

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2013/100/1080
Creation Date(s):	June 1983
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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U.S. Administration attitudes to 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. 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. (Copy attached at Annex II).

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 the National Security Advisor. 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 then 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 reiterated the theme of his statement the previous year and of his letter to the Taoiseach. (Copy at Annex IV). It also emphasised the importance of U.S. investment in the island as a whole.

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.

The main lines of US policy on 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 develop in a way that is closely aligned with the Irish Government's views 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 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 to the then Taoiseach, Dr. FitzGerald (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.

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 Consultation held in November 1982, when a high level Department of State delegation visited Dublin provided a useful opportunity to pursue our concerns at official level. In recent months several Department of State officials visiting Britain and Ireland 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 the Falklands and 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.

Thus, unless the Anglo-American relationship deteriorates badly (and currently it is showing signs of recovery from recent irritations) 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.

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 note, 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 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 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, will grow significantly if, as seems likely, President Reagan decides to run for a second term of office. One obvious constituency which the President may seek to cultivate in the run up to November 1984 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 the recent years.

A further factor which works in favour of White House interest in the Irish question is the personality of Judge Clark. Clark is conscious of his Irish-American background, and, as has been noted, sympathetic to the approach of the Irish Government on Northern Ireland. At the same time, as National Security Advisor, having a close relationship with President Reagan, Judge Clark is in a powerful position to influence US foreign policy. Another element linking Ireland to the White House in general, and Clark in particular, is the US Ambassador to Ireland, Peter Dailey, a protégé of Clark's. Ambassador Dailey has better than usual access to the White House, and was appointed by the President as his special representative in Europe on US-Europe relations.

Current position:

The reaction of the Reagan administration to the conflicting pressures on Irish policy has generally been to compromise - to seek to take position on Ireland which are broadly acceptable to both Governments and helpful to the overall purpose of reconciliation. 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.

The cautious approach of the administration can also be seen in its attitude towards recent political developments in Ireland. The administration on the one hand has refused to take a public position on the Northern Ireland Assembly. On the other hand it has also refrained from any public support for the New Ireland Forum, and has indeed cited its lack of endorsement for the Assembly as a reason for this stance on the Forum. The size of the vote for PSF in the June 1983 election 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. As yet, however, as Vice-President Bush demonstrated in his recent interview with RTE (see below, 'Bush and Ireland'), the administration is unwilling either to comment upon the Northern Ireland election, or to urge a new initiative on the British. In effect, this means that the British argument, that the success of the PSF requires America more than ever to show a sensitivity to British political priorities in Northern Ireland, will probably continue to carry weight.

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 overtly 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, together with the assistance of the Friends of Ireland in Congress, and the use of the 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

June 1983