

**THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE  
PEACE PROCESS, 1992-94**

**—A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE  
Albert Reynolds**

**— AN OBSERVER'S PERSPECTIVE  
Kevin Rafter**

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## ABSTRACTS

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### **THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PEACE PROCESS, 1992-94— A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

This paper explores the role of the Irish government in advancing the peace process in the years leading up to the ceasefires of 1994. As Taoiseach since 1992, Albert Reynolds had brought his own familiarity with Northern Ireland as a businessman to bear on efforts to resolve the problem. A positive working relationship with British prime minister John Major and with US President Bill Clinton helped to ease the path towards a ceasefire, and to provide the outline of a political settlement (as summarised in the Downing St Declaration of 1993, on which the later Framework Document was built). The paper discusses the role of the Irish government, and in particular of the Taoiseach, his advisors and intermediaries, in persuading republican and loyalist paramilitaries of the potential of the political path, and in encouraging the adoption of conclusive ceasefires.

### **THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PEACE PROCESS, 1992-94— AN OBSERVER'S PERSPECTIVE**

This paper examines the contribution of a number of key individuals—prominent among them the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds; his advisor, Martin Mansergh; and a Redemptorist priest, Fr Alec Reid—to bringing about peace in Northern Ireland. It assesses the central contribution of the Taoiseach in persuading the republican movement that his government possessed sufficient international clout to make it a worthwhile ally in pursuing a political rather than a military path. Martin Mansergh was able to reinforce this message in his contacts with republicans, and Fr Alec Reid, an intermediary whose role was not known at the time, was able to provide vital reassurances to each side about thinking on the other side as discussions proceeded.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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**Albert Reynolds** was a Fianna Fáil Dáil deputy for 25 years, from 1977 to 2002. He served as a government minister in 1979-81, 1982 and 1987-92, and as Taoiseach in 1992-94. A businessman by background, he played a central role in promoting the peace process, in drawing up the Downing Street Declaration (1993) and in paving the way for the ceasefires of 1994 and for the Good Friday agreement.

**Kevin Rafter** presents the *This Week* programme on RTE Radio One. An economics graduate with a master's degree in politics, he has been researching the peace process for several years. His books include *Martin Mansergh: a biography* (New Island, 2002); *The Clann: a history of Clann na Poblachta, 1945-65* (Mercier, 1996); *Neil Blaney—a soldier of destiny* (Blackwater, 1993); and *Malin Head to Mizen Head: 1991 local election guidebook* (Blackwater, 1992).

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## THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PEACE PROCESS, 1992-94— A POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Albert Reynolds

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### I

Among the people who can correct me on dates and details relating to this talk, at least two are present in the audience tonight. One is Dermot Nally, former Secretary General to the Government, who served every Irish Taoiseach since the 1970s. He took part in the Sunningdale conference in 1973, and was involved in all later initiatives between then and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. I remember that he gave me great encouragement in going forward with the peace process. I particularly remember what Dermot said to me as we came out of Downing Street following my first meeting as Taoiseach with John Major, who was a personal friend of mine for quite a number of years. He said, “you know, I have been coming here for a long time and I have never heard a British Prime Minister being as open and accommodating as John Major was to you. I think the two of you will do business”. And he was right; my thanks to Dermot.

The other person is the man who guided everybody—not alone me, as Taoiseach, but indeed those who came before and after me in this office. This is Martin Mansergh, an expert on all of the details, committed to this heavy task, but now under less pressure in the Seanad. Having said that, I will turn to the topic of the evening.

### II

Many people are surprised to learn of my own connections with the North of Ireland. I had quite a lot of friends from the North even before I came into politics, because of my business: I sold my products there. These people came from very diverse backgrounds. For example, I had contact with one particular individual who was an election agent at the time for William Craig; he is now a strong supporter of Ian Paisley’s. This man distributed my products in the North of Ireland on two conditions. One was that I did not put “Manufactured in the Republic of Ireland” on the label; the second was that I didn’t deliver the goods by means of CIE trucks. “If you do this”, he said, “I will not have much chance of selling any of them”.

Another contact was the late cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. I always remember the first letter I got from him after he was made cardinal, just after I had been appointed Minister for Posts, Telegraphs and Transport in late 1979. He told me that the best contribution I could make in trying to lay the foundation stone for better communication for the two communities in the North of Ireland would be to extend the signal of RTÉ right up to North Belfast, and right into the Bann valley. Mr Moriarty was chairman of RTÉ at the time, and together we sat down and worked out that we could do this. We put up a very strong booster outside Letterkenny. This was in breach of

international law, because only a certain level of carrier overspill was allowed. The first person to challenge this was Dr Ian Paisley, in the House of Commons. The Taoiseach, Charley Haughey, came to me and asked what kind of row I was raising between Britain and Ireland while he was trying move away from confrontations of this kind. My response was that he could tell Foreign Affairs, the House of Commons and Dr Paisley that I would not ask to inspect the strength of the Northern Ireland booster stations in Enniskillen or Strabane, and I would not expect them to inspect the strength of mine either (as had been demanded). But Tomás Ó Fiaich had given me a useful understanding of the situation: people sitting in their living rooms looking at television in the North have no idea about the realities of life in the South. Because of their suffering for the last 30 years at the hands of the IRA, they overestimate support in the South for the IRA. We need to get the message across that we are not like that in the Republic, and let people that live in the North know that there is a difference in this respect between North and South.

