

USA AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES**USA - General**

The relationship between the British and American Governments over Northern Ireland is strong and healthy. This reflects President Clinton's strong personal interest in Northern Ireland since he ran for President in 1992, as well as his close friendship with the Prime Minister. During the 1992 election campaign, reflecting internal Irish-American opinion, he endorsed the idea of sending an American peace envoy to Northern Ireland and allowing Gerry Adams a visa to visit the States.

2. In the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement the President used his personal influence to encourage the parties to reach agreement and agreed to the appointment of Senator George Mitchell as co-chair of the International Body on Decommissioning and of the talks process. He also appointed Jim Lyons as Secretary of State for Economic Initiatives in Ireland. He continues to remain in regular contact with the Prime Minister on Northern Ireland, and to lend his support to the continuing search for a resolution to the impasse over decommissioning and the formation of the Executive. The President has visited Northern Ireland on two occasions, November 1995 and September 1998.

3. During the latter visit, the Prime Minister paid tribute to the President for his role in the political process. He said -

"There is no President of the United States of America that has done more for peace in Northern Ireland than you. During these past 15 months I have often sought your help

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and support. Not once has it been unforthcoming. No call was ever left unmade, no step left untaken. No effort, great or small, was too much.The people of Northern Ireland owe you a deep debt of gratitude. And I say this: if this process ends where we want it to end, in lasting peace in Northern Ireland, then when the history of that peace is written, your place within it is assured.

4. In addition to lending political support to the search for peace in Northern Ireland, President Clinton has been active in encouraging economic support. In October 1998 the American Administration supported a Northern Ireland investment tour of ten cities in the States (before it moved on to Toronto). The American Administration has also recently announced continued funding for the International Fund for Ireland (see below).

5. A number of political leaders in the US show a direct interest in Northern Ireland affairs. Over the years these have included Senators Ted Kennedy and Christopher Dodd, and Congressmen Richie Neill, Peter King and Ben Gilman (who is Chairman of the House International Relations Committee). They regularly intervene on issues of interest to the nationalist and republican community, including delays in the implementation of the Agreement (for which they blame HMG and the unionists), police reform, and attacks on nationalists - including the need for an independent inquiry in connection with the murder of Rosemary Nelson. Past experience shows that if NIO Ministers and the Washington Embassy go out of their way to explain Government policies to them this can have a helpful, moderating effect.

Other Countries

6. The level of interest in Northern Ireland in countries other than the United States remains sporadic though there was world-wide positive reaction to the Agreement. Interest is most evident in countries where a significant

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element of the population claims Irish descent - Australia, New Zealand, Canada (where there are strong links with the Northern Protestant community), or where human rights issues attract particular interest (for example the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands). The Far East retains a close watch on the security and political situation, particularly in relation to resident and potential investors in Northern Ireland. The countries of the EU have become significantly more important in our overseas information effort, particularly as Sinn Fein has embarked on a programme of lobbying the European capitals. The Holy See also follows events in Northern Ireland closely. Spain too maintains a close interest in Northern Ireland, not least because of comparisons with the Basques. (We avoid drawing comparisons in public.)

International Fund for Ireland

7. The Fund was established in 1986 by the British and Irish Governments in the wake of the then Anglo-Irish Agreement. It is administered by an independent Board, jointly appointed by the two Governments. It operates throughout Northern Ireland and the border counties in the Republic. The objectives of the Fund are to promote economic and social advance and to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Nationalists and Unionists throughout Ireland. Overall, the United States has contributed some \$327 million, and the European Union 184 million Euros with a further 15 million in Euros per annum over the next 3 years. Australia will have contributed AUS\$7 million by the end of this year, New Zealand has contributed NZ\$900,000 and Canada has recently donated a further tranche of CAN\$1 million bringing their total contribution to date to CAN\$5.2million.

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Conclusion

8. Ministers will wish to continue to encourage international support for the Government's policies in Northern Ireland, in particular from the US Administration.