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From: Philip Barton
Date: 28 January 1998

JOHN HOLMES

cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell

MEETING WITH TRIMBLE

Adam Ingram telephoned while you were in Sir Richard Wilson's office to give us advance warning that Trimble might raise handguns with the Prime Minister when they meet later today.

Ingram said that he had had a meeting with Trimble this morning. The background was that he had invited Trimble in on Privy Counsellor terms to try and reassure him. But he had ended up going off the deep end.

Ingram said that he had explained to Trimble that there were two reasons for the legislation:

- (i) reform – much of the legislation was out of date and needed clearing up. Trimble had looked at a document on this and welcomed it;
- (ii) ban on handguns – this would affect 2,000 guns mainly held by the shooting fraternity in Northern Ireland, ie. only 1.5% of the legally held weapons there. Rifles and shotguns widely used in rural areas would not be affected.

There would be an exemption for personal protection weapons.

Nevertheless, there would be a new regime for these and the Chief

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Constable would re-visit all those who had been issued with such weapons over the years.

Ingram said that Trimble had flown into a rage at this. He described it as an attack on legally held weapons. Personal protection weapons were being withdrawn. Trimble had refused to accept that this was not the case and his argument that the Government had no hidden agenda, but was merely implementing the Manifesto commitment to ban handguns.

Trimble also claimed that he had been assured by the Prime Minister, while walking in the garden on a sunny day (presumably at Chequers) that what was being done on the mainland would not go ahead in Northern Ireland. Ingram did not believe this was the case, but would welcome confirmation from here.

Philip

PHILIP BARTON

