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The two Governments believe that it may be helpful to clarify their views on two crucial issues, consent and decommissioning, in the run-up to the resumption of all-party talks.

The two Governments remain fully committed to the consent principle as set out in the Downing Street Declaration, and this will be a guiding principle for them in the negotiations, from which no outcome is of course excluded or predetermined.

Both Governments re-affirm that the aim of the negotiations is to achieve a new and lasting agreement, addressing the totality of relationships, which commands the consent of both Unionists and Nationalists. They recall that a guiding principle for the process of negotiations launched on 10 June 1996, enshrined in the agreed rules of procedure and therefore binding on all participants, is that any agreement in these negotiations must command sufficient consensus among the participants.

The two Governments see the resolution of the decommissioning issue as an indispensable part of the process of negotiation, alongside other confidence

building measures for all sides. That is why they have passed the appropriate legislation in their respective jurisdictions and agreed to establish an Independent Commission simultaneously with the launch of substantive negotiations. Security experts in both jurisdictions have made preparations to brief the Commission, so that options for draft schemes for decommissioning, in conformity with the Mitchell Report and the Independent Commission's terms of reference, are available for their consideration and their discussion with all the participants from 15 September.

The two Governments remain totally committed to the implementation of the Mitchell Report in all its aspects. Successful decommissioning will depend on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves and cannot in practice be imposed on them as a precondition for successful negotiation or as an absolute obligation. But both Governments would like to see the decommissioning of some paramilitary arms during the negotiations, as progress is made in the political talks, and believe this could be a major contribution to confidence-building and momentum towards agreement. They look to all parties to negotiate in good faith on this compromise, as set out in the Mitchell Report.