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Confidential

6 November 1979

The Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

1. Welcome to the United States! You have by now been weighed down with briefing papers on the political and economic facts of life here but even since the last papers were prepared there have been changes which require some updating of the material. The purpose of this report is, on the one hand, to provide that update and, on the other hand, to set the overall scene against which the Taoiseach's official visit is taking place. The report is not an attempt at a comprehensive analysis but is rather an essentially random selection of points in relation to which there have been recent developments.

Domestic Affairs

2. The race for the 1980 Presidential elections has somewhat unexpectedly already moved from a trot to a gallop. During the Taoiseach's visit, at least three major contenders, Kennedy and Brown on the Democratic side and Reagan on the Republican side, will formally declare their candidacies. For the next year, the race will obviously dominate US politics. The present situation is that there are three Democrats (Carter, Kennedy and Brown) seeking their party's nomination. The Democrats will choose their candidate at a Convention in New York next August. On the Republican side there are nine people seeking the nomination of their party's Convention which will meet in Detroit next July. The nine are Ronald Reagan of California, John Connally of Texas and Philip Crane of Illinois (all on the right), George Bush of Texas, Robert Dole of Kansas and Howard Baker of Tennessee (in the centre),

John Anderson of Illinois (liberal), Harold Stassen and Larry Pressler (somewhat quixotic). On the Democratic side, most public opinion polls have Kennedy well ahead of Carter and Brown nowhere. Kennedy's lead is, however, narrowing rapidly since he indicated that he would run. On the Republican side, Reagan is well ahead with Baker, Connally and, most recently, Bush narrowing the lead each week. But it is early days. Between now and next Summer's Conventions, there are state primaries and caucuses which will make some candidates but break most.

3. While it is hazardous at this stage to predict who might win nominations and ultimately who will be inaugurated President in 1980, it is not difficult to predict that the issues which will determine the attitude of most Americans as they vote will be essentially domestic, economic issues, notably inflation, unemployment and energy. President Carter's 1976 election promises included a pledge "never to use unemployment as a tool to fight inflation". Inflation is now 13%. Unemployment is 7%. He is obviously vulnerable on economic issues and his opponents, within and without his own party, seem to be mounting their main challenge on that front.

Foreign Affairs

4. One of President Carter's achievements is that he can claim to be the first President in almost 40 years who can say that not a single member of the US armed services has been killed in combat during his Presidency. In the politically sophisticated world of Washington this does not seem to count for much. In the rest of the United States, however, there is a consciousness and appreciation of that fact and though most commentators assume that foreign policy questions are unlikely to figure prominently in determining the outcome of the 1980 Presidential elections, there is no doubt that President Carter's foreign policies enjoy a widespread, if sometimes unexpressed, popular support.

The generations that remember the trauma of World War II, the seeming irrelevance now of the costly involvement in Korea and the bitterness and division created by the losses in Vietnam quietly applaud the fact that currently no one from the US armed services is being killed in combat.

5. The main foreign policy issues that seem to concern people in Washington at the moment are relations with the USSR, relations with China and the Middle East situation. Developments in Cuba or in Southern Africa are seen primarily as elements in the US-USSR relationship. During the Taoiseach's visit, ^{the} developing situation in Iran involving the capture of the US Embassy there will, of course, be on everyone's mind. There may also be public discussion about whether or not the Senate will ratify SALT II, the second strategic arms limitation treaty negotiated between Washington and Moscow. The Senate probably will ratify it before the end of the year but many more words have yet to be spoken. The treaty is so complex that very few Senators can hope to understand it (even though they have, on average, staffs of about seventy people). A recent national poll showed that only 30% of the US people could even identify the two countries involved in SALT II. The issue for many Senators is not SALT II itself but the broader question of who really makes and controls US foreign policy. Since Vietnam, the President's freedom of action in foreign policy has been severely contained. In addition to SALT II, other instances of this containment include the following:

- the President negotiated treaties giving the Panama Canal to Panama. The treaties took effect, however, only after a protracted battle between the President and the Senate;
- the President publicly promised to avoid an unbalanced relationship between China and the Soviet Union but the House and Senate have brought about a situation which will result in China getting trade preferences (most favoured nation treatment) which are being withheld from the Soviets;

- the President has had difficulty persuading the House and Senate to support his policy of continuing sanctions against Rhodesia.

