

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Ms Griffin

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Meeting with PM Blair, Lisbon, 22 March 2000

Steering Note

1. The purpose of the meeting is to assess the state of play in the light of recent discussions and to reach final agreement on how the two Governments might plot a way forward.

Position of UUP

2. Our latest information from Unionist sources suggests that the internal party furore over Trimble's Washington remarks has now abated somewhat. This is little worry about a stalking horse candidate, and a general view that Trimble's position should be safe on Saturday. Trimble himself has said much the same to Frank Millar today. However, Jack Allen (Treasurer) and Jim Nicholson (Vice-President) will probably face strong challenges from the right on Saturday.

3. More worryingly, David Burnside's motion seeking to link the maintenance of the RUC name and badge to the restoration of the institutions could create serious negotiating difficulties. It is known that it is motivated by anti-Agreement forces and that Trimble sees it as most unhelpful. He needs to fight it or neutralise it and the British should encourage him to do so.

4. In general terms, Trimble and his allies are clearly open to some new form of sequencing, but it will be difficult to assess their real bottom line before there is a concrete proposition to put to them.

Sinn Féin

5. While Sinn Féin's position in public has been largely uncompromising (with a few more positive signals), at yesterday's Downing Street meeting Adams said

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he wanted to do business but couldn't move until he received a proposal from the two Governments. In other words, he needs a piece of paper.

6. We appreciate that before they are in a position to go back to the IRA Sinn Féin need assurances on (a) the sustained operation of the institutions and (b) what the full implementation of the Agreement would in detail involve, particularly as regards normalisation.

Way Forward

7. The British have now accepted our argument that the only way in which the arms issue can be resolved is through broadening the context and the positions of the two Governments are, therefore, now converging.

8. At yesterday's meeting with the Secretary of State, the Minister for Foreign Affairs forcefully made the case that any early gesture on arms, even short of decommissioning, from the IRA was highly unlikely (the NIO has been arguing for this). He also emphasised that any examination of failsafe mechanisms would, as experience has shown, be quite counterproductive. Indications are that Downing Street might be less concerned about these issues but this remains to be tested.

9. Broadly, Downing Street seem to be looking at three elements : (a) a "war is over" type statement; (b) comfort/certainty that weapons would not be used [ie in period before they are put beyond use; that should be easy for republicans to offer and indeed follows logically from (a) above; and (c) how it is guaranteed that arms will actually be put beyond use.

10. What is required in the immediate future is, therefore, work by the

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Governments on two tracks: (a) the urgent development of a full implementation strategy by a small intergovernmental committee and (b) agreement on the broad thrust of a possible IRA statement.

11. The implementation strategy committee needs a clear remit and officials could work on this in Lisbon on Thursday morning. It should aim at producing a draft text, with indicative timetables, within a week to ten days. Clearly, it is vital that it transcend the routine exchanges on these matters and be capable of developing a scenario predicated on the removal of the IRA threat.

12. The possible IRA statement, which would build on the de Chastelain report of 11 February, might be along the following lines:

- the IRA recognise that the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, together with the commitment of the two Governments to the sustained and irreversible operation of the institutions, will lead to a fundamentally changed situation; and

- within the context of the full implementation of the Agreement, the IRA will accept that the removal of the causes of conflict should be pursued exclusively by political means, and will commit themselves to putting their arms and explosives beyond use [by an agreed date] in a complete, verifiable and acceptable manner so as to ensure maximum public confidence.

13. Whereas during the discussions leading up to the second de Chastelain report it was envisaged that a period of about six weeks would be specified within which commitments from the IRA and in regard to the implementation of the

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Agreement should be pursued, the objective now would be to tie down agreement in the period before Easter - in other words, to be able to move right away to endgame.

Anglo-Irish Division

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