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Reference Code: 2021/96/27

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TÁOISEACH'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES

12-19 MARCH 1994

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Overview Note

Presidential Image and Performance

1. This should be a period of positive publicity for the President, particularly against the background of a strongly growing economy. And there has been some good news. A recent ABC/Washington poll, for instance, has shown the President's popularity rating at 58%; its main message was that the public believe (at present) that Bill Clinton is much better able to manage core issues - the economy, the federal deficit, health care and crime - than his Republican opposition. Only in Defence and Foreign Policy have the Republicans an advantage; however, in a country where most people demand that the President give priority to domestic issues, this is not a particular concern (unless, of course, something goes wrong!)

2. Overall, and after a wobbly start, Bill Clinton has performed with style, confidence and an instinctive political sense of the issues that matter. The economy is surging ahead and, to put the Republicans even further on the defensive, the President has seized and run with many of their core issues, especially that of urban crime. Even on foreign policy, the President has had (strategically-selected) successes - the GATT and NAFTA Agreements, the Serbian withdrawal of heavy

weapons from around Sarajevo, the Bosnian-Croatian breakthrough, the Israeli-Palestinian accord, his personal intervention to secure a multi-billion Saudi jet deal for Boeing, etc. And while he has looked weak and indecisive on Haiti and Somalia, the reality is that domestic considerations made a continuation of the Administration's initial policies unviable.

Whitewater

3. And yet, at the week-end, a senior White House aide spoke in terms of this being a perilous time for the President. The reason for this, to put it bluntly, lies largely in the lack of common sense and competency in the advice and actions of a number of staff in the White House. As a result of their mishandling of the issue, the Whitewater affair has been transformed from a complex - and, to the public, fairly marginal - real estate transaction in Arkansas some ten years ago into a top news story.
4. While the general view remains that there may not be too much substance to the Clintons' involvement in Whitewater, the appointment of an independent (and tough) Special Prosecutor means that the investigation is likely to be protracted, perhaps lasting as long as two years. (There is, I might add, also a tenuous Irish dimension to the affair in that, responding to allegations during the Presidential campaign,

the Clintons commissioned a report into their involvement; this was researched by Jim Lyons, the U.S. Observer on the IFI, and showed the then Governor and his wife had lost \$69,000 in the deal).

Peace Process

5. The Clinton Administration has had a visibility on Ireland which is quite unparalleled. The President has praised the Joint Declaration on many occasions saying that it "offers new hope to the goal of peace". It is the focal point of Administration policy; during John Major's visit, for instance, all of the President's comments on Northern Ireland were firmly grounded in support of it. The President has also committed the U.S. "to contribute in any appropriate way to the new opportunities which lie ahead in Northern Ireland". (In addition, the Declaration has won almost universal acclaim among Irish-American groups).

6. The Taoiseach will wish to brief the President on expectations for the future and, in particular, on the prospects for Sinn Féin/IRA entering the peace process.

Adams visa

7. The President, personally, took the decision to admit Gerry Adams in the clear belief that it would assist the peace process. Despite some suggestions in the British media, there

is no evidence that the President regrets the decision. On the contrary, Tony Lake (the National Security Adviser) has made it clear the President believed he had taken the right decision in all the circumstances. Moreover, the British themselves acknowledge that the President gave no commitment to John Major when asked if a future visa application would be refused. However, unless Sinn Féin sign up for the peace process, it is highly unlikely that the President would agree to admitting Adams into the United States for a second time.

8. It would be important to reassure the President that, in very sensitive circumstances, the calculated risk he took in approving the visa was the correct one. In addition to the hope that it would help advance the peace process, the visit to New York also brought home starkly to Mr Adams the two options facing him:- (a) to be part of a dynamic process which has strong and growing support here, both from political and corporate Irish-America, or (b) to be rejected by Irish-America and, in the process, to become a progressively irrelevant figure here.

Special U.S. Relationship with Britain

9. In the light of the President's decision to issue a visa to Gerry Adams (and also differences over Bosnia), there has been considerable speculation about the status of the so-called special relationship between London and Washington.

10. The reality is that, for a number of reasons, the U.K. is increasingly viewed in Washington as an important Member of the European Union, no more and no less. These reasons include: (a) the generational factor (Bill Clinton is the first President to be born after 1945); (b) the ending of the cold war; (c) the progressive integration of Europe, (d) the shift of economic power towards Asia, and the resultant American preoccupation with penetrating Japanese and other markets in the region; and (e) the foolishness of some elements in the Conservative Party in seeking to damage Bill Clinton during the Presidential election.
11. What might be called the "niceties" of the relationship were fully restored during Mr Major's recent visit here. Both the Prime Minister and the President seemed to get on quite well; however, neither the show nor the (limited enough) substance could hide the reality that, with the generational and other factors listed above, the parameters of the relationship have fundamentally changed.