At an early stage, I appreciated the differences between North and South through doing business in the North. In promoting music, I employed bands from the North for many years, but I never enquired about their religion. As long as they were able to bring in a crowd and produce results I was quite happy. At one time when I had a newspaper I hired an editor whose religion I did not know, but who was probably a Protestant. On one occasion our local bishop in Longford, Cathal B Daly (who subsequently moved to Belfast), asked me how I had hired him. When I asked him why he wanted to know, he replied, "He is very good." I had thought that he was going to complain about his religion. Yet religion still mattered. At one time, all of the old altars in Irish cathedrals were being removed. Longford was very proud of its altar because it had been built in the famine years, and there was a protest about taking it away. The editor phoned me and asked me what he should write about a protest walkout from mass that had taken place. I replied by saying that I could not guide him except by saying that the Catholic church was not a democracy, never had been and never would be, and he just laughed. It is interesting to note that, as one Orangeman reminded me, Maynooth and the Orange Order were set up at the same time (in 1795); both of them protect their status and are entitled to do so, but times are changing and they will have to change too.

Let me turn then to the peace process in Ireland.

### III

After succeeding Charles Haughey as Taoiseach, I set myself two political objectives. One was to bring peace to Ireland; the other was to promote economic growth, to attack emigration and unemployment. The reaction from the press at the time was very sceptical—they saw these two objectives as crazy, on the grounds that the possibility of achieving them was very slight. My personal view was that it was worth the effort; I was prepared to take the risk in relation to both objectives on the basis that I would rather try and fail than not to try at all.

I was very lucky to have as my opposite number in Downing Street a man with whom I had built a great personal trust from the time we had spent together in Brussels, namely John Major. I met him frequently in Brussels while he was trying to win back the ground that Britain had lost in Europe. He sat beside me for lunch at our first meeting and asked for my interpretation of developments. I explained that in my view Britain was outnumbered 11-1 on most issues, but that I would make it 10-2 by siding with him on any occasion that I could help. His role had been a difficult one. When he had come to Ashford Castle for the European Council meeting at which the single currency debate was launched, the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, had not wanted him to talk about Europe. I believe that his heart was in Europe, but he was not supported in this by his cabinet, which also failed to understand what he was trying to achieve in Northern Ireland. It was for this reason that he established a subcommittee of the cabinet to deal with this issue, but in his later years he was dependent on Unionist votes in the House of Commons.

John Major was very friendly with James Molyneaux, and tried to bring him along the path of change, slowly but surely. But I would also like to say that James Molyneaux, who had a different style of leadership to those who came after him, once wished me luck in what John Major and I were trying to do. He took the view that the previous 30 years had been dreadful, and he did not think that a solution would be found until the Unionist Party and Fianna Fáil sat down together and worked it out. He believed that only the Unionist Party could sell a settlement in Northern Ireland, and only Fianna Fáil could sell the necessary constitutional change in the South. But he was realistic about the challenge: there were mountains to be climbed. This is the basis on which we started.

#### IV

The long journey for justice and peace began for me on 10 February 1992, when I took office as Taoiseach. One of the first people to come to see me was Martin Mansergh, who had been the advisor to my predecessor, and whom I was quite happy to take on (he was able to brief me on the talks between John Hume and Gerry Adams). John Hume himself also came to see me at an early stage. He filled me in on his talks with Gerry Adams, which were very unpopular at the beginning—rather like my own role. The media at the time described me as in a minority of one, which was wrong, because my wife supported me if no one else did!

In briefing me about his talks with Gerry Adams, John Hume said that unless the two governments supported it the process would fail. He had seen that at my very first press conference I had given priority to peace in Northern Ireland, and stressed that, while he would be there to help, it was primarily the responsibility of the two governments. This was the reason that Dermot Nally and I set out for Downing Street. I always remember John Major turning to me. All the pencils were put away, and we spoke off the record. He asked me to tell him about Ireland—where to start, and how to proceed. I said, “John, it is as simple as this: if you people had done what you promised you would do in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, you and I

would not be talking about it at all. So you start by going back to the 1920 Act and take out the explanatory memorandum attached to it" (there is always such an attachment to items of legislation). I explained that that was the core of the issue, though he thought that much of that legislation had been amended.

I had been following what the republican leadership had been saying for quite some time. The first time that I mentioned the 1920 Government of Ireland Act (Section 74), Martin McGuinness responded out of the blue by saying, "If section 74 of the Government of Ireland Act is at the table, I will be at that table". That happened at a very early stage; the language that republicans used was changing. They needed a different future. I believe that the reason for this—though I did not talk to them personally—was that the members of the movement were at a certain age, and their children were at a crucial age, and they could see that there was nothing facing their families except another 20-30 years of the same. While they were prepared for this, I do not think, if the truth was known, that they wanted to see their children having to join that movement. That is what they would have to do; there would not have been any choice.

