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'A log-rolling, Irish-American politician, out to raise votes in the United States': Tip O'Neill and the Irish dimension of Anglo-American relations, 1977-1986

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**‘A log-rolling, Irish-American politician, out to raise votes in
the United States’: Tip O’Neill and the Irish dimension of
Anglo-American relations, 1977-1986**

Abstract

The Irish dimension of Anglo-American relations is a relatively marginalised aspect of the historiography of transatlantic studies. Historians have focused on the role of the Clinton administration in the Northern Ireland ‘peace process’ but previous American contributions also warrant attention. As the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Thomas P. ‘Tip’ O’Neill was one of the most prominent Irish-American politicians. This paper will demonstrate O’Neill’s attempts to ensure that the American contribution to the Anglo-Irish process steadily increased, despite the transition from arguably his natural political ally in the President Jimmy Carter administration to President Ronald Reagan in 1981. O’Neill’s interest in Northern Ireland and position as speaker helped ensure that Carter’s promise of financial aid to Northern Ireland in 1977 following progress in the political process was fulfilled in March 1986.

Introduction

On 28 March 1979, Jim Callaghan’s Labour government narrowly lost a ‘no confidence’ debate in the House of Commons. This defeat prompted a general election campaign that lasted for over a month. On 3 May, Margaret Thatcher’s

Conservative Party won the election and she would remain prime minister for over eleven years. The campaign was briefly interrupted by the visit of Thomas P. ‘Tip’ O’Neill, Jr. (D-MA) – the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives – to London as part of a Congressional delegation’s expedition to Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (Ireland). Due to the speaker’s keen interest in Northern Ireland, his meetings with senior British and Irish politicians were potentially controversial. The controversy that emerged from O’Neill’s remarks about the attitude of the British government to Northern Ireland – as will be discussed below, he claimed that they treated Northern Ireland as a ‘political football’ – was bookended on the one hand by the promise of President Jimmy Carter in 1977 to offer financial assistance to Northern Ireland on condition that there was some success in the political process there, and the fulfilment of that pledge by the Reagan administration and Democrat-controlled U.S. Congress in 1986.

The connection between American foreign and domestic policies is an established phenomenon, particularly the role of ethnic groups in the lobbying of policymakers (Smith 2000 and McCormick 2012). The internationalisation of the Northern Ireland conflict is likewise well established in the historiography of the topic (DeConde 1992, Guelke 1984 and 1996). The concern for Irish affairs in the United States is perhaps understandable given that in the 1970 census, sixteen million Americans cited some form of Irish heritage. In 1980, the number of Americans describing their ethnic background as Irish was almost forty-one million (Wilson 1995, 73). In spite of this large domestic constituent, during the early 1970s there was little pressure from the American executive branch directed towards the British government in relation to Northern Ireland. However, this changed as the decade

progressed, ostensibly in line with the increase of Americans citing Irish descent. O'Neill was a key protagonist in Irish-American contributions to resolving the paramilitary sectarian violence known as the 'Troubles' that resulted from the divisions caused by Northern Ireland's constitutional relationship within the United Kingdom. This article will add contribute to the historiography in a number of different ways. It will discuss O'Neill's efforts to ensure that American pressure on the Anglo-Irish process evolved and how – at times – it created Anglo-American tension. Furthermore, it will show the extent that that domestic lobbying could influence American foreign policy and whether O'Neill was able to ensure that President Ronald Reagan was able to act on an issue that did not particularly interested him.

Tip O'Neill was a key protagonist in Irish-American contributions to resolving the paramilitary sectarian violence known as the 'Troubles' that resulted from the divisions caused by Northern Ireland's constitutional relationship within the United Kingdom. A prominent Irish-American and Catholic politician, O'Neill enjoyed a successful career in Massachusetts State politics before being first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1953. After securing senior leadership positions amongst the House Democrats during the 1970s, he became speaker in 1977. O'Neill would prove to be a keen defender and advocate of 'New Deal' policies during his speakership (1977-1987) as he worked alongside presidents Carter and Reagan (Farrell 2001, 419-672). His Irish Catholic and working class childhood, coupled with his public interest in the Northern Ireland conflict since the 'Troubles' began during the late 1960s, ensured that he was one of the key Irish-American politicians calling for a satisfactory constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland,

while simultaneously condemning the violence of the IRA and its American financial support (Wilson 1995, 130-31). The ‘Troubles’ were a violent period in the history of the UK and Ireland, whereby the constitutional arrangements and national identity of Northern Ireland were in dispute. In short, the Protestant Unionist community wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the UK while the Catholic Nationalist community sought a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland and the restoration of a united Ireland. Violent acts by the Irish Republic Army (IRA) were responsible for thousands of fatalities and injuries in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.¹

O’Neill’s interest in Northern Ireland dated back to the beginning of his political career. As speaker of the Massachusetts House he wrote to Irish officials about the issue and later, even as a freshman congressman, called for a united Ireland. His republican sympathies developed into a concern for the civil rights of Catholics in Northern Ireland at the outbreak of the ‘Troubles’ and criticism of the British response, for instance the ‘Bloody Sunday’ shootings in Derry in 1972 and internment without trial (Farrell 2001, 510-11). As speaker, O’Neill was clearly one of America’s senior political figures (as speaker he was technically third in line to the presidency) and his views – on topics including Northern Ireland – carried weight in American political discourse. O’Neill was determined to use his influence to further interests of a peaceful and constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland.

George B. Galloway, historian of the US House of Representatives, described the speakership as ‘an office of great honor and influence’ (Galloway 1955, 346). The position entails key powers and duties: establishing floor procedures, precedents for rule making, points of order, and directing and influencing legislative committees.

The speaker is ultimately responsible for seeing that the House passes legislation (Green 2010, 3-4). The importance of the speakership is further underlined by the fact that since the 1947 Presidential Succession Act, the speaker is next in line for the US presidency if the president and vice-president are both unable to carry out their duties. In addition, the speaker has the procedural and bureaucratic means to influence foreign policy. Indeed, concurrent to broader powers that determine the use of government funds, confirmation of cabinet officials, and – in the case of the Senate – approval of treaties, Congress enjoys specific powers, in accordance with Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution, to:

provide for the common Defence,” “To regulate Commerce with foreign Nations,” “To define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high seas,” “To declare war,” “To raise and support Armies,” “To provide and maintain a Navy,” and “To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces.” (Lindsay 2012, 225)

In sum, the speaker can potentially have a real impact as an actor in American foreign policy by guiding American investment in some areas rather than others. Congress is also able to influence public opinion and, as result, foreign policy more generally through its powers to debate issues and carry out investigations and hearings (Lindsay 2012, 225-226)

During the 1970s Irish Americans seized on reports of human rights abuses in Northern Ireland, which would appeal to the broader human rights concerns of leading political figures, such as Carter. The British government increasingly

presented the conflict as anti-terrorist and anti-communist – aspects that appealed to some quarters in the United States, including the Reagan administration in the 1980s (Dixon 2008, 169).² Thus, the role of prominent Irish-Americans in the political process and the support of some Americans for the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAIID) – a financier of IRA activities – became a fixture in Anglo-American relations. In 1971 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) investigated NORAIID and determined that it should register as a ‘foreign agent’. A joint communiqué by the US president, Gerald Ford, and the Irish Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, urged Irish-Americans to stop supporting NORAIID. This signalled the beginning of a new political strategy to utilise Irish-American politicians to influence the political process in Washington D.C., and in turn Anglo-American relations, in order to reach a settlement in Northern Ireland. By the end of the decade, this plan seemed to be working. The ‘Four Horsemen’ – O’Neill, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Governor Hugh Carey (D-NY), and Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) – were key activists in favour of a solution to the ‘Troubles’ (Dumbrell 2006, 247-48). This strategy, developed by Sean Donlon, a senior Irish foreign office civil servant and later Irish ambassador to the United States, sought to use leading Irish-American politicians to tackle American support for the IRA and pressure the US government to influence the British into addressing the conflict. O’Neill was a key component of this plan, albeit it resulted in much criticism from many Irish-Americans in Boston and New York City, particularly those bars in Boston that were home to fund-raising jars for NORAIID (Farrell 2001, 511-12). O’Neill and his Irish-American colleagues benefited from the advice and expertise of, for instance, John Hume, a civil rights leader from Derry, Northern Ireland and other leading colleagues in Northern Ireland’s Social and Democratic Labour Party (Thompson 2001, 69). This foretold

the involvement of extra-political protagonists during the Clinton administration, such as William Flynn, an Irish-American businessman based in New York City (Thompson 2001, 174-76). During the 1970s, the conflict increasingly became a factor in American politics: Carter used Northern Ireland as a campaign issue during the 1976 presidential election in order to capture the Irish-American vote (Dixon 2008, 167). Subsequently, as president, Carter issued a statement in 1977 promising American investment if a power sharing solution could be agreed (Dumbrell 2006, 247-48). He explained:

Throughout our history, Americans have rightly recalled the contributions men and women from many countries have made to the development of the United States. Among the greatest contributions have been those of the British and Irish people, Protestant and Catholic alike. We have close ties of friendship with both parts of Ireland and with Great Britain.³

He further added:

It is natural that Americans are deeply concerned about the continuing conflict and violence in Northern Ireland. We know the overwhelming majority of the people there reject the bomb and the bullet. The United States wholeheartedly supports peaceful means for finding a just solution that involves both parts of the community of Northern Ireland ... and protects human rights and guarantees freedom from discrimination--a solution that the people in Northern Ireland, as well as the Governments of Great Britain and Ireland can support.

