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FROM THE AMBASSADOR

HEAD OF THE N.I.
17 JUL 1985
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BRITISH EMBASSY,
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9 July 1985

The Rt Hon Geoffrey Howe QC MP
Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
FCO, London

- 1. cc PS/SJ/S(B) m
- PS/Bryon (US) m
- PS/M Scott (US) m
- PS/PUC (US) m
- WAB 11/7 PS/p/Branford m
- Mr Brennan
- Dr Gungley m
- Mr Lell m
- Mr Menfield m
- Mr Gilliland m
- Mr Lyon
- Mr Brackham

My dear Secretary of State,

THE AMERICAN DIMENSION OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM

1. As the moment of truth may be approaching in the Anglo Irish dialogue, I thought it might be useful for you, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to whom I am sending a copy of this letter, if I brought to your attention what I might call the American dimension of the Northern Ireland problem. I mentioned it briefly to the Prime Minister, to Mr Hurd and to yourself when I visited London last week.

2. So/S to see.
Now
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2. Let me say at once that I fully realise that the American dimension, however significant, is not likely to be a determining factor in any decision Her Majesty's Government are likely to take. Nonetheless, there is an appreciable bonus in prospect if the talks succeed, not least a sizeable American financial commitment to Ireland, North and South, of which the North would get the lion's share. No figures have been officially put forward but people concerned with the problem in the State Department are thinking in terms of \$500,000,000, to be divided approximately 75% for the North and 25% for the South. Obviously this is both highly speculative and very delicate since any American contribution must be seen to flow from an agreement and not to be a bribe for it. The down-side of a failure to agree is, however, very much more substantial, in terms of the Administration, the Congress and the general support of the Irish American community for NORAID.

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3. At present we are having a fairly easy ride in the United States. The attitude of the Administration is Impeccable, the President's St Patrick's Day messages unexceptionable and the contribution of the US Consul General in Belfast beyond reproach. Even on the Hill, with Senate and particularly House members close to electorates with a high proportion of Irish American voters, we have done pretty well over the last couple of years. I put as turning point St Patrick's Day 1983, when people like Senator Moynihan pulled out of the Parade in protest at the appointment of Michael Flannery as Honorary Grand Marshal. Moreover, among the general public there has been less and less concern with the affairs of Northern Ireland as the forces of law and order have more and more got the measure of the problem; even within the Irish American Community there has been much less support for NORAID.

4. I think there are two main causes for this. First, and I would judge it to be the lesser, is the efforts that we have all been making, from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland downwards, here in the United States to bring the facts of the Northern Ireland situation home to American public opinion. A great deal of Ministerial, Ambassadorial and official energy has been expended on this and it has produced, on the whole, satisfactory results.

5. But the second factor, and to my mind the more important, is the appointment of Dr Garret Fitzgerald to the position of Taoiseach and his view of the Northern Ireland problem and the Republic of Ireland's role in it. There is no doubt

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at all in my mind that since Garret Fitzgerald became Taoiseach his contribution to the American dimension of the Northern Ireland problem has been almost wholly beneficial. He has addressed both Houses of Congress in a helpful way. He and his Ministers make regular visits to the US, particularly the Eastern seaboard, and his instructions to the Irish Ambassador and to the Irish Consulates General throughout the US have consistently been sensible and moderate. His efforts to boost the results of the Irish Forum perhaps went rather further than we would have liked, but from his point of view they were perfectly legitimate and certainly did not spoil the overall favourable atmosphere in which we have been working in the United States over the past two years.

6. I do not wish to suggest that there is anything altruistic in Dr Fitzgerald's attitude. Quite clearly, he is very well aware that the IRA, if they are allowed to succeed are as big a menace to the Republic of Ireland, if not bigger, as they are to Northern Ireland. It is very much in his interests that the IRA do not succeed and that they are not encouraged to succeed by material support to NOIRAID from the Irish American Community in the United States.

/That said

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That said, his attitude and the general behaviour of the Irish Embassy in Washington has been responsible and praiseworthy. One wonders whether we would have had so comparatively easy a ride if Charlie Haughey had been Taoiseach. We certainly did not when he last occupied that office. And I suppose it must be a political consideration of a certain significance that Garret Fitzgerald should not be replaced in the future by Mr Charlie Haughey by any act of omission or commission of our own.

7. So it seems to me, as seen from Washington, that we have every reason to wish to continue to deal with an Irish Government in Dublin led by Garret Fitzgerald.

8. But, it may not in the end be possible to cut a deal with Dr Fitzgerald. In that case I would expect a very considerable deterioration in the atmosphere and indeed in the activity of the American dimension. Depending on the causes of the failure and the way in which failure occurred there would I think be a very considerable sense of let down here in the United States. There would be a general feeling that an opportunity had been missed which might not recur again for a considerable time. I think this general feeling would translate itself into action in different ways in different parts of the American Government and people.

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9. First, the Administration would certainly feel that we had missed a window of opportunity. Our reputation for effective diplomacy, high as a result of your successes over Hong Kong and Gibraltar, would take a turn for the worse. I do not think that the Administration would wish to take any action against us which would make our task more difficult. They would not see that as being in the American interest. It would still be the case that the United Kingdom as an ally, trading partner and friend is many times more significant to American interests than is the Republic of Ireland. So they would continue to not wish to get involved. And since the Republican Party and the West and South is less subject to Irish-American pressure than the Democratic Party and the North and East, the Administration would not feel any overwhelming need to take a more active role.

10. But it would, I think, be different on the Hill. The Friends of Ireland in both the Senate and the House would find it very much more difficult to resist pressures from the grass roots for action in support of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland. The Friends of Ireland themselves - the goodies - would lose influence and the Biaggi group - the baddies - would gain. There would be increased pressures on the Hill for public hearings on Northern Ireland, and renewed pressures in the House and Senate for the Administration to appoint a Special Representative to visit both the North and South of Ireland and to get the Administration actively engaged in a search for a solution. All this, I am sure you will agree, would be very unhelpful. Any such Special Representative would be required to take a position on events in Northern Ireland as they unfolded which would at the least be embarrassing and at the worst positively harmful.

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11. At State level, there would be increased pressure for legislation based on the McBride principles, which again would only be unhelpful. This pressure is already being felt in States with large Irish American constituencies - New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut - and it could spread elsewhere and become a national campaign. A linkage has already been established with South Africa, and that could grow too.

12. And at the grass roots level one might expect to see a great surge of sympathy for NORAID with all that that implies for the provision of funds and arms for the IRA from North American sources.

13. In brief the down-side of a failure of the Anglo Irish dialogue in your American dimension would be substantial: in terms of loss of political reputation, in the increase of general busy-bodding, harmful legislation and an increase of popular support for the IRA.

14. So I end as I began, realising that the American dimension cannot be a determining factor in any agreement between London and Dublin, but emphasising that there will be a very considerable down-side risk in the American dimension if the talks fall.

Oliver Wright
Oliver Wright

cc

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

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