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DECOMMISSIONING LEGISLATION

Current Position

- The Prime Minister has given a commitment that the Decommissioning Bill will be introduced this Autumn. The Bill itself at a very advanced stage. Irish Bill also ready, but not clear that they would be willing to legislate in parallel.
- The precise timing of introduction, and enactment, not yet finalised: dependent on progress in Talks, and how we see the next phase developing. May still be necessary to seek enactment before Christmas, subject to these constraints, and the likely attitude of the House.

Content of Bill

- The Bill provides for an amnesty from prosecution in respect of certain specified, mainly possession-related, offences, available to those acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme; for certain evidential restrictions; for restrictions on forensic testing of articles decommissioned; for powers to confer certain attributes, privileges and immunities on a Commission, its members and staff; and for powers to pay any expenses incurred in connection with a decommissioning scheme or in connection with a Commission.

Circulation to NI

- How we play the draft legislation into the current phase of the Talks still being considered. NI has given contingent approval for publication of the draft Bill as part of the Talks process; if colleagues wish I can circulate a copy of the Bill to colleagues beforehand.

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GB Dimension

- The Bill is specifically tailored to provide for arms decommissioning in Northern Ireland. The UUP and DUP have criticised this (as have the Irish).

- We considered carefully at an earlier stage how we might handle terrorist arm holdings in Great Britain and concluded that the Bill should remain specific to Northern Ireland; and that when necessary we should take steps separately to facilitate the decommissioning of terrorist arms in Great Britain taking account of the arrangements made on decommissioning in Northern Ireland and the particular considerations applicable to GB.

- Believe this is the right course: extension of the Bill now would preclude early introduction.

Lords	1st Reading	
	2nd Reading	
	Committee Stage	11 November/18 November
	Report/Third Reading	25 November/2 December
Commons	Consideration of Lords amendments	9 December/15 December
Lords	Royal Assent	12 December

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