



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/46/284

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON
CONFIDENTIAL

✓PSM
✓PSS
✓Mr Miley
✓point etc
✓Councillors At
✓Box
John
18/2

17 February 1992

Mr Sean O hUiginn
Assistant Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs
Dublin 2

Discussion with Mr John Chilcot

Dear Assistant Secretary

The Head of the NIO, Mr John Chilcot, came to lunch at the Embassy on 14 February and what follows is a summary of our discussion.

The Prime Minister's meeting with the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties a few days earlier was, of course, a natural topic. I said I had noted from the Irish Times report on the date of the meeting that Frank Millar had seen the Downing Street exercise in a security context only. Chilcot's response was that, for once, Millar was wrong. The meeting was much more wide-ranging than that. Chilcot said he was impressed by the remarkable degree of solidarity between the four party leaders. He had noticed Molyneaux nodding approvingly of certain points made by Hume. How did Paisley behave? Chilcot's reply was that he was of good behaviour and waited for his turn to intervene, even though on occasion it was quite clear that he was impatient with and disapproving of certain views expressed. He was not strident when he did speak. At a certain stage he handed over a document containing proposals on security. Chilcot agreed that Paisley's remarks on TV immediately after the meeting gave a somewhat false picture of the meeting and an exaggerated account of what the Prime Minister had promised.

Chilcot confided that the Prime Minister was taking a calculated risk in convening the meeting. However, the feeling was that it had gone well and that the opportunity had been availed of to impress on the party leaders that they, too, had heavy responsibilities to shoulder. Did we share the view that there was a risk involved? I proffered the view that, because of the intrusion of the general election campaign, the Prime Minister had been deprived in advance of one very desirable option - the need to restart the Brooke talks without further delay. Chilcot thought it unlikely that

Mr Major would meet the party leaders again before the election, but Mr Brooke, on the other hand, was available to see them. The Prime Minister, in his handling of the meeting, was very sensitive to Brooke's situation. There was the possibility of the four leaders meeting among themselves before meeting Brooke again.

Our discussion turned to the desirability of arranging meetings between our new Foreign Minister and Mr Brooke and between the new Taoiseach and Mr Major. Chilcot noted that since there was likely to be only one further inter-Governmental Conference before the election, the likelihood was that Mr Andrews and Mr Brooke would have the opportunity of meeting only once. He seemed to take it for granted that, even in the event of a Tory victory, Peter Brooke would not be staying on as Secretary of State. Chilcot said he understood that the two Prime Ministers were keen to meet before the election. I said that such a meeting would therefore have to be held within the next 2 - 3 weeks - and certainly before the election campaign got under way officially. Chilcot cautioned against rushing things when the two Prime Ministers do meet. The same applied to the early meetings between Mr Andrews and the Secretary of State, whoever he may be, after the election. It was necessary to allow some time for the personalities to get to know each other and build up trust.

I made the point that in relation to Northern Ireland both Governments should be agreed on the ultimate objective and work towards its attainment. In that connection it was important to ensure that policies adopted in the short-term are consistent with that long-term objective. There must be no question of the Unionists recovering the power to veto progress. It was still necessary to continue the process of conditioning the Unionist mind towards a complete and permanent realisation that their "top dog" status was over. That process started twenty years ago with the abolition of Stormont and the imposition of direct rule. It continued with the Sunningdale Agreement, the establishment of the power-sharing Executive and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. I said that in many ways John Major had certain advantages over his predecessors in dealing with the problem at this time. Valuable time had been required to convince both Ted Heath and Margaret Thatcher of certain realities. When he took office in 1970, Mr Heath was quite dismissive of Dublin's concerns and refused at first to acknowledge that we had a legitimate role to play. Gradually he realised that the Irish dimension was a crucial factor in the whole situation. Much had happened since 1970 in that respect and it was reassuring that John Major showed no signs of having to go through a similar period of conversion.

Taking up the point about the ultimate objective of unity, Chilcot made reference to a John Hume assessment which, he said, envisages a further generation before a new Unionist mentality is created with another generation or two required before the Unionists will be ready to share the island with the rest of the Irish people.

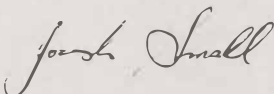
Speculating on possible future arrangements for governing Northern Ireland, Chilcot said that an alternative expression will have to be found for "power-sharing" in view of the fact that since Sunningdale it has become an unacceptable term in the Unionist lexicon. He accepted that even with power-sharing it would still be necessary to ensure that there were built-in safeguards against discrimination. I said that even after twenty years of direct rule one still heard complaints and allegations that a disproportionate amount of public money was being spent, on projects such as roads, in Unionists areas.

We had a general discussion about the Brooke talks which were characterised by an extremely patient, "softly softly" approach. He agreed that this approach had a limited shelf life. The Secretary of State had admitted as much in the recent Walden TV interview. I said I had detected a growing impatience in sections of the British media with the talks process as conducted to date. Walden seemed representative of those who would advocate a more assertive and prescriptive approach to the Northern Ireland problem. Chilcot accepted that there was indeed palpable evidence of impatience in sections of the British media. I offered the view that the prospect of the two sovereign governments working closely together on an enhanced Anglo-Irish Agreement would go a long way towards focusing the Unionist mind on the need for urgent political progress.

I touched once again on the question whether the current Unionist leadership is capable of entering into a political deal. Chilcot said that Robinson seemed to be one of the few Unionist leaders capable of fundamental thinking. On the day Brooke informed the Commons that he had offered to resign, the Unionists "got it wrong", with the possible exception of Robinson.

With regard to the current wave of violence in Northern Ireland Chilcot was pessimistic and anticipated that this trend will continue for some time. He noted that there had been a dramatic drop in casualties in the ranks of the security forces in recent months. On the other hand the number of soft targets and innocent victims had increased dramatically.

Yours sincerely



Joseph Small
Ambassador