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17 June 1997

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To: HQ  
 For: Second Secretary OhUiginn

From: Belfast  
 From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Secretary of State's meeting with Mr. Trimble (16 June)

1. We requested this morning a read-out on the Secretary of State's meeting with David Trimble at Stormont yesterday, along with clarification of the reference in Frank Millar's article in today's Irish Times to UUP claims about understandings with the former British Government.
2. I attach a note which we have been given in response. (I gather that it was prepared by David Hill, who was at yesterday's meeting). I attach also a copy of an aide-memoire which the Secretary of State sent to Trimble over the weekend.
3. I have remarked that the comments made by Trimble, in particular his insistence on the need for a test of sufficient consensus before the talks could move back into substantive mode from the plenary envisaged following Sinn Féin's entry, are not the mark of a man seriously looking for a way forward on decommissioning. While it is encouraging that the British side still see prospects for securing UUP acquiescence in the paper under discussion between us, Trimble would appear at this stage to be still well outside the ball-park in which the two Governments are operating. Whether this is simply tactical posturing prior to reaching an accommodation remains to be seen. On the face of it, however, much work remains to be done by the British Government in explaining to the UUP leader that decommissioning cannot be handled, either as a talks issue or as a concrete objective, other than on the basis of implementation of the Mitchell Report in all its aspects.
4. On the general atmospherics of yesterday's meeting, I am told that it was "fairly chaotic", as it took place under the immediate shadow of the Lurgan killings, news of which had just reached both Trimble and the Secretary of State.

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5. As for the claims about understandings with the former Government, this is covered in paragraph (h) of the British note. Bell and Hill report that criticisms by Trimble of NIO civil servants are commonplace at meetings between the UUP leader and the new Secretary of State. By their account, the particular object of his abuse on this occasion was not clear and no particular attention was paid to it. When I speculated that Trimble might have had in mind the "communication chord" assurance given to him by Michael Ancram, no confirmation was forthcoming.

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- (a) The Secretary of State has had two meetings with Mr Trimble to discuss very general terms, our proposed approach to the resolution of the issue decommissioning;
- (b) given the absence of any Irish reaction to the paper we gave them on 4 June, she did not discuss specific proposals or show him the text;
- (c) as Mr Trimble expressed cautious interest at the first meeting and asked to see our proposals in writing, the Secretary of State sent him a brief summary over the weekend, still in very general terms. The covering letter made clear that any such proposals would be presented in the context of seeking a firm commitment to move to substantive negotiations on a fixed date. The brief summary (copy attached) took account of known Irish reservations. In particular it avoided any reference to the "Chairmen's call" or to the need for any review plenary to agree by sufficient consensus to proceed to further negotiations; and it suggested that the Governments might "hope" rather than "expect" to see due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the three strands;
- (d) at a meeting on Monday morning which began just as the news of the Lurgan murders arrived, Mr Trimble expressed dissatisfaction with the brief written summary on three main grounds
- the handling of "confidence building measures", which he feared was too close to the liaison arrangements in respect of decommissioning and would therefore make it possible for the Republican Movement to present any decommissioning as being in exchange for confidence building measures;

- the "hope" of securing due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the three strands was too weak. He could not possibly justify staying the talks (if Sinn Fein were to join them) on the strength of a mere "hope" of securing some decommissioning during the negotiations:
  - as to the "review plenaries" and especially any plenary held on the occasion of Sinn Fein joining the talks, there needed to be greater clarity that further progress could only be made if the talks participants as a whole were satisfied, by sufficient consensus, with the quality of the progress being made in the talks and of the commitments given by any new participant;
- (e) the upshot of the meeting was that we would reflect on the UUP's comments in finalising any proposals;
- (f) our overall assessment remains that it may just be possible, with careful handling, to persuade the UUP to acquiesce in the "possible conclusions" set out in the paper handed to the Irish side on 4 June. It is certainly encouraging that Mr Trimble has shown interest in proposals which would require him effectively to concede his previous demand for a prior tranche of IRA decommissioning and prior commitment to a schedule of decommissioning. The "possible conclusions" paper is obviously far more developed than the document sent to the UUP over the weekend and when they see it they may be more comfortable with the concepts it contains;
- (g) Mr Trimble's desire to have the option of preventing further progress at the point of Sinn Fein's entry to the negotiations may yet prove to be a stumbling block: we have given him no reason to think it could be available, but he obviously sees it as crucial:

- (h) contrary to the suggestion in Frank Millar's article, the Secretary of State (with the approval of Sir Patrick Mayhew and Michael Ancram) <sup>has</sup> been fully briefed on all relevant contacts between the UUP and members of the previous Government on this issue, all of which were reported to the Irish side at the time.

## POSSIBLE ELEMENTS IN RESOLVING DECOMMISSIONING

### An aide memoire

1. Build on the "trilateral" paper of December 1996 on mechanisms making further progress on decommissioning.
2. Establish the Independent Commission at an early stage in parallel the launch of the three strands with a remit to develop decommissioning schemes and facilitate and verify decommissioning (The enabling legislation has already been enacted in both jurisdictions).
3. Establish a Committee of Plenary to advance all aspects of the Mitchell Report and with a role in liaising with the Independent Commission.
4. The mechanisms will include provision, perhaps in a distinct committee, for discussing "confidence-building measures".
5. Clarify the role of the two Governments; their joint commitment to see the issue tackled to the satisfaction of the participants as an indispensable part of the process; and their intention to carry matters forward energy and determination.
6. Secure commitments from all participants to work constructively and in good faith to secure the implementation of all aspects of the International Body's proposals on decommissioning; and to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent Commission.
7. The Government will make it clear its hope that there would be progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the political

negotiations, emphasising that success in the negotiations will depend on the creation of mutual confidence.

8. If the commitment to work constructively with the Independent Commission were not honoured, it would be in a position to draw attention to the fact.
9. More generally the Independent Chairmen would keep progress in the process as a whole under review so that they could identify what progress was needed if confidence were to be sustained.

10. Regular review plenaries.

11. If agreement is secured on proposals of this kind, we envisage that it should be on the basis that they would not be open to negotiation by any party who might wish to join the process at a later stage.
12. Requirement to convene a plenary if any new participant is invited to the negotiations, to secure commitment to the Mitchell principles, and affirm its acceptance of the commitments on decommissioning (para above). Such a party would of course be subject to all the agreed provisions and rules of procedure adopted by existing participants.