to it;
 - e) we would be prepared to table a joint paper on these lines alongside an equivalent paper on the Intergovernmental Council and intergovernmental machinery. Grateful for immediate reactions.

4. Mr Brooker will be submitting separately a version of the Strand 3 paper recast in similar terms. Mr Ferguson will be submitting a revised draft of the Strand 2 background paper which was also requested by the parties. Although we have a Strand 1 discussion paper ready to table and a Strand 1 background paper nearing completion, I suggest that we defer tabling them until the end of next week.

5. I should be glad to know that Mr Murphy was content for us to put the attached draft to the Irish on this basis as soon as possible.

Signed: David Hill

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