There were also changes happening in the Republic, some that I even noticed in my own county. There were people there from whom you could pick up the sounds of what was happening, and from what I picked up it was certainly one-way traffic. Although many people would not believe these signs, I certainly believed that this was the time for a change; on this one, I believe the timing was right.

Very early on, I had many discussions with people in Northern Ireland on matters that included demographic change. I know that there are statisticians and economists who dismissed this and who said that it was not going to be a factor. But it is likely to be an even bigger factor in the future, because the next census will probably show something in the region of 47% nationalists and republicans combined. The view I expressed to my business contacts was that this was a great little country, and a great island; it was not divided, and it never had been divided—it was always one, even when it was colonised. We could work together and do a better job for all of us. Unionists were coming from a strong position, and should negotiate before they became weak. If I had been dispensing power and privilege for as long as they had, I argued, I would not be inclined to give it away easily; but the time must come for change. On an economic and trade front, there was room for about a 100% increase in exports from the North to the South and about 70% in the opposite direction. The problem about the business people that I was constantly discussing this with was that they did not look to Europe as their market, they looked to Britain. In the South we looked to Europe as our home market, because we wanted to get away from long-term over-dependence on the British market. There was a different outlook in both directions, and we could put the combined effort. We know how astute Northern Ireland business people are; they could teach many of us a lesson. The point is that great gains can be made if we combine the two, and this was the line and language I used to them.

In relation to the people on the nationalist side, SDLP supporters and Sinn Féin supporters had different perspectives. I told them that we wanted to give it our best shot, and I asked, "Who is afraid of peace?". Nobody could answer that in the negative. How do you answer this in the negative unless you are a militarist or a paramilitary? Nobody was listening much to the paramilitaries anyway, but the vast majority of people in their hearts would have to say, whether they agreed with me or not, that they could not take a negative attitude towards peace.

## V

Martin Mansergh had been working with John Hume to try to put a declaration together, because the view of the nationalist and republican leadership in the North through the Hume-Adams talks was that if they could get a declaration it could be the starting point, a foundation stone to work on. We worked on this over a long period, and there were many, many disagreements and periods of coldness between the sides during this time. As always, the republicans demanded the whole agenda, and that it be done together. This was impossible, because at all times we would have to bring the two communities and the paramilitaries along.

The genuine fear of each community was of attack from the other. Unionists feared an IRA attack in some shape or form. If their young people went out at night to enjoy themselves, would they come back? Would they run into a bomb or a stray bullet somewhere and would never be seen again? Children could not play on the streets like children elsewhere. The overriding concern that I picked up from ordinary people, business people and everybody else was that we needed to start with the IRA, because of the fear engendered in the other community. That is the reason why the loyalists had built up their side. There were vast numbers of guns, illegal and legal, and progress was impossible in that kind of situation. It was peace first.

Not all of those involved agreed with this approach. The Department of Foreign Affairs view was that talks should be held first. My view was that peace should come first. This division went through the Taoiseach's office. John Major and I were on the peace side, and Foreign Affairs through the Tánaiste and the Secretary of State opted for the talks process. We had the two strategies running side by side. The problem for the civil servants in London was that they were never sure what Major and I were doing. We always sat down without civil servants, so that they never knew exactly what we were agreeing or not agreeing. This was useful, because anybody who has any experience in that situation would be aware of the dominance of security advice in London. This overriding security advice was the dominant factor in relation to Northern Ireland, and is still a problem. It takes a great deal of courage on both sides to take the decisions and risks that have to be taken.

The security advice had to be overridden, and I was convinced that John Major was genuine. When we left after our first meeting, he said, "I am with you all the way, let's not condemn future generations of people living in the North of Ireland to murder and destruction and injuries that will last for the rest of their lives. Not the next

generation. Let's solve it at this generation." For a man who did not have a lot of political strength at the time, this was a brave risk to take. He was a key man in this whole situation. The other key man was, of course, President Clinton.

## VI

I visited President Clinton five weeks after he was inaugurated (I was one of the first leaders to see him, helped by St Patrick's Day). I liked his style, too. He also sent away his civil servants. He asked me to tell him about Ireland, and told me what he knew about the country. He said that he could not have been elected President of the United States if Irish America had not come in behind him. Irish America, he said, was lost to the Democrats at the time of President Reagan, and he had set out to win back their support. He had given a commitment to the Irish American leadership that if he were elected President he would send an envoy to help to make peace in Ireland. The President said that he intended to honour this commitment, and that he wanted me to help. He took the view that the next presidential election had started already the day he was inaugurated, and that he needed to hold on to Irish American votes. He asked whether he should make the announcement about the envoy, or whether I wanted to make it when I returned to Ireland. I replied, "No. I do not want any announcement, and I don't want any peace envoy. In my view, in this developmental stage, a peace envoy will not work. We have local elections coming up in Northern Ireland. The unionists will not speak to an American peace envoy. I have discussed it with John Major before I left and I told what I him I was going to say".

