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17 NOVEMBER 1995

TO HQ FROM WASHINGTON
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LOYALISTS IN WASHINGTON

1. During their visit, Gary McMichael and David Ervine had meetings at both the White House and on Capitol Hill. In their briefings, they struck a note of determination to make the peace process succeed, in contrast, they suggested, to the negative attitude of Sinn Fein and the UUP. As before, they impressed their interlocutors with their easy personal style, and their readiness to tackle difficult issues.
2. At the meeting with Tony Lake, they argued that while Adams was correct in his analysis of the current situation, his public statements that the process was in crisis were self-fulfilling, and were making the situation worse. He had a duty (as, they claimed, they were doing) to lead public opinion.
3. The Loyalists laid considerable emphasis on their pledge of "no first use", and pointed out that their challenge to the Provisional IRA to take a similar stance remained unanswered. They argued that, by helping to build confidence, a pledge by the IRA could help unlock the decommissioning issue. They indicated agreement with Sinn Fein on the impossibility of decommissioning in advance of talks, but given the high level of anxiety on the issue within the Unionist community, a commitment not to be the first to have recourse to arms could be a way around the problem.
4. In the context of the President's trip, the Loyalists clearly tried to sell themselves as boosters for the peace process, and in tune with what the President might be likely to say while in the North. They emphasised the importance the wider Unionist community attached to maintaining the peace. The pitch to the White House was, in effect, that with the Loyalist parties in support of the President, it would be more difficult for Trimble and others to take a different tack.

Capitol Hill

5. The most frequent comment from Capitol Hill sources was the contrast in tone and style with Trimble. Their presentation to Gilman's group, broadly on the lines above, made much of the problems caused by Adams' talking up the present difficulties. However, having emphasised the need for goodwill gestures, they were seen to falter in indicating that they were not yet ready to meet with Adams. That said, the trip certainly maintained their reputation as an interesting and potentially helpful partner in the process, provided of course the present impasse can be overcome.

ENDS