

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2012/90/639
Creation Date(s):	March 1982
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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Attitudes of current U.S. Administration on Northern Ireland

1. The visit to Dublin from 4-6 December, 1981 of then Deputy Secretary of State William Clark marked the latest stage of the Reagan Administration's interest in Ireland, an interest which has been deeper than might have been anticipated when President Reagan took office. The text of the letter from President Reagan to Dr. FitzGerald which Judge Clark handed over is attached. In the letter the President affirmed the principles of his St. Patrick's Day 1981 statement (also attached) - support for just and peaceful solutions to the Northern Ireland problem and condemnation of all terrorism and violence. It went on:-

"We believe a lasting solution can be found only in a process of reconciliation between the two Irish political traditions and between Britain and Ireland. But, as much as our hearts long for a settlement, it is not for the United States to chart the course others must follow. If the solutions are to endure they must come from the people themselves. I wish to add a personal note of my support and encouragement for the efforts you and Prime Minister Thatcher have made in widening the framework of your co-operation to the achievement of that goal".

2. In his departure statement (attached) Judge Clark said that he had listened with care to the views on Northern Ireland of the Irish Government and that he would report this information and his assessment to President Reagan and Secretary of State Haig on his return to Washington. In an interview with R.T.E. television he expressed his hope for reconciliation between the two Irish traditions and the hope and prayer of all Americans that this would ultimately lead to reunification. However a State Department spokesman was later quoted in the New York Times as saying that the United States has no policy or position on the question of Irish reunification. Judge Clark also referred to terrorism as "a hideous disease of today's world - a disease that must be fought by civilised people everywhere." He conveyed an invitation to the Taoiseach from President Reagan to have lunch with him at the White House next St. Patrick's Day. The then Taoiseach accepted the invitation.

3. U.S. policy on Northern Ireland has developed in a general satisfactory way from our point of view over the last five years. This development has been due mainly to the efforts of prominent Democrats in Congress who were particularly successful in persuading President Carter publicly to adopt a helpful position. Two of the significant Irish-related developments of the Carter Administration were the statement of August 30, 1977 which contained a qualified promise of job creating investment for Northern Ireland and the joint press statement issued following the meeting between President Carter and Prime Minister Thatcher on December 17, 1979 which for the first time formally recognised that Northern Ireland was a matter for discussion between Washington and London.

4. When the Reagan Administration was established there were obvious dangers that the U.S. interest in the Northern Ireland situation would diminish. Indeed, it is still by no means certain that we can hope to retain completely the position established during the Carter Administration. The President is personally well disposed to Ireland though as is fairly clear his knowledge of Irish Affairs is not considerable. His interest is, however, sufficient to have succeeded in securing from him a formal statement on March 17, 1981 in which he offered "the good offices of the United States to those Irish - and indeed to all world citizens - who wish fervently for peace and victory over those who sow fear and terror". The statement was to a large extent the President's own doing. The advice given to him both by the State Department and the National Security Council at the time was not to issue a statement at all. There were two separate Reagan gestures on St. Patrick's Day, 1981. He visited the Embassy and made a very warm but largely non-political speech. The formal statement was the culmination of a major lobbying exercise which had been going on for some weeks and which used to the full the O'Neill/Kennedy lobby in Congress. At the time - early days in his Administration - the President was very anxious to establish a good working relationship with Speaker O'Neill and there is no doubt that that desire was the major factor in securing the statement. A secondary factor, however, was the administration's desire to respond to our request for

help in combatting U.S. support for violence in Northern Ireland. Reagan personally and his Administration generally have been taking a particularly strong anti-terrorist approach and it has been found particularly helpful to bear this approach in mind and emphasise the terrorist element of the N.I. problem when talking to senior Reagan officials.

5. It would appear, therefore, that the two factors most likely to be helpful to us as we seek to continue the U.S. Administration's interest in Ireland are firstly the personality of Ronald Reagan and secondly his Administration's strong stand against terrorism all over the world. Judge Clark will continue to be the key figure within the Administration in any efforts to get President Reagan to take an active pro-nationalist Irish interest. His associations with the President are close and long standing. He has shown, both before and during his visit, that he wishes the U.S. to take an active interest in Irish affairs and he is inclined to the view that that interest should be expressed in favour of the Irish nationalist position. Though he is personally very close to the President, it is important to bear in mind that Clark has not been able to influence the President on two recent occasions when we might have hoped for a more sympathetic US position. In July, the President did not help substantially in relation to the H-Block situation and in November he was not apparently prepared to deliver a speech which included references helpful to our position. Other than that reaching him from Clark, all the advice reaching the President warns him to keep away from the Irish problem. For foreign policy reasons the State Department is advising the President to take a "neutral" (that is pro-British), non-interventionist position. The National Security Council, is also giving the President a very pro-British line and there are reasons for believing that the former Director, Richard Allen is personally very anti-Irish. But perhaps most significantly, the President's top adviser, Ed. Meese, is totally opposed to the U.S. getting involved in any way in the Irish problem. Meese believes that it is a no-win situation for a U.S. President and in any event he is firmly of the view that the President has enough on his plate without taking on one more issue. Meese is by far the most powerful of the Reagan advisers and indeed is frequently referred to as the real President of the United States.

6. From our point of view the Clark visit represented an important advance towards getting the Reagan Administration involved in a helpful and constructive way in the Northern Ireland issue. Clark's appointment as National Security Director is unlikely to change the role he could play in the President's counsels -if anything his position will be even stronger now. The next key date is obviously 17th March when the Taoiseach meets President Reagan.

7. Mr. Peter H. Dailey (52) a public relations and advertising executive from Los Angeles has been named as the U.S. Ambassador-Designate to Ireland. In testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Mr. Dailey noted Ireland's important role in EEC and U.N. affairs and said he hoped to strengthen relations between the Irish Government and U.S. business. Mr. Dailey promised to work closely with the Friends of Ireland in Congress. The Senate is expected to confirm Mr. Dailey's appointment before 17 March. The Ambassador-Designate was in charge of media and advertising for President Nixon in the 1972 election, for President Ford in the 1976 election and for President Reagan in 1980. He accompanied Judge Clark to Ireland in December 1981.

Department of Foreign Affairs
March 1982

Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan

His Excellency
Mr. Garret FitzGerald
Prime Minister of Ireland
Dublin