

Immediate

16.12.96
PST
✓ PSS
Mr. Treahon
Mr. Dalton
Amb. L & W
Joint Sec

For: Tánaiste
From: Seán Ó hUiginn
Date: 14 November 1996

1. We have just received a draft paper from the British side which formalises the new approach to decommissioning they had been edging towards (with Alliance as the stalking horse).
2. Although ostensibly a draft of a joint paper, they clearly envisage that it could be used on a unilateral basis. Since the notion of the British unilaterally setting up an International Commission etc. is obviously unreal, its true purpose is presumably to reassure Trimble that they are prepared to entrench the decommissioning precondition within the Talks - I understand the paper will be shown to Trimble today, and is no doubt the fruit of extensive prior consultation.
3. The main objections to the paper are that:
 - The proposed International Commission is a totally different body from Mitchell's Verification Commission (which was "to observe and verify the decommissioning process" - par 42). It envisages that one of the most fundamental political calls (on when political progress required decommissioning) should be vested in military type personnel, who would clearly have a transcendent political role in the whole process in such circumstances.
 - It reverts to a peremptory approach to decommissioning which is certain to eliminate any prospect of paramilitary cooperation, and is contrary to the basis of our earlier work with the British.
 - Giving the Commission the role of "securing all aspects of the International Body's report" enables the unionists to "stay in denial" on the political role they have to play in that process and is in direct contradiction to the thrust of the Report, which emphasises the enabling role of political progress.

- For the paper to rehearse the UUP objection "that progress on decommissioning could be vetoed by the Irish Government or the SDLP" is downright insulting, given the stated positions and work done by the Irish Government, and indeed the SDLP.

4. The overall effect of this proposal would be to launch a totally unreal scenario on decommissioning, which on any honest analysis, will actually be counterproductive to that objective. It proposes to repeat the fundamental error of making the political process hostage to decommissioning.
5. It may be the British feel that this would open the way for them to be more forthcoming on the SF agenda. They do not seem to realise that to refurbish the decommissioning precondition in this way dramatically rejects a key SF request on the Talks, and therefore almost certainly precludes another ceasefire.
6. It must also be a matter of the gravest concern for us in regard to all aspects of our cooperation with the British that the parliamentary arithmetic now leads them to a solo run on an issue which manifestly cannot succeed without our cooperation - unless of course they believe they can stampede our system.
7. There would need to be very close coordination among the Government on the details of our response, given that the issues now raised by the British paper are fundamental to our cooperation with them and to all the objectives of our current policy.

Ends.