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SEEN BY TAOISEACH
TUESDAY, 11 MAY 1999

11 May 1999

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Dear Dermot,

Conversation with Frank Millar on Trimble's position

Frank Millar telephoned me at midnight last night to say that his information from within the Ulster Unionist Party was that the emerging deal on implementation of the Good Friday Agreement was encountering significant difficulties within the Party. The prevailing mood was "no guns, no government" and he thought that Trimble would not be able to muster the support of his Assembly party for a resolution based on a form of words - even if the formula, as he put it, "stipulated that decommissioning could be achieved in the context of the overall implementation of the Belfast Agreement". The argument of those opposed - and he placed Reg Empey in this category - was that words, however cleverly put, would not be sufficient to signal a change in the culture of the republican movement. He had been informed that the Party would resist pressure from Blair, notwithstanding Trimble's apparent willingness to move.

On Trimble, Millar said that there was understanding within the UUP for the position in which he found himself last Thursday. People understood that he genuinely wanted to see the Agreement implemented, and that he would wish to preserve his position with the Prime Minister. They understood also that the pressures of the Downing Street environment would have encouraged him to make positive noises. But this understanding for the predicament of the party

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leader did not extend to accepting the approach developed at Thursday's talks. For many in the UUP it was in conflict with the principles set out in the Hillsborough Declaration which had now become a point of reference for those opposing a change of strategy. The message that Millar was getting was that there was no deal and that Trimble would not get his "twenty six hands in the air" in support of it. Such was the suspicion of Trimble that several senior members of the UUP were insisting that he be accompanied at his meeting today with Blair. (However, John Taylor on Radio 4 this morning said that as it was a private meeting Trimble would attend alone).

Millar seems to have pieced together the main elements of Thursday from contacts with the parties over the weekend - not the details, but sufficient of the essentials - Blair's acceptance that there will be no prior decommissioning, his willingness to press Trimble on this, the attempt to find language on longer term decommissioning. He also had some of the colour - Seamus Mallon's irritation and his threat to walk out. His contacts with Sinn Fein revealed continuing criticism of the Irish position.

I report the above for what its worth from someone who maintains reasonably close contacts with a wide range of UUP members, and conscious that Millar himself may be the subject of spin from within the UUP. But it does square with what you heard from Jonathan Stevens yesterday.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Barrington
Ambassador

Note
S am also hearing that Taylor and Saber were distancing themselves from Trimble - As indicated in yesterday's report, the Paisley elections are also beginning restricting Trimble's room for manoeuvre
DT 11/4

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