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Key Points in Taoiseach's Phone Conversation with
British Prime Minister on Friday, 11 July, 1997.

1. The Prime Minister expressed appreciation for the Government's statement of 10 July in response to the Orange Order's decision of the same date on parades.
2. On the decommissioning issue, Prime Minister Blair said that the British Government were making some progress with Mr. Trimble, although it was still quite difficult, as Mr. Trimble was coming under intense attack. Mr. Blair referred to ongoing efforts to put together a sort of scheme for talking about decommissioning so that something was at least happening if the talks got underway properly in September ; and Mr. Trimble's need to be able to say that it was possible that decommissioning should happen. The Prime Minister added that, whatever about the horrendous problems caused by Drumcree, it at least had had the positive effect of allowing Mr. Trimble to come along some way on decommissioning.
3. The Taoiseach expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have had an input into the reply issued by the British to Sinn Féin, which he described as very positive. He underlined the importance of making progress in the talks process in order to restore Nationalist confidence after Drumcree. He also emphasised the importance of sticking to the joint paper on decommissioning. In doing so, he warned that the proposed British response to Mr. Trimble's request for clarification of the paper could run the risk of upsetting the balance achieved in the paper - and of leaving the Governments open to the accusation of offering different interpretations to Sinn Féin and to the UUP. The Taoiseach warned in particular of the dangers of saying that decommissioning could be set up without the involvement of the

parties or that it could take place before there had been at least some progress in the substantive negotiations.

4. Prime Minister Blair agreed on the need to avoid saying different things to the different sides. The question was how what was said was to be interpreted - viz. as between that there must be decommissioning during negotiations or there must be a rational possibility of decommissioning during negotiations. Mr. Blair emphasised the UUP's concern to avoid a situation where in effect Sinn Féin were given a veto over decommissioning. What it came down to was that there must be some possibility, "even likelihood", that decommissioning would happen during negotiations without saying to Sinn Féin that unless there was decommissioning upfront, they couldn't come into the talks - or saying to Unionists that it was only if Sinn Féin wanted, that any decommissioning would happen at all.
5. The Taoiseach underlined the importance of the requirement for talks participants to sign up to the principle of non-violence. He also referred to the wording of paragraphs 34 and 35 of the International Body Report. ("Consider").
6. The Prime Minister indicated that in his view, Mitchell was clearly contemplating that there should be decommissioning during the negotiations rather than before or after. He added, however, that he was aware of the dangers of over-definition in this area.
7. The Taoiseach referred to concerns that a written response to Mr. Trimble could be interpreted as a second joint paper.
8. Prime Minister Blair returned to the question of the interpretation of paragraphs 34 and 35, as he wished to avoid any misunderstanding between himself and the Taoiseach on this point. He indicated that his reading of the paragraphs was that the intention, "at the very least", was that there should be decommissioning during the negotiations and he added that he would lose the Unionists altogether if he was

unable to say this. Mr. Blair indicated that he was at the same time conscious of the need to avoid losing Sinn Féin.

9. The Taoiseach noted that, following Drumcree, Mr. Trimble owed the Prime Minister one. Mr. Blair agreed. He added that he felt - although he could be proved wrong - that if there were an early ceasefire - with no more killings - the decommissioning issue would recede greatly.
10. The Taoiseach responded that he believed that if we got over the weekend and got the clarification process right, we had a great chance of moving things on. It was all the more important to avoid being knocked off course over decommissioning.
11. Prime Minister Blair agreed that there was an opportunity to make progress. He indicated that he would be as sensitive as he could on decommissioning - although we should keep in mind his need to have regard to the concerns on the other side.
12. The Taoiseach indicated that he understood this but reiterated his earlier warning against having two positions on the decommissioning issue.
13. The Prime Minister suggested that the easiest way to resolve the issue would be for the Taoiseach to say that of course people want decommissioning during negotiations - which stopped short of saying that there was an obligation to decommission. For his part, the Prime Minister could say that the intention of Mitchell was that there should be decommissioning during negotiations, which would take him one millimetre - but an important millimetre - away from saying that decommissioning should happen during the negotiations. What we had got to avoid was a situation where the Prime Minister was saying in effect that the Unionists could veto the talks if they didn't get decommissioning or where the Taoiseach was saying there was no way that Sinn Féin could do anything , other than if they decided they wanted to.

14. The Taoiseach responded that he would be urging that decommissioning was an important aspect of the talks process and if the talks were going well, decommissioning should take place in a voluntary way.
15. The Prime Minister responded that while he understood what the Taoiseach meant in using the word "voluntary", it would be helpful if he were instead to use language which focussed more on the linkage between political progress and decommissioning.
16. The Taoiseach said that he would take care in what he said on decommissioning: he was not going to start saying that it could not happen. At the same time, he knew that if he were to say that there had to be decommissioning, we would lose Sinn Féin.
17. Prime Minister Blair commented that we had to avoid defining what was an ambiguity (Paras 34 and 35) in such a way as to undermine the attempt to get everybody on board. He promised that the British side would keep in touch, including in particular as regards how they proposed to respond to Mr. Trimble's letter.
18. The Taoiseach noted that consideration would need to be given to Plan B, against a situation where Mr. Trimble did not come through on 23 July, although he added that it was perhaps too early to be thinking about this. The Prime Minister commented that the British didn't have a fully focussed Plan B: "we may need to acquire one but let's hope that we don't".
19. The conversation concluded shortly afterwards. Prime Minister Blair agreed, at the Taoiseach's request, to describe the exchanges as a 20 minute discussion, rather than a phone call - for presentational purposes.

Department of the Taoiseach