

Points to make

1. Today's Independent quotes the Taoiseach as saying "I passionately believe that unless we can find a formula for peace, the Talks process will not succeed."
2. Commentators have not been slow to say that this seems to put the Talks process, and the prospect of an overall accommodation, at the mercy of the gunmen.
3. It also casts a strange retrospective light on what we were doing in 1991 and 1992. We patently did not have a permanent cessation of violence during the Talks of March to November 1992. But I do not believe we were wasting our time. Nor did Sir Ninian Stephen.
4. A mistake to make an overall settlement and peace an either/or choice. The Brussels Joint Statement of 29 October made clear that both needed to be pursued urgently.
5. Paragraph 7 of the Joint Statement urged the Northern Ireland parties to intensify their efforts to find a basis for new Talks. That will be undermined if the Taoiseach is seen as saying that peace must come first.
6. None of this is to rule out further urgent work between the two Governments on the prospects for bringing about peace. There was a further meeting of the Butler/Nally Group yesterday. British officials indicated that we would want to consider the latest draft most carefully. But we remain genuinely worried that the Hume/Adams demarche, and all the subsequent publicity, has made this particular approach very difficult, with a high risk that it would prove counter-productive.



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7. If we conclude, reluctantly, that even the latest text will not produce the result we all want to see, I hope we can continue to work together to see whether other approaches might be found.

8. I am very anxious that you should not underestimate the importance of the work of the Liaison Group. It could provide the key to enable the Talks process to be intensified, and perhaps even round table Talks to recommence. But it is also addressing issues, such as those of constitutional balance, which are at the heart of the Joint Declaration, and which could prove vital either in that or in some repackaged approach.

9. For these reasons, I am increasingly concerned that we have seen no product on the Irish side in response to our joint commission at the IGC on 10 September. A British draft was handed over on 24 September. There have subsequently been three meetings of the Liaison Group. While there have been constructive discussions, we are still awaiting an Irish draft.

10. We really do need the full engagement and co-operation of the Irish Government on these issues. It adds insult to injury when we read briefing in the Irish Press that the Irish Government is looking to the British Government to be imaginative and responsive. Please keep in mind that the input which we await from you to the Liaison Group is central both to the Talks and to work on the prospects for peace.

11. We continue to believe that it would be counterproductive to resuscitate speculation about a US peace envoy in the present climate. The Unionists are always going to see any envoy from such a quarter as parti pris. We know of no evidence that a peace envoy would make the Provisionals any more likely to call a cessation.

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12. I quite understand and accept the need to buttress the position of John Hume. I have myself taken political risks by praising him in the House of Commons. The Joint Statement of 29 October steered a very careful path in decoupling further work towards peace from Hume/Adams, while giving Mr Hume due credit. Any attempt to recouple Hume/Adams and the work on peace is likely to increase the risks that it would be counterproductive.