Special Envoy

12. In response to media questions arising from Gerry Adams' call in New York for greater U.S. involvement, the President indicated that the need for a special U.S. envoy for Northern Ireland had been "overtaken by events". This, it should be

noted, created very little concern in the Irish-American community who, overwhelmingly, remain delighted with the President's decision on the Adams visa.

13. If asked about the special envoy, the Taoiseach might agree with the President's view that the process has moved on remarkably since 15th December. Our firm hope is that the two Governments will succeed in restarting political talks, hopefully with all parties around the table. The Taoiseach might add that if, at some stage in the future, it was felt that a particular U.S. involvement (as a friend to all sides) would be helpful to the process, we felt confident that the President would consider sympathetically any approach to this effect.

International Fund for Ireland (IFI)

14. Last year, for the first time ever, the Clinton Administration included a provision in its budget of some \$19.6 million for the IFI. This year, the Administration again decided to make a provision, but at the reduced level of \$15 million (in line with across the board cutbacks in expenditure). We hope however that, by the time of the Taoiseach's visit, the Administration will have restored the shortfall.
15. The Taoiseach might convey his deep appreciation to the President for including an amount for the Fund in the

Administration's budget, and also for the work of his Observer on the Fund, Jim Lyons.

Congress/Oireachtas Exchange

16. In the early to mid-1980's there were exchange visits between the Friends of Ireland Group in Congress and an (Irish-US) Dáil Group. These (formal) exchanges, however, fell into abeyance around 1985, though the Speaker has led groups to Ireland in the intervening year. There is now general agreement that we should again seek to organise annual visits between the Oireachtas and the Congress, with the Tánaiste and the Speaker both being supportive of the proposal. The objectives would be to develop and strengthen the relationship, to advance the level of personal contact and to enhance awareness of issues, especially Northern Ireland. The arrangements envisaged will be informal and flexible, involving visits to Washington and Dublin in alternate years; these hopefully will begin in late 1994 with a visit to the Congress of some six to eight Members of the Oireachtas.

Pre-Inspection

17. Our talks with the U.S. to maintain pre-inspection at Shannon, and extend it to Dublin, are going particularly well at present (despite earlier considerable concern arising from a joint audit report by the State and Justice Departments recommending the closure of all such facilities overseas).

I saw the Associate Attorney General on the issue on 1st March and will be meeting the Attorney General, Janet Reno, on the 16th. The U.S. tentative thinking, following the meeting of the 1st March, is:

- (a) to maintain the Shannon facility, with a slightly reduced staff (see below), and
- (b) to open a new facility in Dublin through transferring some Shannon staff and through the recruitment of U.S. citizens in the Dublin area.

(No action seems necessary during the Taoiseach's visit).

Visa Waiver

- 18. We are discussing with Friends on the Hill, including the Chairman of the relevant Committee, whether and how best to push for Ireland's inclusion in the visa waiver scheme; this would mean that Irish people would not have to apply for visas to visit the U.S. It is a delicate issue, given that other groups in Congress (especially the Latin American Members), are keeping an active eye on developments.
- 19. Overall, our discussions have been reasonably encouraging, and we are awaiting for the Committee Chairman to come back (privately) to us on whether to move forward. It is, however, too early for any more active lobbying; the issue is mentioned here simply for information (and in case Frank McCloskey, the Chairman of the Friends, raises it).

Speaker

20. The Speaker continues to be very helpful across a range of issues, and was central to the (likely) full restoration of this year's Fund allocation by the Administration. I had a most stimulating discussion with him on the 4th March for about forty minutes on all aspects of the North, especially the peace process.
21. The Speaker was opposed to issuing a visa to Gerry Adams but, once he had conveyed his view, kept (unlike the British) a low profile on the issue. He has subsequently said that, while he disagreed with the decision, he will be the first to admit he was wrong if it is shown to have contributed to achieving peace. He did not raise the issue at our meeting.


Vice President

22. Al Gore is an increasingly influential figure in Washington. He, for instance, politically demolished Ross Perot (probably for all time) during a one-to-one television debate on NAFTA; he also gave a powerful performance for an hour on television to-day in defence of the President.
23. The Vice President was in favour of a visa for Gerry Adams. Moreover, it was his Chief of Staff (Jack Quinn) who was asked by the President to pull together all the (advisory) papers

before he made a decision. The Taoiseach might convey his warm appreciation to the Vice President (who will almost certainly be at one or more of the White House functions) for his deep interest in Ireland.

Possible Presidential visit to Ireland

24. I have a sense that the President will travel to Ireland in 1995 (the pre-election year) rather than this Summer. In addition, his overseas visits this year are already over-charged, with the danger that we might end up with a half-day "add on". In the circumstances, the Taoiseach might say that, while the President would of course be welcome in 1994, we would understand, given his schedule, if he found 1995 more convenient; in either case, we would wish to begin planning for the visit at an early date in order to ensure its maximum success.


Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

6 March 1994