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FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
24 June 1996

DESK IMMEDIATE

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/Sir John Wheeler (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Legge - B
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B
Mr Leach (B&L) - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Perry - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Cran - B
Mr Campbell-Bannerman - B
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Budd, Cab Office
Mr Holmes, No 10
HMA Dublin - B

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AN

Mrs McN

MR HILL (B&L) - B

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH THE UUP ON DECOMMISSIONING:
18 JUNE 1996

I have belatedly noticed that the production of a record of the Secretary of State's meeting with the UUP on the evening of 18 June 1996 fell between the cracks. This note aims to correct that.

2. The purpose of the meeting was to sound out the UUP on how the agenda could be adjusted to meet their concerns on decommissioning as floated in broad terms in discussions the previous day (see my note of 17 June). The discussion was carried out in the light of provisional agreement reached between the two Governments and the Chairman that there was scope for bringing decommissioning up in the order of the agenda, though no draft agenda was actually shown to the UUP.

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3. Trimble opened the meeting by saying that the key issue was the agenda. He was confident that procedural guidelines could be agreed quite quickly if the Government and the Irish were prepared to make concessions in a way that would be remotely acceptable to the UUP. The Secretary of State agreed that the agenda was the crucial thing. He thought there was a good prospect of being able to bring decommissioning up the agenda in a significant manner. He asked for clarification of a draft agenda which had been produced by the UUP which talked about establishing a sub-committee to consider practical arrangements for decommissioning.

4. Trimble said that his main objective was to reach a clear agreement on the handling of decommissioning. There was a possibility that Sinn Fein might come in later. He did not want to let them off the hook. Nor did he want to re-open what was in the Mitchell report. His idea for a sub-committee was to take the issue away from plenary and deal with it in a smaller group which could report back. He felt this was an approach that could also be used with the comprehensive agenda. He regarded the reporting back of this committee as vital. In that sense, he did not regard it as being the same as the Government's proposals for a sub-committee. As far as the UUP were concerned, principles had already been set out in Mitchell, including the establishment of a verification commission. What was needed was a commitment to implement what was in Mitchell with some element of timetabling and benchmarking.

5. Continuing, Trimble said that for the loyalists the key was "mutuality". What was needed would be a unilateral undertaking from them that mutual decommissioning would take place once an opportunity presented itself (ie once Sinn Fein were in and the IRA had agreed to do the same). However this could not be seen as a free pass for the loyalists. There were other aspects such as punishment beatings which would need to be dealt with and were independent of whether or not Sinn Fein entered the process. Trimble finished by saying that the Government's proposal for a sub-committee operating alongside discussions in the strand might form the basis for monitoring and sanitizing Sinn Fein if the conditions became right for them to enter the process.

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6. The Secretary of State repeated that he saw a good prospect of getting decommissioning raised up the agenda. We would be looking for a thorough discussion of Mitchell's proposals on decommissioning and one idea might be to seek from the participants a commitment to work constructively towards the implementation of Mitchell's proposals along the same lines of the commitment to the six Mitchell principles. This would have the advantage of removing the discretion from the Chairman to declare whether or not he was satisfied that such a commitment had been given. The Secretary of State said that we envisaged that such an approach might best fit in immediately after opening statements.

7. Reg Empey reacted positively to this, though he was anxious about the idea of doing it after opening statements. He was worried that the DUP would use their opening statement to grandstand. He repeated with some emphasis the need to keep the loyalists in and to avoid pushing them over the edge.

8. Returning to decommissioning, Trimble said that any commitment would need to be specific and relate to implementation and, as he had said before, with some element of timetabling and benchmarking. Empey agreed with this. He said that "by the time Provos came in" mechanisms needed to be established that could take them through the formalities and enable them to catch up. This would then trigger mutual decommissioning by both republicans and loyalists. He said that the nightmare scenario for the UUP was to get into substantive negotiations without a convincing commitment to decommissioning being given. At all costs this had to be avoided.

9. On timetabling, PUS asked whether the UUP were actually looking for calendar dates or for the establishment of blocks of time, given the absence of Sinn Fein and the conditionality that might be attached to loyalist decommissioning. The UUP confirmed that they were thinking of blocks of time rather than a calendar date. PUS said that we also needed to be careful not to get in a situation where decommissioning was being carried out in exchange for movement

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on political issues. You asked if the UUP conception involved drawing up some sort of decommissioning "contract". The UUP said that this matched their broad thinking.

10. The Secretary of State said that the Government's position had to be rooted in the concept of decommissioning happening alongside negotiations. He understood the need for the UUP to have an assurance that it would happen in that way and that otherwise their political position would be unsustainable. What was needed was a convincing commitment at the beginning. He agreed with the UUP that the loyalist position would have to hinge on mutuality as far as actual decommissioning was concerned.

11. Mr Leach asked whether the proposed plenary review in September would meet what the UUP were seeking by way of a benchmark. Trimble said that it would be necessary to be much more precise and tougher. That was why he had suggested the idea of getting legislation on the decommissioning scheme in place as soon as possible. He was concerned at the moment that there was too much vagueness and uncertainty around. He also said that in reality if we were to proceed down the road he proposed, it would be extremely difficult if not impossible for Sinn Fein actually to enter the talks. In the circumstances, we also needed to think about a suitably robust security response. He said that a pre-emptive internment strike in parallel with the Irish might be an option. He thought that Bruton would be in favour of this and that public opinion would support it.

12. The Secretary of State asked for Trimble's views on the desirability of legislation on decommissioning in the immediate aftermath of the Manchester bomb. He said it might look a little odd for us to be rushing through legislation for an amnesty in such circumstances. Trimble said that he had no view about this as he had not recently been in the House of Commons. He did however acknowledge the point that the Secretary of State had made. He observed that the mood in both the Republic and in Great Britain was shifting against Sinn Fein. Even the Guardian was breathing little fire in its editorials.

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13. Summarising the discussion on decommissioning, the Secretary of State said again that he thought there were good prospects of decommissioning being brought up the agenda. He favoured the idea of seeking a formal commitment to working towards the implementation of the Mitchell principles which would remove from the Chairman the discretion to signify that such commitment existed. He said that the underlying principle had to be that decommissioning took place alongside negotiations. We would think further about the idea of benchmarks. He agreed that we should try to keep the loyalists in and keep Sinn Fein on the back foot.

Comment

14. This was a friendly and frank meeting. Trimble and Empey pushed a fairly hard line on decommissioning, but ultimately fell back on the need for a "convincing commitment". They were attracted by the idea of a Mitchell Six style commitment to Mitchell's proposals on decommissioning. The Secretary of State did not get drawn on specifics, nor did he in any sense sign up to meeting Trimble's requirements in full, though he expressed an understanding for the political difficulties that the UUP would face if they were negotiating substantively on political matters while decommissioning was simply being talked about.

(Signed)

MARTIN HOWARD

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