

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Ms Griffin
13 JAN 2000

Taoiseach
A most significant report
- scarcely surprising but not encouraging but with intriguing straws of possibilities.
18-1-2000

P. Teale
D. G. Hayes
M. Hennessy

Meeting with Decommissioning Body

11 January 2000 in Belfast

Present - Full Commission
British Side (Bill Jeffries, Stephen Leach)
Irish Side (Tim Dalton)

54, 24

Summary

1. Commission held second meeting with IRA representatives in early January. Had been arranged at previous meeting.

2. The IRA

   - did not say "no" to decommissioning but did not say "yes" either;

   - proposal that they should "give up arms" (IRA terminology) would be defeated if they tried to force it on the Organisation now. Leadership would be changed;

   - in the circumstances, it would not be "appropriate" for representatives to commence any discussion on modalities at this time;

   - understand the need for "positive" de Chastelain Report in January (to ensure that the new political institutions survive) while at the same time emphasising the importance of the Commission maintaining its "credibility and integrity";

   - recent factors which undermine prospects for early decommissioning were the Trimble "deadline", the bugging of Adams' car and Fusco.

3. The Commission

   - is not in a position to say decommissioning will begin before February or even that it will begin or end by 22 May;

   - informed IRA that the January report would be a neutral reporting of the facts. It would say that discussions were "ongoing" but that there was no real progress. Told IRA that such a report would be interpreted by Trimble and others as a negative report;

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- informed IRA that while "destruction" of arms is required, the law defined this to include "making permanently inaccessible". In Commission's view, if a gun was damaged (e.g. by removing the firing pin) and it was then set in concrete it would be decommissioned. Commission would ask the Governments to make regulations for this, if necessary.

  [I asked if the IRA or the Commission had first raised this scenario. It was the Commission - the IRA did not comment on it]

- will meet IRA representatives, again, before the end of January and will show them the draft Report.

4. Brig. Nieminen said this meeting was much more friendly than the previous one (all Commission members agreed). He does not believe that decommissioning is possible right now and cannot say that it will ever be possible. IRA came up with no new ideas.

5. Andy Sens said he was worried about the fact that the IRA appeared to be "moving the goal posts". M. McGuinness used to say that the establishment of political structures would open the way for decommissioning. At the recent meeting, however, there was more emphasis on the need for "demilitarisation" and (at one point) the need for "ending British presence" in Ireland. The IRA representative had asked if the Commission was familiar with the "pike in the thatch" approach and could help in finding a solution along those lines. De Chastelain explained to them that a missile in the thatch was an entirely different matter. Sens had a sense (and the others agreed) that a debate is taking place within the movement, right now, and, even if something positive is to emerge, the IRA will "hold its cards" until end January.

6. British side

   - not surprised;

   - consistent with what Adams had said to Mandelson yesterday (as he did to us earlier). The requirement according to Adams was to bring the IRA to the point of formally deciding it was all over. Arms would then be dumped as a matter of course;

   - officials will report back to their Government. Their overall sense is that, while decommissioning before February could not be ruled out, Governments would have to prepare for the consequences of a negative report.

   - Had a sense that IRA/Sinn Fein may not fully appreciate Trimble's difficulties and would "play it up to the wire".

   - Would de Chastelain set a deadline in his January Report?

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[de Chastelain said probably not. The Commission's view is that setting timetables makes sense only if agreed with paramilitaries. However, to discharge their mandate, they would have to report to Governments in February/March that, if the 22 May deadline was to be met then, as a matter of practical necessity,decommissioning would have to begin by a date which they would suggest (de Chastelain joked that it might be 17 March). I urged that no timetable be set in the January Report.]

- PM Blair is to phone President Clinton sometime today or tomorrow. Before that phone call the British side will report to him on the present state of play as outlined by the Commission.

7. Irish Side

- not surprised;

- disagreed with the suggestion the Sinn Fein did not appreciate Trimble's difficulties. We had emphasised over and over again that Trimble would feel justified in "walking" if there was a negative report and we were not in doubt that this was understood;

- indicated that both Governments would of course reflect on the implications of a negative report in January,while not acting in a way that suggested despair about that possibility;

- we had been meeting with Sinn Fein representatives and discussed the type of decommissioning options which the Commission had mentioned to the IRA. No response so far. We found it interesting that, side by side with the statement that decommissioning was "not on", we were being asked for "imaginative" ways of doing it. Apart from that, why mention Trimble, Fusco etc. as impediments, if there is no question of doing it anyway?

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