

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



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URGENT
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TO HQ FROM WASHINGTON
FOR ASST SEC NELIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR

UUUOKMNB

20/7/81 0935
J. B. S. J.

U.S. ADMINISTRATION AND H-BLOCK
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THE FOLLOWING ARE RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS AND ASSESSMENT OF U.S. ADMINISTRATION POSITION SINCE OUR C200 OF 15 JULY. AS INDICATED IN PARAGRAPH 4 OF C200, THE TAOISEACH'S LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT WAS REFERRED TO HEAD OF NSC. UNDERSTAND THAT SENIOR NSC OFFICIAL DISCUSSED MATTER WITH BRITISH EMBASSY AND THAT STATE DEPARTMENT ASKED U.S. EMBASSY, LONDON, TO MAKE ENQUIRIES. U.S. SOURCE EMPHASISES THAT IN NO WAY SHOULD THESE ENQUIRIES BE REGARDED AS QUOTE REPRESENTATIONS UNQUOTE. ARISING OUT OF THE CONTACTS BETWEEN THE U.S. OFFICIALS AND THE BRITISH OFFICIALS, A COMMON LINE EMERGED FOR DEALING WITH PRESS ENQUIRIES. BRITISH EMBASSY OFFICIALS HERE AND WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS REFERRED REPORTERS IN A GENERAL WAY TO STATEMENT ON IRELAND MADE BY PRESIDENT REAGAN SINCE HIS ELECTION BUT IN PARTICULAR REFERRED THEM TO A STATEMENT MADE IN LOS ANGELES ON 7 NOVEMBER WHEN, IN REPLY TO AN IRISH TIMES QUESTION ON ARMS SALES TO THE RUC, THE THEN PRESIDENT ELECT SAID QUOTE THE U.S. WOULD NOT INTERFERE OR INTERVENE IN NORTHERN IRELAND UNQUOTE.

2. CARRINGTON'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON TOOK PLACE ON 16-17 JULY AND HE HAD PUBLICISED MEETINGS WITH HAIG AND SENIOR PEOPLE ON THE HILL CONCERNED WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS. HALF OF THE MEETING WITH HAIG WAS A TETE-A-TETE AND WE ARE UNABLE TO OBTAIN ANY INFORMATION AS TO WHAT WAS DISCUSSED. IRISH AFFAIRS WERE NOT DISCUSSED AT THE PLENARY MEETING. WHEN ASKED AT A BACKGROUND BRIEFING FOR BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS ON 17 JULY IF HAIG HAD RAISED THE H-BLOCK SITUATION WITH HIM, CARRINGTON REPLIED QUOTE NOT REALLY UNQUOTE. IT IS LIKELY THAT IRELAND WAS NOT DISCUSSED IN ANY MAJOR WAY BETWEEN CARRINGTON AND HAIG THOUGH CARRINGTON DID COMPLAIN TO HAIG ABOUT THE LACK OF PROTECTION FOR BRITISH CONSULATES ESPECIALLY IN NEW YORK AND BOSTON WHOSE OFFICIALS WERE BEING SUBJECTED TO A LOT OF ABUSE FROM PROTESTING H-BLOCK SUPPORTERS.

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3. HAIG IS A GREAT ADMIRER OF THE BRITISH ROLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM I HAVE FOUND HIM TO BE EITHER WELL INFORMED ABOUT OR SYMPATHETIC TO OUR POSITION. AT A PRESS BRIEFING EARLY IN JUNE HE WAS ASKED WHY THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION INSISTED ON TREATING NORTHERN IRELAND AS AN INTERNAL BRITISH MATTER. HE REPLIED QUOTE I THINK PRECISELY BECAUSE IT IS THAT. THAT DOES NOT SUGGEST THAT THERE AREN'T EXTERNAL FORCES INVOLVED FROM TIME TO TIME IN ONE OR ANOTHER ASPECT OF THIS ANGUISHING PROBLEM. BUT I THINK IT'S CLEAR THAT THIS IS A PROBLEM THAT MUST BE WORKED OUT INTERNALLY BY THE PARTIES. IT'S AN HISTORIC AGONY FOR THOSE PARTIES AND HAS BEEN. ONE MIGHT MAKE THE CASE IF THERE WERE NOT A GREAT BRITAIN PLAYING THE ROLE THAT IT'S PLAYING THERE TODAY, WE MIGHT EVEN HAVE TO CREATE ONE TO PREVENT A BLOOD BATH. I THINK WHAT WE ARE ALL INTERESTED IN IS PATIENTLY AND SYMPATHETICALLY TO DO ALL WE CAN IN AN EMPATHETIC WAY TO SEEK A RESOLUTION TO THESE HISTORIC PROBLEMS, BUT TO RECOGNIZE THAT THEY ARE INTERNAL AND THAT FOR A PUBLIC OFFICIAL IN MY POSITION TO MAKE OFFHAND PUBLIC COMMENTS ABOUT IT ONLY AGGRAVATES A PROBLEM WHICH NEEDS NO AGGRAVATION: SO I WON'T DO IT UNQUOTE. SHORTLY AFTERWARDS AT A PRIVATE MEETING WITH A SMALL GROUP OF EUROPEAN BUSINESSMEN, INCLUDING DAVID KENNEDY OF AER LINGUS, THE SUBJECT ALSO CAME UP AND HE MODIFIED HIS REPLY SOMEWHAT TO INDICATE THAT THE WORLD WAS FORTUNATE THAT THE MAIN PARTIES INVOLVED IN THIS PROBLEM WERE THE BRITISH AND IRISH GOVERNMENTS WHO COULD BE RELIED ON TO HANDLE THE MATTER IN A RESPONSIBLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE WAY.

