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From: John McKervill  
Political Affairs Division  
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cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B  
PS/Malcolm Moss (DHSS,DOE&L) - B  
PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Sir David Fell - B  
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Wood (B&L) - B  
Mr Beeton - B  
Mr Priestly - B  
Mr Hill (B&L) - B  
Mr Lavery - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Perry - B  
Ms Bharucha - B  
Ms Mapstone - B  
Mr Whysall (B&L) - B  
Ms Collins, Cab Off (via IPL) - B  
Mr Dickinson, TAU - B  
Mr Lamont, RID FCO - B  
HMA Dublin - B  
Mr Westmacott (via RID) - B  
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B  
Mrs McNally (B&L) - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 20 NOVEMBER 1996

Summary

A relatively quiet day with only two bilaterals, both with the SDLP, and a meeting with the Independent Chairmen and the Irish Government. The UUP announced that they would not be free to see the Government team. Most of the day was spent preparing for that evening's Intergovernmental Conference meeting and with the Secretary of State returning to London for meetings at No 10.

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Detail

2. A meeting took place between the Chairmen and the two Governments at 11.30. Michael Ancram led for the British Government in the absence of the Secretary of State at SPM. The meeting reviewed the various bilateral meetings which had taken place with Prime Minister Holkeri suggesting that Sean Farren (SDLP) was looking more optimistic than he had been about making progress with the UUP. It was generally recognised that there was little role for the Chairmen other than to encourage further dialogue and it was noted, encouragingly, that a tri-lateral between the UUP, the SDLP and Alliance was likely to be held shortly. Minister Coveney said the Irish were concerned that the talks were coming almost to a halt. He reported on two meetings the Irish had held with the UDP at which the latter had pleaded for someone to do something to break the impasse: the UDP could not accept the UUP's proposals on decommissioning. At the same time, Coveney believed that Trimble seemed to be incapable of breaking from the UKUP and the DUP on the issue.

3. Michael Ancram concurred that while the UUP might have sounded flexible in their oral contributions at meetings, they had shown inflexibility in publishing their decommissioning proposals, which had made it more difficult for them to find room for manoeuvre. The British Government would be seeking to try to establish if the paper represented the UUP's bottom line.

4. Reflecting on previous events, Prime Minister Holkeri suggested that the closer the two Governments were together, the better for everyone: without the two Governments strong support on an issue, nothing happened. At this stage, Mr Coveney, in response to a question from General de Chastelain, suggested that we were close to the stage at which we were trying to save the talks. There was general agreement that Trimble was the key to the talks' future. If he continued to be inflexible, then the prospects for the talks were not great.

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5. Finally, the meeting agreed that it would be worthwhile calling a plenary meeting at noon the following Monday if only to ensure that the other participants, who had not been engaged in the bilaterals, had a sense of involvement. The plenary would seek to agree minutes of previous meetings and invite reports from delegations on the bilaterals that they had held. It was noted that Senator Mitchell would be back to chair the meeting.

6. Just before lunch, at 12.45, the Minister met an SDLP delegation, led by Sean Farren, who had requested the meeting to report on their contacts with the UUP. Farren said that they had held a meeting the previous afternoon at which the SDLP had the impression that things were moving in a more positive direction. The UUP have acknowledged that the issue of "entry requirements" for Sinn Fein was not a remit for the purpose of a discussion with the SDLP, although the UUP have made clear that it was not off their agenda in their discussions with others, namely the British Government. The meeting had focussed on item 2(c) of the opening agenda with both parties schematically beginning to sketch out the basic set of relationships involved ie the remit of the all-party Committee; its relationship with the Commission; and the Commission's relationship with the two Governments. The discussion was described as "very preliminary" although a further meeting with the UUP would be held that afternoon.

7. In response, Michael Ancram said that the UUP had told him they would be too busy to see him today. He agreed that the terms of reference of the Commission would be the key, as would getting the balance right. At the end of the day however, it had to be remembered that decommission would be voluntary and appreciation of that must be tied into any arrangement. Farren in reply, took the opportunity to put down a marker that a firm condition for SDLP in reaching agreement on item 2(c) would be agreement to move rapidly through item 3 of the agenda into item 4, namely launch of the three-stranded negotiations. The Minister responded that he would not disagree on that.

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8. At this point, **Mark Durkan** surmised that if the UUP chose to rely on their proposals for decommissioning, then things would become unstuck. The future progress of the talks depended on the readiness of the UUP to compromise, for example, on their proposal which demanded a substantial tranche of guns and explosives being decommissioned before Sinn Fein could be admitted to substantive negotiations. In discussion **Michael Ancram** advised the SDLP that the UUP's third proposal was not seen by them as a retreat to Washington 3. For the British Government's part, this was regarded as a retreat and outside the Mitchell proposals. The British Government would attempt to get that across to the UUP.

9. The meeting ended at 1300 with an undertaking on the part of the SDLP to keep the Minister informed of their further contacts with the UUP.

10. At 4.55, an SDLP group (Mr Farren, Mr Durkan and Mr Haughey) called again on Michael Ancram. They reported that they had had a further meeting with the UUP to discuss decommissioning structures, and had agreed to hold a trilateral with the Alliance Party at 2.45 on Monday. Between now and then, their "homework" was on the outline remits for the Commission and Liaison Sub-Committee. The SDLP had insisted that any such arrangement should carry the process all the way through to item 4 of the Agenda, the launch of the three strands: there should be no setting up of structures in advance of that. This was one of the points on which the UUP had undertaken to "come back to them".

11. Pressed as to whether they really thought that the UUP were interested in doing business with them, **Mr Durkan** said that he did not know: "even after seven days in Castlereagh", he could not tell. **Mr Haughey** was clearer that they were not interested. He thought that the UUP's main agenda was an entirely different one - entry conditions presumably - but he agreed that they had to be tested. And he acknowledged that if there were no question of Sinn

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Fein entering, they would probably want to make progress. He remarked how difficult negotiation with the UUP was, when the team kept changing. The thought was also injected by Mr Durkan that the UUP would be particularly anxious not to agree anything next week, the week of the DUP Conference.

12. Mr Farren pressed that the Governments should indicate shortly how they saw relations between themselves and the Commission. [In discussion afterwards, it was speculated that they knew something about our latest suggested conclusions, and were seeking to find out more.] Presumably, Mr Durkan said, the Commission would not be able to go around doing things on its own initiative, but would engage the Government. Michael Ancram stressed that he saw the Commission being independent. It was suggested that the UUP might wish to write fixed tests and targets for decommissioning into the rules of the Commission: the Government side made it clear that we would find that unacceptable, although there was scope for a certain amount of legitimate argument, for example on the balance of remits of the Commission and the Liaison Committee.

13. This was another very friendly encounter, finishing with undertakings to keep in touch early next week. Mr Durkan reported on alleged admissions by a member of the UDP of technical breaches by the UDA of its ceasefire: this is noted separately.

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

TALKS: 15 NOVEMBER 1996

JOHN MCKERVILL

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Michael Ancram held bilateral meetings in the morning with the UUP, the SDLP and the Alliance Party. In the afternoon there was an official-level bilateral with the Irish delegation.

At the UUP meeting, Michael Ancram outlined the British Government's on handling decommissioning the conditions for a

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