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(512) 537-1000

## CONSULATE GENERAL OF IRELAND

400 N. MICHIGAN AVENUE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60611

c.c.

Mr. D. Nally  
Joint Secretary  
Consulate AI  
Embassy London

## FAX COVER SHEET

FAX NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: 24.9.91TO: Pat Hennessy, Perm. Mission New YorkFROM: Gary Ambro, Con Gen ChicagoBRIEF MESSAGE: Re: Peter Brooke MP

✓ Assistant Secretary  
c.c. Sean O' hUiginn

c.c. Ambassador Embassy Washn.

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THE RT HON PETER BROOKE MP  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
SPEECH TO THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FORUM, CHICAGO

EMBARGOED TILL 6pm on 9/23  
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

23 September 1991

Introduction

I am grateful to have the opportunity to talk to you today about Northern Ireland and feel very honoured to be following in the footsteps of men such as President Reagan and former Secretary for Defence Weinberger - and indeed, more recently I understand, General Colin Powell - each of whom has done much to influence recent world history.

2. I am not sure if events in Northern Ireland, in themselves, make much international impact. But it is undoubtedly true that some of the underlying tensions of national identity that exist there are not perhaps entirely dissimilar to those found elsewhere today, and which have, in recent times, led to profound changes in other parts of the world.

3. We, too, in Northern Ireland are currently exploring the possibilities for change - particularly to try to secure political stability and find a way in which locally elected representatives might enjoy greater power, authority and responsibility for the governance of the region. This is not an easy task, but it is an important one and I believe that some detailed discussions I had on the subject with local political leaders before the summer

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2

recess have given us a valuable basis for further dialogue on which we should build.

### Background

4. Our problems, like others around the world, are rooted in a long history. Some would say it goes back to the plantations of Ireland by English and Scottish settlers in the early seventeenth century; others go much further back and talk of 800 years of Anglo-Irish entanglement. But, whatever starting point one takes, it is an incontrovertible truth that the legacy of this history has been the development, over the years, of two distinct political and cultural identities within the island of Ireland. These are most sharply drawn in Northern Ireland where they have become further entwined with religious belief.

5. Since the early 1920s, following the partition of Ireland into two separate political identities with their own Parliaments and Governments, a majority of the people who live in Northern Ireland have, through the ballot box, consistently indicated that they want the present political union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain to continue. That is a clear, democratic expression of opinion which the British Government has long recognised and respects, and which provides the constitutional framework within which we are trying to find ways to accommodate community divisions and bring about peace and stability.

3

6. But, in doing this, we must also acknowledge that a substantial minority of people in Northern Ireland feel their interests have not been adequately represented within Northern Ireland and that some of them would prefer to see the island of Ireland united into one political entity. That, similarly democratically expressed wish must, likewise, be recognised and respected as a legitimate, albeit minority, viewpoint.

7. In the absence of a constitutional consensus, there is an obligation on those of us with responsibility for the day to day Government of Northern Ireland to ensure that these differing political aspirations are not allowed to impede the ability of those who live in Northern Ireland - all of those who live in Northern Ireland - to pursue their daily lives in peace and security, free from intimidation and coercion.

The present political unrest essentially began in 1969 following the emergence, a few years earlier, of a civil rights movement not dissimilar to that which took place in this country. That campaign sought to bring about improvements for those in the minority in Northern Ireland in three main areas: employment, electoral representation, and housing.. In response the then Northern Ireland Government, encouraged by London, quickly introduced a widespread programme of reform to redress these vitimately held complaints of discrimination and unfair treatment.

4

9. Unfortunately, however, the peaceful civil rights movement of the 1960's was quickly overshadowed by the violence of the more militant members of the community - both nationalist and unionist - who sought not to reform, but instead to exploit the old historical divisions. In 1972 the British Government, in London, decided that there was no alternative but to dissolve the local, regional Parliament and Government in Northern Ireland, and to introduce direct rule from Westminster. Although this arrangement was never intended to be permanent, and in the years since successive attempts have been made to try to restore a measure of devolved government acceptable to both nationalists and unionists, it is the system of Government which continues today and for which I, as Secretary of State, am responsible.

