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FROM: C G MACCABE
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
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- cc PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Moss (DOE, DHSS&L) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (DED, DANI&L) - B
- PS/Lady Mayhew - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Legge - B
- NI Perm Secs
- Mr Williams - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Steele - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Brooke - B
- Mr Shannon - B
- Mr Blackwell - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Hamilton, DOE
- Mr Wood (B&L) - B
- Mr McCusker, MBW
- Mr Maxwell - B
- Mr Canavan - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mrs Collins - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Dodds - B
- Mr Cornick - B
- Mr Marsh - B
- Mr Perry - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mr T Smyth - B
- Mr Caine - B
- Mr Alexander, NIB, Washington
- Mr Lamont, RID - B
- HMA, Dublin - B
- Ms Collins, Cabinet Office
- CIVSEC, HQNI

Mrs. M. Auley cmax. 2/14.
Mrs. M. Kibbe

Mrs. Hanny

Mrs. Doherty LD 4/14

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, JANUARY TO MARCH 1995

I am sorry this edition of our quarterly review is longer than usual. This is, however, a consequence of the high level of political activity during the last three months.

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Summary

2. The period was dominated by the "Frameworks for the Future". The weeks before their publication were filled with speculation as to their probable content; in the weeks following, the political process has been defined by the attitude of the parties to them; and for the future, the death of Sir James Kilfedder has presented the opportunity for a by-election which will inevitably be perceived as a test of the Frameworks' acceptability. In broad terms, the documents found favour in Nationalist/Republican circles, were condemned outright by the mainstream Unionist parties, and judgement was reserved by the Loyalist parties and Protestant Churches.

3. Exploratory dialogue with the Loyalist parties and Sinn Fein continued to make headway, with Michael Ancram participating in recent meetings with the former. Sinn Fein won significant propaganda points by Adams' participation in the St Patrick's Day celebrations in the US; but their request for Ministerial involvement in the dialogue became bogged down in a linguistic sub-plot involving the nuances of "decommissioning" and "demilitarisation".

"Frameworks for the Future"

4. The year began with renewed speculation about the content and publication date of what was then known as the Joint Framework Document (JFD). By mid-January, the 'News Letter' was quoting "a highly placed source" to the effect that Dublin was insisting on being given executive authority over not only a future Assembly, but also over the present 26 District Councils. James Molyneaux's version of the same story had a "little mafia" of civil servants drafting plans for joint authority "overlord" bodies, and default mechanisms which would allow a local Assembly executive to be dismissed for failure to obey its masters in Dublin and London. The Prime Minister used a meeting in Downing Street with the Mayors,

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Chairmen and Chief Executives of the District Councils to give a categorical assurance that the proposals did not include any provision for the two Governments to exercise joint authority.

5. In the public perception, these assurances were difficult to reconcile with the leak in 'The Times' on 1 February of purported details of the JFD. Although there was a calmness in some quarters - particularly the Loyalist parties, who insisted that no considered response could be given before the full text of the document was published - the leak increased the pressure on the nine Ulster Unionist Party MPs to use their votes against the Government. The Prime Minister's position was strengthened by support from Labour and the Liberal Democrats, with Marjorie Mowlam making it clear that the Opposition would not form an alliance with the Unionists on the issue of Northern Ireland in order to bring down the Government. The Prime Minister gave a personal pledge that he "cherished" Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom, and that he would not become a persuader for a United Ireland. Inevitably, such reassurances gave rise to a flood of counter-speculation that the Government had made a U-turn, and were engaged in diluting the provisions of the JFD in order to retain Unionist support. At the time of the Inter-Governmental Conference in Belfast on 14 February, commentators were still undecided about whether or not a document was imminent, or indeed, whether it could be produced at all.