4. UNDOUBTEDLY, FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW THE SIGNIFICANT ENGAGEMENT OF CARRINGTON'S VISIT WAS A VERY SMALL PRIVATE DINNER PARTY ARRANGED FOR HIM AT A HOUSE IN GEORGETOWN ON 16 JULY AT WHICH THE PRESIDENT, ACCOMPANIED BY MIKE DEEVER, WAS PRESENT. IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT IRISH MATTERS WERE DISCUSSED IN SOME DETAIL THAT EVENING AND IN PARTICULAR THAT CARRINGTON RELIED HEAVILY ON THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS INVOLVEMENT WHICH HAD COMMENCED JUST THEN. IT IS LIKELY THAT HE GOT AN INDICATION THAT THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION WOULD NOT BE GETTING INVOLVED IN RESPONSE TO THE TAOISEACH'S LETTER. ON THE EVENING OF 17 JULY A SENIOR NSC OFFICIAL TOLD ME THAT A NEGATIVE REPLY HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE PRESIDENT BY THE NSC AND THAT HE EXPECTED THE PRESIDENT TO SIGN IT AND HAVE IT TRANSMITTED TO DUBLIN BEFORE LEAVING FOR THE OTTAWA SUMMIT. IN INFORMAL CONTACTS WITH WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS I ARGUED THAT A NEGATIVE REPLY THAT PARTICULAR WEEKEND WOULD BE VERY UNHELPFUL AND SUGGESTED THAT THE TIMING OF A REPLY SHOULD BE CAREFULLY CALCULATED PARTICULARLY IF THERE WAS LIKELY TO BE ANY PUBLICITY ABOUT IT. FOR REASONS THAT ARE NOT CLEAR AT THIS STAGE, THE PRESIDENT DID NOT SIGN THE LETTER BEFORE HE LEFT FOR OTTAWA AND THE LETTER WHICH WAS EVENTUALLY SIGNED ON JULY 23 AND TRANSMITTED TO THE TAOISEACH VIA THE U.S. EMBASSY IN DUBLIN IS SOMEWHAT MORE SYMPATHETICALLY DRAFTED THAN THE NSC VERSION OF 17 JULY.

5. I HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO ESTABLISH WITH ANY CERTAINTY WHEN NORTHERN IRELAND WAS DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND MRS THATCHER AND WHAT EXACTLY WAS SAID AND BY WHOM. BOTH U.S. AND BRITISH SOURCES HERE CONFIRM THAT NORTHERN IRELAND WAS DISCUSSED AND THE PROBABILITY IS THAT IT WAS DONE RELATIVELY BRIEFLY DURING DINNER ON SUNDAY 19 JULY AT WHICH OFFICIALS WERE NOT IMMEDIATELY PRESENT. BOTH SIDES CONFIRM THAT THEIR PRINCIPALS WERE FULLY BRIEFED AND THE LINE THAT HAD BEEN SUGGESTED TO MRS THATCHER WAS THAT HER GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO REACH A SETTLEMENT OF THE HUNGER STRIKE WAS DEMONSTRATED BY THE EFFORTS OF VARIOUS INTER-MEDIARIES WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN FULL CO-OPERATION BY THE RELEVANT BRITISH AUTHORITIES AT ALL TIMES. THE ONLY OBSTACLE TO A SETTLEMENT WAS THE FACT THAT THE PRISONERS WERE PREPARED TO SETTLE FOR NOTHING LESS THAN THE FIVE DEMANDS. PRESIDENT REAGAN'S BRIEF DID NOT GO BEYOND HIS MARCH 17 STATEMENT.

