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SUBJECT: TAOISEACH'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

SUMMARY

1. Bruton visited Washington on 8 - 11 September for meetings with Clinton and Congressional leaders. Addressed a joint meeting of Congress.

DETAIL

2. Soderberg (NSC) gave us an account of Bruton's meeting on the evening of 9 September with the President. On Northern Ireland, Bruton had been quite encouraging about the resumption of the talks: there were good contacts between Hume and the Unionists; and it looked as though the squabbles between the Loyalists and the mainstream Unionists were going to be resolved. Clinton and Bruton had discussed at length prospects for a new IRA cease-fire - and agreed completely that it was a sine qua non for new political contacts with Sinn Fein. In a CNN interview Bruton said he thought a resumption of the ceasefire likely, but admitted he had no hard evidence: it was a matter of his "political instincts". (Comment: Soderberg also mentioned that the White House had been in touch with Adams, as well as with Hume and other players. Although Adams was equivocal on most things, he claimed he was close to being able to deliver a new ceasefire.)

3. Clinton and Bruton also covered EU business. They had not been able to agree a date for the President's visit in December - he hadn't even decided whether he was going to the OSCE meeting in Lisbon on 2 December. But if he did, he would probably go to Ireland for an EU/US summit on the 4th. Bruton clearly spoke softly on Helms/Burton. Soderberg said that he agreed that, in order to give the President some reason again

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*File
John 13/9*

*Prime minister
To note particularly that
Clinton may go to Dublin
in early December. We
should try to get him to
stop here too, if you
remain opposed to
going to Washington
yourself! John 12/9.*

to suspend the application of Title III in January, the EU needed to come up with a credible plan for promoting democracy in Cuba.

4. Bruton's (poorly-attended) address to Congress was, I thought, admirable. It contained no criticisms of HMG, and the more extreme Sinn Fein supporters in the House would plainly have preferred a greener text. Instead he stressed that:

(a) the IRA must restore the ceasefire: "all of us want the IRA to stop for good. True negotiations can only take place in an atmosphere of genuine peace... That means a cessation of violence by the IRA that will hold in all circumstances. I know I have the full support of the United States Congress for that vital objective". (Loud applause);

(b) one musn't live in the past "We in Ireland can admire our history, we can regret aspects of it too, but we certainly cannot erase it. We do not owe our history any debts. We cannot relive our great grandparents' lives for them. We are not obliged to take offence on their behalf, any more than we are obliged to atone for their sins";

(c) agreement was now within reach and the parties must rise to the challenge: "The Irish and British Governments were able to agree last year on a detailed model or framework of a possible agreement. The parties can add to that, or subtract from it, they can come up with an entirely new or better draft. But the core problems that the two Governments have plainly identified must be tackled and overcome by this present generation of political leaders".

COMMENT

5. (b) strikes me as a particularly apt message to the Irish diaspora.

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