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Original on Ireland situation
May 79.

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTER'S

20 July 1979

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T48/79T

Dear Mr President,

You asked me on the telephone if I could let you have a note of our position on Northern Ireland. I have set this out as briefly as possible in the four enclosed papers, one on the background, one on present Government policy, one on terrorism, and one on security policy and its impact on human rights. I am happy that you should show these papers to anybody to whom you think that they might be useful.

The essence of our position today is that as a Government we have a good majority in the House of Commons and five years in which to make progress over this problem, and all those directly concerned know this. Our present view is that we can best make progress by patient and persistent negotiation with the parties, rather than by more precipitate action. We have already taken an initiative, in the sense of starting discussions with all those with a concern in the matter; but this does not mean that we expect an early solution. There is a wide gap between the outlook and aspirations of the two communities in Northern Ireland, and it will not easily be bridged.

I know that you are in close touch with Jack Lynch, and I am sure that he understands our position. I myself met him shortly after taking office, and both Humphrey Atkins and Peter Carrington have had useful talks in Dublin with Irish Ministers during the past few weeks. We recognise that they have a legitimate interest in the matter, and in the outcome; but they recognise that the responsibility is ours alone. Of course Irish unity remains their

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long term aspiration, but they are at one with us that any settlement must have the broad consent of both sides of the community in Northern Ireland, a principle which you endorsed in your statement of August 1977. To seek to impose a settlement in the face of opposition from either community would only aggravate and prolong the troubles.

I have included the paper on our security policy and its impact on Human Rights in Northern Ireland because the subject is often a live one in the United States. We are as concerned, as I know you are, to safeguard civil liberties to the fullest possible extent: we have a fundamental duty to protect all the law abiding citizens of Northern Ireland from murder and maiming by terrorists, which is the most important human right of all. I know that Tip O'Neill and others have been quite concerned about human rights. We have done all we can to encourage understanding of our problems. We have been extremely appreciative of the efforts which he and several of his colleagues have made to reduce the flow of funds from Irish-American sources in the United States to terrorist organisations over here, and more generally to put the record straight on the "Irish question" in those circles. It is an unhappy fact that perspectives on Ireland and not only in the United States - are still apt to owe more to the 19th Century than to the facts of the present day world.

I have tried to keep these papers as short as possible; but Sir Nicholas Henderson had a very full briefing on all aspects of the Irish question before taking up his post in Washington, including a visit to Northern Ireland. You may be sure that we shall keep him fully informed as our thinking develops.

Warm personal regards.

Yours sincerely

Raghubir Singh

The President of the United States of America

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