

PRIME MINISTER

From: John Holmes
Date: 25 January 1998
cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell

NORTHERN IRELAND

A quick update may be helpful. We and the Irish have not reached agreement on the text of the Strand II paper. I attach the version the Irish sent us on Saturday. The guts of the paper are the questions, and I see no particular problem with them. They are in reasonably neutral terms.

The difficulty comes in the preamble, particularly paragraph 3, where the Irish are trying to pin us as firmly as they can to the Framework Document. Sinn Fein have had wind of this Irish language and are trying to spin it to the press. This in turn has alarmed the UUP, who have been in a state of advanced paranoia about being sold down the river all weekend.

At official level, we have told the Irish that at the least we cannot accept the quote from paragraph 13(b) of the Framework Document. We have also suggested a new sentence in paragraph 4 about the need for the parties to agree. They have said that in that case they cannot accept the earlier deletion of "firmly" before committed in the third line of paragraph 3, and the addition of "possible" before "purpose" in the next sentence. Things have stuck there.

Paddy Teahon has been on to me this evening to say that the Taoiseach is worried and expects us to be accommodating to their concerns over this paper, as they were to ours last time. He has said the Irish can accept our extra sentence about the parties agreeing but really want "firmly" and the deletion of "possible"..

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Even if we got "firmly" out, the UUP will still hate paragraph 3, although I have given Trimble a fair indication of what is in it. They believe we and the Irish are backing away from the Heads of Agreement under Sinn Fein pressure/intimidation.

It is hard to argue that the paper is a backing away, even in the Irish form, but any reference to the Framework Document is anathema to the UUP – the virtue of Heads of Agreement in their eyes was that it got away from Framework Document language.

Ideally we would want to say no more than that the two Governments have put forward proposals in past documents, including the Framework Document, and stand behind those, and that the need now is to get down to detailed negotiation on the substance as represented by the questions which follow. But this will certainly not be enough for the Irish.

Failure to agree would result in no paper, which would uncomfortably expose the extent of the differences between us and the Irish. One possible alternative would be for Mitchell to table the questions, and we and the Irish Government to say at the beginning of the discussion that we remain committed to the Framework document. We will have to look at this again in the morning. But you may like to reflect on how far you are prepared to push Trimble.

On the UDP, Mo steered a careful course in interviews today between stressing the unacceptability of UFF violence and the case for throwing the UDP out on the one hand, and the possible consequences of this for the talks on the other. Trimble has, as usual, thrown the whole responsibility onto Mo, while implying that the UDP should be thrown out. The most likely result, if we can get some reasonable

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language out of the UDP, is very strong condemnation of them and a final warning. We need to be seen to be held back from expelling them by others, if possible.

It doesn't get any easier! How serious are you about the "Sunningdale" scenario? I begin to think that, unless the killings stop, there may be no other choice. We may be better placed to judge after this week's talks.

Lizzie McG...
c.p. **JOHN HOLMES**

CONQUEROR