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FROM: D J R HILL  
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM  
12 DECEMBER 1996

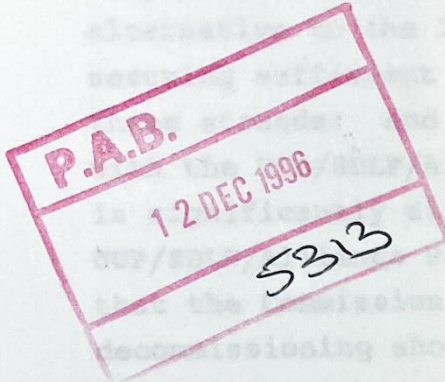
DESK IMMEDIATE

J. McKERVILL

P. SMYTH

J. BLACK

A. McVEIGH



cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B  
PS/PUS (L&B) - B  
PS/Sir David Fell - B  
Mr Thomas (L&B) - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Wood (L&B) - B  
Mr Lavery - B  
Mr Perry - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Beeton - B  
Mr Priestly - B  
Mr Whysall (L&B) - B  
Ms Mapstone - B  
Ms Bharucha - B  
Mr Holmes, No 10 (and the US - B  
Administration, who may have - B  
HMA Dublin - B  
Mr Clarke, Dublin - B  
Mr Westmacott, W'ton via RID - B  
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B

**TALKS: INFLUENCING THE IRISH**

I have already submitted advice that Ministers should try to have a word with Mr Trimble today if at all possible and in any event before the weekend. This submission identifies a parallel series of points which might be made in any contacts with the Irish or the US Administration. The overall objective is of course to prepare the ground as effectively as possible for achieving a successful determination on the handling of decommissioning before Christmas.

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The Irish appear deeply pessimistic (although Sean O'hUiginn's dark grey pallor of Tuesday had lightened somewhat by yesterday afternoon). They continue to be fixated on the issue of Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations and formally stand by the two Governments' proposals of 1 October on the handling of decommissioning.

3. However, while still sceptical about HMG's revised proposals they have consistently said they would look seriously at any alternative to the 1 October proposals which seemed capable of securing sufficient consensus support and achieved the launch of the three strands: and we can reasonably assume that they are content with the UUP/SDLP/Alliance Party paper of yesterday evening, which is significantly different from the "1 October" proposals. The UUP/SDLP/Alliance Party approach does not incorporate our suggestion that the Commission should have an explicit role in determining when decommissioning should start - the element of our revised proposals which the Irish most objected to.

4. We should aim to communicate to the Irish (and the US Administration, who may have some influence with the Irish and with Senator Mitchell) that

- it is highly desirable to resolve decommissioning before Christmas (not least because of the positive incentive effect this would have on Sinn Fein);
- there is a real chance of achieving this;
- they should be ready to support us and the Chairmen in working hard to bring the discussion to a successful conclusion.

5. The attached checklist of points to make/arguments to deploy may be helpful for Ministers and, in particular, for colleagues in Dublin and Washington. If the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram are content you might invite Mr Holmes to take specific steps to



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Communicate these messages to Paddy Teahon and Tony Lake/Nancy Soderberg. Mr Thomas might also want to have a word with Mr O'hUiginn before the weekend.

(signed)

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- it would boost the general credibility of the talks process;
- the issue will be no easier to resolve in the New Year and the pre-election atmosphere may make it more difficult;
- it will certainly be easier to resolve before there is any question of Sinn Fein joining the negotiations;
- if we can resolve decommissioning before Christmas we could set a date for launching the three strands in the New Year (a couple of weeks after resuming the talks to wrap up the opening plenary). That would provide a real incentive for the Republican Movement to declare an IRA ceasefire. (If the talks were still focussed on decommissioning in the New Year that would be a disincentive to an early ceasefire);
- a resolution of the decommissioning issue before Christmas would also justify a longer recess;
- we may not be able to make much progress in the substantive negotiations before the election period but getting them launched would provide a firmer foundation for subsequent progress and a better electoral platform for the DUP and SDLP.



(12 December )

**NORTHERN IRELAND TALKS: HANDLING DECOMMISSIONING - INFLUENCING THE IRISH**

Points to make

1. There is a strong case for seeking to resolve the handling of decommissioning before Christmas
  - it would boost the general credibility of the talks process;
  - the issue will be no easier to resolve in the New Year; and the pre-election atmosphere may make it more difficult;
  - it will certainly be easier to resolve before there is any question of Sinn Fein joining the negotiations;
  - if we can resolve decommissioning before Christmas we could set a date for launching the three strands in the New Year (a couple of weeks after resuming the talks to wrap up the opening plenary). That would provide a real incentive for the Republican Movement to declare an IRA ceasefire. (If the talks were still focussed on decommissioning in the New Year that would be a disincentive to an early ceasefire);
  - a resolution of the decommissioning issue before Christmas would also justify a longer recess;
  - we may not be able to make much progress in the substantive negotiations before the election period but getting them launched would provide a firmer foundation for subsequent progress and a better electoral platform for the UUP and SDLP. //!



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There is a real prospect of being able to achieve agreement before Christmas;

- the paper drawn up by the UUP, SDLP and Alliance Party represents a significant level of agreement. We can support it. Trust that you/the Irish will too. The balance it strikes between the establishment of the Commission and the role of the Committee should obviate the need to pursue HMG's idea of giving the Commission an explicit role in determining when decommissioning should start, and we are happy to drop it;
- we have successfully created a climate of expectation within the talks that the issue can and should be determined before Christmas and the Chairmen's decision to take a more proactive role and consider tabling proposals could be helpful in clinching a deal;
- it seems to be in the interest of all the key players to register an achievement before Christmas and lay the foundation for substantive negotiations to start in the New Year;
- publication of HMG's views on terms of entry for Sinn Fein, and its resolution in the face of Irish pressure, has greatly re-assured the Unionists (while not ruling out the possibility of Sinn Fein entry relatively soon if the criteria are fulfilled). The Unionists may now be more ready to settle the decommissioning issue and we should put that to the test;
- the publication of the Irish Decommissioning Bill has been very favourably received by the UUP. We should capitalise on the success of that confidence-building measure.



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Remaining issues?

- relative timing: UUP seem to accept that the Commission and Committee can only be established alongside the launch of the three strands. They would then be content for everything to proceed in parallel. This and the timing of developments in the New Year may need to be tied down in any proposal from the Chair;
  - place for consideration of confidence-building measures: this is implicitly assigned to the Liaison Committee by the UUP/SDLP/Alliance Party text of 11 December [whether the words in square brackets are included or not]. Sure we can find a way round Unionist concerns on linkage;
  - have consistently made clear to the UUP that their demand for a prior tranche of IRA weapons before Sinn Fein could join the three strands is unrealistic and undeliverable. Trimble has privately acknowledged that he will not hold out for this, but will not find it easy to drop that requirement publicly.
4. Procedurally it will be crucial to get some proposals forward (via the Chairmen, largely based on the trilateral paper?) which we know will carry sufficient consensus support (ie which the two Governments, the SDLP and the UUP can support). Then DUP/UKUP amendments can be seen off, even if UUP support them or table variants of their own if that is politically necessary; and the original package voted through.