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File

From: John Holmes
Date: 2 February 1998

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell
Philip Barton

NORTHERN IRELAND: TRIMBLE

... I attach a memo from Trimble, which I take as a partial response to your meeting with him last Wednesday, when you said that we needed to know the UUP's bottom line. He rang me to warn it was coming, and seemed in a much more reasonable frame of mind than last week.

The main body of the memo sets out the UUP's basic objections to the Framework Document approach. It is pretty much in line with what he said to you at the original long meeting in Chequers. If we take these positions at face value, they make negotiating a settlement difficult, perhaps almost impossible. But I assume there is still some room for manoeuvre in what he sets out.

The attachments to the memo are three papers, on constitutional change, Strand 1 and Strands 2/3. The paper on constitutional change is clearly an internal paper, and is reasonably encouraging as far as it goes. Trimble told me that versions of the other two papers may be tabled in the talks soon. It would be an advance for the UUP to table substantive papers in the talks at all, and therefore to be encouraged. But their positions will not go down well with some.

On Strand 1, their vision of the Assembly has virtually no checks and balances built into it, and could be seen by others as simply enshrining Unionist domination.

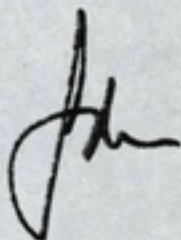
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On Strands 2 and 3, I find the paper not too bad, in particular the paragraph suggesting that agreed policies/actions shall be implemented by appropriate agreed mechanisms. This looks to me like bodies with executive powers by another name. But the Council of the Islands umbrella will be hard for others to swallow, to say the least.

I ought to share this paper with the NIO, with suitable caveats about distribution. I have meanwhile written to them to expose the serious difficulty we have in our respective approaches to the talks. We are trying to fix up a quiet dinner with Mo on your return from Washington. We also need to fix another meeting with Trimble, which I suggest should be after you have met Mo. I have told him that we will be in touch about this, but that you will not be able to see him until after Washington. He was not pressing.



JOHN HOLMES

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