President Clinton asked me how he should present this to the leaders of Irish America. I told him to tell them that I turned it down, and that I would explain why I did so at any time. None of us wanted failure, and there was no point in talking about a peace envoy at that stage. I said that I would be back during the year with something that would make a real difference. He agreed, and gave me a private line on which I could ring him. I was immediately convinced that the man was serious; otherwise our contacts would all have to go through the system. So the foundations were set.

## VII

As I explained to Bill Clinton and John Major, what the Irish government and I were trying to do was to change our whole policy towards Northern Ireland. We wanted to bring the republican/nationalist movement with us. I was absolutely satisfied in my own mind that if we could get the IRA to stop, the loyalist paramilitaries would stop. I opened communications with both sides. Martin Mansergh was the link on the nationalist/republican side, and I established other links to the loyalist paramilitaries. The loyalist paramilitaries said to me, "If you are serious and not dreaming, we will give you a ceasefire six weeks after you produce an IRA ceasefire." My experience is that if people in the North give you their word they will keep it. The loyalist paramilitary leadership was, as far as I was concerned, equally as committed as

the republicans. Eventually through Martin Mansergh we got the message back, and the Downing Street Declaration came through, so we built on that.

The Downing Street Declaration to me was the charter for peace in Ireland. It set out in very careful terms how everybody could go forward. It did not show a way just for republicans, or just for nationalists, but for unionists as well. It was very balanced, and stood the test of time. It became the forerunner for the Framework Agreement, which in turn carried itself through into all the meetings, and the hours, days and weeks that were spent in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement. But the principles had already been set up before I left office, and the Framework Agreement really put flesh on these.

The peace envoy that President Clinton had in mind was Senator George Mitchell. I have full admiration for the patience that he had in keeping the talks going, because it needed somebody of his standing to do it. What we set out to do, and what we brought about, was a shift in policy; we put in place a strategy to replace violence. Nobody could argue that violence had got the republican movement anywhere. The only thing that was achieved was an acceptance by the British army that they could not defeat the IRA, and the IRA's acceptance that they could not defeat the British army and get them out. Nothing else could be claimed for 30 years of violence, for around 3,000 deaths, for 40-50,000 people injured, and communities being further apart than they ever were before 1969. That was the reality of what we were facing.

How was an alternative strategy to be put in place? First, we had to get a ceasefire. We also had to convince the republican leadership that we were going much further than that. We were prepared to stick out our necks and give a commitment that we would do certain other things as well. We looked at the issues that were uppermost in the republican leadership's mind. First of all, they were denied the opportunity to argue their point of view in public, so we agreed to remove section 31 of the Broadcasting Act. Secondly, we stated that we would look at the possibility of parole of prisoners, and that we would speak to the British government about this, as that was their business. We also stated that we would speak to them about the issue of censorship in the United Kingdom too. We had to demonstrate, not only to the leadership, but also to the membership and to the world at large, that this was an issue that we wanted to put on the international stage. I personally believed that this was the only way in which we could get any sense out of Britain because of the strength of the opposition, and because of the fight that we had to win in Washington as well. The State Department and the other relevant departments took the British view by and large, since Britain had huge influence, and had a long-term "special relationship" with America. We had to prove to the republican movement that we could win an argument against Britain on the international stage, and the issue around which this centred was a visa for Gerry Adams.

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## VIII

This was a huge issue. Gerry Adams had not been allowed into the United States for at least 20 years. Sinn Féin could not officially collect any money there, and the State Department and all other departments that mattered fully supported this policy. John Major and I agreed to differ on this. I said that “the decision is to be made in Washington, not by you or me. You make your case, I make my case, and we will see what happens.” I told President Clinton that I believed that this was the step that was needed to start the process moving, rather than sending over George Mitchell as a peace envoy. I stated that there would be a time for that, but that it would be much later.

The arguments went on, but we were fortunate to have had great help from Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith and from others, including Nancy Soderberg (trained in Ted Kennedy’s office but then in the White House, so we had a friend in court) and Trina Vargo in Ted Kennedy’s office. Ambassador Kennedy Smith asked if the Irish government had changed its policy, and I said that we had, and that we needed the support of Ted Kennedy. She told me that I would have to talk to John Hume and Ted together, as both of them opposed a visa for Adams. I said that I was aware of that, but that this was a new policy, a change in direction. She replied that as soon as I had convinced Ted and John Hume she would be with me all the way.

On the basis of this support we got our visa. President Clinton expected a ceasefire to follow immediately, but the republican leadership do not operate like that; they had to be convinced and brought along. I was aware at times that I was beginning to lose out on the balance with the paramilitaries in the loyalist areas because developments seemed to favour the IRA, but I knew what I wanted, and at the end of the day a ceasefire from the IRA was what they really wanted too.

Having done what we could to help, we faced the next hurdle: Father Alec Reid, who had performed a major role quietly behind the scenes, came down to me and said that a visa for Joe Cahill was needed because of the importance of having a person of Joe Cahill’s calibre in the United States. This was based on the experience of the early 1970s, when the Provisional IRA and the Official IRA split. At this time, apparently, the organisation in America stayed with the old Rory Brady section and did not come to support the official leadership. The republicans were not going to risk another split in the IRA at any cost, and saw Cahill as necessary to sell the message and maintain unity. I had to explain this to President Clinton. Nancy Soderberg did her best, but she rang me and said that the case was hopeless, because of opposition from the State Department, the Attorney General and other relevant departments. But I asked her to not let the President say no until I had spoken to him on the phone, so she arranged a telephone conversation with him outside Boston, where he was on holiday. The language between us was frank.

We eventually got an agreement because I had talked to Father Reid and told him that I needed a statement if I was to succeed in getting Joe Cahill a visa. I did not think he would get one, because it was breaking every rule of the immigration au-

thorities. I have been told that this is one area where the President does not really have constitutional authority. However, I had the statement in my pocket. I told President Clinton that I would read him not only the first line, but the first paragraph of the statement, because there were a couple of lines that made all the difference, and he agreed, saying "Fine, this is it, this is your last chance. This is your last run. I did it before, I got nothing, only criticism, if I get it again, do not come near me." I said, "Fine, I will not, because you will have a delivery on Wednesday morning"—which he had.

There is another little bit to add to this story. When Joe Cahill went to the embassy for his visa, he was accompanied by a Sinn Féin councillor from Clones, who was not questioned because of President Clinton's intervention. When the two arrived at New York this man was stopped by the immigration, as he had apparently already been refused entry the previous Wednesday. Cahill has a very bad heart, and he needed this man to stay with him, but the immigration authorities refused him entry. President Clinton rang me again and asked what in the name of Christ we were trying to do to him. He said, "They could not pick anybody in Ireland, except a guy that was turned back by immigration last Wednesday?" He was very annoyed. I said, "Look, we cannot do anything about it now. You are over there, and everything is set for Wednesday for the announcement of the ceasefire." So I said, "Where to go? Can you do something with it?" He said, "Leave it with me. There had better be an announcement of peace and I hope it is going to last, because if it is not, don't ring me again". That was it; he let him in. I don't know how he managed, but he let him in. We were on our way.

## IX

I then got back to the loyalists and said that in six weeks time we expected a move from them. Their leaders at the time were Gusty Spence (who had spent 20-30 years in jail, one of the toughest paramilitaries) and David Ervine. They sent me a copy of the declaration of their ceasefire before they announced it, to see if it was alright. We were on our way, we had peace, and as far as I was concerned, the war ended on 31 August 1994. I have never, ever, given up on my commitment to this process. The war is over and it will not start again.

I believe that the ceasefires arose for several reasons. First of all, many of those involved did not want their families involved in this operation. We proved to them that we could beat Britain on the international stage and that we had the arguments. We got the visas for Adams and for Cahill. We let them on to RTÉ, and we opened the door for them to come into politics. But, as Martin Mansergh would confirm, I never spoke to Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness or anybody in Sinn Féin or the IRA before the ceasefire was put into place, and I had the same policy towards the other side. It is true that I did speak to them two days beforehand on the phone. Gusty Spence had sent me down an emissary to give me some details that I needed at the time. He also wanted to know what I was going to do for them, and I said "The same as I do for both sides, the process is even-handed all the way through. I am going to continue to be even-handed". He asked to speak to me on

the telephone, and I agreed. They produced the ceasefire on time. This was the first step, but a lot of work remained to be done.

## X

We can imagine the distance that both sides have travelled if we go back to the period when Sinn Féin would never have considered taking seats in Stormont, not alone in Dáil Éireann. It was unthinkable then that they would now be working with their long-term enemies in running a devolved government—then they would not even have recognised such a government. Our constitutional position has changed, to give them the reassurance they needed. The principle that I started from was the principle of consent, and the republican leadership knew this from the start. If they did not accept this as a starting point, there was no point in going forward, and indeed we came close to calling the whole thing off. At the end of July 1994 a letter was delivered stating that if there was not a decision on a permanent ceasefire by the time we came back from holidays on 31 August, the curtain came down on the whole project. On 31 August we got a ceasefire.

Notwithstanding these difficult developments, everybody was very honourable and stayed with the process. Some points of detail were significant. I got a request from Gusty Spence. He said, “When the first of those prisoners are let out, would you ensure one thing for me?” When I asked him what that would be, he said, “Would you ensure that the prisoners that come out the gate at least get their full bus fare home?” I said, “What is that about?” “Well”, he said, “I came out of jail and got a bus fare that took me half way home.” I told him that we have social funds in Europe that would only be too delighted to pay full bus fares, provide retraining and try to reconcile the communities, but that the huge job of reconciliation starts from then.

I am glad to see how well the agreement is working in all its aspects. There are still a lot of problems, but there has been a great deal of progress. I have the same confidence on progress the rest of way as I had the first night when we got a ceasefire. There are people who would say that the ceasefire broke down in Canary Wharf, but the dogs on the street were barking that the ceasefire was going to break down if the talks that were promised to me in John Major’s time had not started. The British government would not let Sinn Féin into the talks. When you break your word to the republican leadership, you do so at your peril. I knew for weeks that something like Canary Wharf was going to happen; no-one in government in either Dublin or London can truthfully say that they did not expect this. The ceasefire broke down for one reason only, and it had been well and truly advertised that it was going to break down.

