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Week Ending Friday, December 8, 1995

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With President Mary Robinson of Ireland in Dublin

December 1, 1995

President's Visit

Q. Mr. President, how did you like the reception when you came in?

The President. I liked it very well. I was delighted to see the people in the streets and delighted to be with President Robinson again.

Q. What's on the agenda for the discussions this morning?

The President. More of the same. [*Laughter*]

Bosnia

Q. How do you like Senator Dole's support of Bosnia?

The President. I'm very gratified by it. I appreciate it very much.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:07 a.m. at Áras an Uachtaráin, the President's residence. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister John Bruton of Ireland in Dublin

December 1, 1995

President's Visit

Q. Welcome to Ireland.

The President. Thank you. I'm delighted to be here.

Q. Did you enjoy your trips to Belfast and Derry yesterday?

The President. Very, very much.

Irish Peace Process

Q. How significant do you think it's going to be for the peace process, your visit to Belfast yesterday? Both of you, would you answer briefly?

The President. Well, I hope it will be very significant, but I think, frankly, it will have more meaning because of what the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Major did in launching the twin-track proposal. They gave me something to talk about, to try to advance the peace process, as well as to hold out the hope that the United States would obviously support both communities in Northern Ireland if they would work toward peace.

It was a magnificent day, and it proved to me once again that people sometimes are far ahead of those of us in political life in their yearnings for the right things.

Q. Taoiseach, what do you think of yesterday?

Prime Minister Bruton. I think that the fact that the President came to Belfast and to Derry gave to the people of Northern Ireland who made the peace themselves that sense of international encouragement and support that is so important. They now see what they have won by making peace. So the recognition that came to those people from the most powerful, most significant politician in the world—if he came in their midst, that showed in the most tangible way possible an appreciation of the dividend of peace. And it was a great tribute for the President to pay.

And I would have to say I think also that the President has played a key role in bringing peace about, and he is now playing an equally important role in entrenching the peace and bringing reconciliation closer.

Q. Mr. President, do you believe that your visit and indeed all-party talks can begin by the February deadline? Would you be very anxious that those talks would begin?

The President. Well, of course, I hope that the process will succeed. I support it strongly. The Taoiseach and the Prime Minister took some risks, both of them did, to try to keep the peace process going. It is

plainly in the interest of the citizens of Northern Ireland and of all those who wish them well here in Ireland and, frankly, throughout Great Britain and throughout the world. It's a very important thing. So of course, I hope it will work, and I'm going to do everything I can to be supportive.

[*At this point, one group of reporters left the room, and another group entered.*]

Bosnia

Q. Will you be talking about Bosnia today, Mr. President?

The President. I expect we will, yes.

Q. What are some of the issues that you want to discuss about Bosnia?

The President. Well, I just want to basically give the Prime Minister an update on where we are now. And of course, I'm going, when I leave here, to see our troops in Germany who are preparing and then, on Sunday, to the European Union. And soon I expect Ireland will be in the leadership of the European Union at a time when we will be, obviously, just in the throes of implementing what we're supposed to do in Bosnia. So we have a lot to talk about.

Q. Are you optimistic about what you saw on Capitol Hill yesterday and what you know of how it went with your advisers testifying?

The President. Yes, I—first of all, I thank Senator Dole and Senator McCain for their willingness to support that resolution, which we certainly agree with. And I'm very—I'm gratified by their response. And I also am pleased that we're having all these hearings on Capitol Hill and that the witnesses are going up; they're giving the best answers they can about what we've done. And I'm looking forward to getting my briefing tomorrow from General Joulwan to see what the NATO planners finally do with the military plan that I authorized General Shalikashvili to support.

So I think right now we're moving toward implementation of the peace agreement. I feel good about it.

Q. [*Inaudible*]—to generate support in the House as well as the Senate?

The President. Well, I take it one step at a time. I think we're making progress. I think we're in better shape as days go by, and I think that the decision by Senator Dole and Senator McCain will help immeasurably, I think, to build the kind of bipartisan support that we need to make this an American effort.

