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FM WASHINGTON 170115Z MAR 82

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 891 OF 16 MARCH .

INFO IMMEDIATE NIO LONDON, NIO BELFAST, DUBLIN

PRIORITY BIS NEW YORK

MY TELNO 818: NORTHERN IRELAND: ST PATRICK'S DAY STATEMENT

1. I CALLED ON JUDGE CLARK THIS MORNING. I GAVE HIM AN ACCOUNT OF MR PRIOR'S THINKING AND SAID THAT, AS HE WOULD KNOW FROM SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HAD BEEN SAID IN PUBLIC BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND PARTIES, MR PRIOR'S DISCUSSIONS WERE AT A VERY DELICATE STAGE. WE WERE ANXIOUS THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE SAID AT THE PRESIDENT'S LUNCH FOR THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER WHICH COULD MAKE MR PRIOR'S TASK STILL MORE DIFFICULT. THE FACT, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT JOHN HUME WOULD BE AT THE LUNCH MIGHT BE INTERPRETED IN NORTHERN IRELAND AS AN INDICATION THAT THE PRESIDENT FAVOURED THE SDLP. HUME MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO THINK THAT THE AMERICANS COULD OFFER SOME MORE TEMPTING ROUTE THAN MR PRIOR'S.

2. CLARK SAID THAT HE WAS AWARE HOW SENSITIVE THE WHOLE ISSUE WAS. HE KNEW THE BACKGROUND AND THE LAST THING THE WHITE HOUSE WANTED TO DO WAS TO INTERFERE IN WHAT JIM PRIOR WAS DOING. THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT WOULD NOT GO BEYOND WHAT HE HAD SAID IN PREVIOUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. HE WOULD URGE RECONCILIATION BUT WOULD MAKE NO MENTION OF REUNIFICATION. HE WOULD ENCOURAGE INWARD INVESTMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND DISCOURAGE SUPPORT FOR TERRORIST VIOLENCE. THE PRESIDENT MIGHT ALSO MAKE A REFERENCE TO THE DOWNWARD TREND IN TERRORIST VIOLENCE AS AN INDICATION THAT THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND WAS IMPROVING. AS FOR JOHN HUME (WHO NOW SPENT SO MUCH TIME IN WASHINGTON THAT HE HAD ALMOST BECOME A WASHINGTON LOBBYIST) HE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT THE OCCASION WAS INTENDED AS A LIGHT, SOCIAL ONE, AND THAT NO POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE SHOULD BE READ INTO HIS INVITATION. NONETHELESS, CLARK ADDED, HE HAD TRIED TO HAVE HUME'S NAME TAKEN OFF THE GUEST LIST. HOWEVER, HE HAD DISCOVERED TOO LATE THAT THE INVITATION HAD ALREADY GONE OUT. HE HAD TRIED, BUT NOT SUCCEEDED, TO HAVE IT INTERCEPTED.

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3. SINCE MY CALL ON CLARK WE HAVE SPOKEN TO HIS STAFF TO SAY THAT, IN THE LIGHT OF YESTERDAY'S CAR BOMBINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, THE PRESIDENT MIGHT WISH TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT HE SAID ABOUT A DIMINUTION IN TERRORIST VIOLENCE. THE WHITE HOUSE SAY THAT ALL THE PRESIDENT INTENDS TO DO IS TO REFER TO THE FACT THAT THE GENERAL TREND OF VIOLENCE HAS BEEN DOWNWARD.

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