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-7 APR 1992

FROM: D E SMITH
CPL DIVISION
3 APRIL 1992

mm18/4.

MR THOMAS

cc PS/PUS
PS/Mr Fell
Mr Ledlie
Mr Alston
Mr Bell
Mr Chesterton
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins *W*
Mr Wood
Mr Allsop
Mr Cooke
Mr Dodds
Mr D A Hill
Mr D J R Hill
Mr Maccabe
Mr Percival
Mr Templeton
Mr Brooker
Ms Lodge
Mr Bentley, HOLAB
Mr Archer, RID FCO
Mr Hallett, RAD FCO

he has...

Mr...

TALK STEERING GROUP

Please find attached the Minutes of the first meeting of the reformed TSG which took place on 31 March.

D E SMITH
CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIVISION
OAB EXT 3786

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CPL1/12897

TSG (2/1)

TALKS STEERING GROUP

MINUTES OF A MEETING IN THE VCR ON TUESDAY 31 MARCH

Those present:	<u>London</u>	<u>Belfast</u>
	Mr Thomas	Mr Watkins
	Mr Bell	Mr Wood
	Mr Allsop	Mr Dodds
	Mr Cooke	Mr Maccabe
	Mr D A Hill	Mr Millar
	Mr D J R Hill	
	Mr Brooker	
	Ms Lodge	
	Mr Smith	
	Mr Archer	
	Mr Hallett	

Raison d'etre for TSG

1. Mr Thomas opened the meeting by reaffirming the need for the TSG. It would meet regularly (hopefully weekly) during the substantive phase of the Talks and provide a forum to call on the collective wisdom of the department to consider matters within the Talks process. It would also serve to keep those not directly involved in the Talks up-to-date on progress and issues arising.

Talks

2. Mr D J R Hill gave a summary of the pre-election position. Following pressure from the Northern Ireland public and from the Prime Minister, the party leaders, with an undertaking from Mr Kinnock to continue the Talks on the same basis, agreed to new Talks, which began on 9 March. Both Mr Reynolds and Mr Andrews have shown unquestioned support for the Talks (and the AIA).

3. On post-election strategy, Mr Hill reported that election campaign sniping, particularly between the DUP and SDLP, was not considered significant enough to affect the prospects of constructive talks after the election. There would be a need for a new Secretary of State to quickly take stock and to make initial

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contact with the parties. Officials would need to clear the UK negotiating position with other interested Whitehall departments. Given that the Secretary of State had said in the final Plenary session on 9 March that talks could resume week beginning 27 April, there was an urgent need to establish a date for an IGC and agree the terms of the gap.

4. The meeting noted that it would be possible to arrange an IGC for the week beginning 20 April, but several factors were thought likely to delay the resumption of talks: Parliament returned on 27 April, 4 May is a Bank Holiday and 6 May is the State Opening of Parliament. Mr D A Hill pointed out that a hung Parliament would also lead to a delay in the appointment of Ministers. The draft letter from Secretary of State to Mr Andrews concerning the date of the IGC and the gap was understood to be with PS/Secretary of State. Mr Archer said that the Irish side would not be happy to make definitive arrangements until after the election and added they (the Irish) would also wish the IGC to be as close as possible to the start of the talks. He pointed out that the first Ministerial meeting would not necessarily have to be in the form of an IGC. Referring to the timescale, Mr Maccabe said the expectations of the parties is to move quickly to talks after the election. Mr Thomas said that whilst other factors may defer the resumption of talks, no delay should be deemed to be "our fault" and every effort should be made to ensure that all preparations be completed for a possible start w/b 27 April. He added that there was a strong possibility of more direct involvement from the Prime Minister, whoever was in office, than was previously shown, and similarly, a likelihood of a Cabinet Committee being established.

Role of TPU and PDT

5. Mr Bell reported that he was about to minute Mr Chesterton on the possible staffing of the Talks Planning Unit and the Political Development Team.

Whitehall Liaison

6. Mr Bell said the responsibility for liaison with other Whitehall departments would fall primarily to the TPU. It might be more intense than last time (particularly due to the interest of No 10) but would be helped by the continuation of NISG arrangements. Should there be a Cabinet Committee established though, this would add considerably to the burden. Mr D A Hill added that, depending on the outcome of the election, there may be a need to ensure consistency with devolution for Scotland. It was noted that the whole decision process for clearing policy could be more complex, with policy possibly being driven by the Prime Minister.

Practical Arrangements for Strand 1

7. Mr D J R Hill said he would chair a meeting on 2 April of the Talks Administration Committee which would essentially tackle the "nuts and bolts" of the practical arrangements. Firm costings would be worked up and estimates presented to Estabs in due course. Mr Bell said the TPU and other Talks-associated groups, should be ready to "go live" on 13 April.

8. It was agreed that the arrangements for the media would be the same as last time - a portakabin "village", partly because this would be the best way of managing/controlling the media and limiting the "goldfish bowl" effect.

