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Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

22 June, 1995

The Right Honourable Mr. John Major MP
Prime Minister

Dear John

Our two Governments have been very successful in handling many difficult problems together. Most recently we have succeeded in agreeing, in some detail, a common view of our objectives in the Framework Document, which outlined a clear understanding of the basis for a comprehensive agreement in the three strands of talks.

I am concerned to avoid any public perception that the unique opportunity which the ceasefires offer for political initiative and progress is being dissipated.

I want also to ensure that no gaps open up between us in our approach to Northern Ireland, since the closest possible co-operation between our two Governments has been the key to our success to date, and remains so for the future.

Oifig an Taoisigh
Office of the Taoiseach

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At this stage, I believe we must again seek an agreed approach to overcoming the remaining obstacles that presently stand in the way of that agreement being reached. As I see it, there are two obstacles that need to be overcome:

1. the issue of decommissioning of arms which is holding up the involvement of Sinn Fein and the loyalist parties in inclusive discussions
2. the reluctance of the Unionist parties to engage in meaningful discussion on the issues we raised in the Framework Document.

As I said at our first meeting, the peace process must not become a one item agenda.

The issue of decommissioning of arms and the wider security issues must be dealt with in parallel with the issue of political progress. I want to transform the present negative interaction between these issues into a positive one, where there is a sense of movement in both. Unless we can maintain a sense of movement between us, I am deeply worried that events could move outside our control.

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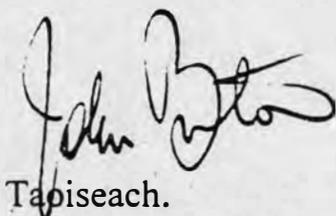
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I suggest, therefore, we mandate two small groups of officials, Dalton/Chilcot for decommissioning/security issues and an expanded Liaison Group for political issues, to draw up schemes, incorporating in each case objectives/timescales/negotiation approach together with changes which would enhance the climate of trust, essential to success. These schemes, for progress in decommissioning/security issues and for negotiating political progress should be ready by mid-July for decision by you and me.

I enclose a short paper on the decommissioning issue, which may be helpful and which should be examined by the Dalton/Chilcot group.

On the matter of getting serious political talks going, I suggest we ask the Liaison Group to advise us on how best to overcome the lack of engagement of the Unionist parties in particular. I believe we should, together, analyse the concerns of those parties, and also look at ways in which they might be subject to sufficient incentives and pressures to induce them to seriously and urgently address the issues we have raised in the Framework Document.

Yours sincerely,



Taoiseach.

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SECRET**Decommissioning of Arms****Background**

1. Nothing less than the verifiable decommissioning of all terrorist arms will satisfy the requirements of both Governments, for security and political reasons. Much work has already been done by the two Governments by way of the agreement achieved on the Dalton/Chilcot Framework for the Decommissioning of Terrorist Arms and through contacts with the relevant parties.

2. What has become increasingly clear in recent weeks is that the decommissioning debate, as it has developed, is capable of creating a total impasse in the peace process. If a way forward is to be found, present strategies must therefore be evaluated against a realistic assessment of what is possible, the risks involved, and of the opportunities that might be created for movement by policies on other fronts.

3. The issue is how to progress work on decommissioning in a manner which can offer a means of securing that objective, without endangering the peace process itself. That requires ensuring peace is maintained and that the possibilities which exist for political engagement and dialogue are exploited.

Evaluation of Present Prospects for Decommissioning

4. It is the Irish Government's view, based on the most up-to-date Garda assessment and on information otherwise available to it, that Sinn Féin cannot, at this stage, persuade PIRA to decommission any arms by way of first instalment or otherwise. It is not therefore a case that Sinn Féin/IRA "won't" decommission at this point but that Sinn Féin "can't" yet persuade PIRA to decommission.

