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British Embassy
Washington

2 May 1997

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*cc JP
+ backfile.
There will certainly
be lots of pressure of this
kind (ie as at +)*

Dear David,

NORTHERN IRELAND: US HOPES OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT, AND PROPOSALS FOR CONTACTS WITH IT

1. Our contacts here are determined that the election outcome should impart new momentum to the peace process. They assure us that the US stands ready to do all it can to help bring that about. We have replied that we share their hope, but the key to progress is in an unequivocal IRA cease-fire. That is not in the new Government's gift, whatever its majority, and however imaginative its approach. We look to the US to keep up maximum pressure on Sinn Fein/IRA. Sinn Fein now has two seats, won on a peace manifesto: let them show that they meant it.
2. A recommendation has been put to Sandy Berger that he should put in early phone calls to John Holmes and to the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, urging that the dynamic imparted by the election should not be wasted. This is the time for a bold stroke: (to "take a risk for peace", as they often put it). The US accept (genuinely) that the essence of any deal must be an unequivocal IRA cease-fire. They continue to believe, however, that Westminster arithmetic was the real reason for what they saw as a failure by HMG to drive the process forward in recent months. The new British Government could do more to precipitate a cease-fire by giving assurances (ideally in public) that if such a cease-fire was declared Sinn Fein would be invited into talks by a set date, or at least within a specified period. This would be the burden of Berger's song, if he followed the script which has been put to him.
3. Mary-Ann Peters say that the NSC has lost all patience with the Hume-Adams process which has "grown too many barnacles", and is now dead in the water. Berger is being urged to recommend a new approach.
4. Another NSC recommendation to Berger is that he should call Dublin to pass the message that their election must not provide

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an excuse for delay on the Irish side. The Americans would say that they expect the Irish to swing behind any initiative from the new British Government, even if they were on the threshold of their own election.

5. State, for their part, are making no recommendations for early contacts on Northern Ireland by Mrs Albright (or senior officials).

6. The President has, of course, already spoken to Mr Blair by telephone. They are likely to see one another in the margins of the President's visit to Europe at the end of this month (whether or not Mr Clinton makes a half day side visit to London). But Northern Ireland is unlikely to be the central feature of their first contacts.

7. Meanwhile Senator Mitchell is keen to make early contact with the Prime Minister, and with the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Ambassador recommends that Mr Blair should accommodate this request if at all possible. One option is that Senator Mitchell might call into London on the morning of Monday 2 June, proceeding to Dublin that afternoon, before resuming the talks in Belfast next day. Alternatively, he has said he could be in London on Tuesday 20 May, or on the morning of Wednesday 21 May. He has engagements in Paris for the rest of that day, and on Thursday 22 May, but could also be in London on Friday 23 May if that suited the Prime Minister.

8. Please let me know whether the PM could see Senator Mitchell, and, if so, whether any of these dates would work. If none of them fit I have no doubt that Senator Mitchell would change his plans to fit in with whatever the Prime Minister could offer. As we reported before the election, we see advantage in the earliest possible contacts with the Americans on the Irish issue, and at a high level. There is a danger that their thirst for early movement in the peace process will lead to recriminations if their hopes are frustrated, and if they have not been brought into the confidence of the new Government.

yours ever,

Anthony

Anthony Garry

cc: PS/S of S NI
PS/No 10
Mr Lamont, RID
Mr Priestley, NAD
Mr Clarke, Dublin
Mr Reid, BIS, New York
Mr Poston, Boston

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