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SUBJECT: ROISIN MCALISKEY

SUMMARY

1. Intense public interest in whether McAliskey will be allowed to keep her baby.

DETAIL

2. In the run-up to St Patrick's Day, Irish America is focussing more and more on the treatment of Ms McAliskey. There have been numerous press articles; there was a small demonstration here on 8 March; and I get about 100 letters a day. I have been replying robustly to criticisms of denial of bail, medical and exercise facilities, etc etc; but the press (and the letter-writers) are increasingly concentrating on the issue of whether she will be allowed to keep her baby. If the allegation that she will have to give it up were to prove correct, we would have a serious PR problem, including with those normally sympathetic to our positions on terrorism, law/order, and Northern Ireland.

3. Plainly our image abroad can't be the decisive consideration. But I hope it will be taken into account. If we were to decide now that the baby could stay with the mother, we could immediately turn the tables on our critics, and recover majority support.

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