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To Bob Minnis

At DED Netherleigh

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From T N Powell

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MESSAGE:

cc Mr. Loughran
Mr. Spence
Mr. Macabe, PAB
Mr. Minnis
Mr. Taggart
Mr. McAuley
US NEGOTIATION (GENERAL)
MARRIOTT EXETER
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7 April 1992

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*Dear Graham,***CLINTON: NORTHERN IRELAND**

1. You will have seen the articles in today's British press and Brian Kirk's letter about comments by Democratic candidates Clinton and Brown about Northern Ireland at an Irish-American Presidential forum in New York over the weekend. I have watched the debate on TV and Clinton's comments were much more qualified than the bald press reporting would suggest. He was unsure of himself, had little idea what he was talking about and waffled a good deal. Brown was impossible; but he always is. We will send you a transcript of Clinton's comments as soon as possible.
2. I called on Clinton's issues staff today to discuss the debate. They were taken aback by what Clinton was reported to have said. Clinton had originally refused to participate in the forum, but criticism by the Irish American community in New York and some arm twisting from Mayor Flynn of Boston persuaded him to turn up. Clinton received good advice before the debate from Ted Kennedy's staffers and from his own issues staff. But this was the first time he had debated Northern Ireland and his staff had only ten minutes to prepare him for the discussion. The rest can be put down to his need to pander to Irish American voters in New York prior to the key primary there.
3. I handed over briefing material to Clinton's staff and went through the main problem areas with them:
 - (a) I explained how undesirable NORAIID and Martin Galvin were. They took the point but said they had no say in the make up of the panel.
 - (b) I stressed the need to put any discussion in a more general, positive framework: support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, condemnation of violence and support for the talks process. Clinton's staff agreed. He had been briefed to do this but a last minute change in the format of the debate had not allowed him to do so.



- (c) I explained that the appointment of a US peace envoy would cut across the talks process, as would the proposed UN role, which was in any case supported only by Sinn Fein. Again Clinton's staff took the point. Clinton had been referring to his foreign policy speech in which he proposed a greater role for the UN more generally. They would get across the point about the talks to Clinton and persuade him to modify his position.
- (d) Gerry Adams: They had intended Clinton's position to be more nuanced. He had at least qualified his position by saying he would "support a visa for Gerry Adams and any properly elected official from a Government we recognise". They would try to walk him away from even that by arguing that Adams should only be allowed to come if he renounced violence.
- (e) Doherty: Clinton's position on this is not too bad from our point of view. He concentrated his fire on Thornburgh and the Bush administration. He said he favoured extradition laws and insisted that the "court process should be allowed to run its course" even if it resulted in deportation.
- (f) Amnesty International/Helsinki Watch: Clinton said he would raise the specific cases with the British Prime Minister. I explained that we had detailed answers to all the allegations in the two reports. If President Clinton wished to raise them with us there would of course be no problem. Clinton did at least refer to all violence, not just to that perpetrated by the security forces.
- (g) MacBride: Clinton said he believed in the principles and would encourage Governors to consider MacBride bills. I explained why MacBride legislation was a problem. Clinton's staff insisted that he would simply say that this was a matter for States to decide. He would not be in favour of national MacBride legislation.

4. I asked the staff to register with Clinton personally the fact that we were listening to what he said on Northern Ireland. We understood the political requirements in New York but hoped he would not restate these positions more formally. The staff said the issues were unlikely to come up again during the campaign. If they did, they would ensure that he was better briefed next time. The Ambassador will also raise this matter with Tony Lake, Clinton's principal foreign affairs adviser, when he sees him next.

5. We should not take these unguarded comments too tragically. They have received no national press play here (although the Irish ethnic press will take them up). It is extremely unlikely that if Clinton were to come to power he would change policy on Northern Ireland from that followed by the current administration. The comments will however offer encouragement to Sinn Fein supporters



in Northern Ireland and here in the US. It is possible that they will try to generate another debate in San Francisco or in Ohio prior to the forthcoming primaries. We will keep a close eye on any further developments.

Yours ever

Jonathan LI,

J N Powell

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