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[We are preparing analysis. Toc 5.10]

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5 October 1998

No of pages including this one: 4

To: HQ
For: T O'Connor

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

Subj: British redraft of our paper and other matters

1. Arising from the discussion at last Thursday's Liaison Group, the British (Jonathan Stephens) have prepared the attached redraft of the section headed "Decommissioning" in our paper on steps to overcome the current impasse.
2. Although it has been cleared by the Secretary of State, we have been asked to treat this as an informal contribution to a mutual "brain-storming" exercise, i.e., the British are seeking agreement on a general approach rather than on a precisely worded text.
3. This contribution is also accompanied by the caveat that Trimble has indicated no willingness to contemplate anything short of actual decommissioning in his most recent contacts with the British Government (including a phone conversation with the Prime Minister over the weekend).
4. The Prime Minister sketched out to Trimble a broad approach involving a series of coordinated statements from Sinn Féin/IRA, De Chastelain and Trimble (though, we are told, without any of the detail or language used in the attached draft). The gist of Trimble's response was that he would need some element of actual decommissioning and that a timescale approach would not suffice. The attached draft, we are told, has not been shown to him (because "we think he would blow up at it").
5. The Prime Minister also had a meeting with De Chastelain (on Saturday). The latter wondered about an approach whereby the Executive (proper) would be formed on the basis of a statement from the Commission guaranteeing that decommissioning would take place and indicating that the IRA had agreed to take specific steps in

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parallel with the Executive's formal acquisition of powers. Such steps could involve the voluntary destruction of weaponry under the Commission's supervision, an actual handover of weapons to the Commission or tip-offs to the security forces. The British, who understand that Ambassador Johnson is pushing this approach, are privately very sceptical about its prospects of winning acceptance.

6. We gather that De Chastelain is to talk to Trimble later today and that the British Government also plan contact with the SDLP (in the context of the Northern Ireland Bill).
7. The British would be glad to have our views on the attached draft in due course and are suggesting a get-together at official level for later this week (if logistics permit). They hope that the two Governments may be able to agree an approach prior to the return of Trimble and Mallon from the US in mid-October. The Secretary of State, incidentally, departs on the same visit tomorrow.
8. The Northern Ireland Bill goes to the Lords for its Second Reading today. The Committee Stage follows in two weeks' time (in the weeks beginning 19 and 26 October respectively) and the Report Stage follows shortly thereafter. While technically amendments may be put down from today onwards, lawyers are still considering a number of points and the expectation is that the tabling of Government amendments will not happen for another several days. Some lawyers, indeed, are suggesting that it may not be possible to table these until the Report Stage. (We are pressing the British side here on a number of matters yet to be resolved, as discussed at last Thursday's Liaison Group, and will be in touch about these).
8. Finally, we understand that Trimble and Mallon are making common cause today over a shared affliction. Lord Alderdice's decision to grant every Assembly member a room at Parliament Buildings has meant that the First Minister and Deputy First Minister no longer have enough space for their own offices. Coming hot on the heels of a recent conversation in which Alderdice complained to Mallon about his decision to draw special advisers from the European Commission (to Mallon's intense irritation), and from a host of other minor provocations to the UUP and SDLP alike, it seems that on one issue at least - Alderdice's future as interim Presiding Officer - some common ground is emerging.

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POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT OF SECTION HEADED 'DECOMMISSIONING'**Decommissioning**

To ensure that the decommissioning issue is addressed in a manner which is sensitive to the concerns of all sides, the two Governments will promote with the key parties the approach set out below.

Sinn Féin

Issue statement in which they would:

- restate their commitment to play their part in the implementation of all elements of the Agreement, including the actual decommissioning of all paramilitary arms by May 2000;
- announce that McGuinness has put forward proposals on the modalities of decommissioning which they believe are acceptable to the IRA and meet the Commission's requirements; and
- recognise the need for visible progress in implementing all aspects of the Agreement, offering their analysis that the prospect of the entry into force of the new British-Irish Agreement and the transfer of powers to the new institutions early in the New Year would create a new political context in which a start to decommissioning should occur.

IRA

Issue statement in which they would:

- acknowledge the democratic endorsement, North and South, of the Good Friday Agreement in all its elements;

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- state their readiness, along with others, to play their part in implementing the Agreement as a whole.

General de Chastelain

Commission issues statement:

- confirms positive co-operation with Sinn Féin/loyalists and all accept actual decommissioning to be completed by May 2000;
- has agreed satisfactory modalities with all its contacts, removing any practical obstacle to decommissioning;
- offers assessment, on basis of discussions, that a start to actual decommissioning will occur in the context of further political progress early in the New Year in implementing the Executive and other bodies.

Mr Trimble

Issues statement in which he would:

- welcome the various statements; and
- look forward, on the basis that progress (including a start to actual decommissioning) continues to be made, to working with all parties entitled to seats on the Executive so as to achieve the transfer of powers without further obstacles early in the New Year.