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Meeting between Prime Minister Major and four Northern
Ireland Party Leaders - telephone call from
John Chilcott (NIO) 12 February 1992

I had a telephone call this morning from John Chilcott Permanent Under Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office. He said he wanted to let me know what had happened at the meeting yesterday in Downing Street between Prime Minister Major and the four Northern Ireland Party Leaders. I understood that he had been present at the talks.

Chilcott said that the meeting had lasted for an hour and a half. The tone had been good and there were "no tantrums". A lot of the time had been taken up with a lengthy statement by the Prime Minister followed by statements by each of the four Party Leaders. Discussion had not gone into detail on security or on political issues and there were no specific initiatives in the security field in question.

I asked about news reports which suggested that this marked a resumption of political talks. Chilcott said that the Prime Minister had pressed very hard to get the talks resumed - that is to say to get those involved to lift the block which seemed to be over the talks until after the election. He had not got agreement or a commitment on this. He did however press them to consult together as four Party Leaders. Chilcott said that "heads nodded" at this point but he himself would not put money on a great deal happening on that point before an election.

I asked about Paisley's news media interviews last night in which he said that he had passed over a series of points to the Prime Minister and that the Prime Minister had promised to let him know what is and what is not on among the various points raised. Chilcott said that this was, as he put it, a rather generous translation of what had happened. In fact Paisley had passed over a dossier but there was nothing very new in it. The Prime Minister had simply said he would look at it.

Chilcott said that there had been a telephone conversation between the Prime Minister and the incoming Taoiseach yesterday. I said I noted from press reports that there had been some reference to an early meeting - did he understand this to mean a summit meeting before an election? Chilcott said that he himself had asked Wall the Prime Minister's Private Secretary the same question. His understanding is that there might or might not be such a meeting before the election - it certainly is not ruled out but a good deal would depend on their respective diaries.

I thanked Chilcott for telephoning me (he had apparently been looking for me last night) and I asked if the British side would be giving a briefing through the Secretariat this morning. He confirmed that they would and he said that he himself had briefed Alston the British Joint Secretary so that he would be in a position to brief Mr. O'Donovan.

N. Dorr
Secretary
12 February, 1992

c.c. Minister
 Secretary Nally
 Secretary Brosnan
 A/Sec Ó hUiginn