

**THE
LESSONS OF
NORTHERN
IRELAND**



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**Airey
Neave
Trust**

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➤ Foreword

My interest in Northern Ireland is rather personal. Against the advice of nearly everybody I then knew – except one very wild Scottish republican – I moved there to teach Politics at The Queen’s University at the very height of the Troubles in October 1972; and only left (rather reluctantly it has to be said) not long after the IRA had called its first cease fire in August 1994. Over that time at least three university colleagues were shot, a number of students murdered, I attended my fair share of funerals, and on quieter nights, I could even hear the sounds of gun battles bouncing off the hills that surrounded Belfast – albeit from the safety of my own middle class ghetto in leafy south Belfast. I did my bit, of course. I taught for two years in what was then known as the Long Kesh prison – this as a protest against internment. Much later I did my best in helping bring about reconciliation through the vehicle of the then nascent integrated school movement (my wife was the first Director of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education). But all to no avail. The troubles rumbled on like some permanent, incurable, stomach disease that never quite killed the patient.

Inevitably, the Troubles generated their own myths and truths, the most repeated of which was that because this most unique of conflicts was like no other, there was absolutely no chance of it ever coming to an end. Indeed, I have the most vivid memory of one debate at Queen’s soon after 1989 warning us more naïve souls not to expect too much change in ‘wee Ulster’. Whole economic orders might collapse in Eastern Europe. Walls might come tumbling down in faraway, distant Germany. But they would do no such thing in Belfast. And of course, in a way, they did not. Yet some form of peace was constructed, after a fashion: and though it has taken more than fifteen years to get to where we are today, the peace not only seems to be holding – just – but according to some in the commentariat, contains all sorts of meaningful lessons for other deeply divided societies at war with themselves.

It was to interrogate such views that I thought it worthwhile to bring together some of those who had helped make the peace, as well as many of those who had written intelligently about it since. The richness of our two days of deliberations at LSE IDEAS in spring 2011 can only be partially conveyed here in these brief and excellent contributions. But taken together they provide a flavour of the occasion; as well as an idea of how difficult it is to draw any simple lessons from what has happened in Northern Ireland since the 1990s. The conference was a memorable experience for me, and I hope for those who attended too. Made possible by the generosity of Dame Veronica Sutherland and The Airey Neave Foundation and of the LSE Annual Fund, the discussions were some of the best I have attended, tinged only by a sense of regret and sadness: regret that my old friend Fred Halliday who had died the year before (but had a unique insight into the Irish Question) could not be there; and sadness that Professor Paul Wilkinson – without whom the conference would never have been possible – passed away only a few months after it had been held. It is to their memories that this report is dedicated in deep appreciation.

Professor Michael Cox

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➤ The Lessons of
Northern Ireland

➤ Lessons of Northern Ireland and the Relevance of the Regional Context

Adrian Guelke

It should be stated at the outset that the notion of Northern Ireland's political settlement as a model for other societies evokes as much hostility as it does enthusiasm. Indeed, at least as much has been written in criticism of the idea of Northern Ireland as a model as in its support. Understanding the perspective of the critics on this issue is a useful starting point for reviewing the lessons to be learnt from the application to Northern Ireland of a variety of counter terrorism and conflict resolution policies, since it provides a means of sorting out in which respects Northern Ireland's experience might be relevant to other cases and in which it is not.

Couching the issue as one of lessons is helpful to begin with, since unlike the notion of a model, it permits the drawing of negative as well as positive lessons from the Northern Ireland case. However, this does not override some of the commonest objections that are made to using the Northern Ireland case to draw conclusions about how ethnic conflicts might be settled. Until quite recently, the argument could be advanced that it was premature to derive lessons from Northern Ireland simply because the story of the peace process was by no means complete. As recently as the beginning of 2010 it seemed entirely conceivable that the whole settlement, based on the 1998 Belfast Agreement and the subsequent 2006 St Andrews Agreement, might unravel. Intensive negotiations among the parties resulted in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, which provided a formula for the devolution of justice and policing powers. This step was widely described as being the last piece of the jigsaw of the peace process.