6. Reactions to the Frameworks when they were published on 22 February were predictable, with a generally favourable response from the Nationalist/Republican parties; a bitterly antagonistic reaction from mainstream Unionists; and Alliance, the Churches, the business community and the Loyalist parties adopting varying postures of less than outright rejection. A series of opinion polls seemed to demonstrate that there was no automatic correlation between political and public reactions. While, in the 'Channel 4' poll, for example, there was 100% support among Sinn Fein supporters (and 99% in SDLP ranks) for their parties to take part in political

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dialogue, even Ulster Unionist (81%) and DUP (63%) supporters sent a strong signal that rejection of the Frameworks was not an excuse for refusing to participate in talks based upon them or on some other basis. Both Unionist parties had issued hastily-produced "alternative" schemes immediately in advance of publication; but by the end of the period had refined their condemnation of the Frameworks as a basis for future discussion without significantly developing the kind of ideas they wished to see in their place.

UUP

7. Pessimism was the keynote at the beginning of the year. Ken Maginnis predicted an early end to the ceasefire; while John Taylor stated that the Union was no longer safe, and anticipated an early General Election. By mid-January, newspaper speculation about the contents of the JFD had led James Molyneaux to warn his Parliamentary colleagues to prepare for stormy days ahead.

8. Despite such prognostications, the nine Ulster Unionist MPs acted shortly afterwards to save the Government from its own Euro-sceptics in a critical vote on European fisheries policy. The DUP claimed that the UUP had betrayed local fishermen; and, possibly in response, Glengall Street published the text of a DUP policy document from the 1992 Inter-Party Talks which showed that Ian Paisley had been prepared to accept a direct say by the Irish Government in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, UUP participation in a gathering of various Unionist groups in East Belfast, held under the auspices of the DUP in mid-February, remained lukewarm.

9. 'The Times' leak of the Frameworks proposals was seen in some quarters as a plot designed to undermine James Molyneaux's leadership. A meeting with the Prime Minister in mid-February failed to reassure Messrs Trimble, Ross and Smyth that the leak could be disregarded. The Party's 'Practical Approach to

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'Problem-Solving' was released on 21 February, showing all the signs of a document which had been compiled in some haste. It seemed to be less of an authoritative statement of Party policy, than a gesture to show that talking might still be possible on some basis. A more comprehensive and better thought-out set of proposals has been promised.

10. Immediately after the Frameworks were published, rumours began to surface about a challenge to James Molyneaux's leadership being mounted at the Party's AGM on 18 March. The spectacle of all nine Ulster Unionist MPs this time going through the Opposition lobby on another critical European vote, early in March, was scarcely unexpected, and was regarded by the 'News Letter' as the end of the special relationship between Molyneaux and the PM. The funeral rites were read over the same relationship by Robert McCartney who, in an extended newspaper article, devoted himself with some relish to the task of pointing out that the failure of Molyneaux to read the intentions of HMG was only marginally less reprehensible than his failure to have a coherent alternative strategy in place against the possibility that the PM's assurances might prove unreliable.

11. It was a theme McCartney developed at a UUP Constituency Association meeting in Lisburn towards the end of the month, when the tacit support given to his attack on Molyneaux was evidence that the dissatisfaction expressed by 88 votes for Lee Reynolds in the Party leadership challenge was not a completely isolated phenomenon. By the end of March, the consensus within the UUP seemed to be that Molyneaux's leadership was holed below the water-line, although no-one - other than the letter writers urging McCartney to stand in North Down and take over the UUP helm - was prepared to predict with any certainty who his successor might be, or the course on which the Party might then be steered.

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The DUP

12. No such sufferings afflicted the Party whose apocalyptic analysis of political development remained consistent throughout the period. The ending of Army patrols in Belfast during daylight; the decision by Queen's to drop the National Anthem at graduation ceremonies; the dispute over Government funding to Meanscoil Feirste; the Boundary Commission proposals (allegedly designed to give the West Belfast seat to Adams); proposals for reforming the RUC; Sinn Fein demands for talks with Government Ministers, while resisting all attempts to engage in discussions about decommissioning IRA weaponry - all were regarded by the DUP as evidence of a political process designed solely to appease Republicanism and maintain the ceasefire.

