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From the Ambassador

*Ken Lindsay,*

## TRIMBLE/LAKE

1. With their agreement, I accompanied David Trimble and Jim Molyneaux when they called on Tony Lake at the NSC last night. The meeting went well.

2. Trimble had originally hoped that the President would join the discussion, and had rashly told the press that this would happen. When he heard from the NSC, early yesterday, that it would not happen, he asked for Embassy activity to try to reverse the schedulers' decision. We did not in fact press the White House to make Clinton available - he was genuinely tied up - but we did establish that Gore would look in on the Lake meeting, and this duly happened.

3. Gore stayed for about 20 minutes, and was particularly friendly, engaging in some uncharacteristic banter with Molyneaux, and reminiscence about his alleged Irish ancestry. He referred to his conversation with the Prime Minister in Lisbon, and raised two points of substance, probing the UUP's reaction to HMG's 28 November statement, and the current UUP view of parallel decommissioning, on Mitchell lines. On the first point, Trimble said that the 28 November statement was acceptable to the UUP. They might have worded certain sections differently, but they could live with all of it. However, the odds were that it would not produce an IRA cease-fire. As for decommissioning, the UUP was ready to accept that none need take place before Sinn Féin entered talks: they must, however, have certainty that some would start to happen shortly thereafter. Lake sat up when Trimble added that he thought the time might soon come when it would be helpful to have Mitchell once again address the decommissioning conundrum. It was not clear precisely what Trimble meant, but he went on to say that the UUP did not think the Dublin Government's proposals for handling decommissioning were serious: the implication seemed to be that Mitchell might be asked to lean on Dublin. Picking up Gore's Lisbon reference, Trimble also

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BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON

WED 04 DEC 96 15:09

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suggested that some OSCE mechanism, tested in Eastern Europe, might have value in Northern Ireland. Again, I am not sure what he had in mind, and he dropped the point when I expressed some scepticism, ensuring that the point was lost in light-hearted Gore/Kerr banter.

4. These exchanges did not go very deep, and it seemed clear that Gore's brief was not to lean hard on Trimble. When he abandoned his cards, his only real point seemed to be that, if there were an IRA cease-fire, the UUP should react imaginatively and flexibly, not insisting on too long a cooling off period before Sinn Fein could sit down with the UUP and others. Quoting the legendary master of malapropism, Yogi Berra, he suggested that a cease-fire would face the UUP with "an insurmountable opportunity". Trimble's response was that the UUP had gone out on a limb before, in June, and that he would be ready to do so again, provided that an IRA cease-fire announcement - which he did not expect soon - was reasonably satisfactorily worded, and was accompanied by clear evidence of an end to arming, targetting, and the preparation of future attacks.

5. This was also Trimble's main theme in the discussion with Lake (and Soderberg), without Gore's participation. The UUP wanted progress in the current talks, both substantively and because evidence of progress without them was likely to be the best form of pressure for an IRA cease-fire, essential to Sinn Fein participation. He talked vaguely of the importance of getting the three strands launched. Molyneaux also talked about the case for establishing some new mechanisms, involving all participating parties, to work on socio-economic issues: this could be particularly valuable for the SDLP. Trimble stressed the risks to the SDLP at the next Westminster election, and spelt out to Lake how badly the UUP and SDLP had done in last May's election. Lake asked, several times, whether Trimble couldn't make more effort to establish a working relationship with Hume: it transpired that neither Trimble or Molyneaux had had any substantive meeting with Hume this autumn.

6. Lake argued that it was entirely reasonable for the UUP to say that they would judge any IRA cease-fire announcement not just by the words used, but also by the IRA's subsequent deeds: however, it was unreasonable for the UUP not to recognise that there would be no cease-fire announcement unless SF/IRA had some advance undertaking that, given satisfactory deeds, they would enter the talks by a set date. Similarly, while accepting Trimble's argument for progress in the talks as a way of extracting a cease-fire announcement, he argued that Sinn Fein would be in an impossible situation if, following a cease-fire announcement, talks continued without their participation. Trimble said that the problem with setting a fixed date was that it would tend to override the subsequent assessment of deeds; but he added - more than once - that he would have no difficulty with an indication that, provided deeds matched words, Sinn Fein could join the talks within "a few weeks" of a cease-fire announcement. Lake and Soderberg both made careful notes of this point: I

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BRITISH EMBASSY WASHINGTON

WED 04 DEC 96 15:09

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expect John Holmes will hear about it from them. Molyneaux intervened to say that the most important contribution the US could make would be to convince the IRA that US displeasure would be severe if a cease-fire proved, in the event, phoney.

7. In a subsequent discussion with Soderberg, Trimble volunteered another possible role for the US Administration. Perhaps in their dialogue with SF/IRA they could establish how long, after an announcement, it would take to wind down terrorist operations and preparations, and could establish bench-marks for progress in the process which would be publicly visible, and would thus help to convince public opinion that a cease-fire wasn't phoney. I thought this a rather rash suggestion, and said so: Molyneaux told Trimble, after Soderberg had gone, that he agreed with me. I fear that Soderberg may take it seriously: the obvious risk is that it might lead her again to try to produce an agreed definition of Trimble's "few weeks".

8. As this record shows, Trimble was in a conciliatory mood. This was also clear at my lunch for him: both Tom Foley and Peter King remarked afterwards that he was much less prickly than on earlier visits. I don't think he took away any continuing grievances about not having seen the President: the fact that his meeting with Lake/Gore ran for 80 minutes, and that on the Hill he had had short meetings with the Republican Leadership in both Houses (Lott and Gingrich), gave him plenty to tell the press about high-level attention. He went out of his way to say nice things in private about the Embassy's support.

Yours ever,  
John Kerr

John Kerr

cc: John Holmes Esq, PS/No 10  
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