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NORTHERN
IRELAND OFFICE
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SIL DIVISION

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FROM: D J WATKINS
US CENT SEC
DATE: 23 DECEMBER 1993

CC: PS/Sofs (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Williams - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Daniell - B
Mr Quinn - B
Mr Rodell - B
HMA, Dublin - B
Mr Archer, RID - B
Mr Hallett, RAD - B

Mr Thomas - B

NORTHERN IRELAND : WAYS FORWARD

1. I found Mr Archer's 21 December minute to you a helpful survey of some of the options which might be open to us.
2. There are real attractions in the idea that the Joint Declaration might itself provide the "framework" for new Talks (though the DUP would doubtless distance itself from them). As Mr Archer seems to suggest, this might circumvent what would be difficult and possibly protracted negotiations in Liaison Group - the Irish draft leaked to the Irish Press would require substantial amendment to bring it to a point where it could form a "framework" for new Talks; and in any event they would adjust their Irish Press stance to align it with the JD.
3. I wonder therefore if Michael Ancram should specifically probe the NI parties on whether, in light of the Joint

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Declaration, they would be prepared to enter Talks which would focus on the agenda of the institutional issues and, perhaps, constitutional balance. (Your mutual recognition formula might be revived and canvassed in the latter context.)

4. However I have real doubts about the viability of a new round of Talks which were convened (if - a big if - the NI parties agreed to re-enter quickly) against the background of the Irish Forum and possible exploratory discussions with Sinn Fein. Would the Irish and SDLP genuinely engage before the "peace process", including the Forum, progressed to the point where Sinn Fein were admitted to Talks? I suspect not, and that they might credibly argue that early Talks would disrupt the logical sequence of the "peace process". But we won't know unless we ask.
5. More generally, I think it would be helpful if we established a clear critical path (with possible alternatives) forward from the Joint Declaration, so that all our activity (eg the next Michael Ancram round) is directed consistently. You may well already have the critical path clear in your own mind.

[Signed DJW]

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