



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

(16)

12.30 PM  
MTB  
J.E.

Uimhir.....

To: Taoiseach  
From: Paddy Teahon

## Cannes Northern Ireland Summit

The objective I had in mind for Cannes was as follows:

- recognise that a decommissioning gesture/demonstration is causing a road block to an eventual political settlement and cannot be delivered.
- move around that roadblock by agreeing with Prime Minister Major that parallel progress on political issues and on decommissioning/wider security issues is required and is possible.
- mandate two groups of officials - who work on Government instructions - in place to produce two schemes/scenarios for political and security/decommissioning issues with objectives/timetables/negotiating approaches by end July.
- the focus of these groups, as I saw it, would be to accept but summarise the Framework Document objectives and to concentrate on timescales for achieving them in parallel and on negotiating approaches vis-a-vis Northern unionists and nationalist parties.

# ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

- 2 -

- at end July you and Prime Minister Major could agree to pursue both schemes, bilaterally at first, UK Government with Unionists and Irish Government with Nationalists

- there could follow either

both Governments in bilateral talks with Unionists and Nationalists separately then all party talks

or

if a sufficient degree of comfort/agreement is reached directly to all party talks.

P Teahon

21st June, 1995.

SECRET

COVERING NOTE FOR CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE  
ON NORTHERN IRELAND

A PROPOSAL FOR CANNES

Sinn Féin/IRA will decommission arms only if they are involved in a process that is leading towards a political settlement acceptable to their electorate. Such a settlement is theoretically quite feasible, and probably would approximate closely enough to the Frameworks model. But nothing significant is happening to bring that settlement any closer.

Our present tactics seem to be to keep Sinn Féin on side with some concessions wrung from the British, to ignore the fact that little or nothing is actually happening on the political talks front, and to hope that a new leader of the Ulster Unionists will begin to take positive steps.

This is overoptimistic. It is not realistic for Sinn Féin to expect political talks to start with or involving Unionists as long as arms are retained as a matter of principle by the IRA. Meanwhile Unionists have nothing to lose by remaining outside the talks process and making no concessions. That will remain the case even under a new leader. Objectively, nobody is putting them under any pressure.

Draft Letter to Prime Minister Major

Dear

I am concerned at a growing public perception that the unique opportunity which the ceasefires offer for political initiative and progress is being dissipated.

I worry also that there may be potential gaps opening between us in our approach to Northern Ireland.

I believe the closest possible cooperation between our two Governments has been the key to our success to date, and remains so for the future.

I am anxious therefore that we should discuss and resolve any points of disagreement and chart a common way forward. With that in mind, I felt it might be helpful to set out in advance how I see things from here and I enclose a paper which I believe provides a basis for agreement between us at Cannes.

As you know, I have made decommissioning of illegally-held weapons a key priority. I have sought to ensure that the paramilitaries came under maximum pressure on this issue, both from the Irish Government in all its private contacts and public statements, and also from the United States and other sources of influence.

I believe this has borne some fruit. The importance of the issue and the need to resolve it are now more fully understood and accepted in those circles than was the case previously. However our steady pursuit of this goal is, I fear, being jeopardised by argument about whether decommissioning is a pre-condition for political progress, or vice-versa.

I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that the decommissioning programme set out by Sir Patrick Mayhew in Washington is simply not attainable in that form.

All the information I have points to the conclusion that the paramilitary leadership cannot at present deliver on this issue in the way you have demanded, and to attempt to do so would destabilise the delicate process which at least ensures the guns are silent, even if, regrettably, still out there.

This faces us both with a grave dilemma: Apart from the intrinsic importance of the decommissioning goal, we know it is also one of the more forceful arguments which the unionists invoke to justify their refusal to dialogue. On the other hand, the indefinite continuation of a political vacuum in Northern Ireland will undoubtedly increase the dangers of the ceasefires unravelling, to say nothing of the failure to consolidate a new political accommodation there.

I would suggest, therefore, that we should refocus our efforts for decommissioning on the only context where they are likely to be realised in practice, namely as part of the outcome of a comprehensive process of dialogue involving political progress together with progress on decommissioning and on wider security issues.

In order to allay unionist and other concerns, I believe we should develop between us clear and detailed scenarios on the objectives, timescales and negotiating approaches for these two areas of progress on decommissioning and wider security issues, including various changes which would enhance the climate of trust, the enabling condition for success.