Confidence in the durability of the new dispensation received two further boosts from events in 2011. The first of these events was the completion of a full term by the Northern Ireland Assembly without the necessity of suspension for the first time since it was established in 1998. That success was underpinned by the outcome of the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in May, which was widely interpreted as an endorsement of power-sharing among the parties, and of constructive cooperation between the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in particular. The results were a resounding endorsement of these leaders and their parties (see Table 1). The second event was the Queen's highly successful visit to the Republic of Ireland in May 2011. This underscored a dimension of the Northern Ireland peace process that has tended to be underplayed: the institutionalisation of cooperation between the UK and the Republic of Ireland going back to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985. Indeed, one way the Northern Ireland peace process can be interpreted is as a case of successful conflict management by the British and Irish governments.

But if these developments made it more difficult to question the staying power of the settlement, it was still possible for critics to raise questions about the quality of the peace that had been achieved. They tended to focus on three areas: political polarisation, the persistence of segregation and continuing political violence. Since the start of the peace process with the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994,

voters have deserted the more moderate of the political parties on either side of the province's sectarian divide for their radical counterparts. This trend is illustrated in Table 1, which sets out the results in terms of seats of the four elections that have taken place to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Thus, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) overtook the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) in the 2003 elections, while Sinn Féin also displaced the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as the dominant party of Irish nationalism in Northern Ireland in the same elections. The DUP and Sinn Féin consolidated their position in the elections of 2007 and 2011. However, the nature of the election campaigns run by the two parties in 2011 was markedly different from previous campaigns, with both parties championing their role in making the settlement work. The triumph of the radical parties might be seen as a vindication of the thesis that an alliance of the extremes offered the best prospect of stable government because the radical parties were less vulnerable to outbidding than the UUP and the SDLP. However, it would be absurd to suggest that this outcome was arrived at by the design of the British and Irish governments. It was only after the dominance of the radical parties had been established that the two governments started to find virtue in the necessity of having to shape the settlement in the interests of the radicals.

Table 1: Results of elections to Northern Ireland Assembly under the Belfast Agreement, indicating seats won by main parties and showing polarisation of opinion

Party/Year	1998	2003	2007	2011
Democratic Unionist Party	20	30	36	38
Sinn Féin	18	24	26	29
Ulster Unionist Party	28	27	18	16
Social Democratic and Labour Party	24	18	16	14
Alliance Party	6	6	7	8
Others	12	3	3	3
TOTAL	108	108	108	108

Source: Information taken from Nicholas Whyte, 'Elections Northern Ireland' on <http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/>

British Prime Minister David Cameron raised the issue of the persistence of segregation in his speech to the Northern Ireland Assembly in June 2011. He expressed his dismay that the number of peace walls dividing Protestant and Catholic communities had increased since the 2006 St Andrews Agreement from 38 to 48, and cited a survey that estimated the cost of the duplication of services in Northern Ireland as a result of segregation at £1.5 billion a year. Echoing criticism that has been made by groups in Northern Ireland that have championed integration such as Platform for Change, Cameron asserted: 'Northern Ireland needs a genuinely shared future, not a shared out future'.

The third issue latched on to by critics of the functioning of Northern Ireland's devolved government was the continuation of political violence. Significantly, the police continued to collect statistics under the

heading of 'deaths due to the Northern Ireland security situation', the first year of which was 1969. The police published annual assessments of the number of such deaths, not merely after the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, but even after the Belfast Agreement received its popular mandate in both jurisdictions in Ireland in referendums in May 1998. The figures for 1998 to 2010 are given in Table 2. By far the most lethal of these post-Troubles years was 1998 itself, largely as a result of the Omagh bomb, perpetrated by dissident Republicans. While the overwhelming majority of those killed throughout the period since the Belfast Agreement were civilians, it should be noted that this category includes members of paramilitary organisations. Indeed, one factor contributing to the killings since 1998 has been internal feuds within and between paramilitary groups. It remains the case, however, that members of the security forces

