

## PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH MR TRIMBLE: LINES TO TAKE

1. Welcome the progress in the talks represented by the significant measure of agreement in the UUP/SDLP/Alliance paper submitted to the Chairmen last week.
2. Assume the Irish Government will support the SDLP position: if so that represents a significant move from their previous commitment to the "1 October" proposals [in which all the weight was put on the Committee];
3. Irish Decommissioning Bill a welcome demonstration of their good faith.
4. We believe there is a strong case for seeking to make further progress in the talks before the election: to resolve the issue of decommissioning when the talks resume, and at least launch the substantive political negotiations;
  - would boost the general credibility of the talks process;
  - the continuation of the process would avoid a political vacuum of a period of months - which we are all aware could be dangerous, not least from the point of view of Loyalists;
  - it is better done early than late: as time goes on, the pre-election atmosphere is likely to make it more difficult;
  - it should also be easier to resolve the issue before there is any question of Sinn Fein coming into the talks;

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- although the formal launch of the three strands would be unlikely to lead to substantial political progress, it would provide a firmer foundation for subsequent progress - and a better electoral platform for the UUP and SDLP;
  - any failure to move forward may be seen as the responsibility of the UUP. It would reduce the prospects for detaching the Irish Government and SDLP from their focus on Sinn Fein.
  - We shall stick firmly by the criteria for Sinn Fein admission in my 28 November statement. My statement on terms of entry for Sinn Fein, and my demonstrated refusal to develop my position in response to Irish pressure, means that that flank is secure.
  - We do not, however, believe there is any possibility of securing agreement to any requirement for a tranche of IRA decommissioning before Sinn Fein enter the three strands.
  - Acknowledge and respect your need to see some decommissioning at an early stage thereafter. We are with you on the need for decommissioning during negotiations, in line with the Mitchell recommendations. We will work with you to achieve that. But prior commitments will be unobtainable.
5. But: if there is no prospect of real progress, we cannot keep the talks process going very long.
- we should try to bring them in for a "soft landing", so that the process can be revived after the election.
  - Once we suspend the negotiations, the Secretary of State has by law to suspend the Forum.

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6. Glad to hear your views on whether there is any prospect of reaching agreement on decommissioning early in the New Year.

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