6. THE LAST TWO WEEKS HAVE SEEN AN INTENSIVE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE DEMOCRATS ON THE HILL OVER A BILL THAT COULD MEAN 750 BILLION DOLLARS IN TAX CUTS OVER THE NEXT SIX YEARS. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STRUGGLE IS THAT IT WILL EFFECTIVELY DECIDE WHO CONTROLS THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OVER THE NEXT YEAR. THE DEMOCRATS, OF COURSE, HAVE A CONFORABLE MAJORITY BUT BY CLEVER USE OF WHITE HOUSE PATRONAGE THE PRESIDENT ALREADY SECURED ENOUGH DEMOCRATIC DEFECTIONS TO ENABLE HIM TO GET HIS BUDGET THROUGH EARLIER THIS YEAR. IF HE WERE NOW TO SUCCEED IN GETTING HIS TAX CUTS THROUGH, IT WOULD MEAN THAT THE DEMOCRATS (AND IN PARTICULAR SPEAKER O'NEILL, HAD EFFECTIVELY LOST WORKING CONTROL OF THE HOUSE. BOTH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SPEAKER PUT THEIR PERSONAL REPUTATIONS ON THE LINE AND AS THIS REPORT IS BEING DICTATED IT SEEMS AS IF THE PRESIDENT WILL EMERGE WITH A STUNNING VICTORY. (FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW A SIGNIFICANT DEFECTION FROM THE DEMOCRATIC RANKS IS BIAGGI WHO HAS ANNOUNCED THAT HE WILL SUPPORT REAGAN. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHAT THE PAY-OFF WILL BE BUT IT MAY WELL INCLUDE SOME RECOGNITION BY THE WHITE HOUSE OF BIAGGI'S ROLE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE AD-HOC COMMITTEE ON IRISH AFFAIRS). AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO BRING TO BEAR ON THE WHITE HOUSE THE REALLY EFFECTIVE O'NEILL/KENNEDY PRESSURE. KENNEDY AND O'NEILL DID CONTINUE TO PRESS THE WHITE HOUSE TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE WHITE HOUSE RESPONDED EVEN TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY HAD DONE EARLY IN JUNE WHEN THE PRESIDENT HAD INSTRUCTED THAT O'NEILL AND KENNEDY'S CONCERN ABOUT THE HUNGER STRIKE - BUT NOTABLY NOT HIS OWN - SHOULD BE CONVEYED TO THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES.

7. AS ALREADY INDICATED, I REMAIN OF THE VIEW THAT THE H-BLOCK SITUATION IS NOT ONE ON WHICH WE CAN HOPE TO SECURE A SIGNIFICANT U.S. ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT. THE MOST INFLUENTIAL OFFICIALS IN THE WHITE HOUSE CLEARLY SEE IT AS SIMPLY ANOTHER PRISON PROBLEM AND A PURELY INTERNAL BRITISH MATTER. EVEN ON THE BROADER ANGLO-IRISH POLITICAL QUESTION, IT IS NOT GOING TO BE EASY TO SECURE SIGNIFICANT U.S. SUPPORT. WE ARE UP AGAINST A PARTICULARLY CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRESIDENT REAGAN AND MRS THATCHER, A SECRETARY OF STATE HERE WHO, DESPITE HIS IRISH CATHOLIC BACKGROUND, HAS SHOWN NO SIGNS OF TAKING EVEN A MINIMAL INTEREST IN IRISH AFFAIRS AND A NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT WHO IS POSSIBLY EVEN LESS SYMPATHETIC TO OUR INTERESTS THAN THE TRADITIONAL STATE DEPARTMENT BUREAUCRACY.

CORRECTION: PARA 2, SECOND LINE, READS AS FOLLOWS
 ..HE HAD PUBLICISED MEETINGS WITH HAIG AND SENIOR PEOPLE I
 ON THE HILL ETC ETC

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URGENT
MAY 14 1968

PLEASE ADD FOLLOWING TO C220 (FOR ASST SEC NELIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR)

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CONTINUATION OF PARAGRAPH 7.

IN OUR FAVOUR WE HAVE THE NOT INCONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM CAPITOL HILL EVEN AFTER THIS WEEK'S DEFEAT FOR THE DEMOCRATS AND, OF COURSE, THE QUOTE IRISHNESS UNQUOTE OF THE PRESIDENT WHICH INCLINES HIM AT MINIMUM TO SOUND SYMPATHETIC. THE STATEMENT OF 17 MARCH WHICH REMAINS THE BASIS OF U.S. POLICY AND THE EXPRESSION OF THE PRESIDENT'S OWN PERSONAL FEELINGS DOES INCLUDE THE STATEMENT QUOTE I ADD MY OWN PERSONAL PRAYERS AND THE GOOD OFFICES OF THE UNITED STATES TO THOSE IRISH - AND INDEED TO ALL WORLD CITIZENS - WHO WISH FERVENTLY FOR PEACE AND VICTORY OVER THOSE WHO SOW FEAR AND TERROR UNQUOTE. THE CHALLENGE FOR US IS TO FIND THE RIGHT COMBINATION OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND IN PARTICULAR THE RIGHT ISSUE ON WHICH TO AVAIL OF THE GOOD OFFICES OF THE UNITED STATES.

CORRECTION:

FIRST SENTENCE OF PARAGRAPH 3. SHOULD READ AS FOLLOWS:

3. HAIG IS A GREAT ADMIRER OF THE BRITISH ROLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IN VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM I HAVE FOUND HIM TO BE NEITHER WELL INFORMED ABOUT NOR SYMPATHETIC TO OUR POSITION.
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