#### Anglo-Irish Agreement

10. In 1985 the British and Irish Governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That accord was warmly welcomed throughout the rest of the world, especially in the United States (where indeed it succeeded in bringing Mr Reagan and Speaker Tip O'Neill into the White House Rose Garden for a joint celebration). It remains a key element of our policies in Northern Ireland today. It is a detailed document which touches upon many areas of life in Northern Ireland and sets out clearly, for all to see, the essential facts of the relationship between the British and Irish



5  
Governments. If I may, I would like to take a moment to describe some of its more important provisions and how it operates.

11. The two Governments agree, and the Agreement recognises, that the principle of consent is the basis on which the status of Northern Ireland should be determined, and that therefore Northern Ireland will not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of a majority of the people who live there. Against this background, the reality is that Northern Ireland is likely to remain a part of the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future. Equally, the Agreement acknowledges the right to aspire to the objective of Irish reunification and makes clear that, if a majority in Northern Ireland were in the future clearly to wish for, and formally consent to, a united Ireland, both Governments would support legislation to give effect to that wish. The Agreement also acknowledges that more needed to be done to increase the confidence of the minority community in the structures of government, and particularly the security forces and the administration of justice.

12. In signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement, both Governments recognised the reality of the political situation today and pledged themselves to work together to secure a more prosperous and confident future for all the people in Northern Ireland. In doing this both Governments stated clearly their absolute

opposition to the use of violence, by anyone, to try to further political ends.

#### Implementation

13. On a practical level the Agreement established an Inter-Governmental Conference whereby the two Governments meet together on a regular and frequent basis to discuss issues of common concern: Gerry Collins, the Irish Foreign Minister, and I have now held 16 Conferences together. I am pleased to report that many constructive and worthwhile discussions have taken place in these meetings and it is clear that there has been significant benefit on a number of fronts from this substantive dialogue. If I may take just one example.

#### Fair Employment

14. One issue which has been the subject of much detailed discussion is the question of fair employment and discrimination in the workplace. As I mentioned earlier, this was one of the three main areas of concern to the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Although extensive fair employment legislation had been enacted back in 1976, the Government decided to strengthen the legislation by the introduction in 1989 of a new fair employment law. This places considerable emphasis on the promotion of affirmative action, including monitoring the religious breakdown of the workforce and goals and timetables. It outlaws indirect as well as direct discrimination.



7

15. Throughout the inevitably lengthy process of preparing this major piece of legislation, the subject was tabled on a number of occasions for discussion at meetings of the Inter Governmental Conference. I was not Secretary of State for Northern Ireland at that time, but I know my predecessor was grateful for the many useful suggestions put forward by the Irish Government and indeed for their subsequent welcome for the new law when it was passed in Parliament.

16. Fair Employment in Northern Ireland is a subject which I know to be of especial interest to many people in the United States and I am pleased to report that progress under the 1989 Act so far has been encouraging. As required by the legislation all 101 public authority employers and the vast majority of private sector employers with over 25 employees (nearly 1,900 firms) have now registered with the Fair Employment Commission established under the Act, and submitted their first annual monitoring returns showing the breakdown of their work forces by religion. The high level of cooperation in the monitoring procedures amongst employees in both sections of the community is also encouraging. At Government level, implementation of the Act is being kept under close scrutiny, with regular meetings between the Government and the Commission. In addition, we are committed to a full formal review of the workings of the legislation over its first five years of operation.

8

17. But strong fair employment law will not on its own succeed in reducing Northern Ireland's high level of unemployment. Just as imperative is the need to create new employment opportunities - particularly for our highly educated and well trained young people. Economic development, along with the maintenance of law and order and targeting social need, are the Government's most important public expenditure priorities.

### Industrial Development

18. Industrial development is a key area. We have recently again renewed our commitment to industrial growth through programmes aimed at increasing the competitiveness of local companies and at attracting new inward investment. Confidence is growing within the business community at home and overseas - proof of which is found in a noticeable upturn in manufacturing investment. In the last 3 years overseas manufacturers invested around £800 million in Northern Ireland, almost twice the level for the previous 3-year period.

19. Northern Ireland is of course a relatively small region, but it has much to be proud of:- the largest telephone production plant in the UK; the main European base for AVX, the world's largest manufacturer of ceramic capacitors; and the only region outside the US where Du Pont produces Kevlar - conceivably the most important synthetic fibre since Nylon?

