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Sean O'Rourke:

It all depends on whether you regard the glass as half empty or half full, one key official is quoted today as saying in the aftermath of Friday's Anglo Irish meeting at Dublin Castle. Albert Reynolds and John Major agreed to continue working on a joint statement which, in the Taoiseach's words, "would hopefully be the foundation for peace", but the two men admitted that they had still a number of obstacles to clear in the period ahead. The Taoiseach joins us now in studio, you're welcome Taoiseach.

Albert Reynolds: (An Taoiseach)

Thank you.

Sean O'Rourke:

Can you tell us what exactly are the issues to be addressed in that joint statement in which you're working?

Albert Reynolds:

Well I don't think it would be wise to go into the minutiae (pho) of the text or the details but it is true that we started our discussions on a document that has been, that was first of all presented to the British Government by the Irish Government and secondly that has been worked upon by officials of both Governments since last July. This was the first opportunity for the Government Ministers and indeed the two Prime Ministers to sit in judgement and start to go through the document which we did and as is, as is normal in good solid negotiations we went through it line by line, paragraph by paragraph and extracted those issues that were still causing

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problems to both sides. We just parked them so to speak and we went on with the rest of the document. It is true to say that we made solid progress, that over half of the document has already been agreed, that there are very serious issues still to be addressed by both sides and we commissioned more work between our teams of officials between now and the meeting in Brussels next week to monitor what progress we have made since then.

Sean O'Rourke:

But surely though the fact that there was no, there wasn't even a communique, not even a short brief statement issued afterwards, that would suggest that you're still poles apart.

Albert Reynolds:

It might, we are, we have already admitted we have difficulties between us, that doesn't say that we won't be able to overcome them, there will be difficult discussions along the way but I think it's, it's important to remind everybody that this was a working meeting, it wasn't a summit, it wasn't expected and we clearly flagged that in advance, it wasn't expected that a communique would come out, but that we would indeed say how far we had got and continue our work and I think that's what is important is that the peace initiative is still firmly on course but there are serious problems along the way as I said there are road blocks there, some we anticipated, some we don't and I'm sure there'll be more difficulties put in our way before the end of the day.

Sean O'Rourke:

According to various reports in the aftermath of the meeting there are several issues, can we just maybe take them individually, for instance, this notion of self-determination now you've said I think that you'd like to see the British acknowledge that the future of the island of Ireland is a matter for the people of Ireland to determine with consent freely given North and South. Is there a problem that this will be seen as something which maybe would be calculated on an all-Ireland basis and somehow would undermine the Union?

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Albert Reynolds:

I think that's the fear that is out there and I think some British media during the week I think were seen to be presenting, presenting it in that light. That is not the position of the Irish Government. We are not looking for self-determination of the island as a whole calculated as one single entity. We have said that, there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without a majority there and I think this issue was clarified very clearly on a BBC Newsnight television programme the other night when the Government Whip, Noel Dempsey and Michael Mates were there and when Noel Dempsey clarified it Michael Mates said that's fine, that clears up any misunderstandings or mis-statements about it and it is quite acceptable to him, so there shouldn't be problems in that regard.

Sean O'Rourke:

Well if it's quite acceptable to Michael Mates is it not quite acceptable to John Major, presumably you said the same to him as Noel Dempsey said to Michael Mates?

Albert Reynolds:

Of course and those are issues as I say, that we still have to maybe work on on the phraseology in relation to them between now and the next meeting and monitor our progress then but that doesn't say that we won't find a formula. I think what, what people need to understand here is that I believe that both communities in the North want a new beginning, I believe a new beginning is absolutely necessary and a new beginning should be, I think the starting point for a new beginning should be peace, a cessation of violence and that this initiative that we're engaged upon is trying to produce a formula that can bring a cessation of violence about, that people want a sense of direction, a sense of turning away from the last twenty-five years of arms conflict between the two communities and the British security forces and that this statement would clearly signal a new direction and a new approach and indeed bring the people that are involved in violence into the political dialogue after a cessation of violence, I think that's basic what we're trying to do.