are prime targets for dissident Republicans. This was reflected in the murder of two soldiers and a police officer in March 2009, as well as the murder of another police officer, Ronan Kerr, in April 2011. Kerr's death followed a series of unsuccessful attempts by dissident Republican groups to kill police officers. That mirrors the pattern present in the latter stage of the Troubles before 1994, which was that through the course of the conflict, the security forces became increasingly successful in protecting themselves against the groups that sought to kill their members.

In the case of the Loyalist paramilitaries, two killings gave rise to widespread concern in 2009 and 2010. The first of these was the killing of a Catholic community worker Kevin McDaid in Coleraine in May 2009 by a sectarian mob linked to a Loyalist paramilitary group. It raised fears that further sectarian killings might

undermine the peace. The second was the result of an internal feud in the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Bobby Moffett was shot dead in broad daylight in the Shankill Road area of Belfast. The sanctioning of the killing by the UVF, after the organisation had completed the decommissioning of its weapons, showed the lengths paramilitary groups were willing to go to defend their turf and pointed to how far Northern Ireland still had to go to be free of such groups. However, lethal violence is only one aspect of post-Belfast Agreement political violence. The period since 1998 has seen a high level of low-level violence, particularly where Protestant and Catholic working class districts intersect. At one of these interfaces there was sustained rioting over two nights in June 2011. Further rioting in the summer months in Northern Ireland is linked to continuing disagreement over the routes of a small number of Orange Order parades.

Table 2: Deaths Due to the Northern Ireland Security Situation

Year	Police	Reserve	Army	UDR/RIR	Civilians	Total
1998	1	0	1	0	53	55
1999	0	0	0	0	7	7
2000	0	0	0	0	18	18
2001	0	0	0	0	17	17
2002	0	0	0	0	13	13
2003	0	0	0	0	11	11
2004	0	0	0	0	5	5
2005	0	0	0	0	5	5
2006	0	0	0	0	3	3
2007	0	0	0	0	3	3
2008	0	0	0	0	1	1
2009	1	0	2	0	2	5
2010	0	0	0	0	2	2
TOTALS	2	0	3	0	140	145

Police	Royal Ulster Constabulary
Reserve	Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
CIVILIANS	including members of illegal paramilitary organisations

Source: <http://www.psn.police.uk>

But even if the imperfections of Northern Ireland's settlement are set to one side, the relevance of the Northern Ireland case to other parts of the world can be questioned on a number of grounds. In the first place, unlike many other deeply divided societies with which comparisons are made with Northern Ireland, the province is not a state. Indeed, it is a small region within what is otherwise a longstanding and stable liberal-democracy. Further, Northern Ireland is part of the rich industrialised world. As a region of the UK, Northern Ireland, like the Republic of Ireland, has been part of the European Community/Union since 1973. However, these particular features of the Northern Ireland situation can also be used as a way of identifying certain cases to which Northern Ireland's experience is most likely to be relevant.

For example, Northern Ireland can be compared with other divided regions within states. An interesting case in point is Kashmir. As in the case of Northern Ireland, it can be argued that progress towards a resolution of this conflict is dependent on the evolving relationship between India and Pakistan and their governments' taking on the role of conflict managers. While the South Asian Free Trade Area is by no means equivalent to the European Union, it does provide a useful framework for the promotion of cooperation between India and Pakistan that is not dependent on progress on the issue of Kashmir. An aspect of the Belfast Agreement of particular interest in Kashmir was its provision for cross-border cooperation on a range of issues. The initiation of a bus service between the Pakistan-controlled and Indian-ruled Kashmir in 2005 was seen in the sub-continent as a confidence-building measure, as well as a first step towards the development of such cooperation in the context of this long-running dispute. A case within Europe with some similarities to Northern Ireland is Cyprus. While partitioned Cyprus is not part of any other state, the role of external parties, particularly the relationship between Greece and Turkey, has been a significant element in efforts to settle this bloodless conflict. The best opportunity for a settlement arose in the context of Cyprus's membership of the European Union in 2004. Ironically, the complicated Annan Plan (so-called after the UN Secretary-General) for the island's reunification was rejected in a referendum that year by a majority of Greek Cypriots, while Turkish Cypriots accepted

