

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Reference Code: | 2014/32/1870 |
| Creation Date(s): | May 1984 |
| Extent and medium: | 9 pages |
| Creator(s): | Department of Foreign Affairs |
| Access Conditions: | Open |
| Copyright: | National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives. |

8/8/3

U.S. Administration Attitude to Northern Ireland

Following months of media speculation, it was confirmed at the end of January that President Reagan will visit Ireland from 1-4 June, prior to attending a summit of Western Industrialised Nations. It is clear that this visit will provide an occasion for the President to articulate his interest in the Northern Ireland problem. The President will address a joint meeting of the Houses of the Oireachtas on 4 June and he may take that opportunity to develop his position on Northern Ireland.

Background

Despite direct pressure over many years from our representatives and from allies in Congress, U.S. Administration interest in Northern Ireland surfaced publicly for the first time in decades only on 30 August 1977 when President Carter made a qualified promise of job creating investment in Northern Ireland. (Copy attached, Annex I). It surfaced again on 17 December, 1979 when the joint statement issued following President Carter's meeting with Mrs. Thatcher showed that Northern Ireland was formally recognised as a matter for discussion between London and Washington.

Concern that Administration interest in Ireland would diminish under President Reagan and the Republicans was lessened when Reagan visited the Irish Embassy in Washington on St. Patrick's Day, 1981 following which he issued a formal statement (copy attached Annex II). He offered "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". The statement undoubtedly owed something to Reagan's desire at that time to establish a good working relationship with the leader of the Democrats in Congress, Speaker "Tip" O'Neill.

Recent Visits and Meetings

Administration interest in Northern Ireland developed further with the visit to Ireland in December 1981 of the then Deputy Secretary of State, Judge William Clark, who is now Secretary of the Interior. Clark carried with him a letter to the Taoiseach from the President in which the latter said, inter alia, "we believe a lasting solution can be found only in a process of reconciliation between the two Irish political traditions and between Britain and Ireland" - language which clearly echoed Irish policy. (Copy attached, Annex III). Clark himself went further when, in an RTE interview, he reiterated the hope for reconciliation and said most Americans hope for the reunification of Ireland. The State Department sought to dilute these remarks but Clark, who is quite close to the President, has stood over the comments.

While in Ireland, Judge Clark conveyed an invitation from President Reagan to the Taoiseach to visit Washington on St. Patrick's Day 1982. This invitation was accepted by the Taoiseach, Dr. FitzGerald, and subsequently taken up by his successor, Mr. Haughey, who in a speech at the White House overtly sought U.S. support for the cause of Irish unity. The President's statement that day (copy attached, Annex IV) reiterated themes in his statement the previous year and in his letter to the Taoiseach of December 1981. It also emphasised the importance of U.S. investment in the island as a whole. However, in a number of important respects it seemed to move back somewhat from the position represented by the letter borne by Clark. In particular, it spoke of "reconciliation between the two traditions in Northern Ireland" where the letter had referred to "the two Irish political traditions."

On his visit to the U.S. in March 1983, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Barry, met with President Reagan, Judge Clark and the Secretary of State, Mr. Shultz. In these meetings Mr. Barry briefed the President and his advisers on Northern Ireland affairs and Anglo-Irish relations. President Reagan met the Minister at our Embassy and made a statement which, though it

did not represent any 'advance' on previous years, at least restated US concerns in a satisfactory manner. (Copy at Annex V - a statement which issued from the White House for St. Patrick's Day is also attached). The President also spoke with the Taoiseach by telephone from the Embassy.

Vice-President George Bush visited Ireland on 4-5 July 1983. He had talks with the Taoiseach and the Minister at which they explained, inter alia, the policy of the Irish government in relation to Northern Ireland. Mr. Bush, who said he had come "to listen and learn", described the talks as "very frank". On the Forum, he said the U.S. attitude was open-minded and that they wished to be kept informed. Three weeks later, the Vice-President greeted an Oireachtas delegation at the White House. This delegation also had talks with senior State Department officials which centered on the need for a breakthrough on Northern Ireland.

During his visit to the U.S. from 9-16 March 1984, the Taoiseach had discussions with President Reagan, Vice President Bush, Secretary of State Schultz and other leading members of the Administration. At a lunch given in honour of the Taoiseach, President Reagan's speech at the lunch consolidated his Administration's position of support for reconciliation between the two traditions in Ireland (copy attached Annex VI).