Carter made it clear that his administration had ‘no intention of telling the parties how this might be achieved’. However, he stressed that ‘the people of Northern Ireland should know that they have our complete support in their quest for a peaceful and just society’. The president noted that Northern Ireland ‘continued to attract investment, despite the violence committed by a small minority’ which would ‘create jobs’ and ‘assist in ensuring a healthy economy and combating unemployment’. Consequently, as Carter explained,

It is still true that a peaceful settlement would contribute immeasurably to stability in Northern Ireland and so enhance the prospects for increased investment. In the event of such a settlement, the U.S. Government would be prepared to join with others to see how additional job creating investment could be encouraged, to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

Crucially, Carter’s statement also condemned Irish-American support for violence in Northern Ireland and the UK generally:

We hope that all those engaged in violence will renounce this course and commit themselves to peaceful pursuit of legitimate goals ... I ask all Americans to refrain from supporting with financial or other aid organizations whose involvement, direct or indirect, in this violence delays the day when the people of Northern Ireland can live and work together in harmony, free from fear.⁴

This was the first time that a US president stated that there would be American assistance should there be a resolution to the conflict. By criticising republican supporters of the IRA in the United States and promising economic assistance should the conflict be resolved, the precedent was established for subsequent American interventions (Dixon 2008, 171).

O'Neill and his Irish-American colleagues continued to follow a similar strategy: condemning violence by all parties on the one hand and calling for political action from the British and Irish governments on the other. In their 1978 St. Patrick's Day statement, the 'Four Horsemen' – alongside fourteen other leading politicians, including senators Joe Biden (D-DE) and Gary Hart (D-CO) – were critical of financial support of Irish-Americans to the activities of the IRA but also attributed the failure of progress on Northern Ireland to the Unionists and the British government. A month prior to O'Neill's visit to the United Kingdom, the results of the Bennett Report prompted another St Patrick's Day statement by the Horsemen, accusing the British government of negligence in the human rights abuses of IRA suspects detained at interrogation centres in Northern Ireland.⁵ O'Neill hoped that by meeting with the leadership of the Conservative and Labour parties during the general election he would raise the profile of the political settlement required to end the Troubles in British political discourse (Wilson 1995, 154-55). The visit also coincided with the so-called 'dirty protests' by prisoners at H-Block in the Maze Prison. The removal of 'special category' status in 1976 – meaning that IRA convicts were no longer granted political status and related privileges – prompted such prisoners to defile their cells in protest with the so-called 'dirty protests' beginning in 1978. O'Neill would also raise this issue with the British government.

1979: O'Neill visits London

According to a press statement issued by the speaker's office, O'Neill was to lead a bipartisan delegation of US representatives to Great Britain, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland between 11 and 23 April 1979. The expedition was prompted by invitations issued by the governments of Ireland and Hungary to the speaker. The delegation would hold meetings in Brussels with people important to U.S. foreign policy interests, namely General Haig – who served as NATO commander in chief – to discuss 'Allied defense posture in Europe'.⁶ Likewise, there would be meetings about 'trade and other international economic issues with key members of the European Economic Community'. The purpose of the meetings with British leaders was discussion about 'matters of mutual interest', with Northern Ireland 'a major topic'.⁷ The visit to Ireland, at the personal invitation of Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach, would be the lengthiest. Discussions would focus on Ireland's emerging role in the European Community and the situation in Northern Ireland. According to the press release, the overriding remit of the expedition was to 'to provide the leadership of the House of Representatives the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of our defense position in Europe, to explore avenues for improved economic and political relations with Eastern Europe, and to assess developments in Ireland'.⁸ The congressional delegation accompanying O'Neill consisted of: Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL.), Thomas S. Foley (D-WA.), Thomas L. Ashley (D-OH), Samuel L. Devine (R-OH), Delbert L. Latta (R-OH), Morris K. Udall (D-AZ), Edward J. Patten (D-NJ), Joseph M. McDade (R-PA.), and James M. Hanley (D-NY).⁹ In addition to being a bipartisan delegation, they were all experienced and senior US representatives. Such expeditions were, and

continue to be, common for US congressmen. Prior to O'Neill's departure, the *Los Angeles Times* mocked the fact that so many representatives and senators were departing the US during the recess. It noted that, for instance, during 'the next few days there will be more members of Congress in China than sometimes can be found on the floor of the House or Senate'. (43 congressmen were scheduled to be in China as part of three delegations.)¹⁰

The speaker consulted with the US State Department in advance of his congressional expedition to Europe. In letters to the US secretary of state, Cyrus R. Vance, and the secretary of defense, Harold Brown, O'Neill explained that the mission of his delegation was to

provide the Leadership of the House of Representatives the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge of our defense and diplomatic positions in Europe, to explore avenues of greater communication with the Eastern European Communist Block, and to investigate feasible American contributions to a resolution of Northern Ireland's troubles.¹¹

A similar statement was issued by the Speaker's Room as a press release.¹² O'Neill was briefed on the outcome of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTNs),¹³ in addition to State Department briefings about European relations, Britain, and Ireland.

On Northern Ireland, State Department reference papers noted that 'terrorist attacks have spread outside Northern Ireland itself'.¹⁴ In regards to the official US position, the papers explained that in his 1977 statement, 'President Carter

emphasized our government's impartiality in the Northern Ireland situation, condemning violence and urging that all parties to the conflict seek a commonly acceptable, peaceful resolution'. However, Carter had also promised American financial investment in Northern Ireland 'following a peaceful settlement'. American-Irish relations were noted by the briefing to be 'traditionally close', although the Irish government was 'concerned about the views of some Irish-Americans on the issue of Northern Ireland and have strongly requested that Americans refrain from contributing to organizations that support violence in Ireland'.¹⁵

The British civil service fully understood O'Neill's role as a representative of the US government, as can be seen from the preparations they made for his reception. On the news that O'Neill would be visiting London, senior civil servants strongly encouraged Callaghan to meet with him. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) explained to Downing Street that the speaker was 'one of the three or four most influential politicians' in American politics.¹⁶ Meetings between British politicians and senior figures from Congress were not uncommon: Callaghan previously met with Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), the Senate Majority Leader, twice in 1978. However, as the FCO observed, O'Neill was a much more experienced and dominating figure than Byrd. Indeed, O'Neill's importance was emphasised to Downing Street: 'We look to him for help over a wide variety of issues above all in Northern Ireland.'¹⁷ O'Neill was therefore clearly someone with who the British government had to ensure a working relationship.

