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McGuinness and Robinson tell Obama that institutions are stronger after killings

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DENIS STAUNTON

NORTH'S MINISTERS: THE NORTH'S First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness yesterday told US president Barack Obama and secretary of state Hillary Clinton that the political institutions have emerged stronger after the killings of two British soldiers and a police officer.

The two leaders met Mr Obama for 20 minutes in the White House and Mrs Clinton for 30 minutes at the state department.

"There is a new administration in Washington and they have brought with them a sense of dynamism, vibrancy and urgency. America is changing and so is Northern Ireland. At home we also have a renewed hope and purpose, for the first time in decades a real sense of vibrancy hangs in the air at home. I am determined that we will not allow the opportunities we have worked so hard to achieve pass us by," Mr Robinson said.

"I think anybody who has followed recent events will know that there was a single purpose on the part of those who carried out those dreadful acts. They intended to divide us. They intended to drag Northern Ireland back into conflict. Their hopes were that the work of the politicians in the Assembly and in the Executive would begin to fray and that the institutions would crumble and fall. They have not succeeded and they will not succeed."

Mrs Clinton said Mr Obama would appoint a special envoy for the North with a special focus on economic ties between the US and the North.

"The state department and the Obama administration will be actively engaged in assisting the leadership in Northern Ireland. This is not a subject of passing interest but of surpassing interest," she said.

"We are there to help. We're not there to do anything other than support the decisions that these extraordinary leaders make. But if we are needed. . . we will continue to support this process."

Mr McGuinness praised Mrs Clinton's record of engagement in Ireland and said the people of the North appreciated the commitment of the Obama administration to supporting the peace process.

"Although we represent different parties, we represent one community in the North. . and we're not going to allow our community to be plunged into mayhem and destruction by people who have no support, no mandate whatsoever and no right whatsoever to attack the peace of the people of Ireland," he said.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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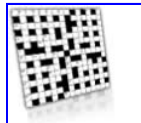
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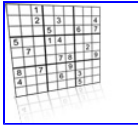
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