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From: PS/Secretary of State (B)  
27 March 1995

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- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP,B&L) - B
- PS/Michael Ancram (DENI,B&L) - B
- PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B
- PS/Mr Moss (DOE,DHSS&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Mr Fell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Watkins - B
- Mr Maccabe - B
- Mr Stephens - B
- Mr Brooker - B
- Mrs Brown - B
- Mr Maxwell - B
- Mr Caine - B

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

C

Mrs Kenny  
Mrs [unclear]  
60303

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH DR JOHN ALDERDICE: WEDNESDAY  
22 MARCH 1995

The Secretary of State met Dr Alderdice on Tuesday 22 March 1994, Dr Alderdice was accompanied by Steven McBride, Seamus Close and John Neeson. Mr Brooker, Mr Maccabe and Mrs Brown represented NIO and Central Secretariat.

Frameworks

2. Dr Alderdice said that he had gone to Glengall Street with David Ford the day after publication of the Frameworks Document. Reg Empey, Chris McGimpsey and Jack Allen had been there. All had had copies and had been happy to discuss the contents amicably. The general view had been that talks were essential.

3. Dr Alderdice said that Sinn Fein were seeking respect, they needed to be a part of the process. The Secretary of State agreed, but observed that Sinn Fein wanted acceptance without giving up any of the things which distinguished them from mainstream political parties. The Secretary of State was asked about his US visit and said that some members of the US Administration, notably Nancy Soderburg had been very unhelpful, the US had however somewhat belatedly realised they needed something from Sinn Fein. The

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Washington Post had described Clinton's policy as "Carrot and Stick". Dr Alderdice said that, on the other hand John Bruton was quite solid, Bruton's view was that Sinn Fein had asked for help because of mounting pressure. He had also done well with Clinton.

4. Dr Alderdice said that a network of discussions between parties had developed, though not everybody was talking with everybody yet. The key question was how to give directions to this network. How were parties to go about conducting negotiations with each other and with the Government? The Secretary of State said that the Government did not have clear ideas on this. Michael Ancram had undertaken to do a public teach-in at Ballysillan Leisure Centre, it would be interesting to see how this would go. The responses of the major unionist parties had been curiously low-key, somewhat poor and factually incorrect.

5. Dr Alderdice agreed. The DUP had been the more organised, producing booklets and other publicity. They claimed to have circulated 50,000 booklets to date. He felt that the UUP was in almost complete confusion, Jim Molyneaux was pretty seriously damaged. Dr Alderdice did not expect him to be party leader this time next year. Several Belfast councillors (Cobain, McCausland etc), were creating discontent but had no real alternative to promote. The current leadership issue kept the UUP MPs in disarray. Attempts to criticise the document had been very poor (eg John Taylor in the Belfast Telegraph). Peter Robinson's critique was the most factually correct so far. At grassroots level, people were saying that the politicians should get into talks.

6. The Secretary of State agreed, public reaction was very largely based on a very positive experience of the ceasefires, this could not however be said publicly.

7. The Secretary of State asked about Dr Paisley's letter to party leaders, asking them to get together. Dr Alderdice replied that this had been wrongly reported. He had contacted Dr Paisley, who said he had no objection to this, but his suggestion had been that party representatives should meet. Dr Alderdice said that he would

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go to such a meeting, and expected Dr Paisley to be there. Dr Paisley had been very disappointed with the Unionist forum, he and Peter Robinson attended, but from the UUP only two Belfast councillors had joined them. Dr Alderdice reported that he had also received an invite to address the East Belfast SDLP.

8. The Secretary of State said that such meetings and discussions were helpful, and were useful in dealing with concerns and misapprehensions. The Secretary of State had been able to reassure Comber Orange Lodge representatives in a meeting following the Times' leak and had written to them again following publication of the Document, after which it appeared they had been reassured. Dr Alderdice agreed with this analysis. He said he had visited the same Orange Hall with Dr Paisley, and quite a few of those present had said they have been very surprised that the document did not say what they thought it did from the reports printed in the press.

9. Sean Neeson said that the unionists had placed themselves in a corner, they had in fact included many of the proposals in their own documents. The Secretary of State agreed, there was some communication difficulty within the UUP. Dr Alderdice agreed and said that he had found that Belfast UUP councillors did not know what UUP leaders had agreed in talks. Those MPs who were likely to be negative had not been involved in talks because Molyneaux had wanted to move forward but feared party reaction. The North Down by-election would be an important indicator.

10. Dr Alderdice queried whether the next step needed some direction. Chris Maccabe said that there would be opportunities coming up in the community (eg Ballysillan). A more structured approach would be bilaterals with the parties, there would be scope to repeat today's meeting with other parties. The Secretary of State asked if Easter was a natural corner, and if it would be appropriate to wait until after Easter to approach the parties. Dr Alderdice agreed, he added that he could not see the Republican movement pulling out of the peace process. The first anniversary of the ceasefire would make this even more difficult. He felt there were no particular crucial dates.

