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Uimhir.....

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To: Taoiseach
From: Seán Donlon

Northern Ireland

The position of the main players might be summarised as follows:

SDLP

- Drumcree and other events this Summer have damaged the party's credibility
- pressure to withdraw from the multi-party talks is evident and will become more marked if the talks continue in the pre-Summer mode
- senior members of the party continue seriously to doubt the Hume-Adams approach. Sinn Féin's failure to co-operate fully with Hume in managing the Derry situation in August has been particularly noted.
- Hume seems unwilling actively to participate in the multi-party talks unless Sinn Féin is involved
- the party is old and tired. It could be seriously weakened by further setbacks
- there is no nationalist alternative to the SDLP other than Sinn Féin
- the SDLP needs a strategy which is distinct from that of Sinn Féin.

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Misc.
F. 2.

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Sinn Féin/IRA

- IRA a serious threat
- unable/unwilling to return to the ceasefire, no matter what assurances are given by the Irish and British Governments
- not interested in (and will not be tainted) by the Belfast talks if they continue in their current mode
- will not be attracted into any talks unless they are convinced that an agreement of historic magnitude is likely to emerge.
- politically well organised. Always ready and able to capitalise on what is happening on the ground e.g. parades, boycotts, anti-drugs moves, mistakes by the security forces etc.
- will create maximum embarrassment for the SDLP in the fight for Westminster seats at the general election
- will do you no favours before the next general election here
- may not be as free as they would wish to resume a full-scale campaign of violence in NI. Even their own supporters have enjoyed the relatively trouble free two years.
- will not decommission until they see the shape of the political package
- will not accept the principle of consent unless it is so qualified as to be unacceptable to unionists

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UUP

- unlikely to do a deal before a British general election
- adamant on decommissioning of IRA weapons before serious political negotiations
- afraid of the DUP
- as long as Trimble is leader, the party will slip into a slightly constitutional gear if the circumstances require it
- will try to use their numbers at Westminster any time the opportunity arises. The possibility of their being a factor in the formation of the next British Government cannot be excluded.

DUP

- not interested in reaching a political accommodation on terms which nationalists might be able to accept
- will do everything possible to prevent other unionist parties from doing so
- no surrender

Loyalist Paramilitaries

- dangerous
- their level of activity essentially dictated by the IRA

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Alliance

- will be a constructive and vital component in securing agreement in the right circumstances
- limited influence in a breakdown/conflict situation

British Government

- uncertain Westminster situation
- Prime Minister engaged, committed to parity of esteem/fairplay in Northern Ireland. Wants good working relationship with whomever is Taoiseach
- NI Secretary of State's already weak position further weakened by his announced departure from politics
- important cabinet members do not share the Prime Minister's approach
- have formally agreed the Joint Framework Document
- looking at three options:
 - continue pursuit of present policy but with no great hope of achieving results
 - further reforms under direct rule
 - impose a "solution"

The second would involve continuing to implement the 1985 Agreement plus reform of policing, local government, flags/emblems/parades, enhanced north/south co-operation, etc.

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The third is not seen as attractive. Trimble and Paisley will resist. An appeal to unionists over their heads will not work.

US Government

- focused on November elections, less time for NI
- Adams let them down. No ceasefire. No political progress. The White House has nothing to show for granting the visa
- unlikely to be helpful in 'pushing' the British between now and November

Fianna Fáil

- formally committed to the Joint Framework Document
- generally careful not to be seen in alliance with Sinn Féin
- current leader will increasingly distance himself and the party from the wilder Albert Reynolds interventions
- hope you will be found wanting on "the national question".

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above:

1. the Belfast talks in their current mode are unlikely to produce an agreement
2. the IRA ceasefire will not be restored this side of Irish/British elections

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3. an agreement of historic magnitude is not on before elections in Britain and Ireland
4. nationalist support will continue to drift away from the SDLP to Sinn Féin
5. sustained pressure by you on the Prime Minister may be necessary to prevent a drift in British policy before an election

The following course of action might be contemplated:

- (a) allow the Belfast talks to continue in their current mode for, at most, the month of September
- (b) when the talks resume on 9 September, try again to persuade the UUP to take decommissioning off the table on the basis that Sinn Féin are not going to be involved in the outcome. Intensify discussions in all three strands on the basis of the Rules of Procedure agreed on 29 July.
- (c) in parallel but away from the talks, both governments agree a position, essentially as contained in the Joint Framework Document, and agree that it be proposed to the parties (? via Senator Mitchell) early in October for negotiation within a month.
- (d) when making this proposal in early October, announce that, in the event of no agreement by early November, both Governments would rededicate themselves to working the 1985 Agreement and, if necessary, modify it to add matters such as reform of policing, local government reform, flags/parades/emblems, enhanced north/south co-operation, etc.

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If the above is broadly accepted, the following steps might now be taken:

1. secure British agreement to the suggested course of action. This might best be initiated by a letter from you to the Prime Minister followed, if necessary, by a meeting. Agreement would need to be reached by the end of September
2. use your contact with David Trimble (a) to test the view that he will not do a deal before the election and (b) to see if he can be persuaded to de-emphasise decommissioning if we now acknowledge that the door is closed on Sinn Féin
3. get the SDLP on side to the above approach
4. review the Government's stance towards Sinn Féin. Is it time, for example, to cut off all contact with their representatives, re-impose the broadcasting ban, etc.?



29 August, 1996.