

21-JUL-1997 13:24 FROM TAOISEACH PRIVATE OFFICE TO

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Office of the Taoiseach

SUBJECT
MASTER

Filed on:

21 July, 1997

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, M.P.,
The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London.

Dear Tony

I write further to our exchanges on the telephone and in terms of possible formulae of words that might help Mr David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party to vote, next Wednesday, in favour of the proposals and possible conclusions on resolving the address to decommissioning.

We have been very anxious to secure that objective and, with that aim in view, have agreed to put in place a range of mechanisms and deadlines, supported by legislation, to demonstrate the seriousness of the Government's purpose in this whole area. But, as we have consistently indicated, we believe that the two Governments must continue to anchor their position firmly on the approach that informed, and is reflected in, the Mitchell Report, particularly paragraph 35:

"As progress is made on political issues, even modest steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence":

That position is well summarised in paragraph 1 of the Governments' joint paper on 25 June:

"They [the two Governments] share the view in the (Mitchell) Report that voluntary and mutual decommissioning can be

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achieved only in the context of progress in comprehensive and inclusive political negotiations".

By reference to this balance between political progress in the negotiations and decommissioning, we believe that the two Governments have gone as far as is possible in advancing matters in regard to the possibility of decommissioning at an early stage in the negotiations. Under the position set out in the clarification Speaking Note of 16 July, we have envisaged steps that would enable the Independent Verification Commission to formulate options for draft schemes on decommissioning which may be available for discussion with all the participants from 15 September. It is only from that date that substantive political negotiations are to start and thus only from then can the context for decommissioning alongside political progress begin to develop. To go beyond that, so as to have an actual firm scheme in place would break the essential parallelism, as well as being at odds with paragraph 38 of the Mitchell Report, according to which the details of decommissioning, including supporting confidence-building measures, timing and sequencing, have to be determined by the parties themselves.

If David Trimble is truly interested in moving forward on all the issues, including decommissioning, he could do a very strong selling job on the significant commitments given by the two Governments in this area, including to establish, within a very close time-scale, a substantial superstructure of machinery for the purpose of arranging for and verifying decommissioning.

However, from the amendments put down by the UUP last Friday, it is very difficult to believe that any formulae of words that we could stretch to, even at the fullest limit of a position that would keep good faith with the clarification that has led to the IRA ceasefire, would bring the UUP on board for the vote next Wednesday. Nevertheless, we wish to make every possible effort. We have accordingly, drawing on elements among the options for wording you suggested, prepared the attached formula, which, we are satisfied, would not cause problems in any other relevant quarter. Frankly, we doubt that it will do the trick but we offer it in a spirit of helpfulness and to enable both

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Governments to say that they have made every effort up to the last possible moment.

If this final effort is unsuccessful, it will be necessary to indicate clearly on Wednesday, as we have discussed, the intention of the two Governments to proceed with substantive negotiations from 15 September, in whatever format. Our colleagues and officials are in discussion on how best to handle and present this contingency.

Taoiseach.