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For: **Secretary O'Ceallaigh** **From:** **Joint Secretary**
cc: **Ray Bassett**

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Subj: Statement by UUP Review Group

The UUP Review Group issued the attached statement yesterday following a meeting with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning.

The statement says that the UUP Review Group is deeply unhappy at the lack of progress on decommissioning, referring to "actual, credible and verifiable decommissioning - the destruction of weapons" as the real measure of progress. The statement goes on to say that the proposed changes to the RUC and the lack of decommissioning have done "massive damage to confidence in the process" and adds that the British Government "must act now to restore the balance".

On 31 August last, a letter from the group - calling for firm action against all paramilitary organisations - appeared in the Newtownards Chronicle. That letter - and yesterday's statement - clearly reflect a growing mood of disquiet, disillusionment and disenchantment within the Unionist community, at all levels, about how things are going. It is all the more damaging and worrying that several members of the UUP Review Group - far from being a Union First or pro-Donaldson grouping - appear to be broadly pro-Trimble and pro-Agreement:

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Sylvia Hermon, who is a member, was Trimble's choice as the North Down UUP candidate (which Peter Weir won)

James Cooper is Vice Chairman of the UUP and one of the party's "grandees", based in Fermanagh, and

May Steele is a UUP party functionary, Assistant Honorary Treasurer.

However, the Chairman of the Review Group, **Tom Elliott**, from Enniskillen, is anti-Agreement.

In a characteristic intervention, John Taylor has issued a statement giving a three-month deadline to "get to grips" with decommissioning, police reform and the flying of flags - as otherwise, Unionist confidence in the Agreement will "fade away" (~~see attached report~~ in ~~this evening's~~ Belfast Telegraph). Reg Empey has been stalwart in affirming that there is no alternative to the Good Friday Agreement and that all sides must realise that they are "playing with fire". Referring to opponents of the Good Friday Agreement, he bluntly posed the rhetorical questions, "What do you replace the Agreement with? Do you want to go back to war?" Other comment on the UUP Review Group Statement from within the UUP has been rather muted, but with even perennially positive Dermot Nesbitt saying that the views in the document do not come as a surprise, that "they're the views I hold and others within unionism hold. (In a sense, even Dermot Nesbitt feels the need to head for cover.)

Decommissioning

One of the indirect effects of the loyalist violence - although it has been largely confined to the Lower Shankill and is now going through a welcome lull, with the possibility of a truce - has been to re-focus attention on the decommissioning issue and the need for the paramilitary groups on all sides to lay down their arms and put them beyond use. At the same time, however, the present reality seems to be that more and more people from within the Unionist community are prepared to contemplate the collapse of the Assembly and related institutions. The reasoning appears to be that, if the Agreement were to falter in that way, the Executive would be suspended - and with it the Ministerial seats of Martin

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McGuinness and Bairbre de Brún, whose presence on the Executive seems to be a source of gnawing irritation for many Unionists. The expectation is that the North-South Ministerial Council would also go and the hope seems to be that, in such an uncertain political and security scenario, policing and other reforms would also falter.

Speaking to my opposite number about these developments, I emphasised the huge significance of the IRA's confidence-building measure and the importance of ensuring a further CBM, combined with a positive progress report from de Chastelain. My opposite number stressed that, even though the initial CBM had been accepted, as such, it was always susceptible to attack, sooner or later, as not being actual decommissioning. As he put it, even if it were accepted that 50% of IRA weapons were in the dumps inspected, what about the other 50%? He felt that a minimum requirement for a further CBM would be to have a greater number of dumps inspected, together with a positive progress report from de Chastelain.

Comment

Generally, the view here in Belfast is at present quite bleak, with some seasoned observers now leaning to the view that the Executive could very well be gone by Christmas. (I understand that the briefings given yesterday by Trimble's officials were by far the bleakest for a long time.) However, as you well know, there have been many dips in confidence in the past also. While the UUP is in some disarray at present, by all accounts Trimble himself remains firmly opposed to resigning and to withdrawing from the Executive. Instead, his tactic is likely to remain to seek to extract maximum concessions on policing, decommissioning, flags, criminal justice review, etc., as the crisis within the UUP rumbles on and gathers momentum, and Trimble's own personal position becomes more precarious. He would also be expected to seek to use any formal review as a means of re-negotiating those issues. It also seems quite possible that Trimble, rather than being deposed, may have to acquiesce in certain policy shifts - such as an ultimatum on decommissioning. Taylor's intervention seems to point in that very direction. (I gather, incidentally, that Trimble has recently bought a house in London, for a significant sum, in preparation - some would speculate - for his eventual elevation to the House of Lords, in the fulness of time.)

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ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

PRESS RELEASE

25/09/2000

Statement by the UUP Review Group

We met this afternoon with the International Commission on Decommissioning. The meeting was useful in that a number of important points relating to decommissioning were raised by us and responded to by the Commission in a frank and businesslike manner.

We are deeply unhappy at the lack of progress on decommissioning which is essential to the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement. The Ahtisaari/Ramaphosa inspection is a stand alone attempt at confidence building. Actual, credible and verifiable decommissioning – the destruction of weapons, is the real measure of progress. Not only have republican and loyalist terrorists failed to decommission weapons, they have not even indicated if and when decommissioning might begin.

The proposed changes to the RUC, outside the terms of the Belfast Agreement and the lack of decommissioning have done massive damage to confidence in the process. Conference announcements by the Secretary of State of task forces do not measure up to decommissioning and the need for total support for the RUC. The Government must act now to restore balance.

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