

CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM Q J THOMAS, DUS(L)
18 January 1994
DUSL/MR/44551

PS/MICHAEL ANCRAM(L,B&DENI)
Rathgael House-Mufax

cc PS/Secretary of State(L&B)
PS/PUS(L&B)
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Bell
Mr Watkins
Mr Williams
Mr Maccabe
Mr Daniell
Mr Rickard
Mr Archer RID/FCO
Mr Wood(L&B)
Mr Brooker
Mr Westmacott, Washington
Mr Dew, HME Dublin
Mr Caine

PUS/ 396
19 JAN 1994
N.I.O. LONDON

JOINT DECLARATION: FOLLOW-UP

Your minute of earlier today to PS/Secretary of State recorded that Michael Ancram would welcome suggestions on a format for carrying the Talks process which would both satisfy the Irish Government while keeping in the UUP. (I think in practice it is the UUP: with any multilateral talks we can probably capture the SDLP, perhaps after some wriggling, and the Alliance Party, whereas the DUP are doubtful.)

2. I assume that the minimum requirements from the Irish Government will be that:

- (i) Talks should clearly be seen to be part of a single comprehensive process which addresses all three Strands and which accordingly,
- (ii) provides at the appropriate point for Irish Government involvement, through face to face meetings with all the other participants (and not just the British Government) round the table.

3. On the other hand it will presumably remain important to the Unionists that the Irish Government does not have a direct role in relation to Strand 1 issues, though they have a disguised role via the formulation that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

4. The 26 March 1991 groundrules were of course negotiated with considerable difficulty over a period of months to meet these various requirements, and in language which all could accept. I do not myself despair of resuming multilateral Talks on that basis, provided we can ensure a context of mutual reassurance. In particular it is obviously important, and the Ancram Round has of course been addressing this since its inception, to do all we can to provide mutual assurance that an agreed outcome is possible. I also recall that while after Talks 1991 Mr Molyneaux in particular and the UUP in general inveighed against the multilateral Talks circus, goldfish bowl and high-wire act, they nonetheless re-joined Talks 1992. Much does continue to depend on our ability to reach a shared understanding with the Irish side. Mr Dew's note of his conversation with Mr Finlay was indeed very reassuring in suggesting precisely what we have been urging on the Irish side: namely bringing the work on the Joint Framework Document to a conclusion. (One wonders whether Mr Finlay had seen the exchange of letters between the Secretary of State and the Tanaiste which appeared rather dismissive of our proposals on precisely this point.)

5. Nonetheless it may well be necessary and appropriate to adopt a slightly different approach. I doubt if we need reach hard and fast decisions at this stage. I myself took considerable encouragement from your note of Michael Ancram's recent meeting with the UUP. Paragraph 11 records both Mr Nicholson and Mr Empey being brought to acknowledge that,

When sufficient progress is being made, the Secretary of State might be able to bring together the Party leaders or "indeed with small Party delegations". That seems to me a significant acknowledgement and we need to work this vein further. If, as I understand is the case, the UUP also acknowledge the need to continue to address the problem in three Strands (granted the necessary engagement, of which they are sceptical, of the Irish Government and the SDLP) then the next trick is to secure an acknowledgement that at or after that point the Irish Government would also need to be brought in.

6. I should be very surprised if the UUP have in practice changed their perception of what they recognised as the realities when they signed up to the 26 March Statement. A good deal of shadow-boxing goes on, for entirely understandable reasons. I believe that if the overall political context is perceived to allow it, and if the necessary reassurance can be generated on the position and good faith of other participants in the process, the format issue may fall into place more easily than might now appear.

[SIGNED]

Q J THOMAS
18 January 1994
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