13. In the circumstances, the Party's response to the Frameworks was a balance between outrage at the unacceptability of the proposals, and triumph at the extent to which their predictions of constitutional disaster had been proved right. (Some UUP members admitted privately that it was difficult to decide whether being betrayed by HMG or being patronised by the DUP was the worse fate.) Despite resistance to the idea of enforced intimacy, the Party made a number of attempts to woo their UUP cousins into a broad Unionist alignment which would fight the Frameworks on a common basis, via a Unionist Forum. Both the tactic of producing (on 20 February) an alternative to the Frameworks - 'A Formula for Political Progress' - and the content of it, were similar to the UUP manoeuvres.

14. By the end of the period, all that could be said was that the DUP were going about their self-appointed task of opposing the Frameworks with greater gusto than their Glengall Street colleagues. Shortly after fulminating against an NIO plot to prevent children waving Union flags during the Queen's visit on 9 March, the Party produced 'The Joint Framework Document, Shame and

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Sham', and followed it up towards the end of the month with Peter Robinson's 'The Union Under Fire'. Neither production pulled any punches in its attribution of personal and political duplicity to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State, and everyone connected with the political process.

The SDLP

15. By contrast, Nationalists entered the New Year on an optimistic note. The ceasefire had held, inter-party discussions, if not with Unionists, were continuing at Dublin Castle, and publication of the JFD was imminent. Any expressed concerns related to a belief that the Government was not moving quickly enough to cement the peace process (criticisms which diminished over the three month period); and fears of a two-track process after publication of the Frameworks, with Unionists insisting on negotiating only on the basis of the Strand 1 document, ignoring the North/South aspects of the document negotiated with the Irish Government. Fearing the influence Unionists had over the Government the Party strongly criticised the unrepresentative nature of the meeting with Mayors and Chief Executives which the Prime Minister hosted on 23 January.

16. Since publication of the Frameworks, the SDLP have maintained a relatively low profile, believing there is little chance of resuming political progress until the fall-out from the publication settles. On publication day John Hume pleaded for calm saying it was a time for "considered judgement", while Joe Hendron sought to reassure Unionists that nothing could be imposed against their will. This has been the soft refrain since.

17. Earlier in the month there was widespread welcome and relief within the Party for the revised Boundary Commission recommendations including the decision to retain a South Down seat and the creation of a potentially Nationalist seat in West Tyrone. The redrawing of

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West Belfast to include Twinbrook and Poleglass estates and the potentially negative impact on Joe Hendron's chances of retaining the seat seemed not to dampen the Party's enthusiasm for the revised recommendations. Speculation began about a future electoral pact between Sinn Fein and SDLP, although the latter have tried to reduce it, most likely because of the potential rift this would cause within the Party - Seamus Mallon and Joe Hendron in particular being strongly opposed to such a development. Such a Nationalist alliance has been made harder to contemplate by the likes of Mallon, in view of his frustration at the media hype surrounding Adams' St Patrick's Day trip to Washington and while he continued to be critical of Sinn Fein's intimidatory tactics to reduce acceptance of the RUC amongst Nationalists, and continued punishment beatings.

Sinn Fein

18. Exploratory dialogue with Sinn Fein continued throughout January and the first part of February until the sixth meeting was abandoned following claims by Sinn Fein that a bugging device had been detected in their delegation room. Since then Sinn Fein have increasingly placed importance on a British Minister entering dialogue with them but, as at the end of the period, disagreements over an agenda and Sinn Fein's demands for inclusion of "demilitarisation" have prevented this.

19. On publication of the Frameworks Sinn Fein presented them as an "explicit acknowledgement" of the failure of partition. 'A New Frameworks for Agreement' had moved the situation close to an "all-Ireland settlement". Predictably, at the Party's Ard Fheis on 25 February both Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness sought to play up the greener interpretation of the 'New Framework'.

