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CIVIL SERVICE

FROM: JONATHAN STEPHENS
Associate Political Director (L)
7 December 1998

cc see distribution below

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

US VISIT: MESSAGES FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

Mr Jeffrey and I spoke over the weekend about the need to reinforce some of the messages we gave Steinberg at the Secretary of State's meeting with him on Friday. I gather the Secretary of State shared the concern.

2. I attach a draft letter to No 10, suggesting that they take action direct with the NSC in the course of today. It needs to reach No 10 by lunchtime.

(Signed JAS)

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cc PS/Murphy (B&L)
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PS/Mr Semple
Mr Jeffrey
Mr Bell
Mr Brooker
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NORTHERN IRELAND: APPLYING AMERICAN INFLUENCE

The Secretary of State met Jim Steinberg on Friday. She briefed him about the week's events, our overall strategy and the helpful role the US Administration might play at the right time.

Steinberg left behind with us three worrying messages:

- Irish America was solidly behind Sinn Fein's analysis that unionist intransigence was to blame for lack of progress. The Prime Minister's personal involvement over the last few weeks had cleared the British Government of blame, but currently the pressure on the White House was all one way.
- The White House anticipated that Trimble would be the main brunt of criticism in the States this week and that what opportunity there had been to put private pressure on Sinn Fein was lost. The Administration was prepared to apply pressure at the right time, but now was not the right time.
- The Administration thought that there was virtually no prospect of achieving actual decommissioning before devolution: the most they were looking to achieve with Sinn Fein was to explore ideas of what Steinberg called a "verbal deposit" ie they promised to decommission at a date in the future after devolution had taken place.

The Secretary of State warned that Trimble's problems in his party were genuine and it would not aid him to put him publicly more on the defensive than he was already. But she is worried that, unless we take some more action, the public presentation in the States this week may be unbalanced and what scope there is for private pressure may be completely lost.

The Secretary of State therefore suggests that we should follow the Steinberg conversation up with contacts today between No 10 and the NSC. Our key messages to the Americans should be:

- the need for balance in public. So calls for progress on implementing all aspects of the Agreement should clearly be directed at all sides,
- a recognition that all sides had genuine doubts which needed to be addressed. Unionist doubts about Republican's good faith on decommissioning are understandable given the lack of progress. Nationalist doubts about Unionists good faith in implementing the Agreement also needed to be addressed;
- in private, the Administration should leave Adams in no doubt that once North/South issues were resolved, it was then reasonable to expect some progress on decommissioning. (Even though the moment for a big US push is not now, Adams should not be allowed to think that the US is letting him off the hook on decommissioning);
- given the evidence that Adams and McGuinness are manoeuvring within the IRA to give themselves more freedom on decommissioning, the US Administration should do nothing to suggest that we are aiming for anything less than a start to actual decommissioning. (We may have to settle for less in the

end but we should not allow the Americans to start out with such low expectations.)

The Secretary of State suggests that these messages are best passed direct from No 10 to the NSC, in time today to influence what the President says in his speech tomorrow evening. It may be useful to touch base with Paddy Teahon, to establish what if any messages the Irish were sending in.

A copy goes to the Private Secretary of the Foreign Secretary, to HM Ambassador of Washington and to HM Ambassador Dublin.