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HCS/8/94

FROM: D FELL
4 JANUARY 1994

- cc PS/Michael Ancram (L,B&DENI) - B
- PS/PUS (L&B) - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Legge - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Wood (L&B) - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Quinn - B
- Mr Archer, RID - B
- HMA Dublin
- Mr Caine - B

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B

THE TALKS PROCESS: RENEWING THE DIALOGUE WITH THE IRISH GOVERNMENT

1. In seeking to catch up on papers which were generated by those who had the fortitude for work last week, I have noted with interest Mr Thomas' submission of 30 December offering both advice on the way forward on the Talks process, and a draft letter from the Secretary of State to Mr Spring. If I may say so, (and on the assumption that it is not too late to do so) I think that, as ever, Mr Thomas has offered very sage advice. I strongly support his view that an early letter from the Secretary of State to Mr Spring should issue broadly in the terms which he suggests (though see Para 2 below) and also endorse the Bull Points upon which the Secretary of State might draw in forthcoming interviews. The key points, summarised at (i) and (ii) of Mr Thomas' covering note which he suggests should underpin HMG's

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general stance in the coming weeks seem absolutely correct to me, particularly those in the last sentence of (i).

2. As to the draft letter to Mr Spring, I have just one comment: my slightly detached understanding of the discussions which took place in the run-up to the Declaration was that the Irish Government believed that HMG was over-estimating the strength of likely unionist reaction to the Declaration. I wonder therefore if it is tactically best to admit (Para 3 of the draft letter) that 'its reception overall has been better than we might have feared'. The Irish are likely to point to such a phrase in future discussions when they might (as in the past) be seeking to persuade HMG that we over-estimate unionist concerns and under-estimate the extent to which unionists can be 'led' by HMG. I wonder if a better formulation might not be something along the lines 'its reception is as good as we could have expected (which repays the care that was taken over the final stages of the drafting) though.....

3. Finally, might I suggest that in the current climate of uncertainty surrounding both the Provisionals' reaction to the Declaration, and the juxtaposition of the Peace Process and the Talks Process, there might be merit in an early stocktaking meeting, involving the Secretary of State, Michael Ancram, and officials who have been engaged in either or both of the Declaration, and the Talks Process. There are many possible scenarios which could develop, and it would be useful to have a session to explore the most likely, and to plan accordingly.

Signed David Fell

DAVID FELL

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