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TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 2332 OF 19 AUGUST
INFO PRIORITY BIS NEW YORK DUBLIN

YOUR TELNO 1370: NORTHERN IRELAND: POSSIBLE EXCLUSION OF IRISH/
AMERICAN VISITORS

1. I FULLY ACCEPT THE DESIRABILITY OF TRYING TO PREVENT NORAID VISITORS FROM MAKING MISCHIEF IN NORTHERN IRELAND. BUT THE SORT OF ACTION CONSIDERED IN TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE WOULD HAVE SERIOUS DISADVANTAGES WHICH I FEAR COULD PREJUDICE OUR MAIN OBJECTIVES HERE OF INFLUENCING AMERICAN OPINION ON NORTHERN IRELAND POSITIVELY, DISCOURAGING THE FLOW OF MONEY AND ARMS TO THE IRA MINIMISING ADVERSE PUBLICITY. THE BROADER THE CATEGORIES OF THOSE EXCLUDED, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WOULD BE TO PRESENT THE DECISION IN A POSITIVE LIGHT AND LIMIT THE DAMAGE HERE.
2. FOR ONE THING, TO EXCLUDE NORAID MEMBERS RISKS ATTRIBUTING TO NORAID AN IMPORTANCE WHICH (IN US TERMS) THEY DO NOT AT PRESENT POSSESS AND GIVING THEM AN ISSUE WHICH THEY COULD EASILY EXPLOIT TO ATTRACT PUBLICITY AND EMBARRASS HMG. AS BIS NEW YORK HAVE REPORTED, US MEDIA COVERAGE OF RECENT NORAID VISITORS TO NORTHERN IRELAND WAS SURPRISINGLY MUTED. THAT OWED SOMETHING TO THE LACK OF POLITICAL INTEREST DURING THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS, BUT ALSO REFLECTS NORAID'S LOW STANDING AND THE DAMAGE THEY HAVE SUFFERED FROM RECENT GUN-RUNNING TRIALS AND RELATED PUBLICITY. ACTION BY US TO EXCLUDE THEM COULD GIVE THEM A HIGHER POLITICAL PROFILE WHICH COULD IN TURN MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE U.S. AUTHORITIES TO ADOPT AS FIRM A POSTURE TOWARDS THEM IN FUTURE.
3. BEYOND THAT, ANY POLICY OF EXCLUSION WOULD BE LIKELY TO STIMULATE THE INSTINCTIVE AMERICAN REACTION (BY NO MEANS CONFINED TO IRISH/AMERICANS) AGAINST MEASURES WHICH INHIBIT FREEDOM OF ACCESS AND INFORMATION. (THERE WAS EDITORIAL CRITICISM ON THESE GROUNDS OF THE DENIAL OF A US VISA TO DR PAISLEY IN 1982). THIS WOULD BE MAGNIFIED IF IT APPEARED THAT WE WERE EXCLUDING THOSE WHOSE INVOLVEMENT IN PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THE IRA COULD BE CLAIMED TO BE TENUOUS OR UNPROVEN BUT OF WHOSE POLITICAL VIEWS (NOT THEMSELVES ILLEGAL IN NORTHERN IRELAND) WE WERE THOUGHT TO DISAPPROVE. NORAID WOULD OF COURSE EXPLOIT SUCH A REACTION. THEY COULD ALSO BE EXPECTED TO ENCOURAGE SOME OF THOSE EXCLUDED TO VISIT NORTHERN IRELAND, TO STAGE PRESS APPEARANCES AND INCIDENTS, AND TO SEEK TO EXPLOIT THE DEPORTATIONS WHICH WOULD NO DOUBT FOLLOW.