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Sean O'Rourke:

Fine, and that is what you've been emphasising for, for many weeks and indeed months now but clearly the British have some difficulty with it, is it that they want you to move a little more than you've been prepared to on Constitutional matters?

Albert Reynolds:

Well our, the Government's position and my position on Constitutional matters and Articles 2 & 3 are quite clear and unequivocal, I have said there will be no unilateral change in Articles 2 & 3, but in the event of a balanced settlement emanating from the talks process, which is a separate process to this, that the Irish Government would indeed put a Referendum to the Irish people..

Sean O'Rourke:

Right, but...

Albert Reynolds:

To bring about whatever changes are required in that situation. Now, let me say, let me go on to say this, John Major accepted that in principal during the general election campaign when he was making his speech on Northern Ireland, James Molyneux after my appearance on the David Frost programme said he was now quite clearly of the view as to where the Irish Government stood and I think there's general acceptance that that's what people wanted to hear from us that in the event of an overall settlement that there would be a Referendum held and give the Irish, the Irish people the opportunity to voice their view because this is a people's issue.

Sean O'Rourke:

But is that something which is going to be tied into the joint statement on which you're working at the present time?

Albert Reynolds:

Well I, I, I think that all these fundamental issues are issues for the talks process, however...

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Sean O'Rourke:

So you're not prepared to give the Constitutional promise in the joint statement?

Albert Reynolds:

I'm not prepared to make any unilateral change in the Constitution or to declare that in, in a statement...

Sean O'Rourke:

Or did you have a commitment to it?

Albert Reynolds:

I will continue to say or write it if somebody wants it the present position of the Irish Government and continue to say that what is our position is and any talks and anything else on changes of a, to reach a balanced Constitutional agreement is appropriate to the talks process and there's where it has to be teased out and what I'm talking about is a balanced Constitutional settlement.

Sean O'Rourke:

But as you say there are two processes, there's the peace one and there's the talks one but you are prepared in the joint statement on which you're working at the present time to make the kind of commitment you've spoken about?

Albert Reynolds:

The present commitment that's there, that hasn't changed and if somebody wants it in writing I don't have any problems with that but I don't see that it's, it's absolutely necessary, I've said it often enough but if, if it, if it bridges the gap, okay.

Sean O'Rourke:

Right now the British Prime Minister and his Northern Secretary, Mr Mayhew both said during the week, Mr Major said it when he sat beside you at the Press Conference that Britain was not prepared to join the persuaders, is that a particular problem for you, I mean, what do you want them to persuade, presumably you want them to persuade the Unionists?

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Albert Reynolds:

I want them to participate in making a statement that's clearly signals a new beginning for, for all the parties concerned, the two communities concerned up there, the people that are involved in violence on both sides and indeed the two Governments as well, in other words that we will accept what, what the two communities agree at what everybody sitting around the table agrees at in the end will be accepted by the Irish Government and will be supported by action by the Irish Government, I want the British Government to say the same thing. I think the real persuading has to be done between the two communities, who after all are the people that, where the conflict is involved and indeed that they have to work out and persuade each other how they're going to live in future and then turn to the two Governments and say that's the position we want solidified by both Governments. What I want this peace initiative and indeed the statement from the two Governments to point to a new beginning, to indeed a situation where hopefully we can get a cessation of violence and that becomes the starting point for the new beginning and then let the talks process take place in a changed environment of peace and no violence and I believe that's where the real progress can be made.

Sean O'Rourke:

Do you agree Taoiseach with the view put forward by Cardinal Daly in that address at Westminster during the week when he said that it wouldn't be consistent with British policy nor would it be unfair or injurious to Unionists if the commitment, the British commitment to the Union were paralleled by a formal acceptance by the British Government of the validity and value of the Nationalist aim of a United Ireland achieved by consent and agreement, is that what you're actually...