X The Minister, Mr. Barry, briefed the Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth Dam, on the Forum Report on 4 May, two days after the Report was issued. The State X Department issued a very encouraging statement following the meeting in which the Deputy Secretary "applauded the hard work and effort that had gone into the preparation of the Report". He also expressed their hope "that the Forum process and the Forum Report will strengthen Anglo-Irish cooperation in resolving the Northern Ireland problem...." (Copy attached, Annex VII).

Present U.S. Policy

The main lines of US policy on Northern Ireland as contained in President Reagan's messages for St. Patrick's Day over the last three years can be summarized under three heads:

- (i) a willingness to assist Britain and Ireland in their efforts against terrorism and to speak out against US support for violent organizations;
- (ii) a readiness to speak in encouraging terms of the need for US investment in Ireland (both North and South);
- (iii) a willingness in principle to encourage political progress and the process of peaceful reconciliation between the two traditions in Northern Ireland.

Our interest clearly remains in seeing these principles developed in a way that is closely aligned with the Irish Government's view and objectives. In particular we seek to encourage American support for the Anglo-Irish process and for a reconciliation between the two traditions in Ireland.

With the visit of Judge Clark to Ireland in 1981 we came very close to securing a pro-Nationalist tilt in American foreign policy on Ireland. Privately, Clark has stood by what he said on Irish reunification and privately also has signalled that he is well disposed to Irish policy. But there was a clear disowning by the State Department of Clark's reference to unity and even a tendency to dilute the sentiment of President Reagan's letter of December 1981 to the Taoiseach, (e.g. in the St. Patrick's Day statement 1982). Thus, although we can assume a willingness on the part of the White House to review our case sympathetically, there clearly remain inhibitions on the room for manoeuvre of those who are well disposed and who would wish to make public concessions to our point of view.

U.S. Administration: Foreign Policy Formulation

(a) State Department

Within the U.S. Administration, the Department of State has direct operational responsibility for managing U.S. diplomacy abroad and above all for maintaining good relations with States which have direct strategic importance to Washington. Political appointments at senior level help ensure that policy formulation in the Department of State is, as far as possible, in harmony with the overall ideological emphasis of the incumbent President. Nonetheless, despite political appointments, the classic role of the Department of State within the U.S. official foreign policy establishment does seem to be that of protecting longterm American foreign policy and security interests from the vagaries of electoral pressures and shifts in the ideological balance at home.

The Irish-U.S. Political Consultations held in Dublin in November 1982, and in Washington in October 1983, provided a useful opportunity to pursue our concerns at official level. Several Department of State officials visiting Britain and Ireland in recent years have also been briefed on Northern Ireland by the Anglo-Irish Section, Department of Foreign Affairs at the request of the U.S. Embassy here.

However, in making Irish reconciliation a goal of American foreign policy, the problems faced by our representatives are best exemplified by attitudes held in the Department of State. In the first place, Britain is America's major ally and still seen as such in Washington. There may be at times be impatience or irritation with the policies of individual British Governments on particular issues (e.g. with Grenada, the Falklands and the oil pipeline issues) but generally Britain has been perceived as the least truculent of America's European allies and the one with whom constructive dialogue is most possible. [The British for their part are sensitive to the American need to have a sympathetic ally in Europe and play their diplomacy in Washington accordingly.]

Although events such as the Grenada invasion prompt speculation from time to time about the current state of the Anglo-American relationship, unless it deteriorates badly, the preference in the Department of State will be against doing anything on Ireland which offends its ally, Britain.

American Department of State officials often prefer not to explain their position on Ireland as an element in the larger Anglo-American relationship. They suggest rather that America is already over-extended internationally and is perforce required to keep very firm control of the range of its overseas involvements. Thus, however distressing violence may be, it is better for the United States not to engage in the issue in a very direct and detailed way. If there is an American role (the argument runs) it is more appropriately that of helping both the British and Irish Governments combat terrorism. This non-interventionist approach, which finds echo in the language of U.S. public statements on Ireland, corresponds with the current British objective of ensuring that the United States stays out of Anglo-Irish affairs as far as possible.

