



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Mr W. Kirwan  
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21 July, 1997

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, M.P.,  
The Prime Minister,  
10 Downing Street,  
London.

Dear Tony

I write further to our exchanges on the telephone and in terms of possible formulae of words that might help Mr David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party to vote, next Wednesday, in favour of the proposals and possible conclusions on resolving the address to decommissioning.

We have been very anxious to secure that objective and, with that aim in view, have agreed to put in place a range of mechanisms and deadlines, supported by legislation, to demonstrate the seriousness of the Government's purpose in this whole area. But, as we have consistently indicated, we believe that the two Governments must continue to anchor their position firmly on the approach that informed, and is reflected in, the Mitchell Report, particularly paragraph 35:

"As progress is made on political issues, even modest steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence".

That position is well summarised in paragraph 1 of the Governments' joint paper on 25 June:

"They [the two Governments] share the view in the (Mitchell) Report that voluntary and mutual decommissioning can be

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achieved only in the context of progress in comprehensive and inclusive political negotiations".

By reference to this balance between political progress in the negotiations and decommissioning, we believe that the two Governments have gone as far as is possible in advancing matters in regard to the possibility of decommissioning at an early stage in the negotiations. Under the position set out in the clarification Speaking Note of 16 July, we have envisaged steps that would enable the Independent Verification Commission to formulate options for draft schemes on decommissioning which may be available for discussion with all the participants from 15 September. It is only from that date that substantive political negotiations are to start and thus only from then can the context for decommissioning alongside political progress begin to develop. To go beyond that, so as to have an actual firm scheme in place would break the essential parallelism, as well as being at odds with paragraph 38 of the Mitchell Report, according to which the details of decommissioning, including supporting confidence-building measures, timing and sequencing, have to be determined by the parties themselves.

If David Trimble is truly interested in moving forward on all the issues, including decommissioning, he could do a very strong selling job on the significant commitments given by the two Governments in this area, including to establish, within a very close time-scale, a substantial superstructure of machinery for the purpose of arranging for and verifying decommissioning.

However, from the amendments put down by the UUP last Friday, it is very difficult to believe that any formulae of words that we could stretch to, even at the fullest limit of a position that would keep good faith with the clarification that has led to the IRA ceasefire, would bring the UUP on board for the vote next Wednesday. Nevertheless, we wish to make every possible effort. We have accordingly, drawing on elements among the options for wording you suggested, prepared the attached formula, which, we are satisfied, would not cause problems in any other relevant quarter. Frankly, we doubt that it will do the trick but we offer it in a spirit of helpfulness and to enable both

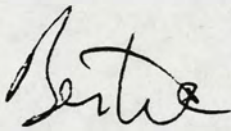




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Governments to say that they have made every effort up to the last possible moment.

If this final effort is unsuccessful, it will be necessary to indicate clearly on Wednesday, as we have discussed, the intention of the two Governments to proceed with substantive negotiations from 15 September, in whatever format. Our colleagues and officials are in discussion on how best to handle and present this contingency.



Taoiseach.

Both Governments are fully committed to the implementation of the Mitchell Report in all its aspects. The two Governments fully support the compromise put forward in the Mitchell Report that the parties concerned should consider voluntary and internal decommissioning alongside other confidence-building measures during negotiations. They recognise that this depends on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves, but believe that actions of this kind could be a vitally important part of the confidence-building needed to make a process of the negotiations. The two Governments have already made it clear in their document of clarification that they will work to achieve due progress on decommissioning alongside progress in the substantive political negotiations. The two Governments see the resolution of the decommissioning issue as an indispensable part of the process of negotiation.



16

*in Hare  
(This is before  
my correction of the  
my name)*

*28/7*

**Note of telephone conversation between Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern T.D.,  
and PM Blair on Monday afternoon, 21 July, 1997**

*transcript*

*28-7-97*



Taoiseach: Hello.

PM Blair: Hi Bertie.

Taoiseach: Tony how are you?

PM Blair: Everytime they put me on hold I get some extraordinary sort of martial .... music playing.....

Taoiseach: It predated me I can assure you, it's not my style of music.

