

GOOD MORNING ULSTER - 08.05 AM 18 MARCH 1993

So President Bill Clinton has decided to postpone indefinitely a decision about sending a peace envoy to Northern Ireland. After talks at the White House with the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds the President said he did not want to undermine the talks process here. President Clinton was first asked if he had a time frame for sending a peace envoy to Northern Ireland.

President Clinton

No, I discussed it with the Prime Minister and we decided after our consultation that it's certainly an option that I should leave open both of those options and have under serious consideration. As you know, talks began last year and then were suspended and I am very hopeful that the British and the Irish Governments get back together and begin serious dialogue soon. I think that is the precondition, as I said for the other talks proceeding, and I'm going to stay in touch constantly with Prime Minister Albert and talk frequently and I expect to have an Ambassador in Ireland pretty soon and I'll make those decisions at what seems to me to be the appropriate time. I have not made them now. I don't think it would be appropriate to make a firm decision on that at this time.

Interviewer

President Clinton, have you taken on board the Unionist concern that anger in Northern is suggesting pretty widespread who would attempt to mediate?

President Clinton

Well I don't think that the United States can make peace in Northern Ireland; I don't think the Unionists, the Nationalists, or anyone else would expect that. I think that we have a deep concern about the future of Northern Ireland; we have a deep concern that any violence reduces humanity which is done there, and I want to do

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Whatever I can to support that process. I do believe, I say again, I do believe that the dialogue that was opened not all that long ago between these two Governments in Ireland and Great Britain offered a real chance of producing a framework within which peace could occur, and I'm going to continue to stay on top of the situation about that, I'll make those decisions at a later time when I think they're appropriate. I think it is inappropriate now for me to do more than just to say that I think the Government should in honest embrace the opportunities that are before them and I'll be as supportive as I can. Whenever there seems to be something I can do by taking further action then I will do it. I don't want to do anything to undermine the peace process. I want to do something that will support it and reinforce it.

Congressman Tom Manton has been a leading campaigner for a peace envoy in Northern Ireland. Only last month he and 30 other politicians signed a letter to President Clinton urging him to act quickly. Now the President has postponed the decision, how disappointed is Mr Manton?

Mr Manton

Obviously it's one of the issues that I'm very sensitive to and have urged the President to do and we realise he made a campaign promise that he would, but there are an awful lot of things on the agenda and it's only into the third month of his Presidency. He didn't foreclose appointing an envoy in the future and he did say that Ireland has a friend in the White House, not only on St Patrick's Day but all year round, so the Irish question or questions I think are still going to be things that are on the President's plate to deal with. So I'm optimistic that this may happen perhaps in the future.

Interviewer

Won't many Irish-Americans be very disappointed though for here's a President who promised during this election campaign he would appoint an envoy who, on St Patrick's Day during a visit of the Irish Prime Minister to America, announces that he's not going to fulfil that commitment?

Mr Manton

Well, I'm sure that there'll be a certain amount of disappointment but there's nothing magical about St Patrick's Day. In some ways it's overplayed; it may prematurely focus attention on things that are not ready to be done yet.

Interviewer

It's a bit of a slap in the face for the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds, though, isn't it?

Mr Manton

Well, I didn't hear any statement from the Prime Minister, but I am not sure whether we could consider it a slap in the face. I think they are leaders of their respective countries and they obviously had a frank discussion. They didn't sweep it under the rug; they adjust the problem in the light of here and now without foreclosing the concept.

Interviewer

Although he has put off the date for sending an envoy to Ireland, have you any idea, any kind of timetable you think he ought to be following on this. For instance, when would people like yourself run out of patience and simply demand that he fulfil the promise he made during his election campaign?

Mr Manton

Well, we like to think here of a honeymoon at least for the first 100 days; it hasn't quite reached that point, but I don't think we're going to draw a line in the sand on the 100th day, but we'll be eagerly watching and waiting to see what the President does. Perhaps even the publicity that's been given to the idea of an envoy might have some benefit when people start to think about the possibility that it might happen and perhaps some of the participants in the disputes may temper their positions a bit and we'll get some progress there; maybe hopefully an envoy wouldn't be needed.

