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27 January 1997

COPY TO:
PST
PSS
MR. P. TEAHON
MR. S. DONLON
MR. T. DALTON

MEETINGS WITH WHITE HOUSE

Dear Secretary

1. The Secretary of the Taoiseach's Department, Paddy Teahon, and I called to see the new Deputy at the NSC, Jim Steinberg, on Friday last. Steinberg is in his early forties (though he looks younger) and comes to the NSC from the State Department, where he was one of the closest advisors to Warren Christopher. He had previously worked for Senator Kennedy, and before that in the Rand Corporation. He is also a veteran of a number of Presidential campaigns.

2. Steinberg was clearly well briefed, and asked all the right and thoughtful questions. He has the reputation of being exceptionally bright, and this came across clearly in our discussion. It was his ability, and the quality of his advice and work at the State Department, which brought him to Berger's attention. However, unlike the latter, he is not well known personally to the President.

3. Steinberg will have day to day responsibility for the North. He will therefore be taking over from Nancy Soderberg but at one level higher in grade. He has also taken over the old Berger Office which is - and this is significant in status terms - on the same floor as the President and the National Security Adviser. (Soderberg's office was one floor lower). The position also is that overall global policy responsibility at the NSC, which effectively was divided three-ways between Lake, Berger and

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Soderberg in the first Clinton term, will now be split between Berger and Steinberg. (The direct successor to Soderberg, Brigadier Don Kerrick, is being given a more administrative role).

Questions

4. Steinberg, after expressing appreciation for our assessment of where matters stood, asked for the thinking behind the Government's recent decision on continuing contacts with Sinn Féin. However, and while he listened carefully to our response, he gave no sense of his own thinking on the issue.

5. He went on to ask about the position of the Loyalists in the talks, and whether their presence there could be maintained in the light of recent events. His undoubted worry was that, if the Loyalists were to be excluded at this stage, the situation on the ground might quickly spiral out of control. In this regard, he also questioned us closely on whether we believed violence would be limited in the period leading up to the British general election.

6. The conversation then moved logically on to the British election, and the prospects for an initiative in the period immediately afterwards. Mr Teahon and I emphasised the great importance of the new Government in Britain (of whatever party) quickly taking up the reins and not allowing the present vacuum to continue. It was crucial that any tendency on the part of the new British Government to let Northern policy drift, while they concentrated on domestic issues, should be resisted; otherwise, the situation could spiral out of control. In this regard, the good offices of the White House would be vital. We also spoke about the importance of parking the talks in as

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positive a manner as possible and, in this regard, we suggested that an encouraging statement by the White House would be very helpful. While no explicit commitment was given, we felt that the NSC was very open to this; Pat Hennessy has been receiving a similar message in his recent conversations with Mary Ann Peters, as reported.

7. We delicately asked if there had been any discussion of Senator Mitchell's intentions with regard to his continued chairing of the talks process. Steinberg said he understood that there had been some discussion about the matter between the Senator and Sandy Berger. However, he added - and not very unconvincingly - that he had not as yet been briefed on this. (My own view is that the Senator might be inclined to stay on if he felt there was a decent prospect of an agreement emerging within a reasonable period).

Lake and Soderberg

8. Later, Mr Teahon and I met Tony Lake and Nancy Soderberg. Lake had been given an emotional farewell earlier in the day at the NSC; Soderberg will be leaving her present position in a week or so. While she will retain her NSC title, Soderberg now accepts that it is unrealistic for her to expect to have a direct continuing involvement in Northern affairs while at the UN. She said she would be happy, however, to try to be helpful in every way possible if we ever needed her.

9. Lake said he remained passionately committed to finding a solution to the Northern problem but, in his new position, he could not become directly involved in policy in relation to it. He lamented the tragedy of Sinn Féin not being able to deliver in June,

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and the related failure of the British to move in November. That had been a very fraught period in his relationship with London.

10. It came across that both Lake and Soderberg still had much regard for Adams. As a result, and also because of their concern and hope that violence would not get out of hand during the present vacuum, it seems they have been maintaining contact with him. Both added that Adams had told them that he regretted very much not being able to deliver in June.

11. We took the opportunity, on behalf of the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, to express deepest appreciation for the extraordinary support of both Lake and Soderberg over the years. They, in turn, said that they had fully briefed their successors - including on their relationship with Irish officials - and were sure, given in particular the President's personal commitment, that Ireland would remain a top priority over the next four years.

Yours sincerely

Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

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