PM Blair: Now Bertie I have had my meeting with David Trimble which has been very difficult and it maybe frankly that nothing we do is going to make any difference to them. There are two things, though that I should liaise with you. The first thing is just going back to the point on decommissioning and I got your notes on that, the difficulty is that unless it is made clear that we at least want to see actual decommissioning even if we cannot guarantee that it does, then it becomes very difficult for them indeed and I don't think that there is any harm in us saying ..... but I don't think there is any harm in us saying that although it depends on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations we do want to see actual decommissioning as part of the confidence building process and expect all parties in good faith to negotiate on that basis. In other words we are not saying that they shouldn't be decommissioning during the course of negotiations, we are saying we want to see that and in good faith negotiate on that basis, what we are simply saying that this is not, in the end, this is something that has to happen on the basis of their co-operation and is not a reason for chucking them out of the talks. But if we cant, the trouble is that if we cant actually say that we want to see actual decommissioning then it becomes very difficult.

Taoiseach: Yes, well I think that we have always said that we want to see it, in actual fact the line that we use *is* the bottom, the last line on my text is we see the resolution of decommissioning as an indispensable part the process of negotiation and we always say

that we personally as Governments would like to see decommissioning but we cannot force decommissioning and we cannot answer for the parties concerned, that they definitely will.

PM Blair: Supposing we were to say that both Governments recognise, suppose we were to say that both Governments see the resolution of decommissioning issues as an indispensable part of the process of negotiation, both Governments recognise that decommissioning should not become a blockage in negotiations and that it depends on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves, that ..... that they do want to see actual decommissioning as part of the confidence building process and expect the parties in good faith to negotiate on that basis. We can't actually use the words that we want to see it.

Taoiseach: That we want to see it during the period.

PM Blair: Even though we are not saying that it is guaranteed. I mean they can say that we are not prepared to do that and we are not doing it. We have at least got to be able to say that we want to see it.

Taoiseach: Yes well I think that we can say that and I mean the other bit that we have in there that they recognise that this depends on the co-operation of the paramilitary organisations themselves but believe that actions of this kind would be a vitally important part of confidence building needed to make progress at the negotiations. I mean that is effectively saying that, isn't it?

PM Blair: Yes it is, it is, I think its too ....

Taoiseach: OK well I'll tell you if you want to get, I'll get Teahon if you just want to switch those words round a bit, I'll get Teahon to talk to John and see if they can just spell it out a bit.

PM Blair: That would be very helpful Bertie on that. Now the other thing that he raised.

Taoiseach: The only thing that we all the time have to make sure of is that we don't knock anybody else off side, but I know that you accept that.



PM Blair: Yes I do and why I put in the words it depends on the co-operation, that of course makes it unacceptable for the Unionists but that seems to be as far as we can go without getting into the opposite problem.

Taoiseach: OK.

PM Blair: Now the other thing that they mentioned for the first time, I suppose its not something that the are particularly wanting but I wonder at first if its not a good idea first to try and say something on this. I mean I was sort of battering away at them to say look surely the important thing is actually the consent principle here, you know we are getting hung up here on decommissioning and the consent principle is important and they said ah well, you know there is not even agreement that the issue of consent should be a priority issue for discussion in the negotiations. And I said of course it will be a priority issue and I just wondered what your feeling was about that. I mean you know presumably one of the things that they will want to discuss early on is the issue of consent.

Taoiseach: Well certainly I believe, I don't know where in the negotiations, I have never really, I haven't really followed this one through as what has happened over recent times on it but we always said back over a while when we were at this early on, when I was on the Forum Report, that the issue of consent would have to be returned to and the Forum Report was .... on the basis of discussion. Sinn Féin would never sign up to the consent principle into the negotiations but they always understood it would be left for the more substantial negotiations, so I mean it is understood that it will be in the more substantial negotiations.

PM Blair: .....if we were to say that once the substantial negotiations start, once they start the consent issue will be a priority in our discussions.

Taoiseach: Would that be any good to them.<sup>7</sup>

PM Blair: I don't know, I mean I just don't know, its just that they, for the first time I thought I was getting somewhere in.



Taoiseach: On that one.

PM Blair: In saying to them, look your obsessed with this decommissioning issue which in the end is actually symbolic when there is a real issue which is really important which is mainly getting Sinn Féin to accept what everyone else does.