Albert Reynolds:

I think that, that phraseology and that wording is extracted from the famous leaked document that was being put together by officials, the document that was being drafted by the officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs for presentation to Government, that's where

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that kind of phraseology comes from. What I say now and what I have always said is that document is not relevant to the peace initiative, that document when it's finalised by the Government or another document like it will be presented indeed for the talks process and it is in that process that those issues should be teased out. I want to keep the peace initiative in a simple, as simple as possible, not complicated by fundamental issues which are more appropriate, appropriately addressed in the talks process.

Sean O'Rourke:

But that's not something that you want them to agree to say in the joint statement that you're working on now?

Albert Reynolds:

I'm not using those words, those words are distracted from a statement that are appropriate to the talks process and I believe that's where they should be considered.

Sean O'Rourke:

Now are you still, do you still take the view that, as you put it forward at the Pianna Fail Ard Fheis a few weeks ago that we can still see the beginnings of peace by Christmas?

Albert Reynolds:

Well that's a matter if we can reach agreement in time, there's a mood for peace, nobody denies there's a mood for peace, John Major has himself accepted that the best opportunity for a cessation of violence exists now than ever existed for the last twenty-five years. I think there is ample evidence throughout the length and breadth of this country and indeed in the British media that represents very solid opinion in Britain that they too would like to see a cessation of violence and a resolution of the conflict, the armed conflict that's going on. Now that mood is there, it is the responsibility and duty of both Governments to take up the initiative in that regard, respond to that mood and indeed grab that opportunity that is there.

Sean O'Rourke:

But is it, is it contingent though on the British actually accepting

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this declaring this right of the Irish people to self-determination?

Albert Reynolds:

First of all it's contingent on the two Governments arriving at a statement that in both our judgements will indeed give a signal for a new beginning that the people involved in arms conflict can respond to, that's the purpose of this joint statement we're working on. Now, we have to make a judgement at the end of the day that those engaged in violence and arms conflict will see the sense of a new direction, see the sense of turning their back on a futile strategy that has brought them nowhere for the last twenty-five years.

Sean O'Rourke:

But you've promised them already a place at the table though, I mean if they cease their violence, now what more do you think you should give them?

Albert Reynolds:

What they want to see is that people are clearly of a mind to seek a new beginning, we know what is, the futile and indeed the way the whole thing has developed over the last twenty-five years, everybody accepts there's going to be no military solution on either side. What I believe is needed is that the two Governments signal quite clearly that the Governments are looking for a new beginning, that they want everyone to join with us in a new beginning and that by our statement we will give the signal and the direction that there is a new beginning there to be taken up and hopefully that the men of violence will see that the futility of twenty-five years has got them nowhere and that consequently they'll join the dialogue and the talks process and that we have to ensure that there is a position for them at an early date to join that process and indeed make their own input into how the future of a new Ireland is going to be brought about, a new Ireland that the two communities in the first instance can persuade each other that there's a better way ahead than the way they have been engaged upon for the last twenty-five years.

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Sean O'Rourke:

An early date, how early is early?

Albert Reynolds:

This thing of telling dates and that I have said on a number of occasions that I believe there's an opportunity there that hasn't been there, I don't believe that time is on our side, I don't believe that the mood for peace will carry on indefinitely and that's why I always try to place it as a matter of urgency between the two Governments.

Sean O'Rourke:

Right, but you're saying that there will be a place for them at an early date now I'm trying to establish how long this quarantine is to last?

Albert Reynolds:

Well this is a matter, this is a matter for agreement between the two Governments, this is a matter for agreement by the two Governments and hopefully we'll get to that issue if not at the next meeting hopefully at a meeting after that.

Sean O'Rourke:

You're going to talk again in Brussels next week, are you, do you expect that there will be much progress between now and then?

Albert Reynolds:

Well it's difficult to say, I think at least we have isolated areas where there can be a focused attention by all parties by the teams on both sides to look at different approaches to the problems that have been thrown up and whatever progress is made they may need a further political input and that's what, what both Prime Ministers will give, will give the process when we meet in Brussels probably on Friday or Saturday. You see we cannot be definitive about what day or what time or how much time we can give to it in Brussels.

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Sean O'Rourke:

Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

Albert Reynolds:

Thank you.
