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For: A/Secretary O hUiginn

From: Joint Secretary

1. The British Joint Secretary, Robert Alston, gave me the following sketch of this afternoon's discussion between Mr Major, Mr Brooke, Mr King, Dr Mawhinney and the Northern party leaders. The information was provided by the Permanent Under Secretary, John Chilcot, who was at the meeting. Further details may be provided later.
2. The Prime Minister "described" the security situation but left it to party leaders to offer their views. The discussion was general and inconclusive: the DUP agenda of security measures recently presented to Mr Brooke was not followed in detail. As previously reported, the only security action that has been taken so far in response to last week's violence is the provision of more troops.
3. The Prime Minister did, however press the parties on the question of pursuing political talks. As a result, while the Prime Minister has agreed to meet them again, they have also agreed to meet among themselves on the political issue with a view to resuming talks before the Election if possible.
4. Alston saw the meeting and Mr Major's statement afterwards on behalf of all the participants as an indication of the extent to which the Prime Minister had become seized by the Northern Ireland issue although he commented privately that being seen to push the Northern parties into talking to each other is good politics for a Prime Minister going into an Election.
5. Alston mentioned that Mr Major had been keen to have a conversation as soon possible with the Taoiseach and had initiated the telephone conversation that took place although, he understood, the Taoiseach had placed the first call. He commented that there seemed an element of competition to see who would speak to whom first which demonstrated the friendliness and level of interest on both sides.
6. Alston expected a Summit meeting quite soon, "certainly before May/June".