20. These are all important elements in the new picture of Northern Ireland which is beginning to emerge, at home and overseas, of a region that has been vigorously tackling its economic problems and is now seeing the fruits of those endeavours. More than 200 British and overseas companies have now established highly successful operations in Northern Ireland employing around 55,000 people - approximately a half of the region's total manufacturing employment.

21. Traditionally, the richest source of overseas investment in Northern Ireland has been from this country, and today more than 30 American companies - including major multi-nationals like Ford, United Technologies, Du Pont, Hyster and McDonnell Douglas - employ around 10,000 local people, about 10% of the total manufacturing workforce. Last Year Fruit of the Loom from Kentucky announced a two phase investment plan of more than \$100 million which will provide 500 jobs in a cotton spinning operation. Harris Laboratories of Nebraska and Sheller-Ryobi of Indiana have also recently chosen to invest in Northern Ireland, and Hyster have just announced a major \$50 million expansion to their factory there.

22. Northern Ireland has particular strengths in a number of sunrise areas, notably medical technology, electronics and software. For example, the Nynex subsidiary, BIS Beecom, now

provides distance-independent software services worldwide from its Northern Ireland base. There is also a particularly close relationship between industry and Northern Ireland's two excellent Universities.

Inner City Renewal

23. Side by side with these new investments there have in recent years been substantial efforts to renew the inner city areas of Belfast and Londonderry. Sub-standard housing has largely been replaced by new accommodation, the quality of which is acknowledged to be among the best in Europe. There has also been major investment by both the private and public sectors in Belfast City Centre and much of what was attractive in the old Belfast has been retained while bringing in the best of the new.

24. The Making Belfast Work Programme, launched in 1988, particularly tackles the social, economic and environmental problems of the most disadvantaged areas of the city. This programme, which has the support of the entire public sector and which aims to capitalise on the energy and commitment of local community groups, is directed at improving the quality of life for those people who live and work in such areas and are determined to build a better future for themselves and their families.

25. Many of these activities involve people from very different backgrounds, Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist, working together - perhaps for the first time - for the benefit of their local areas. These people may cherish their different political identities and aspirations, but that does not prevent them from recognising their common problems and doing what they can, together, to tackle them.

### The Use of Violence

26. The political differences that we see in Northern Ireland today largely stem from many years of history, and differing background experiences - religious, cultural, social and economic. And while it is totally acceptable to uphold one of these aspirations or advocate the other by all legitimate, peaceful and democratic means, it is not acceptable to try to promote them by crude and brutal methods of violence and intimidation.

27. The huge majority of those in Ireland do not support violence: 95% of Nationalists within the island of Ireland have chosen to assert their Nationalism by casting their first preference votes for constitutional parties. It is only a diminishing minority, whether in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland, who have deliberately chosen another path. It is their arrogant and wholly mistaken belief that unity can be

12

achieved by violence that is still causing death, injury and destruction, not only in Northern Ireland, but also in Great Britain and, indeed, in continental Europe as well.

28. Many people have died over the last two decades because a small minority will not accept that a unity of hearts and minds can never be achieved by the use of violence. To its enormous credit, society in Northern Ireland has not disintegrated as, no doubt, the men of violence would like it to do. On the contrary, I have been impressed and often greatly moved as I have met people, right across the region and in all walks of life, who remain determined to get on with their lives in peace, and to see the community in which they live becoming a better place for themselves and their children.

#### The British Presence

29. At the heart of the division is the question of the so-called "British presence" in a part of Ireland. It is to remove that presence that republican terrorism is said to be dedicated. But, just what is the "British presence"?