(b) White House

There are of course many points of convergence between the foreign policy judgements of the White House and of the Department of State on Irish affairs. Many foreign policy analysts in the White House are part of the permanent official U.S. foreign policy establishment. But, traditionally, White House Advisers are obliged to weigh the domestic electoral ramifications of foreign policy issues and seek to ensure that decision-making on foreign affairs is as far as possible in line with the needs of Presidential image management and with the requirements of those domestic constituencies which the President is seeking to cultivate. This means that the Irish lobby in Congress, which is highly visible, and the Irish vote, which is a less measurable phenomenon, are factors in White House decision-making on Ireland.

The White House has naturally sought to play down the importance of the Irish Congressional lobby in influencing Administration attitudes on Ireland. It has been informally suggested that it would be better to deal directly with the Administration rather than seeking to exert pressure through Congress. It is certainly true that the most influential Congressional lobby, the Friends of Ireland, has been handicapped by its relative lack of influential Republican members. On the other hand the support the Friends enjoy from Speaker O'Neill must also be taken into account, since O'Neill has emerged as the chief adversary of President Reagan in Congress, able to exert considerable political pressure upon the President.

The importance of the Irish vote, as perceived from the White House, has grown significantly following President Reagan decision to run for a second term of office. One obvious constituency which the President is seeking to cultivate in the run up to the election next November is the white ethnic community (Irish, Italian, Polish etc.) Hence the concern of the President to give some emphasis to his Irish identity and roots during recent years.

Current position:

The reaction of the Reagan administration to the conflicting pressures on Irish policy has generally been to compromise - to seek to take positions on Ireland which are broadly acceptable to both Governments and helpful to the overall purpose of reconciliation. President Reagan has, therefore, (despite the State Department's attempts to dissuade him) continued to issue St. Patrick's Day statements. Yet he has never gone as far as President Carter in committing the U.S. to encouraging investment following a settlement in Northern Ireland, nor in formally raising Northern Ireland as a matter for high level discussion with the British.

A campaign has been launched to make Northern Ireland an issue in the Presidential Election. The campaign has so far concentrated on the candidates for the Democratic nomination,

X all three of whom have made statements on the issue. Former Vice-President Mondale has promised that he would appoint a "Special Envoy" who would offer the good offices of the President in seeking a resolution of the problem. Senator Hart also supports the Special Envoy proposal and has ~~also~~ said that the "only way to establish a lasting peace is within a democratic All-Ireland context". X Of the three candidates, ^{the} Rev. Jesse Jackson has made the most radical statement. The President has not responded to these statements but the State Department replied to supporters of the Special Envoy proposal that "the naming of a Special Envoy to Northern Ireland would serve no useful purpose".

While the Administration's initial response to the Forum Report was very positive (Annex VII), it has generally been cautious in its attitude towards political developments in Ireland. The administration refused to take a public position on the Northern Ireland Assembly. On the other hand it had earlier refrained from any public support for the Forum and, indeed, cited its lack of endorsement for the Assembly as a reason for this stance on the Forum. (The continuing electoral strength of PSF since the June 1983 election and the Assembly boycott by the Official Unionists after the Darkley massacre would appear to strengthen the argument repeatedly put by Irish representatives that the Assembly will not work and that a new approach must be tried. However, the Administration was unwilling to urge a new initiative on the British. In effect, this meant that the British argument, that the growth of the PSF requires America more than ever to show a sensitivity to British political priorities in Northern Ireland, continued to carry weight. ~

In the post-Forum phase however, the most positive role the U.S. Administration could play would be to encourage the dialogue on which the Government is seeking to engage the British Government.

Given the fact that the Administration is so anxious to please both British and Irish Governments, it seems unlikely that the

Administration would be willing to become directly involved in the Irish question so long as the overall situation in Northern Ireland, and the state of Anglo-Irish relations, remains unclear. Given the importance which the United States attaches to its relations with Britain, there is clearly a limitation on the extent to which it can publicly support the policies of the Irish Government in relation to Northern Ireland. However, the resumption of the process of Anglo-Irish co-operation and the development of a post-Forum dialogue, together with the assistance of the Friends of Ireland in Congress, and the strengthening of existing links with the White House, may help to draw the Americans more clearly into the Northern issue and move them towards policies closer to Irish concerns.

Anglo-Irish Section

Department of Foreign Affairs

May 1984