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11. The Secretary of State asked Dr Alderdice if he had any specific comments on the Frameworks Document. Dr Alderdice said that the Alliance had no enthusiasm for the panel idea, and would want to look at ways at changing that proposal. They also noted that the proposals on policing and administration of justice, and in particular the Alliance proposal for the Department of Justice, had received a positive response from both UUP and SDLP. Alliance had met Seamus Mallon to discuss this, and Mallon had accepted the idea in principle, saying the key issue was accountability. By the end of the meeting Mallon had indicated that he would accept one police force, with separate divisions (as at present), under such an agreement. Dr Alderdice emphasised that very few proposals on policing attract cross community support, and suggested that it would be worthwhile pursuing the Department of Justice's idea further.

12. The Secretary of State said that both of the above points were very proper and neither would cause him particular difficulty. Dr Alderdice also said that Alliance were keen to firm up on the rights proposals in the document. The Secretary of State advised that there were some problems with the Home Secretary on this. He himself had some concerns about the possible politicisation of the judiciary, in the United States this had led to the appointment of judges for their political views, with all of the attendant scope for complaints and criticism. The Secretary of State was not at all sure that Northern Ireland judges would be keen on the idea.

13. Dr Alderdice said that from 1975 until about the last six months senior professional people in Northern Ireland had divorced themselves from politics, he felt the judiciary had succumbed to the same feeling. Younger people coming forward were a lot less negative, and there could be a similar feeling within the ranks of the judiciary. The judiciary were likely to have an important role in any event if the institutions were created, through their responsibilities for judicial review.

14. Dr Alderdice also suggested a possible graduated approach to phasing out the Diplock courts, through scheduling in and scheduling out of particular offences. The Secretary of State responded that

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he had always resisted the Colville recommendations regarding certifying in. He felt that it should not be the role of an Attorney General to take rights away.

15. Dr Alderdice asked for clarification about the role of the north/south body. He understood it to cover a meeting of heads of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland departments. If there was agreement, then the two Governments (ROI and NI Assembly), could move to take decisions. Dr Alderdice felt his needed to be explained better, to show that the proposed north/south body would not be a higher tier body. The Secretary of State agreed. He explained that the committee chairmen in the proposed NI Assembly would be Ministers. The proposed structure permitted these Ministers to meet their Republic of Ireland counterparts to make common cause, using powers delegated to them by the Assembly. The status of this meeting in any particular subject (ie executive or consultative) would be set out and could be varied at a later date. Powers to be exercised by these Ministers would be only those delegated by the Assembly and a Minister would have to refer back to the Assembly and to be accountable. The Secretary of State said that this was clear in the Frameworks Document, and nothing at all could happen until the Assembly had been set up and committee chairmen appointed. Only committee chairmen would be required to join in the proposed north/south arrangements. They would be required to do so as an obligation of service, this was much the same as a British Minister having to attend meetings in Brussels as part of his Ministerial responsibilities.

16. The Secretary of State said the default mechanism was not well explained in the Document. He felt this could have been better drafted. It was important to emphasise that this mechanism would only operate where the north/south body was not working properly, and did not represent an opportunity for the Republic of Ireland to interfere in Northern Ireland matters. The Secretary of State said that if the north/south body failed to operate, both Governments would confer on what would happen thereafter.

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17. Dr Alderdice welcomed the new opportunity for the Assembly to have an input into the Anglo-Irish process. He did however note that there were no opportunities for the Assembly to be involved in financial matters such as the NI Block grant, and that the Assembly also did not have any taxation powers. There was considerable local anger about the regional rate, this issue should be dealt with by a devolved administration. The fact that the regional rate already existed in Northern Ireland as a separate tax raising power meant that this could be changed without introducing entirely new powers of taxation. The Secretary of State said that there was some sensitivity within the Government about comparisons between Northern Ireland and Scotland in this area.

18. Seamus Close asked if there had been any consultation with the police regarding control zones. Where these still valid, and if so, where they still required? The Secretary of State said that he did not know the current position, and would look into this.

19. Dr Alderdice asked what the Secretary of State thought was the best way to move forward. The Secretary of State replied that the best approach for the present was to encourage those with whom Dr Alderdice and his colleagues had influenced. Progress would only be achievable by agreement, and it would be helpful if people could be encouraged to say that. He expected that the Alliance Party would make its own comment, and suggested that, if it felt appropriate, Alliance might gently push for the beginning of discussions.

20. Dr Alderdice asked if it would be reasonable to agree, on the basis of the present meeting, that there should be further meetings between himself and his colleagues and Michael Ancram? The Secretary of State said this could certainly be agreed. He also felt that it would be sensible to hold these meetings after Easter, it would be helpful if Alliance could take the same line.

Signed

ROBERT CRAWFORD  
Private Secretary

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