Senate consent of US treaty-making was written into the US Constitution by the Founding Fathers to support democracy. It may well do this but it has also brought a unique linkage between domestic and foreign politics which many of us who deal with the Americans from abroad do not always understand. Thus the SALT II debate is not just a critical phase in the balance-of-power struggle between the Soviet Union and the U.S. It is also a domestic clash between right and left in the U.S.

The Irish Issue

6. Over the last two centuries, the assertion of Congressional authority in foreign affairs has run in cycles. The present, post-Vietnam intense interest of Congress in foreign affairs is part of the background against which we must see the U.S. dimension in the Anglo-Irish relationship. President Carter is the first President to commit his Administration on the Northern Ireland issue and he has done so exclusively because of pressure from individual members of the House and Senate. He is, incidentally, the first Democratic President in many years who has no close Irish links, either personally or through senior staff or cabinet members. It is clear that his senior advisers have little understanding not just of Ireland but even of Irish America. Casual conversations which I have had with a number of them over the last year reveal a complete ignorance of the facts and an apparent unwillingness to acquire a basic knowledge or to take the issue seriously.

7. The essential lack of interest was, to an extent, to our advantage until now. As long as Kennedy and O'Neill agreed on what it was the President should do in relation to Ireland or the Irish-Americans, the President did it without seriously questioning and possibly without understanding what it was he was doing. The Kennedy challenge for the Democratic nomination

has, however, changed all that. Some very senior people in the White House take the attitude on Irish questions that there were and are two sides, namely Kennedy and Biaggi. Because of Kennedy's challenge, they now automatically oppose all his positions and their opposition on the Irish issue takes the form of supporting Biaggi. The fact that Biaggi has identified with violence in Ireland means little. What matters is that Biaggi is anti-Kennedy. It is also relevant that in the vital state of New York, Governor Carey and Senator Moynihan are suspected or known to be pro-Kennedy. Mayor Koch of New York is nominally pro-Carter but, like Mayor Byrne of Chicago, he could change his allegiance once he has negotiated the 1980 budget for his city. Biaggi is in fact one of the few elected representatives from the crucial primary state of New York to support Carter publicly at this time. The President values his support and is prepared to pay the price. Within the last few days, we have seen this on a non-Irish issue. Biaggi recommended that a friend of his be appointed to a post in the White House dealing with "liaison between the White House and ethnic groups in the Northeast". The friend was exposed by the media as having close links with organised crime. Biaggi insisted on the appointment and the White House has now confirmed it. Biaggi has become an early beneficiary of the Kennedy candidacy and this has obviously short-term implications for us. The decision to invite Biaggi to the White House dinner, even though our views on his involvement in Irish affairs is well known, must be seen against that background.

8. When the chips are down on an Irish issue, however, the key figure in Washington in the next year will continue to be Speaker O'Neill. By instinct, personal preference and geography, the Speaker prefers Kennedy to Carter. In Washington, but especially in local Boston terms, O'Neill has an admiration and affection for the Kennedy family. The sight of the 67 year old Speaker, on private social occasions, deferring to the 47 year old Senator is explicable mainly in terms of the Boston perception of the Kennedy 1960 victory as the signal that "the Irish" had at last made it. WASP rule was no longer ok. The Speaker has, however, a sharp consciousness of his official position not just in Congress but

within the Democratic Party. He is loyal to the letter and spirit of the office of the Speaker which he proudly holds. He is also very conscious of his unique ability to straddle all factions within the Democratic Party to which he has devoted his political life. Though his heart is with Kennedy, his head is neutral and it is both a tribute to O'Neill's personal standing as well as a shrewd move by Carter that the Speaker has been asked and has accepted the President's invitation to preside over the 1980 Convention which will choose the Democratic candidate for the Presidency. The Speaker's position and influence should continue to be such over the next year that it will be possible, through him, to ensure that the White House approach on Irish matters will not be too much at variance with what we would wish it to be.