Callaghan received a list of briefs in advance of O'Neill's visit: Northern Ireland, MTNs, Civil Aviation, Energy, Rhodesia, Namibia, SALT II, and the Arab/Israel situation. Northern Ireland, MTNs and energy were discussed during the meeting at Downing Street.¹⁸ O'Neill's importance to British policy in regards to Northern Ireland and the role of Irish-Americans was stressed. Briefs encouraged Callaghan to take the line that:

The Government appreciates Mr O'Neill's constructive interest in the problems of Northern Ireland, his condemnation of violence and support for the principle that any solution must be acceptable to all parties. The Government appreciates his efforts to resist the pressure for Congressional Hearings which could only aggravate divisions in Northern Ireland.¹⁹

However, the prime minister was urged to emphasise that the House of Commons (Re-distribution of Seats) Act 1979 did not represent any favouritism towards the Unionists. Likewise, Callaghan was to inform O'Neill that even though 'self-imposed squalor at the Maze prison regrettably continues', his government would not 'grant political status to those convicted of' what he called 'criminal acts'.²⁰

As arranged, the Congressional delegation arrived in London for meetings with the leader of the opposition and the prime minister. O'Neill's records detail the delegation's meeting with Thatcher.²¹ They asked Thatcher about the policies of a potential Conservative government in Northern Ireland. She explained: 'both the Labour and Conservative Parties have adhered to a bipartisan approach to Northern Ireland, and that it was not the subject of public debate in the campaign'. Without

going into detail, Thatcher added that her party's manifesto prioritised the 'defeat of terrorism', and her government 'would move to increase security in Northern Ireland'.²² Northern Ireland was a bipartisan policy and not a campaign issue: Thatcher was effectively ending any discussion of the issue with O'Neill before it had even begun. Immediately after meeting with Thatcher, O'Neill called on Callaghan at 10 Downing Street.²³ The twelve members of the congressional delegation and the US ambassador, Kingman Brewster, accompanied the speaker for a one-hour meeting in the Cabinet room – Callaghan clearly intended to use his incumbency to maximum effect. A one-hour meeting was ostensibly polite of Callaghan, but given the number of issues discussed the length was not particularly unusual or excessive. The issues discussed were: East-West relations, trade negotiations, Northern Ireland, and energy. Hanley asked Callaghan about the future of Northern Ireland generally and O'Neill asked specifically about the conditions in H Block in the Maze prison. Not wishing to make promises about a settlement in Northern Ireland that could prove a hostage to fortune, the prime minister addressed Hanley by admitting that he could not offer a satisfactory response, although the government could continue to 'search for a solution to the problems of the province'. In regards to H Block, Callaghan was much more forthright. He turned the question back on the speaker, asking if he could offer a solution. According to the minutes, 'O'Neill acknowledged that he had none' and Callaghan argued that the 'situation of deliberate defilement to which Speaker O'Neill had referred applied only to a part of H block'. Moreover, the prime minister noted how 'in the remainder of the block the conditions were in every way superior to ... most American prisons'. Callaghan continued to explain the British government's position in the clearest of terms: they 'would never agree to treat murderers, who had been found guilty by due process of law, as political prisoners'. In addition, he

reminded the delegation 'that most of the weapons with which their murders had been committed, and money to buy more, came from the United States'. The prime minister clearly saw this meeting as an opportunity to emphasise the need for American support in combating the actions of the IRA and to remind Irish-Americans of the American contribution to the very problems that they demanded the British government resolve. Similarly, Callaghan offered the delegation very little in return for their interest in Northern Ireland: he was noncommittal on peace prospects and in some respects rebuked the congressmen in regards to prison conditions and NORAID.

However, concurrent to his government's resolute stance towards violence, Callaghan added that after the general election, the Labour government intended to 'examine all possible solutions to the political problem of Northern Ireland including, for example, the suggestion of confederation'. Nevertheless, as he reminded the delegation, the IRA would remain 'an obstacle to a political solution'. This discussion allowed Callaghan to request that O'Neill convey his thanks to the Taoiseach for the Irish government's assistance in security matters. Hanley again participated in the discussion, noting that a Peace Forum would be held in Washington D.C. in May that year, whereby there would be discussions about a political solution to the Northern Ireland situation. Callaghan requested that the private conclusions of the forum be given to him. The final aspect of the discussion about Northern Ireland was prompted by O'Neill's question about whether more parliamentary seats recently being given to Northern Ireland reflected 'a softer line towards the Protestants' and a potential agreement with the Ulster Unionists. Although the prime minister was diplomatic and empathised with such conclusions, he stated that the Unionists had gained a solution to a grievance about the

‘representational arithmetic’. Nevertheless, Callaghan candidly admitted that it worked as an example of political pragmatism too: if the government ‘had refused to allow the Unionists to take their entirely justified grievance ... to the Speaker’s Conference, the Labour Government would have fallen’.²⁴ The American record of this meeting is similar to the British account.²⁵ Callaghan warned that there would not be ‘any significant policy changes towards the problem of Northern Ireland’ and claimed ‘that less than 1% of the British electorate have viewed the problem in Northern Ireland as an important national issue’.²⁶ The British may have recognised O’Neill importance in terms of his political position and potential role in helping them with Northern Ireland, but Callaghan arguably sought to school the speaker and his delegation in what he viewed to be the political reality of the situation.

1979: O’Neill visits Dublin and Belfast

After leaving London, O’Neill’s delegation held meetings with European leaders before final stops in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Wilson 1995, 155). According to the American record, discussions during O’Neill’s meeting with the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, inevitably revolved around the issue of Northern Ireland.²⁷ Lynch argued that even though the majority of Irish citizens condemned the IRA, the continuing violence and resulting tension ensured that the ‘the British government was limited in its ability or willingness to solve the problem’. Indeed, Lynch, ostensibly advocating the unification of Ireland, stated that ultimately it was up to the British government to initiate a solution and that simply withdrawing from Northern Ireland was inadequate. According to Lynch, ‘the British government must make the first initiative to *promote* reunification of the Irish people as the only ultimate

solution, and should indicate to the Unionists that their destiny rests ultimately with the entire island of Ireland as a viable member of the European Community'. The Irish government would contribute 'by promoting economic cooperation between the two parts of the island'. He was 'impressed' by Carter's statement about Northern Ireland in 1977 and hoped that he 'would encourage the next British Government to take positive steps to reach a workable, peaceful solution'. Like Callaghan, albeit from a different political perspective, Lynch believed that Irish-American financial aid to the IRA had undermined efforts towards solving the problem. Indeed, IRA activity threatened the political aspects of the Republican cause.²⁸

The Irish record of O'Neill's meeting with the Taoiseach offers a more detailed account.²⁹ The meeting also included Kirk O'Donnell (O'Neill's aide), William Shannon, the U.S. ambassador to Ireland, an Irish foreign minister (presumably Michael O'Kennedy), and Dermot Nally, a senior civil servant. O'Neill and Lynch discussed the political scene in Ireland and the United States. In a comment that proved to be a hostage to fortune, O'Neill observed that Carter would win a second term as president, Kennedy would not mount a challenge for the Democratic nomination, and that while Reagan would be the Republican nominee, 'he did not give much for his chances'. On the concerns for Northern Ireland amongst Irish-Americans, the speaker believed that it would become a key issue in American politics. According to O'Neill, around '35% of the Democratic Party were Catholic – and a large number of them Irish. They were saying that if the President could bring about peace between Israel and Egypt, why could he not intervene, on his own doorstep and achieve a similar settlement in Northern Ireland'. Northern Ireland was therefore of concern to the Democratic base, which sought action in Carter's

foreign policy and O'Neill was keen to see action. The Irish record also notes that Lynch recognised that Northern Ireland would not feature prominently in the UK general election and that it was the responsibility of 'the British Government to produce proposals' to resolve the conflict and they would ultimately have to 'tell the unionist majority – and the minority there – that they would have to find some accommodation'. For Lynch, 'British policy now was guaranteeing the continuance of the status quo, with all its uncertainties and instability', as many of them saw 'the main issue' to be 'the violence and the killing of soldiers'. The foreign minister concurred, adding that 'many British politicians saw the problem only in terms of security'.

Thus, the problem for O'Neill and his Irish colleagues was how to change the political debate from security to one about stability. O'Neill inquired as to whether the Taoiseach wished him to pass on 'any message' to 'the power of the American Government'. The speaker was clearly offering to use his political position and relationship with the White House to further their common cause of developing a peace process. In response, Lynch 'stressed that timing was essential or the whole issue could blow up in our faces. There were many interests involved, not all with clean hands'.³⁰ The Irish record includes details of the meeting between the Taoiseach and the entire congressional delegation. They discussed the strength of U.S.-Irish relations, the importance of the U.S. in the world, the Irish economy, and Ireland's role in the EC. More specific topics were inflation, the Irish postal strike, health care, energy, OPEC and oil production, the Taoiseach's appreciation for Carter's 1977 statement, and the strength of the IRA.³¹ Interestingly, in advance of the meeting with the congressional delegation, the steering note for the Taoiseach

observed that Irish-Americans viewed ‘the Northern Ireland problem in very simplistic terms’ with ‘the British presence in Northern Ireland as the only problem’ and little understanding of ‘the strength of unionist sentiment or the explosive nature of inter-community tensions in Northern Ireland’.³² The Irish government, though clearly grateful for the support of prominent Irish-American politicians, therefore matched - though from opposite sides – their British counterparts in their frustration of some American misconceptions (as discussed below). The complexities of the Northern Ireland question and the potential for achieving a politically united Ireland – in addition to the hope of a culturally united Ireland – are best summarised by Lynch’s comment to Carter at this time. The Taoiseach’s response to Carter’s question about whether he wanted a politically united Ireland was, simply, ‘Jaysus, No’ (Bew 2011, 44).

O’Neill also met with the two opposition leaders: Dr Garret FitzGerald of Fine Gael and Frank Clusky of the Labour Party. FitzGerald outlined his view that the situation ‘is deadlocked in part because of the deadlock in the British Parliament’ and that ‘while there were very few British politicians who actually believed in a United Kingdom ... Thatcher was a notable exception’. (Thatcher’s position was obviously significant as at the time of this meeting she stood a strong chance of becoming British prime minister.) After offering some background information on the Northern Ireland political scene, the Fine Gael leader observed that O’Neill’s ‘fact-finding mission’ to Northern Ireland was ‘significant’ as the rival political groups there would then ‘understand that the outside world was concerned about the problem, and that the interests of Northern Ireland were not perceived in a remote, isolated vacuum’. While positive about O’Neill’s delegation and clearly welcoming an

internationalisation of the conflict, Fitzgerald added caveats to his enthusiasm towards some American involvement. He ‘expressed opposition’ to ‘a Peace Forum planned this summer in the United States, because no political party in Ireland would participate in a meeting where terrorists were invited’. After this meeting, O’Neill then met with President Patrick Hillery to further discuss Irish affairs.³³

Despite meeting with Callaghan, Thatcher, Lynch and Fitzgerald, O’Neill’s visit to the British Isles was still not deemed particularly newsworthy until his speech at Dublin Castle during a dinner given in his honour. In his toast remarks, O’Neill was forthright in his criticism of the British government and British politicians.³⁴ The speaker declared that he was ‘deeply concerned by the lack of political progress in Northern Ireland over the last few years’ and that he agreed with Irish politicians that ‘Britain bears a heavy responsibility for the failures of recent years on the political front’. O’Neill remarked, ‘We have been concerned that the problem has been treated as a political football in London or has otherwise been given a low priority.’ The speaker continued to criticise one of his previous hosts, stating that ‘there is no more serious problem on the agenda of British politics than a crisis which has claimed 2,000 lives and caused almost 20,000 serious injuries’. Provocatively, the speaker presented himself as nonpartisan in the British general election albeit determined to insist that the subsequent government act on Northern Ireland: ‘It is not our concern to favour one party or another on the forthcoming elections in Britain but we do insist on an early, realistic and major initiative on the part of the incoming British Government so as to get serious negotiations moving quickly towards a just, realistic and workable solution.’³⁵ O’Neill’s lexical choice – namely ‘*we do insist*’ – certainly allowed the wider audience in Britain and Ireland to conclude that he was speaking on

behalf of the US government: the speaker of the House was in Ireland telling the British government that the Americans insisted that they address the Northern Ireland situation once and for all. The Taoiseach praised O'Neill during his speech, discussing the role of the Four Horsemen in Irish-American attempts to resolve the Northern Ireland issue. Citing his appreciation for Carter's statement in 1977, Lynch acknowledged the part played by O'Neill, Kennedy, Moynihan and Carey, 'in the preparation of that statement and of the later declarations on the same subject'.³⁶

O'Neill's comments received a fierce and bipartisan reaction from British politicians and the British press. In a UK general election news conference the following day, which was intended to focus on trade unions, Thatcher strongly objected to O'Neill's statement. She defended herself and her opponents: 'we have never used Ulster as "a political football" between the Parties ... The events there are too tragic, too deeply tragic for any of us to do that'.³⁷ Thatcher argued that, if elected, the Conservatives would adopt a 'step by step approach' to Northern Ireland, with the first stage being the re-establishment of local government there.³⁸ Lord Hailsham also explained Conservative frustrations towards O'Neill:

I would say to him, and to Senator Kennedy, that they should bear in mind that Britain is also an independent country.

They do nothing but harm by their comments, with which they are trying to win a few Irish votes. We resent these people electioneering in their own country by speaking in ours.³⁹

While O'Neill may have been representing the wishes of his own constituents, he was undoubtedly interested in Irish affairs. But his knowledge of the issue was further questioned by the Labour Party. Speaking on their behalf, Shirley Williams, observed: 'The Irish-American community has very little idea of the truth of the position in the Republic of Ireland or in Northern Ireland.'⁴⁰ O'Neill's contribution to the Anglo-Irish process was certainly not a welcome one for much of the British political establishment.

Editorial comment in the British press also resented the speaker's intervention. For instance, *The Guardian* sharply observed: 'There must be some sympathy in Britain of all places, for Mr O'Neill's incomprehension [sic.] of other people's crassness. Britain spent a long time overseas trying, usually without success, to knock some sense into the average native.'⁴¹ This was a critique of O'Neill's 'insist' remark: the *Guardian* was rejecting O'Neill's intervention as neo-colonialist language that the UK had moved on from. Further criticising O'Neill, the editorial noted how he had 'a privileged status in these matters', given his position as 'a man of influence in the White House' who could 'gain attention denied to others struggling behind him on that same path to righteousness'.⁴² The exasperation with him was neatly summarised:

if Mr O'Neill is deliberately withholding, perhaps from modesty, perhaps from reluctance to seem to intervene, the master plan for Ireland, we would urge him to be less bashful and tell us what it is. As long as it guarantees Irish unity and allows Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom it is

bound to succeed. We shall kick ourselves for not realising how simple it all is.⁴³

The *Daily Express*, addressing a wider and generally conservatively-inclined readership, was vehement in its criticism of O'Neill. An editorial was scathing in its criticism of the speaker, describing him as 'a log-rolling, Irish-American politician, out to raise votes in the United States by pandering to anti-British prejudice on the part of his fellow Irish-Americans'.⁴⁴ O'Neill was accused of 'pontificating about the tragedy of Northern Ireland, about which he obviously knows nothing'. He was told by the *Express* to 'go home and get on with wheeler-dealing in the U.S. Congress'.⁴⁵ O'Neill certainly succeeded in having Northern Ireland discussed during the British general election.

The Massachusetts as well as the Irish press were more positive about O'Neill's intervention and his intentions. A *Boston Globe* editorial noted that while 'O'Neill's remarks were technically an intrusion', ultimately 'the British and Irish are going to have to sort out the problems left over from centuries of rule and misrule in Ireland'.⁴⁶ However, O'Neill's comments had 'raised the consciousness, and may even have tickled the conscience, of the British in a way that, once their election is over, will produce tangible and creative change'.⁴⁷ O'Neill's domestic needs had therefore been served. The Irish *Sunday Independent* reported that O'Neill's comments were simply in response to his meeting with Callaghan. The prime minister's remarks that his deal with the Unionist MPs was agreed to extend the life of his government had reportedly 'genuinely shocked' the speaker, who was certainly unsympathetic despite the two being kindred 'wheeler dealer' politicians.⁴⁸ Similarly,

O'Neill's meeting with Thatcher was equally disappointing for the speaker. He 'found her almost completely ignorant of the Northern Ireland situation – and somewhat surprised that a senior American politician should make a visit to London to discuss it'. In regards to the reaction by British politicians to his statement, O'Neill was reported to have been 'at first somewhat shaken at the storm he had caused, and later angry at the suggestion ... that he knew nothing about the complexities of the problems'.⁴⁹ It is unknown whether the *Sunday Independent* had been briefed by O'Neill's aides. However, if the furore had genuinely shocked O'Neill, then the speaker was ostensibly a less hard-headed politico than his popular image or, as perhaps is more likely the case, his strengths in domestic politics were equalled by a relative innocence in foreign policy.

Following his discussions in Dublin, O'Neill and a smaller delegation undertook a visit to Belfast, where he held talks with leading Northern Ireland politicians at the residence of Charles Stout, U.S. consulate.⁵⁰ This additional visit and 'secret talks' was reported to have been 'unexpected'.⁵¹ He 'met with Gerry Fitt, leader of the SDLP; Harry West, official Unionist; Oliver Napier, Alliance Party; and Rev. Ian Paisley, Democratic Unionist Party'.⁵² There was subsequently widespread press speculation that Carter was planning a Camp David summit to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict akin to the 1978 Camp David Accords that addressed the Egypt-Israel conflict. The *Irish Independent* claimed that it was 'known for sure' that O'Neill 'was in the North on the specific instructions of the President'.⁵³ However, perhaps signalling Carter administration unhappiness with the speculation, the White House dismissed such a notion. According to the *Sunday Telegraph*, O'Neill was widely presumed to deliver a report on 'fact finding mission' to Carter, but any

suggestion that it would lead to a Carter administration initiative was deemed by administration officials to be ‘pure fantasy’.⁵⁴ O’Neill himself was quoted in the *Boston Globe* as rejecting such thoughts: ‘President Carter asked me to bring greetings to Irish Prime Minister (Jack) Lynch, and I did ... That this (the meetings with party leaders) leads to a Camp David summit is a figment of everyone’s imagination’.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the speaker hoped that his visits to Ireland and Northern Ireland would ‘stimulate interest’.⁵⁶

There is no available evidence suggesting that O’Neill was the vanguard of a Carter peace initiative. Yet O’Neill’s influence over the U.S. response to the Northern Ireland conflict was clear. In June 1979 the speaker publicly supported a ban on American weapon sales to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, hoping that a ban would prompt the new Conservative government to resolve the conflict. Much to the displeasure of the UK government and U.S. State Department, in August 1979 O’Neill allowed the amendment banning the sales attached to the State Department annual appropriations Bill to pass through Congress. The Carter administration accepted the ban, prioritising its domestic legislative programme and working relationship with the speaker over any potential offence made to the Thatcher government (Wilson 1995, 159-60). Any hope that a ban would prompt the Conservative government into action was wishful thinking, but it was clearly a deliberately provocative gesture to the Irish-American political base: the IRA would not be funded from the USA but the RUC would not be able to purchase weapons from the USA either.

O'Neill and his fellow Horsemen also held some influence over the British and Irish governments. When Charles Haughey, the Taoiseach, sought to replace Sean Donlon, the Irish ambassador to the United States, in 1980, in response to his close working relationship with the British Embassy, the Horsemen strongly opposed the move. Thus, Donlon was allowed to continue his work of informing a sufficient bloc of congressmen and supporters in the U.S. State Department who would prove useful for the Irish government in the future (Thompson 2001, 91). Despite the hostility towards his Dublin Castle speech, the lobbying of O'Neill and the Horsemen helped to persuade Humphrey Atkins to launch an ultimately unsuccessful political initiative, holding inter-party talks in Northern Ireland in 1980 (Thompson 2001, 80 and Guelke 1984). It is clear that O'Neill and his Irish-American colleagues were able to influence some developments in this aspect of American foreign policy, despite being ostensible actors in domestic politics.

The Northern Ireland conflict continues and the New Ireland Forum

Irish-American interest in the Northern Ireland conflict continued with the advent of the Reagan administration. The 1981 Hunger Strike was the focus of Irish-American attention and that of the media in the United States. Although the media coverage agreed with the British government's stance that the republican prisoners should not be awarded any political status, as more strikers died criticism of Thatcher's reluctance to negotiate increased. (The death of Bobby Sands, an elected Member of Parliament and the lead striker, even prompted a complimentary biography on CBS morning news on 27 April 1981.) NORAIID's criticism of the Horsemen for failing to stop the Hunger Strike led to the creation of a formal group,

comprising twenty-four congressmen, senators, and governors: the 'Friends of Ireland' even enjoyed the endorsement of the new American president. However, on 6 May 1981, the Four Horsemen issued a public telegram to Thatcher, criticising her 'intransigence' and 'inflexibility' as the cause of needless deaths. The summer months saw the Horsemen and Irish Government attempt to lobby the Reagan administration into action. Kennedy contacted the State Department while FitzGerald asked Reagan to convince Thatcher that a British emissary should personally negotiate with the striking prisoners. On 3 August, the Friends of Ireland sent a telegram to Reagan in support of FitzGerald's request. Although Reagan did discuss the Hunger Strike with Thatcher at the Ottawa economic summit in July 1981, he assured her that his administration would not interfere in the issue. The failure to convince Reagan to intervene was a dent to Irish-American and Irish government hopes that the U.S. government could be convinced to petition the British government on their behalf (Wilson 1995, 180-195).

However, given Irish-American support for the Democrats, Northern Ireland was only of marginal concern for the Republican Party. The Reagan administration's reluctance to intervene in the Anglo-Irish process is also clear in briefings to the president prior to his meetings with Thatcher during his first term. For instance, Alexander Haig, the secretary of State, briefed Reagan in advance of Thatcher's visit to the White House in February 1981: 'Our policy has been to prevent Northern Ireland from disrupting our close cooperation with the UK and Ireland by adopting a policy of strict neutrality.'⁵⁷ Nevertheless, this neutrality was not necessarily a reversal of Carter's policy. Indeed, Reagan's policy towards Northern Ireland was explained in his first St Patrick's Day statement as president:

The United States will continue to urge the parties to come together for a just and peaceful solution ... We will continue to condemn all acts of terrorism and violence, for these cannot solve Northern Ireland's problems. I call on all Americans to question closely any appeal for financial or other aid from groups involved in this conflict to ensure that contributions do not end up in the hands of those who perpetuate violence, either directly or indirectly.⁵⁸

Reagan's diplomacy was embarrassed by the comments of William P. Clark Jr., the deputy secretary of state, during his visit to Ireland in December 1981. Clark declared that the American people hoped to see a united Ireland. British officials were furious and the State Department quickly assured them that Clark's comment was not indicative of the administration's policy. As an Irish-American and longstanding friend of the president, Irish-Americans hoped that he would be an ally in the administration. Unfortunately, as this case highlighted, Clark lacked sufficient experience in international affairs to shape American foreign policy as they had hoped (Thompson 2001, 99, 106). Nevertheless, he remained a supporter of American involvement in Northern Ireland. In October 1982, during a meeting with Gerard Collins, Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs at the White House, Clark, then the National Security adviser, inquired as to if there was 'anything we might do in ... a subtle way' in order to encourage the British government to achieve a resolution in the Anglo-Irish process.⁵⁹ The extent of Clark's role in the Anglo-Irish process will be revisited below. That year saw continued Irish-American interest in Northern Ireland. For instance, in June 1982—on Thatcher's invitation—three American representatives participate in the Ditchley Conference on Northern Ireland in the UK.

Dennis Blair, a member of the Reagan administration's NSC team, represented the White House. O'Neill and Congress were represented by Werner Brandt, who served as legislative assistant Rep. Thomas Foley (D-WA). Joseph Thompson, a leading political scientist, represented American academia. At the heart of the conference was the British government's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to introduce a new Northern Ireland Assembly (Thompson 2001, 110-112).

In the meantime, if institutional and extra-institutional protagonists could not deliver a much desired peace process for Irish-Americans, it was hoped that the process of consultation about constitutional frameworks could deliver the beginnings of a peace process. Thus, the New Ireland Forum (1983-84) was a source of much hope for Irish-Americans who sought a political solution to the Northern Ireland conflict, but ultimately it was the cause of the dismay and frustration that led to O'Neill's appeal for Reagan's intervention. Constitutional nationalist parties – Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, SDLP and Labour – contributed to the New Ireland Forum (NIF). Sinn Fein's exclusion stemmed from their support for violence, whereas unionists did not contribute as they considered the forum to be a biased process. Despite dividing opinion in Ireland and Northern Ireland, St Patrick's Day in 1983 saw the U.S. Congress issue a resolution in support of the Forum and its goal for a united Ireland. Reports that Haughey and FitzGerald were divided over the NIF prompted O'Neill to stress that a united front was necessary if the NIF was to gain the support of the US government and further the nationalist cause on Capitol Hill. In October 1983, Kennedy called for an American envoy to participate directly in the Anglo-Irish process, but Reagan again rejected such an intervention (Wilson 1995, 240-41). Thatcher's emphatic rejection of the NIF's report and its main suggestions

to answer the Northern Ireland question served to harden the opinion of Irish-Americans, particularly O'Neill. The prime minister rebuked the report after her November 1984 summit with FitzGerald, stating:

I have made it quite clear ... that a unified Ireland was one solution that is out. A second solution was confederation of two states. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out. That is a derogation from sovereignty. We made that quite clear when the Report was published.⁶⁰

Thatcher's frustration with the process was clear: 'Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. She is part of the United Kingdom because that is the wish of the majority of her citizens. The majority wish to stay part of the United Kingdom.' The prime minister's understanding of the situation was echoed in the report itself: 'The Forum Report indicated that they realized that any change in the status of Northern Ireland could only come about by the consent of the people of Northern Ireland'.⁶¹ O'Neill had little choice but to 'play the Reagan card' in order to influence to Anglo-Irish process.⁶²

Reagan and the advent of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement

The publication of the NIF coincided with Reagan's visit to Europe in May 1984. Reagan's visit to Ireland and the United Kingdom in 1984 was part of a broader visit to Europe which would provide footage for the president's re-election campaign. Reagan would meet with his fellow world leaders at the London Economic Summit and visit the beaches of Normandy to celebrate the anniversary of

D-Day.⁶³ However, this tour is also significant as it marks an acceptance by the Reagan administration that the Northern Ireland conflict was a topic of discussion for the president with the British and Irish governments. When George Schultz, the US Secretary of State, briefed the president about his visit to Ireland, he warned that FitzGerald, the Taoiseach, might ask Reagan to use his ‘good offices with Mrs. Thatcher’ in order to resolve the Northern Ireland question in accordance with the conclusions of the NIF. Nevertheless, Reagan was advised by Schultz: ‘Without commenting on the merits of the report itself, your best course of action is to reaffirm your support for all efforts, of both the Irish and British governments, to find a peaceful and constitutional solution to the problems of Northern Ireland, and our encouragement of the Anglo-Irish dialogue on this problem.’⁶⁴ Similar advice was given to the president in advance of his meeting with Thatcher. Schultz observed: ‘Making clear that the U.S. does not wish to intrude into a problem which should be resolved by Anglo-Irish cooperation, you might ask for her assessment of prospects for progress.’⁶⁵ The failure of the NIF to convince Thatcher changed this stance.

