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March 17, 1976

Nessen

COSGRAVE VISIT

The President is meeting in the Oval Office with Prime Minister Cosgrave of Ireland. As you know, the Prime Minister is here in connection with the Bicentennial. We expect to provide you with a readout or communique after the conclusion of the meeting.

F.Y.I. Attached are Q's and A's on the Prime Minister's visit as well as language on our policy toward the conflict in Northern Ireland.

You may wish to put the communique out after the lunch break, as it will be a joint release and requires time to coordinate.

March 17, 1976

Contingency Q's and A's for President's Meeting
with Irish Prime Minister Cosgrave
March 17, 1976

Q: How long has Cosgrave been Prime Minister?

A: Since March, 1973.

Q: Why is the Prime Minister visiting the U.S. at this time?

A: As I indicated before, the visit is in connection with our Bicentennial year. March 17 -- St. Patrick's Day -- seemed a particularly appropriate time and was convenient for both leaders.

Q: Is this Prime Minister Cosgrave's first visit to the U.S.?

A: No, he and Mrs. Cosgrave have been in this country before, but it is his first visit as Prime Minister.

Q: Have Prime Minister Cosgrave and the President met?

A: Yes, they met in 1974 when Mr. Ford was Vice President.

Q: When was the last visit by an Irish Prime Minister?

A: In March 1971, when then Prime Minister Jack Lynch was here on an unofficial visit. The last official visit by an Irish Prime Minister was paid by Sean Lemass (Shawn Le-MASS) in 1963.

Q: What is the Prime Minister's itinerary?

A: After leaving Washington, he will visit Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Boston.

Q: What was the Prime Minister's assessment of the Northern Ireland situation?

A: I did not participate in the meeting and so do not have details of the talks. As I said however, both Governments hope for an end to bloodshed and the establishment of peace with justice.

Q: Did the Prime Minister ask the US Government to involve itself in the problem?

A: He did not.

Q: What is US policy on the Northern Ireland situation?

A: Our long-standing policy is one of specifically avoiding direct involvement, since we do not believe this would serve any useful purpose. In our judgment, a solution to this centuries-old dispute can come about only through the efforts of the parties directly concerned.

Q: So, in other words, we are standing aside?

A: We are obviously very concerned about the tragic situation in Northern Ireland. As a people, we have close ties of friendship and kinship with all those involved -- Irish, British and the people of Ulster alike. We therefore have offered and will continue to offer moral support and encouragement to all those of good will who are working to break the circle of violence.

Q: Would the President approve Congressional hearings on Northern Ireland as some are urging?

A: The decision on whether hearings should be held on any given subject is, of course, a matter for the Congress or for its respective committees to make. However, none of the parties directly concerned in Northern Ireland has asked the US to take any action in this matter. We believe that unsolicited outside efforts would be inopportune and have therefore an unfavorable impact.

Q: We have heard a lot about Americans contributing funds and guns to terrorists in Northern Ireland. Did the Prime Minister raise that subject?

A: As you may know, ministers of the Irish Government have publicly called on private persons in the US to stop contributing funds to support terrorism in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government fully understands US policy, position and laws. Wherever there is evidence of illegal involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland by persons in the US, the US Government has enforced, and will continue to enforce, the laws against such involvement to the very best of its ability.

Q: What about gun running?

A: Where there is evidence indicating illegal procurement and shipment of weapons, the Department of Justice has sought indictments of the persons involved and a number of convictions have been obtained.

U. S. - SOVIET JOINT COMMISSIONS POSTPONEMENTS

Although the State Department covered questions of the postponement or failure to schedule three U. S. - Soviet Joint Commissions meetings on Energy, Housing and Commerce, you may want to respond to the following questions:

Q. Can you tell us about the original scheduling of these three Commission meetings and for how long they have been delayed?

A. As the State Department explained yesterday:

1.) The Joint U. S. - Soviet Commercial Commission meeting had not been scheduled. It may perhaps be held in the second half of the year.

2.) The Joint Energy Committee meeting was scheduled to begin in mid-March and there is no re-scheduling date at present.

3.) The Joint Committee on Housing was planned for May and is postponed without a specific reschedule date.

F. Y. I. The State Department was not asked, but was prepared to say if asked that we hope the Joint Economic Commission's working Committee of experts will still meet this Spring. While you should not say so from the podium, you may wish to mention the above to individual reporters who ask about the postponements.

Q. Did the President approve the postponement decisions? How and when? Did he specifically authorize that the meetings be delayed?

A. The President approved the decisions to postpone the Commission meetings, but I am not going to get into a discussion of the internal Administration decision making processes.

Q. How were the Soviets informed and when? Were they told that this was a "signal" about our attitude on their actions in Angola?

A. The Soviet Union was informed of our decisions, but I am not going to get into a discussion of our diplomatic exchanges. The decision to postpone the meetings was made recently and the Soviets were informed by the U. S. government.

Q. What do the Soviets have to do in our view to prompt the rescheduling of the meetings?

A. As the State Department implied yesterday, in view of recent Soviet actions, we want time to assess the trend in U. S. -Soviet relations. At this time, we are not prepared to say what the next steps might be.

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Questions on SALT and other aspects of U.S.-Soviet bilateral relations were addressed at State yesterday, and additional inquiries should be referred there.

March 17, 1976

U.S.-SOVIET OIL TALKS

Since January 26, U. S. and Soviet delegations, headed by Under Secretary of State Charles W. Robinson on the U. S. side and by Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade Nikolai G. Osipov on the Soviet side, have been negotiating an oil agreement.

Under the terms of a letter of intent signed last October 20 by Under Secretary Robinson and Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade Nikolai Patolichev, the annual sale of 10 million tons of Soviet crude oil and refined products over a five-year period was contemplated.

The letter also envisioned that a portion of the oil and refined products would be transported to the United States on U.S.-flag tankers which carry grain to the Soviet Union.

The two sides have not yet been able to agree on a formula for shipping rates considered mutually beneficial to their economic interests and have agreed to recess the negotiations in order to afford their governments further time in which to consider their positions.

They expect to resume negotiations in the near future.

* * *

The above announcement was made at State yesterday. They will emphasize as should we that the "recess" of these talks is unrelated to the decision to postpone the meetings of the three US-Soviet Commissions. Inquiries on the details of the talks should be referred to State.