I can tell you this: As I have been in London and Ireland, I can see that, in addition to the overwhelming preoccupation we've all had with our efforts in Northern Ireland, the ability of the United States to play a leading role in partnership with Europe in dealing with the world's problems in the years ahead is certainly heavily dependent upon our doing our part here in Bosnia, especially after we hosted and did so much to broker the peace.

Irish Peace Process

Q. When you talked to the leaders last night in Belfast, were you encouraged? Was there anything that you told them to hold back their old grudges or—do you have hopes for the future?

The President. Let me just say, yes, I was encouraged because I think that Mr. Bruton and Mr. Major came up with a brilliant formulation which enables them to continue to have dialog with one another without giving up their position—it seems to me that is the genius of that—and then asking Senator Mitchell, along with two other very distinguished people, to be on this arms decommissioning work, so that it can succeed in parallel. I think it was great foreign relations.

Obviously, none of the people with whom I spoke yesterday changed their positions in their brief meetings with me. The point I tried to make to them was that the two Prime Ministers had given them an honorable way to continue to engage in peace talks without giving up any of their previous positions; and if they looked in the streets of Belfast and Derry, they could see that the young people of their country, without regard to whether they were Protestant or Catholic, desperately wanted this to be resolved. They want to live together; they want to live on equal and honorable terms, and they want to live in peace. Those were the only points that I could make, and I made them as forcefully as I could.

Q. If you would permit me, Mr. President, the decommissioning issue is going to be a very hard nut to crack, isn't it?

The President. Sure. But that's why they——

Q. How do you do it?

The President. Well, that's why they set it up the way they did. I think it's not just a rational issue, it's an emotional issue. And that's why, I will say again, what the United States—the role of the United States is not to tell anybody how to solve a specific problem, including the decommissioning problem. We've tried to support those who are taking risks for peace.

The two Prime Ministers have set up a process at considerable risk to themselves which permit all the parties to be heard and permit this very difficult decommissioning issue to be dealt with, and everyone can now proceed forward without giving up any of their own positions at the moment. That is what I thought was so important. We were stalled for too long.

And as I said in Derry, if you look at that statue—those two Statues of Reconciliation there, they're reaching out, and they're not quite touching. But people are not statues. When you get close like this, you don't stay in that position. You either shake hands, or you drift apart. They've given this process a chance to move to a handshake, and that's all we can hope for. Now we just have to redouble our efforts and keep our attitudes proper and remember the message of the people in the streets, which is that they want this done. They're not interested in all the last details. They want it worked out so they can live on equal and honorable terms and live in peace. And I think that's what the rest of us have to try to give them.

Prime Minister Bruton. I just want to say the key word is that this is a process, a process in which people can move closer together, a process in which people can give as well as take.

NOTE: The exchange began at 12:29 p.m. at the Government Buildings. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. George A. Joulwan, USA, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister John Bruton of Ireland in Dublin

December 1, 1995

Prime Minister Bruton. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. President: I'd like to welcome you warmly to Ireland, to thank you for all that you have done to help bring peace to our country, to thank you for all that you are continuing to do to bring the people that live on this island closer together and to improve the relations that exist between this island and its neighbors.

I'm delighted that it was possible for the British Prime Minister, John Major, to whom I pay tribute here, and myself to agree on a framework for moving forward towards a settlement of the differences that have existed on this island for 300 years now. And the fact that we were able to do that on the eve of your visit is no accident. Because we both realized, both John Major and I, that the sort of support that you have been able to give, yesterday and today, to the people of this island searching for peace, searching for reconciliation, searching to heal the wounds that have been there for so long, and looking positively to the future, we both appreciate it that your support gives them encouragement, gives us encouragement, and is something for which we from the bottom of our hearts sincerely thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much. I'd like to begin by thanking the Prime Minister for his warm welcome and more importantly, I want to say a special word of thanks to all of the people of Ireland and the people of Northern Ireland who have shown such extraordinary warmth and generosity to Hillary and me and now our American delegation.

This has been an extraordinary experience for us, and I will never forget it. I thank the Prime Minister for what he said, but the truth is that the credit for this latest progress belongs to the Taoiseach and to Prime Minister Major. They announced this twin-track initiative to advance the peace process of Northern Ireland shortly before I arrived here. It gives the parties a chance to engage in an honest dialog where all their views are represented and everybody's voice can be