Thatcher’s intransigence and, for some quarters, inflammatory remarks about the forum’s conclusions outraged leading Irish-Americans, including O’Neill. The speaker wrote to the president, expressing his ‘deep concern that the Forum, which is the best hope for a peaceful, lawful and constitutional resolution to the tragedy of Northern Ireland may be in serious jeopardy as a result of Mrs. Thatcher’s public statements about the Forum’s Report’.⁶⁶ O’Neill praised Reagan’s public condemnation of the IRA and statements that had ‘been very helpful in educating Americans to the real threat posed by Irish terrorists’. However, he stressed that any solution in Northern Ireland ‘must be peaceful and political’ and ‘must involve the

reconciliation of the two identities in Northern Ireland and the active participation of the governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom in bringing about such a resolution'. In O'Neill's view, the NIF report represented 'the best efforts of moderate elements in Northern Ireland and in Ireland to fashion a political and constitutional framework for achieving a political solution to the tragedy of Northern Ireland'. Thus, Thatcher's refusal to engage with it meant that 'the forces for moderation' in Ireland and America would 'suffer significantly'. In a final flourish, the speaker wrote: 'I ask that you encourage Mrs. Thatcher to renew the Anglo-Irish dialogue over the Forum Report and that the Prime Minister recognize that the Forum has significant support in Congress and among Irish-Americans interested in bringing peace to the beautiful land of their forebears'.⁶⁷ O'Neill was clearly adopting a more nuanced approach than he had previously done in 1979. Equally disappointed by Thatcher's stance, members of the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs also sent a letter to the president. The Ad Hoc Committee was, of course, the rival of O'Neill's Friends of Ireland in terms of establishing a legislative representative for Irish Americans (Thompson 2001, 79-88). Rep. Mario Biaggi, the committee's chairman, requested that Reagan include Northern Ireland on the agenda with his forthcoming meeting with Thatcher: 'We are cognizant of the need for the United States not to be in the position of advocating or imposing a particular solution. However, we contend that we can play a positive and constructive role by encouraging that the peace process be maintained.'⁶⁸ It was hoped that the president would exercise 'some quiet diplomacy ... in the just pursuit of peace and justice in Northern Ireland'.⁶⁹ O'Neill would even again write to Reagan, albeit as a member of the Friends of Ireland. The Friends appealed to the president, making explicit their view that the American government had the ability, and duty, to intervene:

The Friends of Ireland in Congress believe that the United States has a constructive role to play in ending the violence and achieving lasting peace in Northern Ireland. We are very appreciative of your own, encouraging words in support of the New Ireland Forum. On behalf of the many Americans concerned by the lack of progress toward a just and peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland, we respectfully ask that you give priority to the issue of Northern Ireland in your discussions with Mrs. Thatcher, and that you urge her to build on the recent progress that has been made, with a view to encouraging both sides of the conflict to seek genuine compromise of their difference.⁷⁰

Clark also lobbied Reagan to raise the issue with Thatcher at Camp David and ensured that it was placed on the agenda (Thompson, 2001, 119).

Reagan did indeed discuss the Northern Ireland conflict with Thatcher at their Camp David meeting on 28 December 1984. However, according to the minutes of the meeting, it was Thatcher who raised the issue and not Reagan who had been subject to huge pressure by the Irish-American lobby to do so. Perhaps aware of the criticism directed towards her in America, the prime minister did so in a pre-emptively defensive manner: 'Mrs Thatcher said she wished to address the situation in Northern Ireland. Despite reports to the contrary, she and ... FitzGerald were on good terms and we are working toward making progress on this difficult question.'⁷¹ Reagan took this as his cue to pass on Congressional concerns: 'The President said making progress is important, and observed that there is great Congressional interest

in this matter. Indeed, Tip O'Neill has sent him a personal letter, asking him to appeal to Mrs. Thatcher to be reasonable and forthcoming.⁷² Ostensibly overstating the extent of his representation of the speaker's concerns, Reagan wrote to O'Neill, explaining:

During my meeting with Mrs. Thatcher at Camp David on December 22, I made a special effort to bring your letter to her personal attention and to convey your message of concern. I also personally emphasized the need for progress in resolving the complex situation in Northern Ireland, and the desirability for flexibility in the part of all the involved parties.⁷³

The president was seeking to stay neutral on this issue: nothing specific on Northern Ireland was mentioned in his meeting with Thatcher and, similarly, nothing was conceded. Reagan also passed on Thatcher's report about the complexities of the issue and her on-going work with FitzGerald:

While emphasizing the complexity of the situation, Mrs. Thatcher made a point of stressing to me that press reports of her alleged differences with Prime Minister FitzGerald were exaggerated. She also noted that she would be continuing her discussions with Prime Minister FitzGerald early in the new year.⁷⁴

Reagan's message to O'Neill was subtle but clear: the Anglo-Irish dialogue was progressing and there was no need for American intervention. This shows the limitations of the speaker's influence: Reagan and Thatcher shared a 'special

relationship' and their shared Cold Warrior interests would necessarily take precedence over O'Neill's concerns for Northern Ireland. Moreover, Reagan had other priorities and hoped that his exaggerated intervention would gain the speaker's support for one his own foreign interests. According to John Farrell, A National Security Council official noted that Reagan had discussed Northern Ireland with Thatcher in the first place as 'we hoped to use this as a lever against Tip to get Contra aid moving'. The president was frustrated by O'Neill's opposition to his plans to fund the Contra rebels against the communist regime in Nicaragua – and the speaker continued to frustrate him in this regard (Farrell 2001, 624). The subsequent Iran-Contra affair, in which the Reagan administration illegally financed the Contras threatened to derail Reagan's presidency (Schaller 2011, 73-80).

In addition to his lobbying of the president, O'Neill was determined to exercise some quiet diplomacy of his own. Prior to Thatcher's address to a joint session of Congress in February 1985, Sir Oliver Wright, the British ambassador to the U.S., was informed that 'the speaker would appreciate some discussion of Northern Ireland in the speech'.⁷⁵ The prime minister did just that, thanking O'Neill and his colleagues for their support in the peace process and assuring them of her desire to work with the Taoiseach. However, Thatcher actually used her remarks to criticise NORAID and stress that – despite Irish-American worries – she and FitzGerald were working together:

I recognise and appreciate the efforts which have been made by the Administration and Congress alike to bring home this message to American citizens who may be misled into making contributions to seemingly

innocuous groups ...Garret FitzGerald and I will continue to consult together in the quest for stability and peace in Northern Ireland and we hope we will have your continued support for our joint efforts to find a way forward.⁷⁶

According to Alex Brummer, writing in the *Guardian*, the encouragement of the Reagan administration and the sustained Congressional pressure was crucial in the development and signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement later that year.⁷⁷ However, the available evidence suggests that such a claim is difficult to substantiate. Moreover, the subsequent Anglo-Irish Agreement fell so short of providing a geographically united Ireland that it does not constitute a victory for O'Neill or the Irish-American lobby more generally. Thus, O'Neill's influence over Thatcher was limited and his objectives similarly so. Even when O'Neill raised the issue himself with Thatcher on the day of her address to Congress: 'He felt strongly that the problem needed to be resolved ... but was very wary of trying to tell any government what to do,' an aide to the speaker said'.⁷⁸

The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) on 15 November 1985 marked the culmination of Irish-American pressure since the beginning of the 'Troubles' (up to that point in time). In short, the Anglo-Irish Agreement established that the Irish government would be consulted in the affairs of Northern Ireland (Vinen 2009, 217).⁷⁹ The importance of Irish-Americans, particularly Reagan and O'Neill, was tacitly acknowledged by the British and Irish governments. However, their importance was not any role in the brokering of the deal. What is essentially acknowledged is the symbolic importance attached to O'Neill and Reagan domestically in the United States and in Ireland. In other words, even though the

AIA was not what Irish-Americans hoped the Forum would deliver, it was hoped that the Irish-American lobby would cease criticising the British government. Robert C. McFarlane, the national security adviser, informed Reagan that Thatcher and FitzGerald both requested ‘through emissaries who came on a private mission’ that the president and speaker would endorse the AIA and reiterate their condemnation for violence and terrorism in a joined public appearance’.⁸⁰ The joint appearance of ‘America’s two most prominent Irishmen’ would ‘send a signal of hope and moderation to the people of troubled Ireland’. According to McFarlane, the two governments also expressed their hope that the American government would ‘eventually provide tangible, financial support to assist with the economic and social development of those areas that have suffered from the instability’. Reagan’s statement would ‘lay the groundwork for possible future U.S. funding’ although the British government, presumably for political reasons, requested ‘some distance between the agreement and a formal request for funding’.

The AIA was certainly an instance of cooperation between Reagan and O’Neill, with McFarlane observing: ‘The Speaker is impressed that you are willing, on the eve of your trip to Geneva, to address the Irish question personally in public. He wants to be supportive and helpful. We are currently working with his staff to ensure that the Speaker’s brief remarks will complement yours.’ (Reagan was due to meet Mikhail Gorbachev for the first time.) The American response to the AIA and the subsequent statements by Reagan and O’Neill were certainly taken seriously by the Reagan administration. Prior to the statements, Reagan was scheduled to meet with O’Neill to discuss ‘bipartisan, public support’ for the AIA and ‘to lay the groundwork for possible future U.S. funding in support of the rebuilding of Northern

Ireland'. The significance attached to it is underlined by the meetings other attendees: Vice President George Bush, Shultz, Donald T. Regan (White House Chief of Staff), McFarlane, M.B. Oglesby, Jr. (Head of Legislative Affairs), Ros Ridgway (Assistant Secretary of State), Ronald K. Sable (NSC), Peter R. Sommer (NSC), Kirk O'Donnell (O'Neill's senior aide), Sir Oliver Wright (the British ambassador), and the Irish Ambassador, Pádraig MacKernan.⁸¹

The parallel statements made by Reagan and O'Neill suitably applauded the AIA. Reagan stated: 'Given the complex situation in Northern Ireland, all may not applaud this agreement. But let me state that the United States strongly supports this initiative'.⁸² The speaker concurred, congratulating 'the leaders of the governments of Ireland and Great Britain for taking this important and courageous step of constructing a framework for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland'.⁸³ The two statements highlighted the plans for American economic aid to Northern Ireland and this was reinforced in their shared press conference. O'Neill commented, 'I speak for the House, Mr. President -- any means that we can use in the Congress of the United States to help bring peace in Northern Ireland, I assure you that we'll have the full cooperation of the Congress; there's no question in my mind'.⁸⁴ O'Neill's continued interest in Northern Ireland and position as speaker had helped ensure that Carter's promise of financial aid to Northern Ireland in 1977 following progress in the political process become a reality. O'Neill's floor remarks during the debate on the resolution for aid following the AIA highlighted the decade long work of the Four Horsemen and the ambitions of the Carter and Reagan administrations. The speaker recollected how:

Beginning in 1977, Senators Kennedy and Moynihan, Governor Carey and I issued a series of St. Patrick's Day statements condemning the violence in Northern Ireland and urging Irish-Americans to withhold their support from the I.R.A. terrorists who were bringing death and destruction to the land of their forebears ... Beginning in 1977 President Carter and later President Reagan pledged the assistance of the United States in the event that the United Kingdom and Ireland reached an agreement that provided a framework for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.⁸⁵

He observed that although he disagreed with Reagan on many issues, they were 'no differences on the need to end the violence in Northern Ireland and bring about political progress there in a peaceful and constitutional fashion'. On the extent of the financial aid to Northern Ireland, O'Neill believed 'that considering current budget restraints ... this is a reasonable sum'.⁸⁶ The House of Representatives' unanimously voted in March 1986 for a \$250 million aid package (over five years) to Northern Ireland.⁸⁷ Within a year, O'Neill retired from the House of Representatives, and was able to take a great deal of public credit for American assistance to Northern Ireland. Given O'Neill's opposition to NORAID and violence in Northern Ireland, and success in helping to ensure that the need for answers to the Northern Ireland question retained political momentum, it was credit that he certainly deserved.

Conclusions

American pressure has influenced the policies of successive British governments towards Northern Ireland. The challenge to historians is to identify the

extent of that influence (Dixon 2008, 171). The extent of that influence is further open to debate given British and Irish frustrations with how the conflict was viewed in the United States, including by leading Irish-American politicians. Nevertheless, O'Neill's role in putting pressure for success on the Anglo-Irish process is a clear example of American attempts to contribute to that dialogue and an example of the role of ethnicity in the domestic politics of American foreign policy. The outcome of O'Neill's (and his colleagues') efforts was ultimately the financial aid following the AIA – aid first promised by Carter, but delivered by the Reagan administration and O'Neill's Congress – after all, Congress controls the budget. Reagan's discussions with Thatcher about Northern Ireland were certainly prompted by a desire to engage with O'Neill, but the extent of the president's interest was certainly limited. But again, other priorities may have influenced Reagan's thinking. The president hoped that by being perceived to have leaned on Thatcher he might gain O'Neill's support for his policy to fund the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. In the case of American attitudes towards Northern Ireland, policymaking and politics were as much foreign as they were domestic.

The speaker sought a solution to the 'Troubles' and the constitutional arrangements of Northern Ireland, and, to some extent, was successful, although the AIA was far from the republican settlement he had hoped to see. Nevertheless, this is indicative of the potential role of the office of the speaker in foreign affairs, particularly when acting on an issue that crosses over from one party-led administration to another in a changing executive branch. While British politicians initially rejected O'Neill's intervention in the Anglo-Irish process, the criticism he experienced in 1979 evolved into a request for his endorsement by the British and

Irish governments on the advent of the AIA. Even though the British request for O'Neill's support for the AIA was made privately, it does suggest that attitudes were changing and that the potential value of American intervention was beginning to be recognised – even if it was just on a symbolic level at this stage. O'Neill's work on the Northern Ireland conflict is therefore not only an example of the concerns and potential influence of Irish-American politicians, but crucially demonstrates the successful utility of their lobbying. This co-ordinated approach between the president of the United States and (former) members of Congress would be replicated during the peace process and activities of the Clinton administration (Thompson 2001, 191-215).

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¹ For an introduction to the vast historiography about the ‘Troubles’, see, for instance: Bew 2007, 486-555.

² For Jimmy Carter’s human rights foreign policy, see, for instance: Willentz 2008, 99-126. Similarly, for Ronald Reagan, see, for instance: Schaller 2011, 59-86.

³ Jimmy Carter: "Northern Ireland Statement on U.S. Policy.," August 30, 1977. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8014> [The next series of quotations are from this source.]

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Bennett Report followed an investigation into the mistreatment of suspected members of the IRA in Northern Ireland interrogation centres.

⁶ Copy of press released enclosed with: letter, JS Wall (Private Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) to BG Cartledge (10 Downing Street), 11 April 1979, in The National Archives (hereafter PRO), PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O’Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ‘Visit of Speaker O’Neill and Party to London, April 11-14, 1979’, in PRO, PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O’Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979.

¹⁰ News report, ‘Can’t Find Your Elected Representative? Try China,’ *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1979, B22.

¹¹ Staff Files, Kirk O’Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Arrangements and Security, Nov. 1978 – April 1979, Thomas P. O’Neill, Jr. Congressional Papers (CA2009-01), Box 15, Folder 15/14, John J. Burns Library, Boston College (hereafter O’Neill Papers).

¹² Press Release, The Speaker's Rooms, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515, April 5, 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/14, O'Neil Papers.

¹³ The Special Representative for Trade Negotiations, Washington, MEMORANDUM FOR THE SPEAKER, From: Robert S. Strauss, Subject: Review of MTN Status for your European Visit, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit – Background, Jan. 1978, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15, O'Neill Papers.

¹⁴ Reference Papers, Department of State, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/14, O'Neill Papers.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Letter, M Turner (Private Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office) to JDF Holt (Private Secretary, 10 Downing Street), 5 April 1979, in PRO, PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O'Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ PRO, PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O'Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979.

¹⁹ 'Lines to take, Northern Ireland', author unknown, PRO, PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O'Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979.

