

THE WHITE HOUSE
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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with David Trimble, Leader of Ulster
Unionist Party (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
David Trimble

Notetakers: Pat O'Shaughnessy, Joel
Schrader, Cindy Lawrence, James Smith and
Lawrence Butler

DATE, TIME April 10, 1998, 10:59 - 11:09 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Hello, David? (U)

Mr. Trimble: Yes, Mr. President. (U)

The President: Did you get any sleep last night? (U)

Mr. Trimble: I did, actually. Three or four hours of sleep.
It's probably a good thing; I heard it was a really ghastly
atmosphere last night. (U)

The President: I got worried last night. I didn't get much
sleep, and I wasn't even in the room with you guys. I've been
given a little update on where the talks are. First, I wanted
to say that I really admire what you've done so far. I know
you've gotten a lot of crap for it in your party. You've taken
risks and I know the process is still full of tension. But I
also believe you can rightly claim that you have secured the
principle of consent of the people, that the Irish constitution
will be changed, and that you'll have the Assembly. You will
have a lot of things that embody what the Protestant majority
and the unionists want. (U)

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Mr. Trimble: I know all that; I could recite it. Maybe you're not up to date. (C)

The President: Where are you on decommissioning? (C)

Mr. Trimble: We're in a mess. Our problem is we've got a background of no decommissioning taking place, even though we've shifted our position from prior to parallel decommissioning. Now we're looking at actual decommissioning, post-settlement. There is absolutely no expectation of the promise being honored. Sinn Fein is saying they are willing to come into the Northern Ireland Assembly, but without decommissioning, including a wide range of cabinet positions. They could come in and be entitled to walk straight into the administration. They would be fully armed. We would have to sit alongside a terrorist organization and work with them. (C)

That is just a bridge too far. We need assurance from the Prime Minister to guard against this provision. If a party maintains paramilitary links -- not just Sinn Fein, but any party -- and they had not undertaken decommissioning, they could sit in the Assembly but not in the government. We came into talks on that basis, but what was a firm pledge has been watered down. (C)

The President: What does it say on that? (C)

Mr. Trimble: It says that an individual can be removed from office by decision on a cross-community basis, which means only if SDLP supports it. From what they've said, they won't support that. So even though there is a provision to remove people, it would not be effective. We'd be crucified. I flagged this to my party and executive, and they agreed with me that it's important to have, and we hope to reinstate it. The funny thing is, the Strand 1 issue is an internal British affair and within the Prime Minister's authority, but he's reluctant because of representations made to the Irish government and the SDLP. (C)

I have my colleagues here; I told him, "You said in this report decommissioning would be complete in a two-year period. How about if we have a couple of better assurances that if, in the first six months, there is no decommissioning, you will rapidly introduce legislation that if they haven't undertaken it, they'll have no ministerial posts." I got a response from Tony that is nearly there, but not quite. It's not that we disbelieve them, it's what do our own people think, what does our party think. As much as I would like to do it, it looks like the party would split if I were to go ahead. Jeffrey

Donaldson is here -- he's a first class chap -- he can't work with this unless we get an effective provision. If there's a split in the talks team, it would be reflected throughout the country. So, we are right up to the wire. I can see a solution, but I just can't get there yet. (C)

The President: Let me say that if this happens, I mean if this goes forward, Sinn Fein will need a hell of a lot of help from the United States, from all their friends in the Irish community. I have become, for better or worse, an arbiter of that. I don't want to promise you what I can't deliver, but I think I can have a hell of a lot of influence on this decommissioning thing. I believe it ought to be done. If you can get near your comfort zone, I give you my word I'll bust my rear to get this thing going. (C)

Mr. Trimble: If we get words from Bertie Ahern, John Hume, and Tony Blair that are in line with what you said, we'll do it, I hope. They will introduce effective provisions that if there's no decommissioning after six months, paramilitary-related parties will not go into government posts before the transfer anticipated in February. I nearly got that from Tony, but it is not there. Let Tony go the rest of the way, and we could get them. It would be great if you can do it. (C)

The President: Alright, we'll see what they can offer you. I'm not going to walk away. We'll use our influence as the United States. We've got to do decommissioning, we'll set up all kinds of incentives for that. If it falls apart, I don't know what will happen. (C)

Mr. Trimble: I know that. (C)

The President: Hang tough. (C)

Mr. Trimble: I'll do the best I can. (C)

The President: Goodbye. (U)

Mr. Trimble: Goodbye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --