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SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: NORTH REVIEW

SUMMARY

1. Low-key U.S. reaction: White House welcomes prospect of Parades Commission; factual (and scant) press reporting.

DETAIL

2. During his regular press briefing on 31 January, the White House spokesman delivered a prepared statement: "The North Report offers valuable insights and recommendations to deal with the very controversial and divisive questions of parades and marches in Northern Ireland, particularly during the summer when most of the marches occur. The establishment of an independent Parades Commission is an important and valuable recommendation. We are pleased the British Government is moving to set that type of commission up. We very much hope that it can be up and running in time for the marching season this summer; so we don't see a repeat of some of the violence that we witnessed last summer. Last summer's events cost the people of Northern Ireland dearly, both economically and politically. It is vital for the future progress of the Northern Ireland peace process that new ways be found to bring these communities together and to deepen and nurture a process that holds so much hope for the people of Northern Ireland".

3. In a follow-up question, the Irish Times correspondent suggested HMG had postponed the most vital part of the report "which is that the police not be given powers to judge about the parades". McCurry brushed aside the idea: "The British Government itself is better placed to describe its rationale for implementing the recommendations of the North Report... Others will evaluate its effectiveness. We saw the utility in

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at least moving to set up the independent commission".

4. When we briefed Steinberg (new No 2 at NSC) his only reaction was to wonder whether it might be easier to take difficult decisions now (and shelter behind the Review's recommendations) rather than wait until after a further process of consultation (when there would be less political cover).

5. Senator Kennedy issued a rather sharper statement: "I'm surprised and disappointed by the British Government's inability to deal with this issue in a timely way, and give the proposed independent Parades Commission the full powers to deal effectively with controversial parades. The ongoing delay means that adequate steps to avoid further violence may not be in place before the marching season begins. I hope the British Government will reconsider this position and immediately give the Commission the powers it obviously needs".

6. The report is too detailed to interest most U.S. newspapers: so far only short factual articles in the New York and Boston press.

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