9. The Ad Hoc Congressional Committee on Irish affairs is Biaggi's creation. It has probably a half dozen members who would share Biaggi's basic position that the way ahead in Ireland should include organisations and individuals who owe their positions to the bomb or the barrel of a gun rather than the ballot box. The rest of the 130 members have signed up for committee membership for reasons totally unconnected with Ireland. Many of them represent mainly decaying inner-city areas, or urban east coast and mid-west minorities, e.g. blacks, Hispanics. They come together under a number of umbrellas to seek federal aid for cities, to promote the interests of minorities, to counter the lobbying of the elected representatives from the agricultural states, the oil-producing regions and the new booming industrial sunbelt areas. It must be remembered that the old Democratic Party coalition of trade unions, Catholics, Jews, blacks, urban north and rural south that enabled the Democrats to rule in the U.S. with the same consistency with which Fianna Fáil ruled in Ireland has now disintegrated. Factions within the party now openly fight against one another. The Carter-Kennedy struggle is an element in the ~~Republican-Democratic~~ struggle for power within the party. Other elements include the sunbelt versus north-east and north-central. The declining old cities versus the booming new areas is a third element. Biaggi is a rank and filer in

the declining old cities faction. His colleagues do not take him seriously on Ireland but to ask a member of the Ad Hoc Committee to dissociate himself from Biaggi is, in most cases, asking the impossible. On domestic issues, they sink or swim together. On foreign policy issues, they really do not count in Washington. What impact, if any, which they might have is confined to Ireland and especially to the Irish media which are, with the notable exception of the Irish Independent, apparently prepared to take, without checking, any story given to them by the skilled clerical propagandist, Seán McManus, whose pawn Biaggi is on Irish questions. Even the IRA Provisionals have now branded McManus an unscrupulous opportunist. He is, however, a local irritant whose activities need to be constantly and expensively countered even though his real influence in Washington, where there are 18,000 lobbyists, is negligible. By local standards he is on an outer lobbying fringe which thrives on engineering the occasional minor guerrilla spectacular.

The Irish-Americans

10. Depending on whom has had the final drafting of your briefs, there are either twelve, sixteen or twenty million Irish-Americans. Mostly they are not organised into social, political or other groupings. Our records show that there are about 2,000 active Irish organisations in the U.S. Their activities vary from the support e.g. of Irish culture, games and historical research to the vague but in U.S. terms significant quasi-political activity of groups such as the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick in New York, Washington, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Some of the organised Irish relate closely to Ireland. Most do not. Their affection and loyalty to Ireland is gratifying and probably flatters us. The Irish state agencies, notably the Industrial Development Authority, Aer Lingus and Bord Fáilte use this goodwill to great advantage. Politically we must reckon with the fact that the affection rarely translates itself into an accurate knowledge or appreciation of the reality of Ireland today. There are notable exceptions but they are few. There is only one Eoin McKiernan

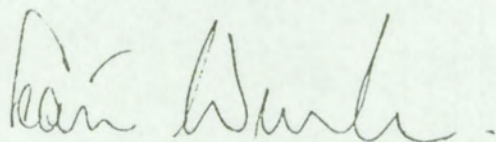
and only one Irish-American Cultural Institute. His mission to keep Irish-America in touch with Ireland may sometimes seem hopeless even to him. But he has chalked up notable successes through his publications, his Irish Fortnight in March and his organisation of student and other visits to Ireland.

11. On Northern Ireland, the brief covers the attitude of Irish-Americans in detail. I would emphasise only that the Irish-Americans are in the main well disposed if at times apathetic and more than slightly confused. It is dangerous to assume that they understand what is happening^a back home.^a It is even more dangerous to assume that they want to understand. Their home ^{is} ~~is~~ America, their future is America. Ireland belongs to the family past. Politically, many of them prefer to forget Ireland. Their interest in Ireland is frequently expressed in other ways.

12. Culturally, for example, the Irish-America links are thriving. Many of those whom you will meet will have recently seen a play by an Irish author (O'Casey, Leonard, Friel, Shaw, Beckett to name but a few whose works have played at Washington's Kennedy Centre this year), read a book with an Irish theme (Leon Uris's Trinity, Tom Flanagan's Year of the French, Tom Fleming's Rulers of the City, James Carroll's Mortal Friends), sang a real Irish song at an Irish pub (there are twelve authentic Irish pubs in Washington alone and they are run mostly by Irish born people), or heard Irish performers such as James Galway, the Chieftains, Mary O'Hara, Hal Roach or the Dubliners. The Irish country and western style musicians are well known in Nashville. Irish show bands survive in Las Vegas. On another level, Irish studies programmes are taught in 35 U.S. universities. Somewhat over 300,000 Americans will have visited Ireland in 1979. The cultural and personal links between the U.S. and Ireland are strong.

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13. There is a range and depth of real friendship for Ireland in the United States that most other countries envy. Our task is to hold it and build on it.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sean Wilentz".

Ambassador