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To: HQ
To: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast
From: Joint Secretary

25A

cc Pilling + Trimble files
Abs W & L

Subj: Secretariats

Ms. McLaughlin
panel on to the
Tadiriakh
1.5.98

1. We have had a number of conversations here over the past week or two about the arrangements which might be made for the future Intergovernmental Secretariat. Some preliminary British thinking about the North/South Secretariat has also emerged in this process.
2. Arising from the Prime Minister's assurance to David Trimble that the Maryfield Secretariat will close by the end of the year (an assurance repeated publicly by the Secretary of State last week), we impressed on Joe Pilling last night that, if this timetable is adhered to, it will be necessary to provide for the successor Secretariat to come into existence at that stage, if necessary in "shadow" mode. The new Secretariat, in other words, cannot await the entry into force of the British-Irish Agreement and the establishment of the new IGC but must open as soon as the present Secretariat closes.
3. Pilling had no difficulty with this, agreeing that there could be no lacuna between the closure of Maryfield and the opening of its successor. He indicated some unhappiness with the Prime Minister giving Trimble a precipitate undertaking on Maryfield (though it may be assumed that this had less to do with our interests than with NIO personnel and managerial considerations). He declared himself, half-jokingly, to be "shocked that the Prime Minister would treat you in the way he treats us".
4. As regards the staffing of the future Secretariat, the British envisage no change on their side in terms of either numbers or grades. While the removal of devolved matters from the Conference will reduce the current workload, the view is that this

will be balanced not only by a heightened focus on policing, security, prisons, rights, broadcasting and other non-devolved matters but also by the requirements of coordination between the two Governments on EU matters in the new context and by the need to ensure continuous monitoring of Assembly and Executive activities.

5. It is taken for granted that the Secretariat will be based in Belfast. Peter Bell and his colleagues have been exploring possible premises. They assume that we would consider anywhere within the Stormont estate presentationally unacceptable. One of the properties they have been looking at is adjacent to Stormont and consists of a secluded house on ten acres. With substantial investment (running into millions of pounds), this property could be renovated and made secure. If accommodation were required for the Irish team, this would probably have to be purpose-built on the spot (again involving a substantial investment).
6. We have been telling the British side that whether or not the staff of the future Secretariat require secure residential accommodation can only be judged in the light of the security climate prevailing at the time of the changeover. Arrangements enabling our staff to move into individual accommodation in, say, central Belfast could be contemplated in a scenario involving a complete absence of risk to Irish Government officials. In the far more likely scenario of a continuing security threat from anti-Agreement Loyalist paramilitaries, it will be necessary for the British Government to provide us with secure collective accommodation.
7. The British recognise this. While they hope that the new beginning afforded by the Agreement will permit us to leave what Pilling described last night as "this dreadful building" and to move out into a normal existence in Belfast, they accept that the security situation at the time may militate against this. Emphasising the difficulty of finding accommodation as secure as that available at Maryfield, they have not discounted the idea that the Irish staff of the future Secretariat might continue to be housed here even if the working premises is elsewhere.
8. Peter Bell has proposed within his system that whatever building is found for this Secretariat might also serve as the premises for the future North/South Secretariat. This begs a question, of course, about the location of the latter, on which the Governments and others involved have yet to reach agreement. If, however, merit is seen in having the North/South Secretariat in Belfast, there would be certain

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practical advantages in accommodating both this and the IGC Secretariat on, say, adjacent floors of a single building. It would be inherently desirable to coordinate as closely as possible the input of the two Irish Government teams (dealing in the respective Secretariats with the NIO and with the NI Civil Service) and a shared premises would be helpful in this regard. The Unionists can be expected, of course, to resist what they would represent as too intensive a concentration of Irish Government influence in one place and will probably press for a bi-located North/South Secretariat with separate teams in Belfast and Dublin.

9. Preparations both for the Assembly and for the North/South institutions are in the hands of John Semple and Tony McCusker (who is tipped to play a key role in the North/South Secretariat). We hope to gain insights into British thinking in both respects when Semple and McCusker come here for lunch on Thursday.