

T. R.

PAB/13/KG

Mr Wyatt

PAISLEY

1. You asked us to examine how we might best deal with Dr Paisley if he presents a challenge to the Government either after a victory in the 20 May local government elections, or indeed before.
2. I assume that HMG's background policy will remain in this time-scale one of
 - (a) continuing the joint studies
 - (b) making no fresh attempt to devolve aspects of government.

In other words, HMG will react rather than lead in general terms.

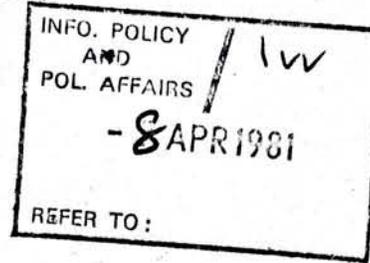
3. It is difficult to speculate about the form of Paisley's challenge. If, as is likely, his star proves to be in the ascendant, he could
 - (a) claim that his 'Carson trail' is vindicated and if, as seems likely, the next Anglo-Irish summit communique reveals how little there is so far in the joint studies, maintain he has defeated a plot
 - (b) build on his success to promote a legal or illegal challenge to HMG.

Our guess is that (a) is the more likely scenario, though Paisley would in any case continue to be a thorn in our flesh.

4. How should HMG deal with him? The options are:
 - (a) to try to convert him into a constructive 'Makarios' figure. Short of another attempt at devolution, we could do this by treating him as the chief representative of Unionist opinion and pushing some responsibility onto his party, for example by consulting him informally on government business. However, all we know of Paisley argues that he could not respond even if he wanted to, which is itself unlikely. His gift is to foment and focus negative emotions and views. He is



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cc. Mr [unclear]
Mr Ranson
Mr Jamieson
Mr Burn

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a destructive critic, unable to create even a party which is more than a vehicle for himself. And if he were to try to be constructive, he would most probably not be able to maintain his political position. In sum, were Paisley to disappear overnight, a major obstacle to reconciliation and progress would have vanished with him. For HMG to seek to build Paisley up would therefore tend to increase his mischief-making power, with no real chance of harnessing his political weight. It would also of course radically antagonise the minority community

- (b) to allow Paisley to make trouble until we judge his antics too destructive to be let continue. As argued in para 3 above, we may find that this point is never reached. But if Paisley were to stir up a major new strike, for example, or foment paramilitary activity, it would be difficult for HMG not to be seen to take action against him: passivity on our part would increase Paisley's standing, antagonise the minority and many Unionists, and leave him with the initiative. Our guess is that provided Paisley made his stand on a clear issue on which his support was limited to the DUP and its adherents, HMG could get away with tough action - especially if he were to break the law. The problem is, of course, that Paisley is unlikely to present us with so clear cut an issue
- (c) to try to cut the political ground from under Paisley's feet. Ministers have chosen to remain aloof from the issues of the May elections and to hope that the flagging OUP horse will run adequately against the DUP. The result so far - even with the DUP error in the Fermanagh/South Tyrone bye-election campaign - is that there is no effective unionist alternative to Paisley. We could try to remedy this by:
- (i) attacking Paisley and his ideas in public, through Ministerial speeches;
 - (ii) urging the OUP in private to get out of their rut and take the fight to Paisley;
 - (iii) coming out publicly in favour of the moderates on the Unionist side.

The dangers are that we would thereby build up Paisley's credit with the extreme Unionists and give the OUP the kiss of death. We would also look foolish if Paisley despite our efforts did well in the elections. On the other hand, we could hope to seize the initiative and gain some control over events. We could expect the support of all but the more extreme Unionists: Paisley's current success owes much to the lack of a credible alternative to him and many Unionists seem to feel the need for a clear lead. A campaign to show how meaningless and irrelevant are the fears Paisley stirs up might tip the balance against him.

5. The ideal way to deal with the Paisley problem would be to allow him to overreach himself and then crack down on him and swing opinion against him. However, he is unlikely to be so foolish as to let himself be manoeuvred into such a position. The real decision therefore is whether we should continue to stand by as events unfold, and try to respond to Paisley in an ad hoc fashion; or try to cut the political ground from under his feet. There are dangers in both courses, but in our view the advantage lies in the second, for the reasons set out at 4(c) above.

6. If we are to take this sort of action, it would be best begun as soon as possible in order to try to head off a Paisley success at the May elections. A success would make his position that much harder to contest.

D. S. Blatherwick

D E S BLATHERWICK
Political Affairs Division

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