²⁰ Ibid. (The increase in parliamentary representation for Northern Ireland in 1979 followed the ending of devolved government in 1973.)

²¹ Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/16, O'Neill Papers. (The recipient of the report is unclear from the documents, but presumably it was for colleagues in the legislative and executive branch.)

²² Ibid.

²³ Letter/Minutes, B.G. Cartledge (Private Secretary, 10 Downing Street) to J.S. Wall (Private Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Speaker O'Neill's Call on the Prime Minister

at 10 Downing Street, 12 April 1979, PRO, PREM 16/2291, The PM agreed to see Speaker O'Neill of the American House of Representatives March 1979. [The following notes are from this source.]

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/16, O'Neill Papers.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/16, O'Neill Papers.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 'Visit by Speaker O'Neill,' 26 April 1979, memorandum of conversation, National Archives of Ireland (NAI): Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), 2009/93/20 (hereafter NAI: DFA). I am grateful to the National Archives of Ireland and the Director of the National Archives of Ireland for the use of this, and similar, material.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ 'Visit of U.S. Congressional Delegation,' NAI: DFA Public Records 2009/93/20.

³² 'Visit of U.S. Congressional Delegation April, 1979, Steering Note, Northern Ireland', NAI: DFA, 2009/93/20.

³³ Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, Folder 15/16, O'Neill Papers.

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- ³⁴ Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., Toast remarks, April 19, 1979, delivered in Dublin, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Ireland – Speakers 1979 Trip to Ireland, Dublin Castle Speech, April 19th, Box 23, Folder 23/9, O'Neill papers.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. J. Lynch, T.D. at the dinner for Speaker and Mrs. O'Neill and American Congressmen, Dublin Castle, 19th April, 1979, at 10.00 p.m., Box 23, Folder 23/9. O'Neill Papers.
- ³⁷ Margaret Thatcher, General Election Press Conference, Friday 20 April 1979, accessed via <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104029>, 23 January 2013.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Anne McHardy and Philip Jordan, 'Belfast welcome for Kennedy ally', *The Guardian*, 21 April 1979, 1.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Editorial, 'Tip O'Neill and the Irish iceberg,' *The Guardian*, 21 April 1979, 8.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Daily Express Opinion, 'Go home Mr O'Neill,' *Daily Express*, Saturday 21 April 1979, 8.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Editorial, 'Ruffling the lion's mane,' *Boston Globe*, 25 April 1979, 14.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. For Carey's call for sanctions see: Wilson 1995, 157.
- ⁴⁸ Mary Holland, 'Tip O'Neill was shocked by Callaghan,' *Sunday Independent*, 22 April 1979, NAI: DFA, 2009/93/20.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, 15/16, O'Neill Papers.

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- ⁵¹ McHardy and Jordan, 'Belfast welcome for Kennedy ally', 1.
- ⁵² Report on the fact-finding mission to The United Kingdom, Belgium, Hungary and Ireland, April 11-23, 1979, Submitted by Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland Visit, Report, April 1979, Box 15, 15/16, O'Neill Papers.
- ⁵³ James Kelly, 'Carter set for North Summit', *Irish Independent*, 21 April 1979, NAI: DFA, 2009/93/20.
- ⁵⁴ Kenneth Clarke, 'O'Neill's trail of rumour,' *The Sunday Telegraph*, 22 April 1979, NAI: DFA, 2009/93/20.
- ⁵⁵ Rachelle Patterson 'O'Neill: Irish trip beneficial,' *Boston Globe*, 22 April 1979, 1.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Memorandum, Alexander M. Haig, Jr. to Ronald Reagan, Visit of Prime Minister Thatcher, [Briefing book re visit of British Prime Minister Thatcher, February 25-28, 1981] (Binder) (1/2) Box 91434 (RAC 1), Executive Secretariat, NSC: VIP Visits, Ronald Reagan Library.
- ⁵⁸ Ronald Reagan: "Statement on St. Patrick's Day," March 17, 1981. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43547>, accessed 31 July 2013.
- ⁵⁹ 'Meeting with Judge William P Clark, National Security Adviser, at the White House, 4 October, 1982,' Visit of Mr Gerard Collins, Minister for Foreign Affairs, To Washington, September – October 1982, Visits abroad by Minister for Foreign Affairs, November 1981 – December 1982, NAI: DFA, 2012/59/1581.
- ⁶⁰ Margaret Thatcher, Press Conference following Anglo-Irish Summit, Monday 19 November 1984, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105790>, accessed 31 July 2013.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² For the 'special relationship' between Reagan and Thatcher, see, for instance: Aldous 2012 and Cooper 2012).
- ⁶³ See, for instance: Cannon 2000, 424-87.

⁶⁴ Memorandum for: The President, From: George P. Shultz, Subject: Your Trip to Ireland: Setting and Issues, The President's Trip to Europe: Ireland, UK and Normandy (1 of 6) Box 20, 06/01/1984 – 06/10/1984 (Binder), Office of Coordination, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁵ Memorandum for: The President, From: George P. Shultz, Subject: Your Trip to the United Kingdom: Setting and Issues, May 14, 1984, The President's Trip to Europe: Ireland, UK and Normandy (1 of 6) Box 20, 06/01/1984 – 06/10/1984 (Binder), Office of Coordination, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁶ Letter, Thomas P. O'Neill to Ronald Reagan, December 13, 1984, 8434471, Congressional Correspondence by member (L-Z), Box 90520, Chris Lehman, Files (4/18) [0], Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Letter, Mario Biaggi et al to Ronald Reagan, December 17, 1984, 834470, Congressional Correspondence by member (L-Z), Box 90520, Chris Lehman, Files (4/18) [0], Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Letter, Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. et al to Ronald Reagan, December 20, 1984, Thatcher Visit – Dec 84 [3], Box 90902, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Subject: Meeting with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Participants: The President, The Vice President, Secretary Shultz, Robert C. McFarlane, Ambassador Price, Assistant Secretary Burt, Peter R. Sommer, NSC, Mrs. Thatcher, Ambassador Wright, Robin Butler, Principal Private Secretary to Mrs. Thatcher, Charles Powell, Private Secretary to Mrs. Thatcher, Date, Time and Place: December 22, 1984, Camp David, 10: 40 a.m. – 11: 10 a.m., Private Meeting, Aspen Lodge, 11:30 a.m. – 1:25 p.m., Expanded Meeting and Lunch, Laurel Lodge, December 28, 1984, Thatcher Visit,

Dec 84 [1], Box 90902, European and Soviet Affairs Directorate, NSC: Records, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Letter, Ronald Reagan to Thomas P. O'Neill, January 9, 1985, Congressional Correspondence by member (L-Z), Box 90520, Lehman, Chris Files (4/18) [0], Box 3, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Alex Brummer, 'The greening of the White House,' *The Guardian*, Tuesday 26 November 1985, 21.

⁷⁶ Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Joint Houses of Congress, Wednesday 20 February 1985, accessed via <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105968>, 1 August 2013.

⁷⁷ Brummer, 'The greening of the White House,' 21.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ For the Anglo-Irish Agreement, see, for instance: Hennessey 2000 and Cochrane 2001.

⁸⁰ 'Meeting with House Speaker Tip O'Neill, Date: November 15, 1985, Location: Oval Office and Press Room, Time: 10:00-10:15 a.m., From: Robert C. McFarlane/M.B. Oglesby, Jr., Meeting with Tip O'Neill & Irish & UK Ambassadors 11/15/85, Box 10, Coordination Office, National Security Counsel: Records, Ronald Reagan Library. [Subsequent quotes are also from this source.]

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ronald Reagan, Statement on the United Kingdom-Ireland Agreement Concerning Northern Ireland, November 15, 1985, accessed via <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/111585a.htm>, 1 August 2013.

⁸³ Statement by Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., November 15, 1985, Kirk O'Donnell Files, Ireland: Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985, 25/6, Thomas P. O'Neill Papers, Staff Files: Kirk O'Donnell Files, Box 25, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

⁸⁴ Ronald Reagan and Thomas P. O'Neill, Remarks on the United Kingdom-Ireland Agreement Concerning Northern Ireland, November 15, 1985, accessed via <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/111585b.htm>, 1 August 2013.

⁸⁵ Floor Remarks of Speaker Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., March 11, 1986, Subject File, Box 13, Ireland 1986, 13/8, O'Neill Papers.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/aia/chron.htm>. Unfortunately the package was delayed due to debates about a new extradition treaty between UK and US. Ultimately, the American contribution to the International Fund for Ireland was passed at \$120 million – over three years – in July 1986. See: Wilson 1995, 254-56.