

same view. O'hUiginn said we do not want more hurdles for those with the weapons to jump. There are a broad range of possibilities. Use of ideas from other conflicts, however, may not be helpful. IRA quatermastering is very sophisticated. Spring said the IRA will never surrender weapons to the British army. We would have no difficulty with the employment of third parties for such the purpose of turning in weapons.

In response to a question which, among the principles enumerated in the Irish government submission, would represent something that Sinn Fein/IRA has not pledged or done before, Spring said acceptance of phased decommissioning during talks would be one such step. O'hUiginn said Sinn Fein seems to be heading in the direction of acceptance of the principle of consent, but is not in the ballpark yet. A successful IB report must transcend the aims of both sides. Violence is rooted in Irish history. Its power comes from myth, not the possession of weapons. Myths make people do things they would not dream of doing otherwise. The frontiers of Sinn Fein doctrine are rolling back year by year. We have brought Sinn Fein very far on most frontiers. Spring said the power and effectiveness of a repetition of things already said, commitments already made, should not be underestimated. Such verification could be a powerful tool for the IB. Sinn Fein/IRA commitment to stop recruiting and punishment beatings would be new. They could stop the beatings if they wanted. O'hUiginn stressed the importance of small steps, thus reaffirmation of what was said in the past could be an important element in the IB report. Two years ago Sinn Fein leaders would not have been caught dead in a picture with the Tainiste. Spring said one should be careful not necessarily to take public statements at face value. UUP Leader Trimble reacted badly to our recent letter inviting him to talks, but we are arranging the next meeting as we speak. We understand that Trimble, like other politicians, has to keep his troops in line.

Spring said that had there been talk of decommissioning, the surrender of arms, the ceasefire would not have happened. The Morrison-O'Dowd intermediaries had proposed a 3-6 month cessation of violence. We said no, the cessation must be permanent. For the past fifteen years decommissioning of weapons as a condition to political participation has been Irish government policy, but we moved on. It was necessary to take a new position in the new political context.

The British will move on decommissioning once the unionists are ready to move. Trimble has to look over his right shoulder at Paisley. If he moves too quickly, Paisley will swoop in to grab hardline support. O'hUiginn said the November 28 communique gives Trimble a way to bring his elected assembly idea to the table. Ordinary unionists want peace, watch their leaders closely, and do not want missteps to give the IRA an excuse to resume violence. Trimble represents a community whose aspirations are satisfied. Almost any change would be seen as a loss; therefore reforms are bound to be unpopular. Dortland said the tragedy of the decommissioning issue is that it has made the political process and progress hostage to a military decision. It would be valuable to establish what the unionists actually hope to gain from decommissioning. The nationalist community fears that the unionists use decommissioning to avoid negotiations altogether. A clear definition of what the unionists want could forestall a rolling series of preconditions.

O'hUiginn pointed to the principle of non-use of force to influence the outcome of negotiations to underscore his point of the significance of acceptance of such principles.

Spring said that just because Trimble must watch his back with Paisley does not mean that he is in the DUP leader's pocket. If Trimble can carry the unionists, Paisley will not want to be left behind. Trimble's ideas on an elected assembly have seemed confused. At first he seemed to be talking about a return to Stormont. Sinn Fein and the SDLP worry about another plot, ploy to avoid doing business on the basis of equality and parity. As presently structured, an elected assembly is a red flag to nationalists. We could not subscribe. We would have no problem if he could sway interlocutors of the merits of his proposal in the course of all-party talks. O'hUiginn said 50%-60% of the people in Northern Ireland see the union as legitimate while 40% accept it only grudgingly. Sinn Fein completely rejects the union. The problem with the elected assembly is that it would accept that framework as assured. Politicians do represent their constituencies in NI, but, on another level, the intuition of the people is that things must



change. Dortland said a demand for decommissioning in advance of talks would send the IRA back to war. A lack of prior decommissioning would be tough for unionists to swallow. Acceptance of a set of principles is the best way to go.

Senator Mitchell asked for a list of practical measures as well as the Government's reaction to a possible recommendation for phased decommissioning to start sixty days after the beginning of all-party talks. The greater the degree of specificity of such proposals, the more likely acceptance would be of such proposals from those who would not get decommissioning as a precondition to talks. O' hUiginn said there would be a need for a political timetable to trigger a decommissioning timetable. He said a phased decommissioning could be worth a try, but the security people should be asked whether in their judgment the paramilitaries could deliver. Spring concluded with a word of caution that any resolution requires cross-community support from communities that have been historically polarized.