Such scenarios would have to deal with the very difficult issues involved - in particular the external brokerage or verification that will almost certainly be necessary, methods, legal consequence, etc. The knowledge that the paramilitaries had accepted such scenarios in principle, or would be held to it by the Governments, would help to allay unionist fears of negotiating under duress - even if those fears ignore the reality that the terms of reference of such talks and the collective weight of the political mandates around the table would, I believe, ensure the pressures went the other way and would readily see off any attempt to play the card of violence.

I am of course fully conscious of the formidable array of political problems you are forced to grapple with at present, and that many will seek to persuade you the time is not right.

On the other hand you have achieved extraordinary advances on this issue so far, including in times of great difficulty. If we are to bring matters to fruition

in the life-times of our respective Parliaments, we do not have much time to spare.

I would hope that we can evaluate the prospects and reach common judgements at our meeting, so as to advance on both fronts with a common purpose.

Yours sincerely,

**POLITICAL PROGRESS**  
**AND**  
**DECOMMISSIONING OF ARMS/SECURITY ISSUES**

1. The Irish Government believe that the search for an agreed political settlement requires that the issues of decommissioning of arms and the wider security issues are dealt with in **parallel** with the issue of political progress.
  
2. The political talks process interacts both negatively and positively with the peace/security/decommissioning process. They inter-react **negatively** in the sense that the Unionists - essential participants in a political talks process - will not sit down with Sinn Fein/IRA without action by them on decommissioning. Yet a comprehensive agreement is impossible unless these two groups can sit down together.

On the other hand, there can be a **positive** interaction between the two sets of parallel discussions if:

- (a) a sense of movement is created in the political talks from which the former paramilitaries will not want to be left out, thereby giving them a positive incentive to agree the method of dealing with the decommissioning issue.
  
- (b) Agreement on a method of dealing with the decommissioning issue creates a sense that there is a potential window of opportunity for political progress, which will increase the pressure



on the mainstream political parties to create a compromise so that they are not politically outflanked by the former paramilitaries. The mainstream political parties will also want to avoid being accused by their electorates of jeopardising the peace process through intransigence or lack of imagination.

- (c) Interaction with mainstream parties means that Sinn Fein/IRA and the Loyalist paramilitaries will be forced to face the prospect of meeting parties representing families against whom their weapons have actually been used. Victims of violence will obviously have relevant views to express to them on the logic of prematurely releasing particular offenders when the arms used by these offenders are still available for reuse. This form of "reality therapy" can perhaps be administered more effectively by other political parties, than by Governments.

These latter arguments point clearly to the need for the two Governments to take linked initiatives to progress both the talks process and the peace process.

3. This parallel process requires, at the practical level, that
  - the UK and Irish Governments have a shared understanding of the objectives - which are essentially those of the Framework Document - and critically the timescales that they are jointly prepared to follow
  - the two Governments develop an agreed approach to persuade all parties to engage in comprehensive negotiations such that Northern Unionists

and nationalists can be directly involved and can have ownership of the outcome

- the clear objective should be inclusive all party talks at the earliest attainable date. Both Governments should use to the full their political resources, in particular their bilateral contacts, to create the basis for such talks.

### A WAY FORWARD

4. What is necessary, therefore, is a strategy which will be capable of achieving progress on the political front in parallel with meaningful progress on the decommissioning/security issues.
5. The Irish Government's view is that such progress is possible if flexibility is maintained on the response which both Governments would be prepared to make to movement by the relevant parties on the decommissioning issue and if both Governments remain open as to the timing and means by which decommissioning is achieved. What that will require is imaginative use of the possibilities created by parallel progress in areas of particular concern to Sinn Fein and the PUP/UDP and of possibilities created by mobilising international assistance. Both Governments would clearly be required to seek to move political dialogue forward.

## A PROPOSAL FOR AGREEMENT

6. Both Governments should now agree that:
- (A) two small groups of officials [Dalton/Chilton for decommissioning/security issues and an expanded Liaison Group for political issues] be mandated to draw up two schemes - incorporating in each case objectives/timescales/negotiation approach for political progress and for progress on decommissioning/security issues by end July for decision by Taoiseach/Prime Minister.

Note The end July deadline should mean that the two schemes would be available for agreement by the two Governments on the way forward before the anniversary of the ceasefires

- (B) In relation to decommissioning/security issues
- (a) both Governments would continue to affirm both publicly and privately the importance which they attach, and which the vast majority of people attach, to the decommissioning of arms in the context of a resolution of the Northern Ireland question;

- (b) the emphasis, however, would shift towards the decommissioning of full arsenals which must remain the ultimate goal to which the Governments are committed; and also towards the building of the trust which will be necessary if this goal is to be achieved.
  
