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Permanent Under Secretary

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*PM: Minister.*

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*Dear Clive,*

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO THE  
UNITED STATES - NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State and I attended this last weekend a Ditchley Conference which brought together representatives from the United States and from Northern Ireland (including representatives of the Official Unionist Party and the Alliance Party but not the DUP) to discuss the international aspects of the Northern Ireland scene. You may find it helpful to have this note of some points specifically put privately by the American visitors. The principal US guests were Congressman Tom Foley (democrat), Senator Christopher Dodds (democrat), Mr. Kirk O'Donnell (Counsel to Mr. Tip O'Neill, Speaker of the House), Mr. Carey Parker (Counsel on Policy to Senator Kennedy), Dr. Kevin Cahill and Mr. Peter Quinn (associates of Governor Carey New York) and Mr. Tim Russert (Counsel to Senator Moynihan). As you will see, each of the so called "four horsemen" was represented. There were no Republicans.

The burden of their message was very simple. There will be a continuing interest in the United States in developments in Ireland - the US is a nation of emigrants and each national group, whether it be Greek or Irish, sustains a continuing interest in the affairs of its homeland. They all supported the Prime Minister's meeting with the Prime Minister of the Republic and were more hopeful of a peaceful development of Anglo/Irish and US/Irish affairs than they had been for some time. They affirmed that their position in countering PIRA supporters and condemning NORAIID was immensely strengthened thereby.

Speaker O'Neill's Counsel said that he brought a personal message

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from the Speaker with regard to the issue of arms to the RUC: they knew that (as Chief Constable Hermon confirmed during the weekend) there was no real operational problem here and strongly advised that it was in the interests of all those opposed to PIRA to bury the business as quietly as possible so as to avoid providing a pretext for Congressman Biaggi and others to mount a campaign in their support. This advice was supported by the others.

Speaker O'Neill's Counsel went on to say that they fully recognised that the Westminster/Dublin relationship must develop slowly over years, not months, and indeed hoped that that was the timescale as we saw it too. Again, his colleagues supported this.

There was strong support for the Government's position with regard to the hunger strike: indeed, Congressman Foley took on a US Roman Catholic priest who was in the party in brutal fashion by saying that as one with deep knowledge of US prisons, he would prefer to be in the H Blocks. Again there was support for this view.

The Prime Minister may like to know that the US visitors were immensely impressed by the Ulstermen whom they met, especially Mr. Harold McCusker and the Chief Constable: they themselves suggested that they should be inviting people like Mr. McCusker to talk to their Irish American groups in the United States.

The Ditchley Foundation served HMG well by this occasion, by bringing such an influential Irish-American group over to be exposed to Ulstermen who presented their position effectively, with concern for all members of their community and - most important of all - with a complete absence of bigotry. The impact made can be judged by the fact that, in the presence of the Minister from the Irish Embassy in London, Dr. Cahill and others made it clear that in their view the Republic was in an indefensible position over its failure to extradite terrorists to the North.

It was fortuitous that the meeting took place just before the Prime Minister's visit to the United States; it could turn out to be useful.

I am copying this to Robert Armstrong, Michael Palliser and Nico Henderson.

Yours man  
Ken Stern

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