

PRIME MINISTER

MEETING WITH TRIMBLE

Note from John Holmes below.

Paddy Mayhew and Michael Ancram saw Trimble this morning. They took him to task for his comments calling for their resignation - according to Michael Ancram in a fairly jocular fashion, but that may be protecting his Secretary of State who was very steamed up when I spoke to him this morning.

Paddy and Michael floated an idea with Trimble that was news to me, and I don't know whether they have discussed with you (I suspect not). This is that we might publicly say to Sinn Fein they have one month to get a credible commitment to a new ceasefire and join the talks; otherwise the talks will go ahead without them and they won't be admitted for six months come what may.

That seems to me to be fraught with danger. It would look weak, and a bit too desperate to get Sinn Fein into the talks at almost any price. And I can't see any chance of it being successful. According to Michael, Trimble was cautious and indicated he would need lots of guarantees and commitments.

Two points to watch in relation to your speech. First, Paddy and the NIO are getting cold feet about announcing the Grand Committee, since Paddy promised the House of Commons that nothing would be decided (?or announced) without prior consultation with the leaders of all the political parties (apparently: I am trying to get chapter and verse). There should be a way through this by adding some words about consultation. But it would be sensible not to go too far with Trimble this afternoon: the worst outcome would be to build up his expectations and then find him attacking your speech for not fulfilling your promises to him.

We will also need to revisit the rest of the text in the light of events, including both what it is sensible to say about Sinn Fein and about decommissioning specifically. I have asked John Holmes to look at the existing text and let you have advice.

Alex Allan