- (c) in particular, both Governments would seek to secure the commitment of all parties to develop in a detailed and realistic way a decommissioning scheme which would be implemented in parallel with the wider security and political schemes against the background of the possibilities which would become available by reference to the discussions on areas in which parallel progress is possible and progress on the political front; and
  
- (d) both Governments should set themselves the task of advancing the foregoing programme to the point where a signal could be given well in advance of the anniversary of the PIRA cessation, that the decommissioning issue no longer represented an obstacle.
  
- (C) In relation to wider security issues [to be prepared]
  
- (D) In relation to political progress [to be prepared]

Add

The two Governments should set a time limit to their consultative process on the issues related to the future Governance of Northern Ireland. Consideration might be given to involving the people of Northern Ireland more directly in the process through a consultative referendum which would set very broad parameters for talks, consistent with the framework document but leaving room for change. If serious discussions do not take place either bilaterally or multilaterally, the British Government, in consultation with the Irish Government could put forward their own substantive proposals. These could be put to a referendum in Northern Ireland. This (possibly second) referendum would be accompanied by a simultaneous referendum in the Republic to change Articles 2 & 3 and approve the overall package.

## DECOMMISSIONING OF ARMS

### Background

- 1 The decommissioning of terrorist arms remains a key objective of both Governments for security and political reasons. Much work has already been done by the two Governments by way of the agreement achieved on the Dalton/Chilcot Framework for the Decommissioning of Terrorist Arms and through contacts with the relevant parties.
  
2. What has become increasingly clear in recent weeks is that the decommissioning debate, as it has developed, is capable of creating a total impasse in the peace process. If a way forward is to be found, present strategies must, therefore, be evaluated against a realistic assessment of what is possible, of the risks involved, and of the opportunities that might be created for movement by policies on other fronts.
  
3. The issue is how to progress work on decommissioning in a manner which can offer a means of securing on that objective, without endangering the peace process itself. That requires ensuring peace is maintained and that the possibilities which exist for political engagement and dialogue are exploited.

## Evaluation of Present Prospects for Decommissioning

4. It is the Irish Government's view, based on the most up-to-date Garda assessment and on information otherwise available to it, that Sinn Fein cannot, at this stage, persuade PIRA to decommission any arms by way of first instalment or otherwise. It is not therefore a case that Sinn Fein/IRA "won't" decommission at this point but that Sinn Fein "can't" yet persuade the PIRA to decommission.
  
5. The voluntary decommissioning of arms requires the consent and cooperation of hardline elements within PIRA. There is no basis for believing that that consent will be forthcoming at this time. Actual decommissioning at this stage would be perceived by hardliners - and by others within the republican movement - as an acceptance that the present status quo represents a satisfactory outcome to the years of "struggle", would risk splitting the organisation and opening the way for a return to violence by a hardline rump. It would be extremely dangerous to assume that this "rump" could be taken on swiftly and dealt with successfully by the security forces. All past experience shows that republicans who pursue violence - however small their numbers initially - can very quickly acquire within their own community the status and support necessary to pose a significant threat. In fact it would be a task of equal proportion

to taking on the organisation as a whole. A perception that a genuine effort for peace had been rebuffed could result in a terrorist campaign equal to anything seen in the previous twenty five years.

6. The information available to us would equally suggest that sufficient progress has not yet been made in discussions with the PUP/UDP to offer any realistic prospect of movement towards on their part, in the short term, decommissioning acceptable to both Governments.
  
7. Attempting to force the decommissioning issue to the point where a practical demonstration of intent - in the form of a first instalment - has to be made now, as a precondition for advancement from exploratory dialogue, will create an indefinite deadlock in the peace process. That holds considerable danger for the process itself as there would be a real risk that the Sinn Fein and PUP/UDP leaderships would very soon lose credibility within their own constituencies, that both Governments would in turn lose control of the situation, and that those who continue to be in favour of a violent campaign would seek to recommence violence. It is not an option, in other words, to allow the present statement to stand - political deadlock runs the risk of causing the ceasefires to unravel.



8. In summary, there is the distinct prospect that the continued insistence on a practical decommissioning demonstration as a precondition for movement from exploratory dialogue will bring an end to the peace process, result in long-term alienation of elements within the republican community who had wished to take a political road to settlement and give rise to the most serious questioning by the vast majority of people in both jurisdictions (and beyond) of the wisdom of putting at risk the silence of all the guns, in a gamble to obtain the recovery of just part of the arsenal. There is also the difficulty of defending on the level of principle that participation in substantive dialogue is impossible while they hold all their arms but acceptable when they still hold some or even the greater part of them.