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SECURITY POLICY & OPERATIONS
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FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
15 NOVEMBER 1996

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B
PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Thomas - 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 Priestly - B
Mr Cornick - B
Mr Whysall (L&B) - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Ms Mapstone - B
Ms Bharucha - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
HMA Dublin - B
Mr Clarke, Dublin - B
Mr Westmacott, W'ton via RID - B
Mr Oakden, No 10 - B
Ms Collins, Cab Office (via IPL) - B

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

TALKS: GAMEPLAN FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING 18 NOVEMBER

Objectives

These might be to

- restore/maintain good relationships with the Irish Government while encouraging them to look more positively on the alternative exit strategy we exposed to them on Thursday;
- pending an agreement, keep the decommissioning debate going in a relatively low-key manner;
- seek to bring the "Hume/Adams initiative" to a head.

Relationships with the Irish

2. The Irish system is under very considerable strain at present. Apart from the "Department of Justice" affair and preparations for the Dublin summit they are working very hard (almost desperately ?) on the Republican Movement to produce acceptable ceasefire terms. Their immediate reaction to our paper of 14 November reflects

- the crucial significance of the approach to decommissioning reflected in the two Governments' "suggested conclusions" of 1 October in persuading the Republican Movement that the issue will not be a block to substantive political negotiations;
- the usual Irish paranoia about HMG's contacts with Unionists and suspicion that we are about to part company from them on a key policy issue;
- a readiness to ascribe entirely cynical motives to HMG, in this case that we are preparing for an endgame which leaves us aligned with neither the Irish nor the Unionists (instead of, as currently, with the Irish Government against the Unionists).

3. Their immediate reaction also suggests that they believe our paper goes further than it actually does towards giving the Independent Commission a decisive role in determining when decommissioning should start. In fact it incorporates the relatively modest suggestion that the Commission should "offer a judgement", which itself would be based on consultations with the parties (via the Liaison Committee) on the conditions necessary for decommissioning and which could not have more than political or moral effect. The Irish side's key (stated) concern - to preserve the "Mitchell" balance between progress on decommissioning and progress in the political negotiations - would be fully protected.

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4. We need to get these points through to them as a matter of urgency, both to open up the best chance we can see of reaching an agreed outcome to the decommissioning debate, and because Irish concerns on this front may otherwise feed into their approach to the "Hume/Adams initiative".

5. The IGC on 20 November may be too late for this purpose and not long enough: I recommend that we seek a substantial meeting with the Irish on Monday to talk the issues through and identify a way forward. If necessary (eg if senior Irish Ministers are not available and/or the Secretary of State and Michael Ancram need to leave early on Parliamentary business) we can hold the discussion at official level. Key points to get across might include:

- we are keen to keep in step with the Irish Government. The modest adjustments proposed in our paper of 14 October remain faithful to the letter and the spirit of the International Body's report;
- the "suggested conclusions" to the decommissioning debate which were published by the two Governments on 1 October are not acceptable to the UUP for seem to us to be good and sufficient reasons, forcibly expressed in plenary discussion and questioning. (In particular it seems politically inconceivable that the UUP could justify remaining in the talks with Sinn Fein present and the DUP and UKUP able to argue that progress on decommissioning was subject to an Irish Government or SDLP veto: attempting to proceed on the basis of the 1 October suggested conclusions would mean there were no inclusive negotiations for Sinn Fein to join);
- in the absence of agreement on an exit strategy from the decommissioning debate we cannot launch the three strands. Surely it is better to try to get beyond the decommissioning debate - on acceptable terms - before Sinn Fein join the talks;

- in any event the window of opportunity to make substantial progress in the talks before the General Election is limited.

Handling the Decommissioning Debate

6. The papers tabled by the three Unionist parties last week do not offer any basis for an agreed way forward. We might suggest

- a brief discussion in plenary to bring that point out;
- time for further bilaterals. There may be support for this as the UUP/SDLP contacts have yet to be consummated (they plan to meet again on Monday morning); and the Irish will presumably share our desire to (re)establish a common position;
- the establishment of a working group [as envisaged in Rule 30(b)] to review the issues, identify areas of agreement and disagreement and report back. As I suggested in my handling plan for 13 November this could, at the very least, be expected to produce a more precise statement of the areas of disagreement and the reasons why the various delegations disagree over particular propositions. It could generate greater mutual understanding and might even begin to identify ways of resolving disagreements. This kind of approach worked very well in strand one in 1992. Part of the secret may lie in restricting numbers to a maximum of two per delegation and discouraging the attendance of party/delegation leaders - in 1992 that appeared to facilitate frank and open discussion and a readiness to explore or float ideas "without commitment". I suggest we mention the idea as a possibility at Monday's plenary with a view to activating the idea if by, say, Wednesday further bilaterals have not succeeded in identifying a way forward.

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Hume/Adams

7. This is becoming increasingly bound up with the debate on decommissioning. Mr Trimble has clearly signalled that he wants to see an early public statement from HMG on the terms for Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations. He may not entirely like what he gets but he is perhaps unlikely to agree to any decisive development in the decommissioning debate until it happens.

8. On the "Hume/Adams text" we await news from Dublin. It is likely to come in the form of a "package", probably presented to us at Prime Ministerial or Butler/Teahon level. It is probably too much to hope that the Irish will conclude that Sinn Fein's contribution is insufficient and/or their demands too high. Our latest ideas on offering a "process of entry" may come into play. As noted above, a resolution of this will inevitably be bound up with the outcome of the decommissioning debate. Unless there are dramatic developments in the interim this nexus of issues is likely to dominate the IGC on Wednesday evening.

9. If all this comes to a head, one way or another, we will need to be prepared to explain and defend our position, domestically and internationally. Even if it does not come to a head next week there may be a strong case for a fairly substantial public statement on the issues which the "Hume/Adams text" is intended to cover.

Miscellaneous

10. One hare which may be "started" at Monday's plenary is Dr Paisley's allegation that Martha Pope has been in contact with Sinn Fein.

11. The Unionists may still be fired up by today's Forum debate on the "Anglo-Irish diktat" (11th Anniversary).

