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Mr. Gallagher,

*Mr. FitzGerald
I agree with +
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To see please, the attached note of a recent conversation with George Fergusson, First Secretary, British Embassy, who called on me to request our support in approaches to the US authorities to have a State Department travel advisory circular on Northern Ireland withdrawn.

The wording of the circular seems factual enough, but may be sufficient to deter intending American travellers from coming to the North - possibly also the South, although that is harder to accept. An American Embassy official has told me that their Consul in Belfast reports a definite fall-off in groups (student exchanges, etc.) planning to visit the North this year. At the same time, the world-wide effects of the Gulf War on travel generally make it difficult to assess the impact of the State Department circular on Northern Ireland specifically. (American Embassy were not able to give a clear picture of the extent to which "travel advisories" are in fact circulated, other than to Missions abroad. They think that airlines, travel agents, group travel organisers, et al, would get in touch with State Department as a matter of course).

X | We might consider an approach to the Americans - perhaps in Washington rather than here, as having more immediate effect - couched in less urgent terms than those the British have used, and referring to our wish to see a prosperous economy in the North, rather than referring to possible damage to our own interests "by association".

Could I have your views, please?

MF
Michael FitzGerald
22 February, 1991.

*1 cc psat
H. Nelson, POF
H. Thomas; H. Dalt
Coulter A1
2. H. Cullen*

Mr. Gallyher.

U. S. State Dept. travel advice on N. Ireland

1. George Fergusson, First Secretary, British Embassy, called on me yesterday to draw our attention to a travel advisory circular issued by the U. S. State Dept., which advises American citizens to exercise caution when visiting N. Ireland. Embassy, Washington had informed us of British attempts there to have the circular withdrawn and of the likelihood that they would seek to enlist our support. (see copy of Washington's message, 14/2/91, attached).
2. State Dept. had previously, in August 1989, issued a travel information circular (ranked lower than "advisory") on the then frequent disruptions of the Dublin/Belfast train service. The British protested then too. That notice was withdrawn, apparently, once the service returned to normal.
3. The present circular - text attached - was issued on 23/11/90, and informs intending travellers of recent ambushes and placing of bombs in the Belfast and Derry areas; it did not advise American citizens to avoid N. Ireland. The British have made efforts with the Americans in London, Washington, Belfast (Consulate) and Dublin (Embassy) to have it withdrawn; so far, State Dept. have replied only that they will consider an amended version saying that Americans are not specific targets. The British hold that this would only focus attention on the original notice and do nothing to counteract its damaging effects - to the contrary, in fact.
4. The arguments used are summarised in the British speaking note left with me by Fergusson (copy attached). Essentially

they are that (i) the travel notice gives an unfair and inaccurate impression of the situation in N. Ireland; (ii) its effect will be damaging, not only for tourism but very probably for the North's economy generally by undermining the confidence of potential investors, and (iii) it seems a contradiction of the U.S. Government's efforts otherwise, as for example through the International Fund, to build up that economy.

5. I asked Fergusson what was intended at 3 of their speaking note - "apparent singling out of N.Ireland". He said that N. Ireland is the only area of W. Europe for which a State Dept. "geographical" notice has been issued - warnings about air-travel apply to Europe generally. He agreed when I said it would be difficult to see at present the circular was having any appreciable effect on U.S./N.I. travel, given the sharp decline in travel/tourism in all parts of the world, as a result of the Gulf War.

6. Fergusson said the British hoped we would cooperate by making our own approach to the U.S. authorities to have the circular withdrawn - partly in our own interest to avoid damage 'by association' to tourism/investment in the South, partly given our wish to see a thriving Northern economy. He said the American officials, (State Dept. or Embassy) to whom such approaches might be made were very likely to be sympathetic. I pointed out that there was, as witnessed by their own lack of success so far, another side to American officialdom particularly sensitive to criticism on any apparent lack of security-warning to the travelling public. Fergusson agreed that since the Lockerbie disaster, the Americans had been extremely nervous about travel security.

7. I told Fergusson we would consider the request made and that we would let his Embassy know if we did take action.

M. H. Goreld
20/2/91

cc Parsons A-1

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Text of State Dept. Notice, 23/11/90

"Travel advisory - Northern Ireland - caution.

Travellers to Northern Ireland should be aware of recent terrorist campaigns in the Belfast and Londonderry areas. An increase in sectarian violence has included recent ambushings involving the Provisional Irish Republican Army, Loyalist Groups and the local police. In addition there have been several recent incidents of incendiary bombs being placed in commercial areas in Belfast. American travellers in these areas are advised to exercise caution and follow the advice of local authorities".

SPEAKING NOTE

1. Wish to focus on the Travel Advisory Note for Northern Ireland and not the wider issue of Travel Advisories about air travel issued since hostilities began in Gulf.
2. Greatly disappointed that Embassy's efforts in Washington to persuade State Department to withdraw Travel Advisory Notice on Northern Ireland have been unsuccessful.
3. Apparent singling out of Northern Ireland cannot be justified by objective evaluation of the facts.
4. Proposal to issue amendment will not help, despite its attempt to moderate the impact of the original Notice. It will merely refocus attention on Northern Ireland and create the real prospect of doing damage to confidence.
5. Notice's continued existence, amended or not, is bound to harm tourism from the USA, and discourage American commercial and industrial investment to the Province, to which Ministers attach great importance. There is already evidence from the Universities that harm is being done to the exchange programme between American and Northern Ireland students.
6. Notice is damaging to the aim of creating right climate of confidence in Northern Ireland, which is one of best ways of countering NORAIID and other organisations which seek to divert American interest in the Province into unhelpful channels.

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7. Timing of the issue of the Notice was curious. The overall security situation in the Province has been increasingly quiet even allowing for the recent shopping centre bombings. It cannot compare with the situation in the early to mid-seventies when it was not apparently deemed necessary to issue Notices. The Northern Ireland murder rate is lower than that of Canada and 36 of the States of the USA. Victimization rates (number of offences, eg theft, assault, per 100,000 people) show Northern Ireland to be lower than the USA, Canada, Australia and most Western European countries including the rest of the UK (International Victimization Survey 1988).

8. Please convey my comments to State Department emphasising deeply felt concern here at the damage being done by this Notice to the reputation of Northern Ireland.

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