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4. IN CONGRESS THE FRIENDS OF IRELAND AND OTHERS WOULD COME UNDER PRESSURE TO DENOUNCE AND OPPOSE ANY EXCLUSION MEASURE. IRISH-AMERICAN EXTREMISTS WOULD NO DOUBT BE ENCOURAGED IN THEIR LOBBYING FOR RETALIATORY ACTION EG. IN STATE LEGISLATURES AGAINST BRITISH INTERESTS. PRESSURE FOR RECIPROCAL ACTION, EG. DENYING US VISAS TO PAISLEY AND OTHER UNIONISTS, COULD ALSO BE EXPECTED.

5. IN SHORT, I SEE REAL RISKS IN CHANGING OUR PRESENT POLICY TO ONE WHICH HOWEVER CAREFULLY PRESENTED COULD TOO EASILY BE DISTORTED HERE TO SMACK OF SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM AND VICTIMISATION. IF APPLIED ON SUCH A WIDE SCALE AS ENVISAGED IN YOUR TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE, THIS COULD BE SEEN AS AN ADMISSION OF WEAKNESS ON OUR PART.

6. IF, HOWEVER, MINISTERS DECIDE THAT ACTION OF SOME KIND IS NECESSARY, THE DISADVANTAGES I FORESEE WOULD NOT APPLY FULLY IF IT WERE CONFINED TO THE EXCLUSION OF CONVICTED GUNRUNNERS. EVEN THIS MIGHT ATTRACT INITIAL PRESS CRITICISM SINCE THEY WOULD PRESUMABLY HAVE SERVED THEIR TERM. BUT SUCH CRITICISM COULD BE FIRMLY REBUTTED ON THE GROUND THAT THOSE CONCERNED, GIVEN THE SUPPORT THEY HAD DEMONSTRABLY PROVIDED TO TERRORIST VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND POSED A CLEAR THREAT TO OUR NATIONAL SECURITY. THIS ARGUMENT APPLIED TO CONVICTED GUN-RUNNERS, BUT WOULD BE LESS CONVINCING TO AMERICAN OPINION IN RESPECT OF BROADER CATEGORIES. WE MIGHT ALSO DRAW A PARALLEL WITH US REGULATIONS WHICH PROHIBIT THE ISSUE OF A VISA TO PERSONS CONVICTED OF CERTAIN OFFENCES.

7. FLANNERY AND HIS CO-DEFENDENTS POSE A PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN THAT THEY WERE NOT CONVICTED (ALBEIT ON THE BASIS OF A TOTALLY SPURIOUS DEFENCE). THERE IS THEREFORE A RISK THAT THEIR EXCLUSION COULD BE PRESENTED AS A CHALLENGE BY A FOREIGN GOVERNMENT TO THE US COURTS AND AN ATTEMPT TO RECTIFY THE LATTER'S SHORTCOMINGS BY POLITICAL ACTION. THIS WOULD NOT HELP IN FUTURE US COURT CASES.

8. AS FAR AS DEFINITION OF THE CATEGORIES IN TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE IS CONCERNED, (A) IS STRAIGHTFORWARD. ON (B) WE AND BIS COULD PROBABLY COMPILE A FAIRLY FULL LIST OF NORAID OFFICERS, CULLED FROM THE PRESS AND NORAID'S SUBMISSIONS UNDER THE FOREIGN AGENTS' REGISTRATION ACT. IT WOULD THEN HAVE TO BE DECIDED WHETHER ALL OR SOME OF THOSE LISTED SHOULD BE EXCLUDED AND ON WHAT CRITERIA. ON (C) WE KNOW OF NO NORAID MEMBERSHIP LIST.

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THEY CLAIM A NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP OF AROUND 5,000 WITH A FURTHER 30,000 SUPPORTERS. NORAID HAVE PUBLISHED LISTS OF CONTRIBUTORS. BUT (EVEN IF CORRECTLY IDENTIFIED) CONTRIBUTORS ARE NOT NECESSARILY MEMBERS, STILL LESS REPRESENTATIVES.

9. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION ON FLANNERY'S RUMOURED VISIT TO NORTHERN IRELAND BUT WILL REPORT ANYTHING WE PICK UP.

THOMAS

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