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Obama hails 'heroic' defiance of terror as he meets Northern Ireland ministers

Wednesday, 18 March 2009

President Barack Obama yesterday praised the people of Northern Ireland for reacting "heroically" in the wake of the dissident republican killings of British army sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar and PSNI constable Stephen Carroll.

Speaking in the Oval Office after a meeting with Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Mr Obama said: "Almost 11 years ago, the world watched with wonder as brave men and women found the courage to see past the scars of generations of violence and mistrust, and come together around a future of peace.

The United States will stand with those who work towards peace

"But every peace process is challenged by those who would seek to destroy it. And no one ever believed that this extraordinary endeavor would be any different. We knew that there would be setbacks; we knew that there would be false starts. We knew that the opponents of peace would trot out the same old tired violence of the past in hopes that this young agreement would be too fragile to hold."

President Obama said that the real question was how the people of Northern Ireland would respond to such attacks.

"Now we know the answer: They responded heroically," he said.

"They and their leaders on both sides have condemned this violence and refrained from the old partisan impulses. They've shown they judge progress by what you build and not what you tear down. And they know that the future is too important to cede to those who are mired in the past."

Mr Obama, whose great-great-great-grandfather, Fulmouth Kearney, hailed from Monegall, Co Offaly, said that "Americans everywhere" had the families of those recently killed in their thoughts and prayers .

"And I want everyone listening to know this: The United States will always stand with those who work towards peace," said Mr Obama.

"After seeing former adversaries mourning and praying and working together this week, I've never been more confident that peace will prevail."

Earlier in the day, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness met with the president privately for 20 minutes, when he joined talks they were having with National Security Advisor, James Jones.

During the meeting Mr Obama discussed the global economic crisis and developments in Northern Ireland with the First and Deputy First Ministers.

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Images from Belfast and Downpatrick



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