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PST: PSS: Messrs. Teahon, Danton & Dalton; Ambassadors London & Washington; Joint Secretary; Counsellors A-1

Mr. Gillin S.H.

Secure Fax: 415

29 April 1997

No of pages including this one: 4

To: HQ

From: Belfast

For: Second Secretary O hUigin

From: Joint Secretary

Subj: Conversation with Sir John Chilcot

~~by Nolan~~
Taoiseach
X, Hage & I
may need
consideration,

depending
I shall discuss this afternoon
with Secretary Teahon

in line
30/4/97

VE 30/4
7/5/97
Hage mentioned to you the tenor of discussion among our delegation in London on this aspect.
9.5.97

- To confirm our phone conversation, Sir John Chilcot visited the Secretariat this afternoon for the purpose of lifting the morale of our NIO colleagues, three of whom have tendered their resignations in the aftermath of last week's Times article and the general security alert here in recent weeks.
- We had a private word afterwards about the "choreography" for a Labour Government's first few days in office, assuming a Labour victory on Thursday.

Chilcot expects that Mo Mowlam will receive her appointment as Secretary of State late on Friday. (While most of the Cabinet appointments are clear, John Prescott's range of responsibilities remains to be agreed and there is some suggestion that negotiations over these could delay the announcement of the other appointments). She is likely to visit Northern Ireland on Saturday, essentially for "photo-call" purposes. She will then return to London and be advised to "go to ground". (There is somewhat exaggerated concern here about the risk of injudicious public comment by the new Secretary of State before she has been taken in hand by the NIO).

As Monday is a bank holiday in the UK, Ms Mowlam would reappear at Stormont only on Tuesday, which would be her first formal day in office. Tuesday would be devoted to intensive NIO briefings. On Wednesday, she would meet key contacts here such as the security chiefs. Chilcot thought that she would also wish to have telephone contact with the Tánaiste on that day. I suggested that the Tánaiste, who knows Mo well, would probably wish to congratulate her sooner than that.

Chilcot understands that the proposal for a meeting between the Taoiseach and Tony Blair in London on Thursday (8 May) is now "an accepted deal", having been cleared

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with Blair's office. The British understanding is that this will be essentially a courtesy or "get-to-know-you" visit, without any formal agenda.

Chilcot did not think that his side would envisage the Secretary of State attending this meeting. The reasoning he offered was that she would still be on "a very steep learning curve" and the NIO would need more time for briefing purposes before it could recommend her participation in such a meeting. He would expect her to return to London for the Cabinet meeting on Thursday but otherwise to devote the remainder of the week to familiarising herself with her new brief.

If the Tánaiste were to accompany the Taoiseach, Chilcot remarked, the Foreign Secretary might well join the Prime Minister at the meeting. The British side would in any event be anxious to demonstrate that Northern Ireland was not the only issue discussed. (Comment: there is a fairly transparent NIO agenda here designed to start Mo Mowlam off on the best possible footing with the Unionists).

Chilcot assumes that there would be a Ministerial meeting between the Tánaiste and the new Secretary of State in the second half of May. He indicated a British preference for an informal "Adare-style" meeting, on the grounds that its agenda would be heavily focussed on preparations for the resumption of talks. I noted that an IGC would be due around then but suggested that the matter could be revisited closer to the time.

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Mentioning the idea of a possible joint visit by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister to the reopening of talks on 3 June, Chilcot wondered whether this would be feasible if the general election in our jurisdiction were to be held, as some current speculation suggested, on 6 June. He also wondered whether our Government might wish to revisit more fundamentally the 3 June date for the resumption in view of the possibility of an election taking place around that time. Another concern on his part related to the timing of the expected election announcement and, in particular, whether this might have occurred prior to the 8 May meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister.

I suggested that none of these points could be profitably addressed at this stage, though I personally saw little likelihood of our Government proposing a delay in the resumption of talks.

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3. Chilcot, who had a long session with Mo Mowlam last Friday (and found her to be in very good form, both mentally and physically), listed what he expects will be her immediate priorities on taking office:

- (1) Resumption of political talks
- (2) Parades
- (3) Policing reform
- (4) Confidence-building measures.

In relation to (2), he recognised that Labour have committed themselves to implementing all the North recommendations. He noted, however, that they have been careful to avoid entering any commitment on timing in relation to the granting of powers of determination to the Commission. Referring to the "unholy scramble" for legislative slots which occurs at the outset of every new Parliament, he suggested that Mo Mowlam would have great difficulty in securing Parliamentary time in the short term for the remaining parades legislation. Labour are committed to bringing in Bills before the summer for the devolution referenda in Scotland and Wales and there are also some urgent financial measures. With competing pressures of this magnitude, it is very hard to see the time being found for the allocation of the remaining powers to the Commission. Chilcot thought it likely, therefore, that Ms Mowlam would keep a public focus on the important work of mediation and dialogue in which the Commission is currently engaged but would try to discourage expectations that the additional powers could be legislated for within the very tight timescale available before Drumcree.

As regards (3), Chilcot said that all he knew of Labour's intentions in this regard was what was contained in the policing paper produced by Tony Worthington last November.

In addition to these priorities, Chilcot expected that the new Secretary of State would have to address the mounting difficulties in the prisons.

4. Finally, on the subject of his visit here this afternoon, Chilcot told me that he had briefed Mo Mowlam last Friday on the security threat to the Secretariat and that she had emphasised her personal concern about this. In conversation between them, it was recognised that this development would strengthen the case for maintaining

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unchanged the Secretariat's traditionally low profile and not undertaking initiatives, as Mu has seemed to be contemplating, which would introduce greater "openness and transparency" about our work. She accepted that priority must be given to ensuring the physical safety of the staff working here and that caution would have to be exercised in relation to any publicity-oriented initiatives which might have the effect of compromising our safety.