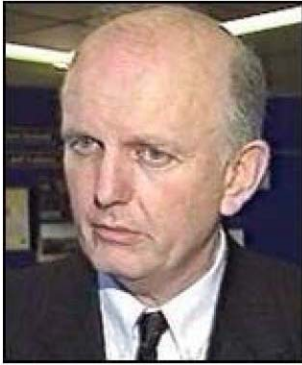




The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Blair deal will allow IRA to retain some weapons.



Michael McGimpsey

It has been claimed that the IRA will be allowed to keep 15 per cent of its weapons for “self-defence”, under secret plans to tempt republicans back into a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. The deal was revealed to unionists by British officials during a private briefing at Stormont last month, it has been claimed.

The deal was allegedly revealed to the paramilitary group, the Ulster Defence Association, and its political wing, the Ulster Political Research Group, during joint negotiations with Northern Ireland Office officials. Michael McGimpsey of the Ulster Unionist Party condemned the idea.

Under the plan, the IRA would be allowed to keep some weapons, handguns and small submachine guns suitable for close combat, to deter attacks from rival republican anti-agreement groups such as the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA. The so-called “peace plan” stipulates that paramilitary organisations must decommission all weapons.

Before decommissioning began in 2001, the IRA was estimated to have two tonnes of Semtex and 650 AK47 rifles, as well as rocket launchers, mortar bombs and ammunition. It was reported last week that the Provisionals had now destroyed more than 100 tonnes of weapons. Michael McGimpsey said that the retention of even a small number of guns was “disgraceful”. “It turns law and order and moral imperatives totally on its head,” he said. “Nobody believes for a second that if they were allowed to keep weapons for self-defence they would be there for anything other than to threaten their own community and to ensure discipline in their organisation.”

Mr. McGimpsey continued: “If they need protection, they are going to have to be protected in the same way as the rest of us - by the police. There is no place for any illegal weapons. It would be an absolute disgrace and something that will be completely and utterly rejected by anyone with any sense at all.”

Sticking point

The disarming and disbanding of the IRA has always been the sticking point for all the negotiations between Unionists and the Government. Unionism under the leadership of Dr. Ian Paisley, of the DUP, has demanded that all terrorist weapons be destroyed in a manner that is visible and verifiable.