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MEETING WITH UUP: POINTS TO MAKE

Contacts with Sinn Féin

1. I have been open about my approach: I want no genuine doubt or uncertainty to remain as a block to a ceasefire.
2. But I won't hold the negotiations up for Sinn Féin. Either they declare a ceasefire and join the negotiations by 15 September, or the negotiations will start without them.
3. It's in your interest that we leave no genuine excuse available to Sinn Féin. Because that is the only basis on which we will get the Irish Government and the SDLP to go forward without Sinn Féin in if necessary. That is what you want.
4. To be clear on the specifics:
 - after Lurgan I said there would be no more meetings in those circumstances. There have been none and none are planned;
 - the Secretary of State told the House on 30 June that there had been some phone calls. Her 15 July letter to the Daily Telegraph sets out the position. I don't propose to add anything more, save to make it clear that the contacts have been fully authorised by Ministers;
 - as the Secretary of State also made clear in her letter to the Daily Telegraph, we sent a letter to Sinn Féin on 9 July explaining again the Government's position. [You now have a copy of that letter which I will publish later].

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5. I will not give guarantees that there will be no more contacts. If there are genuine questions they will be answered. [Equally happy to give you a formal reply to your letter of 30 June if that would help.]
6. Frankly, I think we are very close to critical decision points for everyone. Come what may, I am determined that political negotiations will start on 15 September.

Decommissioning proposals

7. Understand the importance of decommissioning to you and your supporters. Appreciate your political need to have a position that enables you to defend going into negotiations from 15 September in which Sinn Féin may be present.
8. Our position is based four square on the Mitchell report. In our view, the only way negotiations are going to succeed is if there is some decommissioning during the negotiations.
9. We have tried in our proposals and in the detailed clarification offered on them to reflect what we understand to be the UUP's concerns. I am happy to go through the proposals and the clarification in detail.
10. But, first, I want to be clear that we have correctly understood the UUP's position. Is it right, as you told Paul Murphy last week and this week, that the critical issue for you is that you are able to say that there is nothing (except the reluctance of the paramilitaries) to prevent decommissioning starting from 15 September?
11. [If not, then it raises questions as to how we can take what the UUP says seriously. We have only got the Irish Government to move as far as they have on the basis that this was the only outstanding issue.]
12. We have made every effort to meet the UUP concerns:

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- (i) both Governments have given a "formal joint undertaking that they will do all they can to ensure that the decommissioning issue is resolved to the satisfaction of the participants as an indispensable part of the process." So there is no way it can be buried or forgotten about;
- (ii) both Governments say they will "work to bring about due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations". We are clear that, if Sinn Féin is involved, the negotiations will only succeed if there is some decommissioning during them;
- (iii) our clarification makes it clear that the Independent Commission will be formally established, by International Agreement with the relevant Commencement Orders under both sets of legislation, before the end of July;
- (iv) the Chairman will be nominated before the end of July and we want the other members to be in place before the end of August, and by then we shall also make more Orders to give the Commission the privileges and immunities it needs;
- (v) before 15 September we will engage in preparatory discussions with the Commission so that there is no long lead-in time after 15 September but the Commission is ready to start its real work then;
- (vi) in particular, the Commission will talk to the relevant security experts in both jurisdictions before 15 September so that it is in a position to formulate options for draft schemes for decommissioning, in conformity with the Mitchell report and its own terms of reference, which may be available for discussion with all the participants from 15 September. So the work necessary to enable the Commission to formulate options for schemes will be done before 15 September;

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- (vii) but, whatever happens, we won't let any lack of Government preparational provision obstruct decommissioning. As soon as there is any indication that a paramilitary organisation is prepared to commence decommissioning we will give immediate effect to an appropriate scheme;
- (viii) the clarification also makes it clear that the absence of any opinion from the Liaison sub-Committee need not block progress. So your worry that the SDLP and Sinn Féin could block decommissioning by preventing the sub-Committee ever reaching an agreed view has been answered;
- (ix) The end result is that everything will be in place by 15 September to enable actual decommissioning to commence the moment the paramilitaries accept the need for that to happen.

- 13. What we cannot guarantee is when decommissioning will start.
- 14. The security forces will continue to hunt down illegal weapons. But we are talking here about voluntary decommissioning, however much we may press for it to happen (and we shall). The Mitchell report makes clear that, voluntary and mutual decommissioning can be achieved only in the context of progress in comprehensive and inclusive political negotiations. If we don't get the negotiations going, there is no prospect of getting any decommissioning.

Decision time

- 15. We are now close to some critical decisions.
- 16. After the Orange Order's welcome decisions on parades, all the pressure is now on Sinn Féin. The Irish Government and the SDLP both agree that political negotiation must go forward in September without Sinn Féin if necessary.

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17. But if we don't manage to resolve decommissioning next Wednesday, we will let the Irish Government and SDLP off that hook. They will be able to blame Unionists for bringing the talks close to collapse. That may also be how it will be seen by public and Parliamentary opinion here, and further afield.
18. I know how difficult the DUP and others are trying to make it for you. That's why we have tried our best to meet the key concern you expressed to us. I personally pushed the Taoiseach very hard on this. I got him to move only because I told him this was the key issue for you.
19. If I go back and say there are a number of other issues, he will laugh in my face.
20. I want to be helpful. I believe what we have said meets your key concern. But I want to be straight with you - I don't see any prospect of us being able to put anything more on the table. You will have to make your decision on the basis of what is in the proposal and in the clarification we have given you.
21. If you are prepared to support the proposal, then obviously I will do all I can to support your position. There may be other measures we could discuss which would be helpful (eg NI Grand Committee).

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