These are the type of mistakes that British governments which do not have a good understanding of Ireland make from time to time. I don’t know where the advice comes from, and it was not for me to lecture them. But I thought that I had got through to them sufficiently for them to understand that republicans keep their word; every time they told me something in confidence their word was kept. But

Canary Wharf, a terrible mistake, shook confidence in the whole process, and we seemed to be back to square one (though I believed that we had not gone back that far). It is important to be totally even-handed the whole way along, and to be prepared to take risks for peace.

Gusty Spence and David Ervine showed great confidence in coming from Belfast to Dublin to meet me in a hotel. They thought that the security forces would have them under observation, but there is a way around that. We sat for three and a half hours on the top floor of the Berkeley Court hotel, and we worked through the agenda. We parked the constitutional issue, and we could get agreement in principle on every other issue that they raised. To be quite honest, I was not prepared to go the distance that they required at the start, because I thought that changing Article 2 was sufficient. But, as it turned out, the Irish people voted to replace Article 3 as well.

My view is that this Agreement emerged after a long period of time and much effort by both governments and the two communities. It got a very strong democratic mandate, a huge majority. No politician has the right to change a democratic position of the people. The fault that I see is that leadership was lacking in certain quarters and did not use a huge democratic mandate and sell it, sell it, sell it! There was a need to sell the agreement to bring about the change that had to take place. I was not expecting huge change overnight, but we have made progress. I have to say that the selling of the Good Friday Agreement was not what I expected that it would be, and consequently we are back again with the problem of suspended institutions—an outcome that has a strong element of politics.

## XI

Where do we go from here? The agenda of the Good Friday Agreement remains to be completed, and both governments and parties should sit down and do an audit of all the outstanding issues that remain, on both sides. On the nationalist and republican side, the Patten report remains to be implemented, and there is the Compton report that deals with the special branch. There have for long been particular problems with the special branch in Northern Ireland. A service of this kind is of course needed, but so is accountability and responsibility. There is also a huge agenda of human rights and equality—one that will convince people that real change is taking place. Above all, there is what the unionist community want, in my view—to see the final acts of decommissioning, which I have no doubt will take place. They also want the IRA stood down. I believe that the thinking within the republican movement indeed accepts this, and it will happen as soon as the whole agenda on both sides is completed (I agree with—for want of a better description—the “big bang”). Because progress was piecemeal, its impact has been limited. The trust and confidence that has broken down over the institutions being suspended can be restored. A vast majority of people in Northern Ireland do not want to go back to where they were. Trust has to be rebuilt, and I think that this can be done, though there is a question of timing.

As to other outstanding issues, one is clear: get the soldiers off the streets again, for heaven's sake. They are not needed; the Good Friday Agreement does not need an army to back it up. In such areas as South Armagh, there have been no significant security changes since the Agreement. The British army has to prove itself too; it is only across the water in the unlikely event that it is ever again needed. The sooner people have the courage to take risks and to take the army home, the better. Then we get the final act of the coming together and the change that is necessary: equality for everybody, human rights and the focus on building a better nation for all of us.

President Roosevelt's widow, Eleanor, once wrote that politicians should do the things that politicians think they cannot do. We need bold politicians to sit around the table again to resolve the issues. This is a realistic course of action, and that is the message that I leave them with.

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## THE IRISH GOVERNMENT AND THE PEACE PROCESS, 1992-94— AN OBSERVER'S PERSPECTIVE

Kevin Rafter

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### I

The Irish peace process has depended for its success on a considerable number of factors, but among these a few key individuals stand out. Albert Reynolds more than most will testify to the contribution that Dr Martin Mansergh—now Senator Mansergh—has made in the search of peace on this island. There were, however, many contributions including that of the former Taoiseach himself. And that is what I would like to explore a little this evening.

There are two things with which I always associate Albert Reynolds when his name is mentioned in connection with the Northern Ireland peace process. The history books will record—indeed, they already have recorded—the risks he took in pursuit of the momentous achievement of 31 August 1994. After all that went before—the terrible deeds and missed opportunities—the words still resonate hugely: “The IRA will announce a complete cessation of military operations effective from midnight on Wednesday night.”

But my two associations of Albert Reynolds and the peace process actually do not include the declaration of the first IRA ceasefire. The first is actually the mantra that Mr Reynolds gave us from the day he was elected Taoiseach in early 1992 to the day he left office at the end of 1994, the mantra: “Who is afraid of peace?” It is a difficult question to answer in the negative as many, I am sure, have found; and it is possibly still a question that we might do well to pose even now.

The second is the Cahill visa request made by the republican movement just prior to the first ceasefire declaration. It will be recalled that earlier in 1994 huge political capital had been utilised by the Irish government in persuading the Clinton Administration to grant a visa to the Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams. If memories need jogging, remember Gerry Adams and the Larry King TV show—it was indeed a huge international media story.

