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From: John Holmes
Date: 22 March 1998

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell
Philip Barton
Pat McFadden

NORTHERN IRELAND

The position this evening is as follows. I spoke to Paddy Teahon over the weekend. He had promised to send me the Irish text on Friday, but said that this would not now reach us until Monday, because the Taoiseach was looking at a revised version in the more direct language we favoured. He had to say that it would look rather different from the texts we had sent them, which continued to look very Unionist oriented to the Irish. I repeated that the text I sent Teahon did not represent where Trimble was, particularly on Strand II, but where we thought we could get him to with some difficulty. The Irish should bear this in mind.

I have also spoken to Trimble. He was in cheerful and confident-sounding mood. He had been quite pleased with his visit to Washington, and also pleased with the outcome of his Executive meeting on Saturday. The possible challenge from Willie Ross had not materialised. He knew that Ross and his colleagues now proposed to wait until after Easter and then summon an Executive Council meeting to challenge whatever settlement had emerged. Trimble was wise to this, and would summon the Council himself first, to discuss the outcome of the settlement, on the assumption that it would not be a totally Unionist triumph.

I said that you wanted to speak to him tomorrow, and that I was also ready to send him some more text, this time on Strand I. He is in Belfast tomorrow, as I

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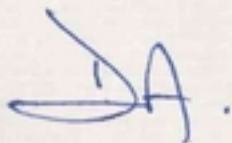

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expected. Ron Davies is at the Talks tomorrow morning, to explain the Welsh model, in which Trimble is particularly interested. He also hopes to meet Hume tomorrow, although a time for this has not yet been fixed. We agreed to be in touch early tomorrow, both to arrange for the transmission of the Strand I text, and to fix a time for a telephone call with you, probably in the afternoon.

Separately, Teahon told me that the SDLP were in a very sensitive state, fearing another Propositions type negotiation from which they were excluded and nervous about being outflanked by Sinn Fein. We needed to keep this in mind. Trimble was not helping by saying publicly that he wanted to get together with the SDLP in order to cast Sinn Fein on to the rubbish heap.

I agreed with Teahon that you and the Taoiseach should also speak tomorrow on the telephone, hopefully when we have had a sight of the Irish text. Again, we will fix a time tomorrow morning.

Not much progress of substance here, I am afraid, but we may make more progress tomorrow. At least we will know the extent of the gap between our position and that of the Irish. I suspect it will look pretty daunting at first sight.

**JOHN HOLMES****CONFIDENTIAL**