

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

DEALING WITH TERRORISM

DISBANDMENT, AND DE-COMMISSIONING OF WEAPONS

15 January. 1995.

IRA/SINN FEIN TACTICS

There has been little deviation, till now, from what Ulster Unionists envisaged in the 11 July, 1995 assessment of likely IRA/Sinn Fein tactics. A Loyalist ceasefire was not an immediate prospect then and could not be taken into consideration in examining how IRA/Sinn Fein planned to develop its strategy. Apart from that, events have unfolded pretty much in line with what was predicted.

However, the lack of any obvious justification for the IRA to be able to resume its "military campaign" has created growing concern among the so-called 'hawks' who had been led, by McGuinness and Adams, to expect either major political progress within, roughly, a 3-month timescale or their consent for a return to violence.

Now 4½ months on, there is increasing debate in IRA ranks about how much more time is required or whether significant gains are likely to be made. Even though the "activists" are restless the McGuinness/Adams leadership still holds sway....but only just.

For example, after the Newry incident Reynolds & Co persuaded the McGuinness camp to try to get the IRA to return the £131,000 as a gesture of good faith, but this was fiercely resisted and almost led to a schism in the ranks. While the IRA eventually had to admit responsibility, Dublin failed to achieve what would have been a master-stroke. H.M. Government has continued to play down the whole incident in order to ensure that McGuinness/Adams should not be put under too much pressure.

Since then the Enniskillen incident was publicly alleged to be a Brits "dirty tricks" operation and other hoax bombs were being claimed to be the work of Loyalists. In fact, these events have been Provo inspired and, like last weekend's press reports, were intended to signal to Government that Sinn Fein was having serious difficulty in holding to the current McGuinness/Adams position.

It was a patently transparent attempt to cajole government into more concessions. The timing of the announcement of an end to daylight patrolling by the military in Belfast, which Ulster Unionists wouldn't challenge, and of the less justifiable Sinn Fein right of access to N.I.O. ministers, seemed to indicate a naive hook, line and sinker response.

Although Sinn Fein originally came into the exploratory talks on the basis of McGuinness and Adams having brokered the "cessation of military operations" and, therefore, the assumption that they spoke on behalf of the IRA, that is more and more frequently being repudiated. Orchestrated dissatisfaction by IRA elements may be helpful to the campaign but there is, increasingly, the probability that real opposition will develop.

Hence, the assumption that the IRA is fully on board is having to be played down. Now Sinn Fein consistently promotes the concept of its right to speak on the basis of its own electoral mandate and not on behalf of the IRA. De-commissioning of weapons and explosives is not, it claims, a matter for a mandated political Sinn Fein. It is simply there to talk about British withdrawal!

GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA

This leaves Government officials with three unacceptable options;

- (a) to continue to have exploratory talks without any prospect of making progress but in the hope that Sinn Fein will pull out,
- (b) to acknowledge that no progress is being made and for them to bring the process to an end, or
- (c) to continue talking and to drip-feed concessions to Sinn Fein, in the remote expectation that if one waits long enough something may turn up.

In either of the first two instances the IRA will be able to claim that it was "forced by perfidious Albion to resume its violence...the only thing the Brits understand".

In the third instance, the 'acceptable' attempts to placate Sinn Fein, like TV/radio access, meetings with ministers at district council level, cross frontier road openings, troops off the streets, etc. will soon run done and unacceptable concessions will then be made.

Sinn Fein/IRA continue to hope that McGuinness/Adams can deliver and that irresistible pressure, by powerful U.S. elements, will eventually persuade the British to capitulate. Sinn Fein has been told by Dublin that this will not happen but that, if it can string things out, there will be more and more helpful gestures.

But by over-stating the assumption that the longer the ceasefire lasts the more difficult it will be for the IRA to resume the violence, both the Republic and U.K. are unwittingly diminishing the rights of the greater number of the electorate in Northern Ireland. Time has never been a significant factor in IRA strategy and it can, and will, resume violence the moment it considers it most appropriate to do so.

Its plan is to continue to frustrate Government and, hence, to dictate terms. It is against that background that Government must seek to change the ballgame and, if necessary, move the goalposts!

Instead of continuing to pander aimlessly to the perceived demands of the IRA, Government must pause to consider whether anything short of humiliating submission on its part will satisfy. The IRA has not made a single gesture of reciprocation since 31 August and, even then, it only agreed to grant a stay of execution to its intended victims. Who is going to begin to exert real pressure on the terrorists and their reluctant spokespersons before it is the patience of the law-abiding community which is stretched to disastrous breaking-point?

The IRA has to be challenged NOW! Government must use every means at its disposal. It must now play the international card! Up till now the IRA is being allowed home advantage at every game and it is, effectively, being allowed to write the rules.

International rules, however, are clearly defined and false pride must not inhibit Government from employing, within clearly defined terms of reference, the means to have IRA terrorism placed under the international microscope.

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

What if Government actually accepted the Sinn Fein assertion that it doesn't speak for the IRA! Then it must ask the obvious question...why are government officials still in exploratory talks with a party which commanded only 9.84% support at the last Council elections and which does not have a single elected MP?

Is it not simply because Government cannot afford to be portrayed as having precipitated the end of the "Peace Process"?....this was predicted in our 11 July paper. Is there, then, another way for Government to get off this hook?

It must re-address the question as to whether the whole question of de-commissioning guns, missiles and explosives is vital to a permanent peace and stability. The vast majority of Northern Ireland citizens believe it is!

So, evidently, does a United States administration which made it a matter of principle to effect the removal of obsolete weapons from the terrorist regime in Haiti. That IRA weaponry which is concealed in the Republic and in this part of the United Kingdom is certainly not obsolete.

Ulster Unionists must, therefore, seek to promote an alternative way forward!

The Government can justifiably assert that meaningful dialogue is being frustrated by Sinn Fein's inability to speak on behalf of the IRA in relation to de-commissioning weaponry and bringing

CONCLUSION

It would be wrong to believe that there are no dangers inherent in this proposal but the advantages will, by placing the IRA as an intact, well armed terrorist organization the full glare of world attention, far outweigh the disadvantages. Being seen to be unwilling to cooperate with U.S. and other international commissioners will portray the IRA as it really is.

It would also leave McGuinness and several others in a dilemma as to what camp they really belong to.

Commitment to exploratory talks with Sinn Fein would obviously be less frequent under the new circumstances where Government would feel obliged not to respond in advance of progress reports from the DISARMAMENT COMMISSION. Similarly with Loyalist groups.

While this proposal may not let the Government entirely "off the hook" but it would be a good start.

It may be necessary, of course, for the Ulster Unionist Party to seek to play a more direct and formal role in encouraging Government to become more pro-active and purposeful in its dealings with the very real terrorist threat which still exists.