Despite the Adams visa concession and other so-called confidence building measures—including an end to the controversial broadcasting ban—in public, at least, over subsequent months little progress was apparent. We now know that a republican ceasefire was in the offering. But as that prospect neared the republican movement made a final demand—a US visa for the veteran republican activist Joe Cahill. Cahill had a IRA career going back to the 1940s, when he had been sentenced to death for the murder of a policeman, and 30 years later in the 1970s he was arrested on board a boat carrying guns for the IRA. The Republican Movement wanted a visa for Cahill to allow him brief their American supporters that a ceasefire was not about selling out or surrendering.

Albert Reynolds will no doubt recall what happened next as he undertook the task of persuading the White House to grant Cahill a visa. There were the practicalities. It was August; the US capital was in political terms in shutdown mode; Clinton and most of his senior staff were away from Washington on vacation. A senior presidential aide, Nancy Soderberg, was eventually located and asked to get a message to Clinton, who was at Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts. The US President and the Taoiseach eventually spoke on the phone. Clinton's first question was "Did you see this man's CV? Albert, what in the hell are you getting me into here?". A great deal of convincing was required, but the Taoiseach was able to assure Clinton that the Cahill visa would be the final obstacle to a ceasefire declaration.

Indeed, Mr Reynolds had already received the text of the IRA ceasefire statement. It was enough to win over the US President and provide one of the more memorable exchanges from the entire Northern Ireland peace process. On hearing the opening line of the IRA statement Clinton said: "That seems clear enough to me." Reynolds replied "It's very clear, that's what it is, and that's what it means, and that's what'll happen." Clinton then responded: "Okay, we'll take another chance. But I never want to hear from you again if this one doesn't run—goodbye."

The story is an interesting one, but more importantly it illustrates several of the significant changes in Northern Ireland policy brought about during the peace process. The US had traditionally taken its lead on Northern Ireland from London. It will be recalled that the first significant American intervention came in 1977 with a statement from President Carter, but the US was not prepared to become an active participant in the attempts to end the conflict. That changed with the election of Bill Clinton to the White House in 1992. Now here was an American President in the summer of 1994 facilitating the calling of an IRA ceasefire.

More importantly, however, and of greater relevance to the topic under discussion this evening, the second development illustrated by the Cahill visa story was the hugely increased role of the Irish government in the internal affairs of what international law at least still recognised was part of the United Kingdom. The Irish dimension recognised and activated by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 had indeed moved onto a different level of sophistication and involvement.

## II

There has been considerable debate about the genesis of the Northern Ireland peace process. Several journalists and academics have sought to date the start of the process and also to link that date to the involvement of particular individuals. Initially, the peace process was acknowledged as starting with the private discussions between Gerry Adams and John Hume in the 1980s. However, as more details of the clandestine contacts between the various participants have emerged, other names have been added to that list—Albert Reynolds for one. I would also argue—and have already done so elsewhere—that the contribution of Martin Mansergh was enormously important (Rafter, 2002).

However, I believe that there are strong grounds for arguing that much greater prominence than heretofore should be accorded to the role of the Redemptorist Order in establishing political contacts and developing political ideas on the republican side of the conflict. Without the involvement of Fr Alex Reid—as I will outline in a moment—the government in Dublin might have found itself in a less advantageous position to respond to the emerging signals from within the Republican Movement that a change in strategy was a possibility, and even a need.

It is almost a decade since Albert Reynolds first entered Government Buildings as Fianna Fáil leader and Taoiseach. His ministerial career had been dominated by economic portfolios, although he had had a long personal interest in the North; for example, he attended the 1970 Arms Trial. Through his business interests he had developed contacts on both sides of the border, and as a government minister he was involved in North-South economic co-operation.

We know that in private Mr Reynolds had made known his preference for a more pragmatic response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985). This would have seen him on the opposite side of the internal Fianna Fáil divide to Charles Haughey and his senior advisor Martin Mansergh. Indeed, Mansergh has said: “He was sometimes praised by the then Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, no doubt to annoy Charles Haughey.”

In early 1992 the incoming Taoiseach immediately saw the possibilities offered by the secret contacts with the republican movement. Work was underway on a draft of what eventually emerged in December 1993 as the Downing Street Declaration. The republican leadership was interested in news that Reynolds was prepared to take risks for peace by progressing the draft declaration. Individuals like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were attracted to the idea of the coming together of the two strands of northern nationalism with the government in Dublin. In their view the movement from armed to unarmed struggle would create an all-Ireland nationalist strategy. Critics would later refer to it as the pan-nationalist front.

All of these discussions and contacts were undertaken under a cloak of secrecy. Mr Reynolds explained: “I knew enough about the republican movement to know that a leak would make them break off all communications. The only way to do it was to keep the whole thing close. I said to Martin, ‘If there’s a leak it’s either you or me.’ Both of us realised the dangers of a leak and the damage it would do. We had to get the confidence of the whole republican movement.”<sup>1</sup>

There were signs that the progress to come with increased republican acceptance—and use—of the diplomatic language included in the Irish government texts. The draft declaration was based on principles endorsed by the three strands of Irish nationalism which—the participants believed—could persuade the IRA to move to pursuing its objectives by purely political means.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with author, 29 April 2002.

