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AMBASSADOR (ON RETURN)

I had lunch with Howard Perlow, the new Irish Desk Officer at the State Department, on 22 August. I found some of his comments interesting as they presumably reflect the briefing he received within the State Department on taking up his present assignment.

Following a general conversation about the changing role of the foreign service in an era of mass communication, Perlow said that the State Department in Washington is at risk of becoming redundant; it is becoming more and more common for Embassies to bypass the State Department in favour of Congress and the NSC. He went on to say that the Irish Embassy is "one of the most egregious offenders" in this respect - Embassy personnel rarely seem to feel the need to call the State Department except to "beat us over the head" on some issue. Perlow added that there seems to be a mistaken concept on the part of the Embassy that the Irish Desk within the State Department should reflect the Irish interest rather than the overall interest of the State Department.

I said that it would be an ineffective Embassy that did not tap all the resources available to it. Ireland had good friends on Capitol Hill and it was perfectly natural that we should stay in close touch with them. Our contact with the NSC is probably less than that of many Embassies; however from time to time there are issues on which it seems appropriate to call the NSC directly instead of, or - more usually - in addition to, calling the State Department. I added that it was ridiculous to suggest that we expected the Irish Desk Officer to act in any way as our "agent" within the State Department. As career foreign service officers ourselves, we know perfectly well how the system operates; the Desk Officer is expected to convey the

viewpoint of the country for whom he/she has desk responsibility but cannot be expected to ensure that that viewpoint prevails.

Mr Perlow insisted on his point that our Embassy fails to use the State Department channel; we always want to "push the easiest button" and that happens to be Congress. There are millions of Irish-American voters who can exert pressure on Congress but the State Department is not exposed to the same kind of pressure. I said that there seems to be an element of paranoia in the State Department attitude and pointed to the Embassy's extensive network of contacts with the State Department and the recent political consultations. I added however that it was natural for an Embassy to deal with those who are most responsive and the State Department did not always fit into that category. Mr Perlow said that "you never try us". I said that this was inaccurate and mentioned that we had tried them that week on the question of a statement by the President to accompany the Aid Bill.

Mr Perlow said the Aid Bill was a good example of how our Embassy "pushed the button in Congress". Everyone knew that the Aid Bill was "a farewell present for Tip O'Neill" and that the money would not otherwise have been forthcoming and certainly not in the same amount. I reminded him that the President had joined with the Speaker in welcoming the Anglo-Irish Agreement and that the Administration had put its own aid bill to Congress. Mr Perlow said that given present budgetary realities, we would not have got the money except for Tip O'Neill. In the circumstances it was unrealistic to expect the State Department to give a big welcome to the Bill. I said that since he was speaking so bluntly, I would give him my personal reaction to the State Department's refusal to recommend a statement by the President. In my view it was a 'dog in the manger' attitude. There were umpteen bills which Congress adopted in a form somewhat different from that originally submitted by the Administration, but provided the basic thrust of the bill was acceptable, this did not stop the President from enthusiastically greeting those bills. The State Department approach in this instance struck me as ungenerous; surely since the Administration was giving the money it might as well do so with good grace.

Mr Perlow said that on the question of issuing a statement he wanted us to know that he had "gone the extra mile" on our behalf. After speaking with the Embassy he had gone back a second time to the Office of the Undersecretary for Security Assistance, Science and Technology, which had blocked the statement in the first place. This office was absolutely adamant in its refusal to recommend a statement. They said that finding the savings from which to make the \$50m payment to the Fund this year was proving enormously difficult. They planned to take about \$12m from Cyprus since within ESF procedures it is easier to transfer money within the European programme (taking from one European country and giving to another) than to go outside the European area. However the Greek American lobby in Congress is reacting very angrily to this and it now seems that the State Department may have to raid the funds for African countries. I said that we certainly understood the difficulty in identifying funding sources; at the same time it should be borne in mind that only about \$12m was coming from ESF in FY '86 (the balance from other programmes). The Administration had itself proposed \$20m in cash in FY '86, presumably with some plan in mind as to where the money would be found. Perlow said that whatever the legislative history, the State Department now finds itself in an almost impossible situation of deciding where the burden should fall.

Despite the abrasive edge to some of the above remarks, I should emphasise that the general tone of our conversation was cordial. Mr Perlow prefaced his comments by saying that he was only a couple of weeks in the job. (As I mentioned, this is what made the conversation interesting; given Perlow's relatively junior position his personal views are not especially significant, but since he is so new to the job, his comments presumably reflect the conventional wisdom in the State Department about our Embassy).

Mr Perlow emphasised throughout that he was speaking off the record and said he trusted that I would not cable a report of our conversation to Dublin. He said at one point "you can talk about it but don't cable it" (a comment which leads one to wonder about the security of our cable traffic).

The conversation confirmed what we have known all along about the State Department's lack of enthusiasm for the Aid Bill as adopted; if the feeling

is running so high about the \$50m allocation for FY '86, the question arises as to whether the State Department might actively lobby against appropriation of the full \$35m which has been authorised for FY '87 and FY '88. Mr Perlow did not address that issue in any of his remarks.

A Anderson

Anne Anderson

27 August 1986

cc: Mr Burke (on return)
Mr Dowling