**BELFAST TELEGRAPH**

**DEBATENI**

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**Mystery of the Missing Arms Inventories**

In February 2007, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) stated, “The basis on which the PIRA agreed to enter into the decommissioning process was that the detailed inventories of their decommissioned arms would not be made public until the decommissioning of the arms of all paramilitary groups had been completed.

That condition was accepted by us and by both the British and Irish Governments before decommissioning began, so that none of the paramilitary groups would refuse to start decommissioning until all had agreed to do so. That being so we will not disclose the inventories of the PIRA decommissioning events until the Loyalist paramilitary groups have completed decommissioning, at which time all the inventories will be given to the two Governments.”

This promise, as we now know, with the limited immunity involved, did not come to pass. All that was handed over to both the Irish and British Governments was the IICD final report of 28 March 2011. What was excluded from the 18-page item was the “record of decommissioned arms” (inventories) handed over by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups for disposal under the watchful eyes of General John de Chastelain’s team of inspectors.

Where explosive ordnance and ammunition was rendered “permanently inaccessible or permanently unusable”, officers from both the US Army and Canadian Armed Forces, along with the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives provided the expertise.

Throughout the decommissioning process, the IICD consulted widely with the Northern Ireland political parties, government departments and relevant organisations such as the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims’ Remains.

In December 2006, the NIO had confirmed its intention to issue the relevant details – “the Government expects a full report on armaments to be published when the IICD’s mandate is complete”.

It was the final report of March 2011 that reversed the IICD commitment to forward inventories to both governments. It reasoned, “Providing details now of what paramilitary arms have been put beyond use, could, in our opinion, encourage attacks on those groups which have taken risks for peace”.

It is almost three years since that IICD assertion. There have been no discernible attacks by the various former paramilitary groups on one another, and all are holding to their formal ceasefire. There has however been recognisable seepage of armaments that were either not put beyond use, withheld or which have been re-activated.

It is now time for the two governments to obtain the inventory records from the US Department of State in Washington where they were sent and stored, beyond FOI enquiries, and, in line with their promise, publish the details. We have a right to know to have some confidence in that process.