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Secret

Briefing Note for Meeting with the Alliance Party on

1 August, 1984

1. Background to the Meeting

The Alliance Party has been seeking a meeting for some months with the Government. The main issues which they would like to discuss are the general political situation with particular reference to the Forum Report and its aftermath and Anglo-Irish relations. Mr. Cushnahan has indicated they will emphasise paragraphs 5.1, 5.2 and 5.10 of the Report. It is also likely that security co-operation, extradition and the Kinsale gas deal will be mentioned.

2. Alliance Party Policy

The Alliance Party has rejected the three models outlined in the Forum Report while welcoming certain aspects of it, particularly the Report's support for the "Principle of Consent" and its acknowledgement of the validity of both the Nationalist and Unionist identities and the need for any settlement to accommodate both". In its reaction (copy attached) to the Forum Report the Alliance Party expressed the view that as the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to a United Ireland will not be forthcoming, this placed an onus on the Forum to examine other proposals not based upon a United Ireland which might have been acceptable to both communities. The party "regrets" that the Forum did not take this opportunity. It sees in para. 5.10 of the Forum Report, a willingness to discuss other views which may contribute to political development. The Alliance Party envisages a "fourth" option to the three models outlined in the Forum Report. The main elements of this Fourth option are as follows:-

- intensified Anglo-Irish co-operation and contact to give expression to the unique relationship between the people on the two islands.
- the establishment of the parliamentary tier.

- increased security co-operation (the Alliance Party has publicly welcomed the McGlinchey extradition/^{and} expressed the hope that such extraditions will become the norm.)
- the encouragement by the two Governments of the SDLP and the Unionists to come together in a local power-sharing administration.
- there is an Irish dimension but it does not extend to interference by the South in the purely internal affairs of Northern Ireland.
- Nationalists must be realistic about the impossibility in the foreseeable future of moving down the road to some form of Irish unity.
- Unionist intransigence in refusing to make even the most tentative accommodation with constitutional nationalism must be faced up to by the British Government. While the majority community has a veto on constitutional change, it should not have a veto on how Northern Ireland is to be governed.

3. Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Assembly

The Alliance Party has supported the Prior initiative and the Assembly to a greater extent than any other party. Alliance have continued to reject any offer of devolved government that does not involve the SDLP. They have, however, adopted what could only be described as a Unionist stance on issues such as the European Parliament's decision to carry out a study of the Northern Ireland problem. They have tried to form a bridge between the two main Unionist parties without great success and refuse to acknowledge that the SDLP are not now going to enter the Assembly. They still hope that the Assembly can form the basis for a local power-sharing administration in Northern Ireland.

4. Electoral Performance in recent years

The Alliance Party's percentage of the first preference vote has fluctuated from 14.24% in the 1977 local election to 8.7% in the 1981 election. In recent years it has found its vote squeezed and on the decline because of a hardening of attitudes in both communities. In the 1982

Assembly election the party was fortunate to take 10 seats (out of 78) with 9.3% of first preferences. In its last two elections it has been less successful gaining 8% in the 1983 Westminster election and 4.9% in the 1984 Euro-election.

5. Divisions in the Alliance Party

There have been serious divisions within the leadership of the party during the past year mainly centred on David Cook's desire to oust Oliver Napier and replace him as leader. David Cook supported by two other Assembly members (Will Glendinning and Paul Maguire) used the question of making a submission to the Forum as an issue on which to try to defeat Napier who was opposed to have any contact with the Forum. Oliver Napier called a Council meeting of the party last Autumn which decided by a majority of over 100 votes to support existing party policy and not to make a submission to the Forum. Napier's leadership appears to be secure as a result and his most likely successor in due course is likely to be John Cushnahan rather than David Cook. Relations between Napier and Cook have continued to be extremely cool in recent months.

6. One further matter which may be raised is the procedure to be followed when elected Alliance Party representatives wish to make contact with Irish Ministers on constituency or other business. [One possibility is that contact could best be made through the Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, It would in any event be important that the Minister for Foreign Affairs be kept informed of such contacts].

7. The Alliance Party intends to issue a Press Release on 31 July stating the meeting is taking place and will hold a press conference after the meeting. They will look after their own press arrangements.

Martin Burke
31 July, 1984