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FROM: M J WILLIAMS
US(POL)

16 December 1993

Mr. Thomas

cc PS/PUS (L&B) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Cooke - B
Mr Brooker - B
Mr Dodds - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Maxwell - B
Mr Quinn - B
Mr Rickard - B
Mr Archer, RID, FCO - B
Mr McKervill, Dublin - B
Mr J Powell, Washington - B

Mr Kyle - B

MEETING WITH MR DECLAN O'DONOVAN, 16 DECEMBER

Since we were unable to hold a delegation meeting of the Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield today, because of the Secretary of State's meeting, I had a brief one-to-one meeting with Mr O'Donovan.

2. We first exchanged notes on how the Joint Declaration issued by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach on 15 December had been received in Northern Ireland. We agreed that the reception had been encouraging so far, especially amongst the UUP politicians, even those who are considered to be relatively hard line. When I said that we did not yet know what the Sinn Fein/PIRA reaction would be, Mr O'Donovan commented that he was not sure the Declaration would induce them to stop the violence.

3. Mr O'Donovan asked if we had decided how to react in the event of a cessation of PIRA violence. In particular, what would be our line about their handing over their weapons? I said that this was a difficult but important issue which we were currently looking at.

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Mr O'Donovan noted an apparent inconsistency between what the Secretary of State said on BBC television yesterday evening, which implied that PIRA would be expected to hand over its arsenal of weapons, and what the Secretary of State was reported to have said on BBC radio this morning, which implied that we were prepared to open exploratory talks with Sinn Fein before any weapons had been handed over. I repeated my earlier response. (Mr O'Donovan subsequently told me that Dublin hoped that if we were questioned on this subject further, we would follow the sort of line used by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons yesterday in response to Sir James Kilfedder.)

4. I told Mr O'Donovan that Mr Thomas and Mr O hUiginn had had a word about a meeting of the Liaison Group, and thought they might first have a private lunch meeting. I asked if the Irish side would now let us have their version of the Joint Framework document, a draft of which had been leaked to the Irish Press. Mr O'Donovan said that he did not know but would enquire.

5. We talked about a possible date for the next Intergovernmental Conference. I said that given the intensity of recent meetings on Anglo-Irish affairs, and the imminence of the Christmas break, it might make sense to think of a date nearer the end of January than the timing we had originally been considering (10-12 January). Mr O'Donovan said that he had mentioned the dates to the Tanaiste, but did not deny that a later date might now be preferable.

6. I told Mr O'Donovan that there would be an announcement this afternoon in the House of Commons of the Government's decision to start consultations with the parties, following the report of the Procedure Committee, on the basis that the time for a Select Committee on Northern Ireland had now arrived. Mr O'Donovan commented that this would be seen as confirmation of the deal with

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the Unionists, and when I mentioned that the Taoiseach at yesterday's Press Conference had said that the Select Committee was a matter for the House of Commons, he responded that this was what his officials had briefed him to say, but was not what either he or his officials believed. Mr O'Donovan asked how long the consultations would take place, and what would happen if the Labour Party and the SDLP were opposed to the establishment of a Select Committee. I said these were questions for the House of Commons, not the Government.

[signed MJW]

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