Taoiseach: Well let me just check that one, we have not raised the consent issue for a long time, I don't know if Sinn Féin would jump up, if we throw it in now but I will try.

PM Blair: I am not say as a precondition.

Taoiseach: I know sure, ..... back the time of the Forum Report when we were doing the Forum Report, I always used to say that this would come back into the more substantial discussions, so I mean it will there is no doubt about that.

PM Blair: You see, what we could say is that, it can only, what you are really saying to them is that you are only going to discuss this once the substantive negotiations start.

Taoiseach: Yes.

PM Blair: You see what I mean, what I would like is some reasons for them to want to get into the substantive negotiations as opposed forever to be discussing points of senior decommissioning .

Taoiseach: Which are hopeless, you know, we have spent 14 months discussing those items and they have got every clarification on Gods earth, I mean they have to move on, they either stay in the discussions and leave the decommissioning issue on the table or they actually just move on and accept it which they probably.

PM Blair: Thats why that might be sort of ..... for them to do that, I mean you wouldn't be saying it is ..... the very first thing and until you discuss that nothing else is discussed, you wouldn't be saying that.

Taoiseach: It is one of the items that will be.

PM Blair: You won't be saying ..... parity issue, its not something you get to and sort march. Its something that has you working through it and as a constitutional side this is a priority issue.

Taoiseach: Yes. I'll just check here what the reaction is likely to be to that because it has not really came up for a long time.

PM Blair: I'm in a position with them now, I mean, you know I will talk to Trimble again but I'm in the position now where I mean I think I can try and persuade him not to walk out of the negotiations on Wednesday but I don't know they may just do that. I have said to them that I think from there point of view that maybe very foolish to do that. What I am trying to do is to get to a position where I at least see an exit strategy for them, where at least they say we can see X,Y and Z and the Governments listen to us on this without us actually putting decommissioning back as a blocker, a blockage cause that is ..... So I am trying to think of everything that I can do short of .....

Taoiseach: .....

PM Blair: Giving them something that they can say to their own community ..... just to move on.

Taoiseach: Do you get the impression Tony that they want to stay in?

PM Blair: I get the impression that they do in the end yes but I mean I could be wrong and I'm sure you know, conversation has become rather difficult. But I think they are reluctant to, I think they are a bit worried about their own community on this.

Taoiseach: OK.

PM Blair: You know, so I think, what I think they really need is something that is likely to calm the fire within their own party, that's what they need. And if we can do that then we have got a, you know, we are going to have to be shown to have given them something, I mean the two ..... like it or not are mainly ..... the incompetence of their own public relations, Sinn Féin have the initiative in the last 48 hrs.



Taoiseach: And they need to see that there is something back.

PM Blair: You know, if I was handling their PR I think I would have done it slightly different. I mean, you know say this is good news and it has got to be absolute and genuine and now we want to repeat our values, and that would be saying that we are going to move forward to the substance with all the rest of it.

Taoiseach: The other thing they are hopeless at doing, I mean they, apart from Mitchell, which is old now its around a long time, but in the decommissioning document and in the clarification there are a whole lot of things, if they were sold right I'd ....., but they don't make any attempts to sell them they just accept them and move on.

PM Blair: They are incredibly .....

Taoiseach: Yes.

PM Blair: Anyway, I mean what we have got to do is to give them a way out of this.

Taoiseach: I'll tell you I will talk to Paddy Teahon immediately and I'll tell him to ring John just using the words that we have, just switch it around, make it a bit more positive on that point.

PM Blair: Think about the priority, consent as a priority issue, as to whether something could be said on that

Taoiseach: OK and the other one which you would like to be able to say is that the two Governments want to see something in the process.

PM Blair: If you haven't all the stuff about it, it depends on the co-operation, you then say that we are clear that we want to see it happen. You don't expect people in good faith to negotiate on that basis, so your not saying that it must happen, your just saying that you do actually want to see it happen.

Taoiseach: OK, I'll just play around with a few words here, I'll get Teahon back to John within half an hour.

PM Blair: OK Bertie, thanks a lot, bye.

Taoiseach: Bye.