It is fair to record that this dialogue and exchange of ideas provided the republican movement with both linguistic and theoretical challenges. Republicans were still using a language lumbered by history. They talked about the partitionist parliament at Leinster House, about British imperialism and about the necessity for a fixed timetable for British withdrawal. How little we now hear those concepts articulated by leading republicans! Mitchel McLaughlin recalled the language learning curve faced by the Republican Movement: "That was a challenge particularly for Sinn Féin. One of the early benefits was the advice we were being given by Martin Mansergh about how certain words and language was charged in a very political way."<sup>2</sup> The dialogue with the IRA spawned almost six years of debate on these fundamental principles. But the very fact that the different components of Irish nationalism were communicating was in itself significant.

### III

The secret channels of communication between the various strands of nationalism in Ireland were kept open by the relentless activity of one individual in particular. When the IRA announced its first ceasefire in August 1994, Albert Reynolds acknowledged the role played by Fr Alex Reid: "That priest was absolutely vital in trying to bring about peace. He never gave up in going back and forth. He was at all times absolutely reliable in conveying what the various views were" (*The Guardian*, 12 September 1998). Fr Alex Reid—the Redemptorist priest—was to become an active participant in the peace process and arguably the key person in starting the process.

Fr Reid's belief was that the Catholic Church had a responsibility wider than just condemnation of the republican movement. From his earliest contacts with senior republicans in Belfast in the 1970s—at a time when church condemnation of their actions was vocally strongest—Fr Reid identified a constituency prepared to actively examine the feasibility of a political alternative to the military campaign. He said—and here I quote from a recent interview I conducted with Fr Reid:

One of the things I discovered very quickly was that the people who most wanted peace were the IRA. Who wants to live that kind of life, always on the run? These were young men in their early twenties with wives and young children caught up in nightmare stuff. They wanted some way of getting out of that honourably.<sup>3</sup>

A mission statement for the peace work of the Redemptorist Order was drawn up in 1988 at the suggestion of the late Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. The statement was in fact a blueprint for the ministry, and endorsed the idea of direct face-to-face dialogue with representatives of the IRA, something that governments in Dublin had for many years avoided. The Redemptorists were driven by a vision of peace, be-

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with author, 21 March 2002

<sup>3</sup> Interview with author, 15 October 2002

lieving that they had a pastoral responsibility to intervene directly in the conflict. Their objective was clear:

Seeking to channel the course of events away from the road of armed and violent confrontation...and on to the road of communication and dialogue, which is marked out by the principles of justice and charity and characterised by the democratic use of political diplomatic persuasion (Redemptorist Peace Ministry, 1988).

It was against this backdrop that the Redemptorist Peace Ministry operated: “The Church has a missionary and pastoral duty to intervene directly and to do all she can to bring its violent dimensions and their tragic consequences to an end”. What was meant by direct intervention was unambiguous and clearly established in the 1988 mission statement: “to use her resources, her influence and her lines of communication to encourage, promote and, when necessary, even to facilitate it” (Redemptorist Peace Ministry, 1988). The rest, as they say, is history.

The role of Fr Reid is now emerging. In my biography of Martin Mansergh (Rafter, 2002), considerable space is given to his contribution and also to interview material I was lucky enough to obtain from the normally reclusive priest. I hope to examine further his contribution and that of the Redemptorists in a forthcoming paper but here tonight I would like to draw upon a reflective paper written by Fr Reid last summer. The themes he developed offer signposts to the participants in the peace process drawn from a quarter of a century of involvement—and yet are still highly relevant even now. The paper is entitled *The lessons of the Irish peace process*.

The first lesson—according to Fr Reid—“tells us that there is always a way forward no matter how difficult or indeed impossible the obstacles ahead may appear to be” (Reid, 2002). These are the words of a man who witnessed many an obstacle to peace but who succeeded because of his commitment, and, I suppose, faith. The words are a twin to Mr Reynolds’s mantra “Who is afraid of peace?”.

The second lesson, the Redemptorist priest noted, “follows naturally from the first, because it tells us that dialogue is the most powerful and the only effective dynamic of peaceful and democratic conflict resolution” (Reid, 2002). Fr Reid concluded by observing that dialogue leads to negotiation, which in turn leads to agreement which itself leads to accommodation. It is probably fair to conclude that the Irish peace process has worked its way through these various stages, but for one. From dialogue—in secret through the late 1980s and early 1990s—into negotiation between the various participants that led to the Good Friday Agreement at Easter 1998.

The last four and half years—with all the stops and starts and stops again—have been about reaching an accommodation, the so-called “new dispensation”, though as we know in the light of the current position that accommodation has yet to be reached in Northern Ireland.

#### IV

By way of conclusion I would observe that the role and impact of the Irish government in the peace process has at all times been driven by key individuals—the many civil servants and their political masters. And yet an intermediary—its fair to say on the nationalist side—was required to link the government in Dublin with the republican leadership. The Redemptorist Order and its member Fr Alex Reid filled that role as intermediary. In their absence there may have been another, yet it is hard to locate an institution which—or an individual who—would have generated such trust between Dublin and the Republican Movement.

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