



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

PO/83/1

22 December 1983

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Prime Minister

John [unclear]

DMS
22/12Possible Visit to the Irish Republic by President Reagan

We have been warned by HM Embassy, Washington, that President Reagan has in principle accepted an invitation to visit the Irish Republic. The Embassy are in close touch with the State Department and understand that no dates have been discussed. But the Embassy have pointed out that the only obvious opportunity for the President to make such a visit would be at the time of the London Economic Summit next June. It is therefore possible that he might visit the Republic on his way to the Summit, only a week or so before the European Parliament elections.

It is by no means certain that President Reagan will take up the Irish invitation, not least because of the tightness of his schedule during an election year, but a visit to the Republic of Ireland by an American President would pose obvious risks in relation to Northern Ireland. The President would find it difficult not to refer publicly to the situation in Northern Ireland and would come under pressure from the Irish-American lobbies. At the same time the Irish Government might well seek some statement of support from him for whatever policy they adopt following the report of the New Ireland Forum. At the very least, a visit to Ireland by the President would stimulate American public interest in the Northern Ireland situation. We have therefore discussed with Sir Oliver Wright whether we should intervene in an attempt to discourage the President from taking up the Irish invitation.

I agree

Sir Oliver has advised that it would be a mistake to do so, on the grounds that this would seem unnecessarily defensive, that it would not be understood by the White House and that the fact of an intervention would get back to the Irish, with serious consequences for Anglo-Irish relations. At the same time, the Ambassador has said that a visit to Ireland by President Reagan might not necessarily be harmful or difficult for us. Sir Oliver has pointed out that the

/President



President has so far taken a helpful line on Northern Ireland - as reflected in his St Patrick's Day statements - and that he has refused to become involved in what he regards as a UK internal problem. We are inclined to accept the Ambassador's advice and think that if the visit goes ahead it need not necessarily turn out badly for us.

Nonetheless, we cannot afford to be complacent about the risks associated with a visit to the Republic by an American President and we should need to consider, if the visit were to take place, what steps we could take to ensure that the President did not deviate from his helpful line. It would, for example, be for consideration whether the Prime Minister should send a personal message to the President reminding him of the acute sensitivity surrounding the Northern Ireland problem. The exact line that it would be appropriate to take would depend on the circumstances prevailing at the time.

The Embassy are keeping a close eye on the matter and will inform us of any developments.

For your background information, two American Presidents have visited the Republic while in office, President Kennedy in June 1963 and President Nixon in October 1970. Neither visit appears to have given rise to any serious difficulties for us, although President Nixon's visit coincided with the beginning of the most recent phase of trouble in Northern Ireland.

Copies of this letter go to John Lyon at the Northern Ireland Office and Richard Hatfield in Sir Robert Armstrong's office.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R B Bone', with a horizontal line underneath.

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

28 December 1983

POSSIBLE VISIT TO THE IRISH REPUBLIC BY PRESIDENT REAGAN

Thank you for your letter of 22 December to John Coles. The Prime Minister has seen this and noted its contents. She agrees with Sir Oliver Wright that it would be a mistake to intervene in an attempt to discourage the President from taking up the invitation from the Irish Government.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

MR. D. BARCLAY

Roger Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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