30. The heart and core of the British presence is the reality of nearly a million people living in a part of the island of Ireland who are, and who certainly



13

regard themselves as, British. The presence of the British Army, British Ministers - and the very substantial economic transfer from the central UK exchequer - are all related to this reality. This is not simply a debating point made by an English politician. It has been very specifically acknowledged both by the democratically elected representatives of all the parties of constitutional Irish nationalism, through for example the New Ireland Forum Report of 1984 and, more recently, by Cardinal Cahal Daly, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, in his book "The Price of Peace" where he wrote:

"The publicity of Sinn Fein and the IRA talks of the "British presence", the brutal occupation of the North of Ireland, as if this were something extraneous to the Northern Ireland situation; something which could be ended unilaterally by Britain's simply withdrawing her army and her governmental institutions. This is to ignore the fact that there are in Northern Ireland roughly 1 million people - who have been on this island for more than three hundred years, and who form a rightful and permanent part of Irish reality - who owe allegiance to Britain; they profess a British identity, claim British citizenship, and demand the presence and protection of the British army, which they see as "their army". These rightful inhabitants of this island, of Ireland are a "British presence" in Ireland. They are a "British dimension" in Ireland. Indeed, in the most relevant sense of that term, they are the "British presence" in Ireland."

14

### Political Development

31. I have already referred to the desirability of locally elected representatives taking greater responsibility for the government of Northern Ireland and in my introductory remarks I mentioned that I had had some useful conversations with local political leaders on this before the summer.

32. It is clear to me that a prosperous, stable community with effective local political institutions would undermine the motivation of many terrorists, by making it harder for them to obtain from the community the practical and moral support they require. Determined and effective security force action will continue to be a central component in bringing terrorism to an end, but law and order could more effectively be maintained in Northern Ireland if there was a greater basic political consensus leading to wider public support for and confidence in the security forces.

### The Talks Process

33. In January 1990 I embarked on a series of bilateral discussions between myself and the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, and with the Irish Government. Following these discussions, in March of this year I was pleased to be able to announce to the House of Commons an agreed basis for talks and that these talks would have three strands to enable all three main sets of relationships to be

addressed, namely, relationships within Northern Ireland (including the relationship between any new institutions there and the Westminster Parliament); relationships within the island of Ireland between the North and the South; and the relationship between the UK and Irish Governments.

34. All these relationships are inter-related, as was demonstrated by the agreement in the talks that nothing could be agreed in any one of the three strands until everything had been agreed in the Talks as a whole, that there were trade-offs to be made between the different elements on the political agenda; and that all the participants would need to know the shape of the overall package before they could reach a firm view on the outcome of the talks. My statement in the House of Commons also referred to the need for the outcome to secure popular validation.

35. As you may know, these formal talks began in Belfast at the end of April and concluded on the 3 July. They did not, regrettably, proceed to plenary exchanges as rapidly as had been hoped. But, once round-table discussions did begin on the 17 June, significant conversations took place. All the participants agreed that the talks were valuable and had produced genuine dialogue. At the beginning of July, however, it became clear that

whole, before the end of the period which we had set aside, and that fact inhibited our ability to make further substantive progress. In the circumstances it was agreed that the talks should be brought to an orderly conclusion in the hope that this would preserve a foundation for further constructive political exchanges in the future.

36. I pay tribute to the determination and seriousness of purpose of all involved in those talks. All four Northern Ireland political parties, and the Irish Government, showed real commitment which enabled us, together, to tackle and overcome many obstacles and difficult issues. I particularly pay tribute to the courage of the local political leaders in Northern Ireland. The talks were intended to deal with some extremely difficult and sensitive issues about which people in the community in Northern Ireland, and in the Republic of Ireland, feel very strongly. I appreciate the moral and political courage displayed by all concerned.

37. As I said at the beginning of these remarks, my preliminary conclusions remain broadly positive. Although there were evident difficulties, the talks showed that the four parties and the two Governments are capable of tackling sensitive issues. I believe there is now a greater real understanding among constitutional politicians in Northern Ireland about the views of others around the table on the major issues at the heart of the communal divide

in Northern Ireland, and indeed I will go so far as to claim that there is greater mutual respect. There was the beginning of a political engagement of real potential for the future.

38. My current preoccupation is to find a way of building on what was achieved. I have had a preliminary round of meetings with the leaders of the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland and with Mr Collins to discuss the prospects for fresh talks. Progress may seem slow but painstaking efforts by democratic politicians to resolve the complex difficulties of Northern Ireland is ultimately more effective than the murderous chatter of a machine gun. Northern Ireland has been a by-word for violence. My ambition is that it should in future become an example of how to tackle and resolve the problems of terrorism and intercommunal division through constitutional processes.