5. The voluntary decommissioning of arms requires the consent and cooperation of hardline elements within PIRA. There is no basis for believing that that consent will be forthcoming at this time. Actual decommission at this stage would be perceived by hardliners - and by others within the republican movement - as an acceptance that the present status quo represents a satisfactory outcome to the years of "struggle", would risk splitting the organisation and opening the way for a return to violence by a hardline rump. It would be extremely dangerous to assume that this "rump" could be taken on swiftly and dealt with successfully by the security forces. All past experience shows that republicans who pursue violence - however small their numbers initially - can very quickly acquire within their own community the status and support necessary to pose a significant threat. In fact it would be a task of equal proportion to taking on the organisation as a whole. A perception that a genuine effort for peace had been rebuffed could result in a terrorist campaign equal to anything seen in the past twenty five years.

6. The information available to us would equally suggest that sufficient progress has not yet been made in discussions with the PUP/UDP to offer any realistic prospect at this stage of movement towards decommissioning acceptable to both Governments.

7. Attempting to force the decommissioning issue to the point where a practical demonstration of intent - in the form of a first instalment - has to be made now, as a precondition for advancement from exploratory dialogue, will create an indefinite deadlock in the peace process. That holds considerable danger for the process itself as there would be a real risk that the Sinn Fein and PUP/UDP leaderships would very soon lose credibility within their own constituencies, that both Governments would in turn lose control of the situation, and that those who continue to be in favour of a violent campaign would seek to renounce violence. It is not an option, in other words, to allow the present stalemate to stand - political deadlock could very soon destabilise the peace.

8. In summary, there is the distinct prospect that insistence on a practical decommissioning demonstration as a precondition for movement from exploratory dialogue will bring an end to the peace process, result in long-term alienation of elements within the republican community who had wished to take a political road to settlement and give rise to the most serious questioning by people in both jurisdictions (and beyond) of the wisdom of putting at risk the silence of all the guns, in a gamble to obtain the recovery of just part of the arsenal. There is also the difficulty of defending on the level of principle that participation in substantive

dialogue is impossible while they hold all their arms but acceptable when they still hold some or even the greater part of them.

A Way Forward

9. What is necessary, therefore, is meaningful progress on the issue of decommissioning and a strategy which will be capable of achieving that progress without inhibiting parallel progress on the political and security fronts.

10. The Irish Government's view is that such progress is possible if flexibility is maintained on the response which both Governments would be prepared to make to movement by the relevant parties on the decommissioning issue and if both Governments remain open as to the means by which decommissioning is achieved. What that will require is imaginative use of the possibilities created by parallel progress in areas of particular concern to Sinn Fein and the PUP/UDP and of possibilities created by mobilising international assistance. Both Governments would clearly be required to seek to move political dialogue forward.

11. The Irish Government believes that the prospects for voluntary decommissioning by the paramilitaries would be enhanced by an openness to the mobilisation of international assistance for this purpose. The complexities and sensitivities involved, and the ingrained suspicions which must be overcome, point to the merits of outside involvement. It is already widely envisaged on all sides that some external or generally

acceptable verification procedure will be necessary at the implementation stage, and there could be considerable advantage in bringing the external dimension into play quickly to lay the groundwork for the future.

12. To highlight their determination on the matter, both Governments might agree in principle to establish jointly an International Commission. Its function would be to assist in the development of a workable and broadly acceptable decommissioning scheme and subsequently to oversee its implementation.

13. What is therefore proposed is that:
 - (a) both Governments would continue to affirm both publicly and privately the importance which they attach, and which the vast majority of people attach, to the decommissioning of arms in the context of a resolution of the Northern Ireland question;

 - (b) the emphasis, however, would shift towards the decommissioning of full arsenals which must remain the ultimate goal to which the Governments are committed and also towards the building of the trust which will be necessary if this goal is to be achieved;

 - (c) officials (probably the Dalton/Chilcot Group) would be mandated to explore the possibilities that would be created by addressing a range of security related issues in both jurisdictions as appropriate to each situation and also to explore the possibilities outlined in

paragraphs 11 and 12 by reference to such matters as possible composition, terms of reference, objectives and working methods etc.

- (d) in particular, both Governments would seek to secure the commitment of all parties to develop in a detailed and realistic way a decommissioning scheme which would be capable of being implemented against the background of parallel progress on other security issues and on the political front; and
- (f) both Governments should set themselves the task of advancing the foregoing programme to the point where a signal could be given well in advance of the anniversary of the PIRA cessation, that the decommissioning issue no longer represented an obstacle.

22 June, 1995.