20. The highlight for Sinn Fein, however, was the international recognition given to Adams by President Clinton on St Patrick's Day and the American decision to lift the ban on Sinn Fein fundraising.

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And Adams will have taken considerable satisfaction in bringing about tensions in the relationship between Clinton and the Prime Minister.

Alliance Party

21. The Alliance Party's role throughout the period was directed at alleviating fears prior to the launch of the Frameworks and, since then, appealing for calm and constructive discussion. While as a Party, it has been unable to accept the proposals as outlined in full - and has said so publicly - it welcomes with enthusiasm the forthcoming discussions based on them.

Loyalist parties

22. The PUP and UDP have now had nine meetings of exploratory dialogue, the last two with Michael Ancram leading for the Government. A full range of topics has been discussed, including decommissioning of arms. The Government side has registered its concern at the ongoing trouble caused by UVF prisoners at the Maze and also the continuing punishment attacks by the Loyalist paramilitaries. The parties' response to the leak in 'The Times' was essentially one of wait and see, but since the publication of the Frameworks, the reaction has been one of disappointment, with the PUP describing them as "badly weighted" towards the Nationalist/Republican viewpoint. Neither Party has yet given a detailed response to the document or agreed to discuss it in exploratory dialogue.

The Churches

23. The concerns of the Protestant churches, largely muted, began to surface when the Church of Ireland Bishops led by Archbishop Eames, met the Prime Minister and pleaded that the law-abiding majority must not be ignored.

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General

24. Away from the main political scene, a wider debate on the Frameworks continues to take place with, notably, the Ulster People's College and the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland both hosting a series of seminars. The purpose is to allow all shades of political opinion to express a viewpoint on the Frameworks, and for that to be tested by exposure to questions from the general public. In this context, the indications are that the public see participation in dialogue as preferable to a return to violence. In the coming months, Government Ministers will be tapping into this mood, by undertaking public engagements which will explain the thinking behind the Frameworks, and urge inclusive political dialogue as the best means of maintaining the peace.

[signed CGM]

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SH EXT 27085

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12 January Third LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives.

16 January Third XD meeting with Sinn Fein.

23 January Prime Minister's meeting at Downing Street with Council Mayors, Chairmen and Chief Executives.

25 January Fourth LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives.

25 January Boundary Commission issued revised proposals increasing Parliamentary constituencies from 17 to 18.

1 February Leak of Frameworks Document to 'The Times' newspaper.

1 February Fourth XD meeting with Sinn Fein.

6 February Fifth LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives.

7 February Fifth XD meeting with Sinn Fein.

9 February Sixth XD meeting abandoned following claims by Sinn Fein delegates that a bugging device had been detected in their room.

20 February DUP published its booklet "DUP Formula for Political Progress".

21 February UUP published its booklet "A Practical Approach to Problem Solving in Northern Ireland".

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21 February Sixth LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives.

22 February "Frameworks for the Future" published by Prime Minister and Taoiseach in Belfast.

25 February Sinn Fein Ard Fheis.

9 March HM Queen opened the new bridges in Belfast and conferred City status on Armagh.

13 March Seventh LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives.

13 March DUP published their booklet 'The Framework of Shame and Sham'.

17 March St Patrick's Day reception at the White House attended by the Taoiseach, John Hume, Dr John Alderdice, Gerry Adams and Gary McMichael.

18 March Lee Reynolds, stalking horse challenger to the UUP leadership, gained 88 votes to Mr Molyneaux's 521.

20 March Death of Sir James Kilfedder, MP for North Down.

20 March "The Union Under Fire", an analysis of the "Frameworks" document published by Peter Robinson.

22 March Eighth LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives; chaired by Michael Ancram.

29 March Ninth LXD meeting with Loyalist representatives; chaired by Michael Ancram.

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