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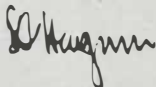
Meeting with John Chilcot, Permanent Undersecretary, NIO

1. I had dinner with Mr. Chilcot in London on 2 April, 1992. I discussed with him the text which Sinn Féin had put forward for a draft declaration by the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister, saying that we had regarded it as rather discouraging. He was critical of John Hume's overly positive assessment of it. I pressed him a little on whether there were developments through their other - probably more operational - channels. I understood from him that this text was the most recent one but he felt (whether justifiably or not, I cannot say) that the Provisionals were very wary of Hume's involvement and that this particular text was inspired largely by tactical considerations. He asked me specifically to mention to my own side that Sir Robin Butler would be briefing the incoming Prime Minister on developments in this area to date. I said I would do so, but that we assumed that this would be the case. He personally counselled against too early an approach by the Taoiseach to the new Prime Minister on the issue. I said that we would at some point have to give John Hume a reaction to the text - possibly in the form of alternative language on a number of points. I felt the British and Irish analysis of the points of difficulty in the text would probably largely coincide. Mr. Chilcot said he saw no problem from their point of view in our supplying an alternative text to Mr. Hume.

2. We chatted generally about the way forward in Northern Ireland. He was sceptical in a philosophical way whether "words" could achieve progress. A number of passing reference; gave me an impression, or rather confirmed it, that quite a lot of talking has been going on behind the scenes, in contacts with the Provisionals through an

intermediary. He also expressed a purely personal doubt about whether the line that there could be no talks until an end to violence would hold indefinitely. I probed him a little on the dangers of feeding or raising Provo expectations, and his view on the dangers of Unionist backlash, but formed no very clear picture of how he meshed the various factors in the situation into a single strategy (unless that of fairly unconditional British withdrawal ?) He was very open however on the possibility of new structures or approaches under the aegis of the EC.

3. Much of the rest of the evening was taken up with speculation about possible outcomes of the election and their implications - he is clearly mulling over the implications of Kevin MacNamara as Secretary of State or Roger Stott as junior Minister. I mentioned also the Minister's interest in reducing numbers at Conferences, and said we would make a formal approach on this shortly.



Seán O hUiginn
8 April, 1992