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Reference Code: 2021/98/11

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CONFIDENTIAL**Ancram visit with Senator George Mitchell**

1. Senator Mitchell contacted me to brief me on his meeting with Michael Ancram in Washington yesterday.
2. Ancram's proposal was that Mitchell should be Chairman of the Plenary, and that de Chastelain should be chairman of Strand Two. Ancram sold this concept by presenting the plenary as the key role, whereas the chairmanship of Strand Two would be merely a "ring-master" role. Ancram envisaged the plenary lasting several weeks, because of the difficulty of handling the decommissioning issue. He had suggested that Senator Mitchell might wish to make a preparatory visit to Northern Ireland in the interval between the election and June 10th.
3. Senator Mitchell said that his own view was that the chairmanship of the Plenary and of Strand Two should go together. That was important for the perception people would have of his role. (He said his instincts in this respect had been increased by informal soundings with a number of Irish people at a reception which the Irish Times had given later that evening for Conor O'Clery's departure).
4. I told the Senator that the respective weights of the plenary versus Strand Two still had to be established. The only thing certain about the plenary was that it would be the opening mode of the negotiations. It might largely lapse thereafter, or, conversely, become the significant focus if the various strands tended to merge. However, the independent chairperson role had been envisaged primarily for Strand Two. There was an obvious danger if Senator Mitchell's role was confined to the plenary that he would be used only at the opening stage and on an agenda dominated by decommissioning, and any further

involvement would be largely dependent on whether or not participants reconvened the plenary.

5. Michael Ancram had asked Senator Mitchell to come back to him with a reaction. After some reflection Senator Mitchell said that he would adopt the following position:

He would indicate to Michael Ancram that he would welcome a joint approach from both Governments, setting out their preferences in regard to his role.

Secondly, in that process, he would ask for their best joint assessment as to how the talks would unfold, and in particular how the decommissioning issue would be handled in that context.

6. I briefed Senator Mitchell on our preferred scenario for the opening. I assured him that we for our part would want him involved as Chairman both of the plenary and Strand Two. I mentioned we had suggested to the British a flexible approach, whereby he could use his other colleagues on the body as vice-chairmen. If it were helpful for the British that could include some involvement by General de Chastelain in Strand Two, in Senator Mitchell's absence. However, the essential point would be that it would be under Senator Mitchell's overall aegis, and that the Senator would be involved as of right in the key North/South strand.



Sean Ó hUiginn

17 May 1996