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AND TO ROUTINE NIO(B), NIO(L), EU POSTS, WASHINGTON, BIS NEW YORK

SUBJECT: NORTH REPORT AND BLOODY SUNDAY: IRISH MEDIA REACTIONS

## SUMMARY

1. Publication of North report overnight lead story in Irish media. Likely to stay there as Irish politicians respond. Criticism of HMG fuelled by dissenting Labour party approach on timing of the establishment of the proposed parades commission. But also driven by continuing emotive power here of Drumcree. Parallel pressure for review of alleged new evidence on Bloody Sunday contributes to reporting of "bilateral rift on two fronts".

## DETAIL

## THE NORTH REPORT

2. The publication of the North Committee report on 30 January was the overnight lead story in the Irish media. It is likely to remain there for the next few days as Irish politicians respond. Initial coverage was largely factual, covering the Report's 43 recommendations in exhaustive detail. But such commentary as there was focused on the statement by the Northern Ireland Secretary in the House to the effect that a consultation period would be required prior to establishment of the proposed Commission. Here the line was uniformly critical, fuelled in part by the Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary's response in the House, but also by subsequent reactions from the Tanaiste and Taoiseach ("I would like to see the legislation to give effect to this in place before the marching season opens. That's essentially my bottom line"). Bertie Ahern called for me to be summoned to see the Taoiseach. And the story has continued to run here today as other politicians, notably the normally moderate and conservative leader of the Progressive Democrats Mary Harney, have added their voices to calls for early enabling legislation, their main concern being to avoid a repeat of Drumcree '96.

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## BLOODY SUNDAY

3. Media interest in the 25th anniversary, already high, has been taken to a new pitch by the recent publication of the book purporting to contain new evidence on the events of January 1972. On 31 January the Irish media contrasted the Prime Minister's statement in the House (making clear that unless fresh and relevant evidence could be presented to the authorities he could see no grounds for re-opening the inquiry) with the Taoiseach's statement in the Dail ("I believe the Irish Government should and will take this matter up with the British authorities at the highest political level"). This latter statement can be read in several ways. There was, however, no equivocation in the Tanaiste's line; "it is incumbent on the British Government to look into the new evidence that has been brought forward - and to do so as quickly as possible."

## COMMENT

4. We gave a widespread distribution to the relevant Ministerial statements, and have briefed subsequently. But of all the issues that separate our two Governments, these two touch some of the rawest nerves. With the talks seemingly stalled, with no early prospect of any sort of IRA ceasefire, and with a nagging fear of renewed loyalist violence, there is a real risk that these two issues will dominate the bilateral agenda for the next few weeks. The Tanaiste is likely to be in gloomy mood when he sees Sir Patrick Mayhew in Belfast next week.

## SUTHERLAND

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