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FROM: D J R HILL  
CPL DIVISION  
23 DECEMBER 1991

WESTERN IRELAND: POLITICAL TALKS

MR ARCHER, RID, FCO

cc PS/PUS (L&B)  
PS/Mr Fell  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Bell  
Mr Alston  
Mr Wood (L&B)  
Mr McNeill  
Mr Cooke

Some progress in recent weeks. Outside channels political talks in the New Year. Please inform Sir Ninian Stephen Australian Government.

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TALKS: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

It would be prudent to warn Sir Ninian Stephen that his appointment has again become an issue in the "Talks about Talks". There is a possibility that this could become public and he could thus face renewed interest from the press and media. As events could move quickly in January it would also do no harm to alert him, and the Australian Government, that should all the remaining issues be resolved at the Secretary of State's meeting on 7 January, we might find ourselves making a call on their services sooner rather than later.

2. I attach a draft telegram to Canberra which you might use for this purpose.

There has been no dissent from the Irish Government, or any of the Northern Ireland parties, that the key elements of the previous talks, as set out in Mr Brooke's statement of 25 March, should be retained. Thus, there is no disagreement with the three-staged approach embracing the two Governments and the four Northern Ireland parties, with talks taking place on a wide agenda, with the formula of nothing being agreed until everything is agreed, and with any conclusions having to be acceptable to the people. The

SIGNED:  
D J R HILL  
CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL DIVISION  
23 DECEMBER 1991

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## DRAFT TELEGRAM TO HC CANBERRA

talks, and the Kerryfield Secretariat to discontinue servicing  
conferences during that period. These pre-conditions can be dealt  
with on similar lines to before.

## NORTHERN IRELAND: POLITICAL TALKS

Summary

1. The following remain at issue  
Some progress in recent weeks. Outside chance of political talks in  
the New Year. Please inform Sir Ninian Stephen and the Australian  
Government.

2. Detail

Mr Brooke has had an intensive round of meetings with the Irish  
Government and the Northern Ireland political parties during the  
last three weeks. As a result, the outline of an agreement is  
beginning to emerge although there remain points of conflict which  
could yet obstruct progress to a final agreement.

3. There has been no dissent from the Irish Government, or any  
of the Northern Ireland parties, that the key elements of the  
previous talks, as set out in Mr Brooke's statement of 26 March,  
should be retained. Thus, there is no disagreement with the three  
stranded approach embracing the two Governments and the four  
Northern Ireland parties, with talks taking place on a wide agenda,  
with the formula of nothing being agreed until everything is agreed,  
and with any conclusions having to be acceptable to the people. The  
Unionist pre-conditions remain unchanged; no meetings of the  
Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference during the period of the

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talks, and the Merryfield Secretariat to discontinue servicing Conferences during that period. These pre-conditions can be dealt with on similar lines to before.

4. The following remain at issue -

i. Format and Venue for Strand One. The Unionists favour smaller, more informal meetings, preferably in London (the Palace of Westminster or a Government Office) or, if necessary, in Stormont Castle (not Parliament Buildings, Belfast, as last time). The SDLP, however, are unhappy with the thought of reducing the delegations (from ten last time) and dislike a concentration of meetings in London.

ii. Gap. An outline formula has begun to emerge. This would envisage talks starting after an IGC in mid to late January, then running until the point when the British General Election was called. At that point they would cease and a further IGC would be held in London. There would also be a commitment that, if no agreement had been reached in the talks and if there was no change of administration as a result of the election, the talks would resume after a post election IGC on the same basis and continue until the end of June or for a further 2 months, whichever was later. The Unionists have been digging their heels in over the

idea of a post election IGC, which was inserted at the suggestion of the Irish Government.

iii. Chairmanship of Strand Two. The Unionists have

resurrected their concerns about Sir Ninian.

Dr Paisley continues to allege that he was never very happy about the appointment and only agreed to it for the good of the process, although he also fails to produce any hard arguments against Sir Ninian. (We

gave the Unionist, at the beginning of December,

leaders copies of the transcripts of Sir Ninian's

various media interviews in June; they produced no counter reaction).

5. Mr Brooke is planning to see the four Northern Ireland party leaders together, on Tuesday 7 January, to try to resolve these outstanding issues. He made it clear to the party leaders last week that if they continue to press their objections the chances of starting new talks before the election will disappear. The meeting on 7 January could therefore be a watershed. If it transpires that these issues are resolved at that meeting, or that good progress is made in that direction, this could, as indicated above, clear the way for an Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in mid to late January to launch a fresh gap for new talks to begin in early February. Were such talks to get under way and make decent progress it is not inconceivable that Strand Two - which is the point when Sir Ninian would become involved (assuming his appointment is endorsed) - could begin in early March. This is all, obviously,

highly speculative but we gauge that it would be better to warn Sir Ninian and the Australian Government now, on a strictly contingent basis, rather than leaving it until well into January. It would be useful if you could ask Sir Ninian, were his appointment to be endorsed, whether he has any other commitments in March/April that would cause difficulties. You might also invite Mike Codd to say whether he would envisage any difficulties in producing George Thompson at short notice.

6. You will wish to be aware, when speaking to Sir Ninian, that he rang John Chilcot (PUS, NIO) on Monday 16 December when passing through London en route to the Commonwealth Mission meeting in South Africa. Chilcot gave him a brief update but events have since moved on to the point described in this letter. Chilcot also tried without success to ring him in Johannesburg, on Friday 20 December, to warn him that the Unionists were again (privately) making an issue of his appointment and that this could become public as the parties jockey for position. We were grateful for the confirmation, in your letter of 22 November, that Sir Ninian has been playing a dead bat to all enquiries from the press and media and would be grateful if he would continue to do so. There would, of course, be no harm in him confirming that he would be pleased to stand if he were approached on behalf of the participants but he should not go beyond that.

7. Irish officials were informed on Friday that we would be aiming to get a message to Sir Ninian as soon as possible.

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