

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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- 2 MAR 2000

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Mr Griffin
Not issued on
to the
Taoiseach -
overtaken by events.

CONFIDENTIAL

1 March 2000

FOR: **SEC GALLAGHER FROM AMBASSADOR**

9 3 2000

RE: **STEINBERG/NORLAND VISIT**

1. Messrs Steinberg and Norland are considering visiting Belfast on Mon/Tues or possibly Tues/Weds of next week. They will seek to explore this idea and a possible programme via a conference call tomorrow with yourself, Paddy Teahon, Bill Jeffreys and John Sawyer.

2. The question of a visit to Dublin has not been decided. Jim Steinberg, due to time constraints, would probably prefer to meet Dublin officials in Belfast if possible, but this is something which you may want to address in your phone contact.

3. An immediate and obvious US concern is the St Patrick's Day period, which they would want to reflect hope rather than despondency on the future prospects of an agreement which the President sees as part of his legacy. Steinberg essentially wants a process to be laid out which can lead hopefully to agreement on substance, and which would have the advantage of highlighting a purposeful future programme aimed at restoring the institutions and countering any sense of drift.

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4. They have no preset notions of what might be involved. Broadly they incline to the widely-mooted view that a way must be found to broaden the agenda away from the chicken-and-egg dilemma of decommissioning versus devolution.

5. One thought they may want to explore in a non-committal way is the value of a formal US engagement with the parties on an overall agenda of confidence-building, embracing both building confidence in (a) the restoration of the institutions; (b) confidence in an accommodation on the decommissioning/peaceful commitment agenda and (c) economic confidence building. Such an engagement might for example involve a session with the party leaders in Washington before St Patrick's Day, or a meeting with representatives, not necessarily at party leader level, through some ambassadorial or other proxy in Ireland.

6. The White House are conscious of the dangers of raising unrealisable expectations, and these ideas are so far internal and exploratory only. They understand that any gains in terms of enhanced openness to dialogue would be for the Irish and British Governments to build on, in the processes sketched out after the Taoiseach's call to PM Blair today.

ENDS

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