Bill Clinton has decided to postpone indefinitely a decision about sending a peace envoy to Northern Ireland. After talks at the White House with the Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds the President said he did not want to undermine the talks process here. Our political editor Jim Dougal asked Mr Reynolds if he had asked President Clinton to defer sending an envoy to Northern Ireland?

Albert Reynolds

No, he made it quite clear that all his options are open, whether it is by exploratory mission, fact-finding mission or a peace envoy or anything in that regard. All his options are open; he is not about to take an immediate decision in that regard. He made that quite clear. He made it also quite clear that at the luncheon today that he is not - just because he's not making a decision now - that's he's not letting down anybody or anything like that. He's very seriously immersed in the whole problem, wants to be helpful to both Governments and to both traditions and to try and find a solution, help to find a solution. He does not want to be divisive; he wants to be constructive.

Jim Dougal

But the fact that he's deferring a decision on it means that he's not going to send anyone in the near future. Do you think that's a wise decision?

Albert Reynolds

It's not a question that he hasn't taken a decision or deferred it. He said he's not at the point of decision-making yet and he will keep in close consultation with us and keep in close personal contact with me in relation to developments and he wants me to do likewise. It's not a question of deferring a decision; he's not at the point of decision-making as yet. He has kept all his options open and he wants everybody to understand that.

Jim Dougal

Would you welcome an envoy?

Albert Reynolds

I gave him my views as to where it's odd; I gave him the views of a lot of other people as well that I had garnered along the way and I think he, like the British Government and myself, is fully conscious of the fact that we're coming into an election situation, local elections time in the North of Ireland, and I think he's conscious of that and he's taken that matter into consideration as well.

Jim Dougal

Are you and the British Government at one in what you actually want with regard to this issue?

Albert Reynolds

I think what he wants us to see is the two Governments get together and decide themselves what they want to see and then try and mobilise support. That's the way his mind was thinking rather than Americans trying to impose what his views might be on the British Government and the Irish Government. He sees his role as very important, very supportive, wants to get the two Governments and encourage them to get together and get back to the talks process.

Jim Dougal

And what about the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland?

Albert Reynolds

He understand quite clearly the complexity of the constitutional position in Northern Ireland. That's why he went back the whole way through the historical positions that brought it about. He's very well versed; he's going to continue to learn about the problem and whatever is the best process to try and solve this.

Jim Dougal

He says that he wants the two Governments to get back to talks. Obviously he wants the parties in Northern Ireland to get back into talks. Do you think that's realistic given Unionist attitudes at the moment?

Albert Reynolds

Well I think it should be realistic. I think that everybody in the North of Ireland, on whatever side of the political divide they may find themselves, surely after 23 years of violence, don't want to face into another 23 years of violence, and I think there's a responsibility on all political leaders, both from the North, both from the South, and in London to ensure that that's not happening, and that's not going to happen for the next generation.

Thank you for your letter of 5 March enclosing one from your constituent Mrs McKechnie about speculation that the United States Administration will appoint a special envoy or fact finder on Northern Ireland.

There has been much media speculation about this. The Prime Minister discussed the subject with President Clinton in Washington recently. No announcement has yet been made and it remains to be seen how the United States administration will proceed.

Your constituent mentions in her letter that she is totally opposed to the appointment of Speaker Tom Foley as a possible fact-finder because he is not impartial or sympathetic to Her Majesty's Government's policies on Northern Ireland. Speaker Foley's name has been mentioned in the media. While I cannot comment on the suitability of individuals I can only say that Speaker Foley has, in the past, been extremely helpful to Northern Ireland in many ways, not least in his forthright public condemnations of terrorist violence.

Copied: To / Mr J. S. (Hill)
To / Mr. Atkins (C.D. Del.)
To / Mr. Bailey (C.D. Del.)
To / Mr. 19.11.