Practical Arrangements for Strand 2

9. It was agreed the arrangements for venues, accommodation and burden-sharing would be dealt with by the TA committee.

10. Mr Brooker said that Sir Ninian Stephen and George Thompson would both be available for Strand 2. Sir Ninian was currently in New York and wanted to be fully briefed by Officials on his return to Australia. Mr Archer added that Sir Ninian needed a

forward-looking brief which could not be done until after the election - there was therefore no merit in sending anyone to New York to brief him. It was agreed that PUS should be minuted to agree a strategy of speaking firstly with Sean O'hUiginn and then make telephone contact with Sir Ninian before flying to Australia to brief him in detail.

11. Mr D J R Hill said that it had been agreed at the talks last year that the opening plenary of Strand 2 would be in London, the substantive discussions in Stormont with a final plenary in Dublin. Mr Thomas felt it might be necessary to revisit the question of location in the Business Committee. He suggested that the difficult transition to Strand 2 talks might be eased by Prime Minister/Taoiseach contact.

Policy Preparations

12. Mr Bell reported that briefing for the new government, including policy and analytical papers, was well advanced. Possible outline solutions were being drafted under the guidance of Mr Thomas but these were at a very early stage and it was not yet appropriate to give them a wider circulation. On the UK negotiating position and possible discussion papers, Mr Bell said that many of the papers had already been prepared for the last talks. Some would require modest editing, whilst others needed substantial amendment. Mr D J R Hill's minute of 23 March set this task in hand.

Handling Issues

13. The meeting worked through Mr D J R Hill's minute of 27 March which set out the issues to be addressed. The following points were made:

- a. post-election gap - draft with Secretary of State's office.

- b. timing of resumption - must assume w/b 27 April but note: 27 April - opening of Parliament; 4 May - Bank Holiday; and 6 May - State Opening of Parliament.
- c. Meeting with parties - Secretary of State's draft programme suggested he meet the party leaders on day 2.
- d. Business Committee - the Business Committee would not be able to meet until after the talks had formally resumed with a Plenary session.
- e/f. Sub-Committees - Mr Thomas said he believed the Plenary Session on 9 March had arrived at the best solution: they would establish any sub-committee as they went along, taking each issue on a step by step basis. He added that the timing of the tabling and discussion of papers would depend upon the possibility of the new Secretary of State whether he adopted a gradualistic approach or pressed on with issues of substance as quickly as possible. Whatever option we try and broker will require Secretary of State to take a view.
- g. Anglo-Irish Summit - Mr Archer commented that, depending on the outcome of the election, Mr Reynolds would wish to either see Mr Major again relatively quickly to maintain their relationship or be equally keen to have early access to a new Prime Minister. Mr D J R Hill said that a summit meeting could be useful for the transition to Strand 2 and noted that the summit that had occurred during talks last year had not caused the parties any discernible problems.
- h. Direct rule renewal - Mr D J R Hill said the renewal date was mid-June and wondered if it were best to move quickly or delay until after the launch of Strand 2. Mr Bell added that it was the same timescale for the EP Bill. Mr Watkins suggested that agreement might be

sought from the parties that their contributions to the debate be kept to a minimum, thereby causing minimal disruption to the Talks. Mr Archer believed that if the Unionists had not met the Irish Government in talks by the time of the debate they would be bound to make demands in the House which could effect the talks. Mr Thomas said that no special effort should be made to push the Bill through quickly.

- i. Launch of Strand 2 - Mr Thomas said that we should not go beyond the 26 March formula. Though Mr Brooke had given a "best endeavours" assurance to Mr Collins on 18 December, this was not deemed to be a commitment, but a judgement of position.

- j. Three Strands: sequential approach - Again, Mr Thomas said, we would be governed by the 26 March formula. Mr Archer said that the FCO and their legal advisers would need to be part of HMG's team for Strand 2 in order to pick up details of "Treaty" language. Mr Bell added that decisions taken within this Strand could necessitate referenda both North and South of the border and for which a Bill would be required for that in the North.

- k. Arrangements "after Strand 3" - Mr Thomas said that this point in the process, when in effect everything would be on the table and all participants present, was unscripted and will be of great importance. Little could be done at this stage to plan for it. He pointed out that while the 26 March statement was in terms of "nothing agreed until everything agreed", it should be noted that there was nothing explicit to the effect that agreement should be unanimous, though it was a natural assumption made on occasion by the Secretary of State, that it had to be. He wondered if, in practice, dissent from only the DUP or the Alliance party would

be fatal to a deal. Mr D J R Hill wondered if there may be a need for an independent chairman for talks in or after Strand 3 involving the parties or if the two Governments would co-chair. This, it was suggested, should be left until nearer the time.

Next Meeting

14. The next meeting will be (provisionally) on Monday 13 April at 10.30 in the VCR. Thereafter, and certainly during the course of the Talks, it will be desirable to meet once a week on either Thursday or Friday.