the deal. Just as Northern Ireland's consociational institutions providing for power-sharing among the province's main political parties was the product of external conflict management rather than of internal elite political accommodation, as in Lijphart's original example of consociationalism in the Netherlands, so too in Cyprus it was the external parties who took the lead in designing the country's institutions at its independence in 1960. That experiment failed, as did the Sunningdale Agreement in Northern Ireland in 1973-4. However, these failures have not deterred external powers from using consociationalism as a tool of conflict management and resolution in other cases, including that of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The similarities have not gone unnoticed. In particular, a number of scholars with widely different views on their outcomes have compared the cases of the Belfast Agreement and the Dayton Accords.

However, the case that has generated the most controversy both among politicians and scholars has been that of Israel/Palestine. Peter Hain put forward the view that the appropriate lesson for Israel from the Northern Ireland peace process is that Israel should be ready to enter into negotiations with Hamas. David Trimble has argued that this misrepresents what happened in Northern Ireland. Trimble emphasises the parameters within which negotiations on Northern Ireland's future took place, including the observance of a ceasefire and the two governments' insistence that the principle of consent would form part of the settlement. In other words, it would be provided that a united Ireland could only come about with the consent of majorities in both jurisdictions in Ireland, underpinning what nationalists had once opposed as amounting to a Unionist veto. Trimble's approach might seem to beg the question as to what are the roughly equivalent parameters in the case of the Middle East conflict. The obvious factors would seem to be ending violence and an acceptance of the borders that prevailed before the Six Day War in 1967, subject only to the negotiation of a few, mutually agreed adjustments. The fact that the current Prime Minister of Israel has emphatically rejected the second of these parameters is one indication, among many, as to why the prospects for an externally promoted peace settlement along the lines of what was achieved in Northern Ireland remain so poor.

Even so, the parties in the Middle East, as well as external mediators in the conflict, are likely to continue to pay attention to aspects of Northern Ireland's experience that may fit with developments in the Israel/Palestinian conflict, both because of the features they have in common and the resonance that exists between them. Admittedly, this is limited by the fact that the inhabitants of Northern Ireland remain far more alive to the comparison than anyone in the Middle East.

The length of time it took for Northern Ireland's political settlement to crystallise, as well as the relatively benign regional context of the conflict, provide ample basis for scepticism about how far the province's experience of conflict resolution can be successfully exported to other regions of the world. Situated on Western Europe's inner periphery, the island of Ireland lay beyond the areas of competition among the major powers, even during the Cold War. The Irish Question was exploited from time to time by the Soviet Union for propaganda purposes, but there was never any prospect that the Soviet Union would gain a foothold on the island. The rhetoric of one British minister, that if the Republican challenge was not met that Ireland might become another Cuba, had little credibility and attracted little interest. The lack of strategic significance of Ireland was even more evident after the end of the Cold War. By contrast, a number of the divided societies with which Northern Ireland is compared lie in areas which for oil or other reasons have continued to be regarded as strategically important to major powers.

It is worth underlining that an argument which had considerable traction during the late 1980s was that there was very little prospect of a settlement in the Irish case, not because of the impossibility of compromise, but because there were too few incentives for the parties to end the conflict. Too little was at stake for the parties to arrive at any settlement, it was asserted. In the event, that view proved mistaken. The commonly expressed assumption now that parties elsewhere will prove unable to derive usable and valuable lessons from the outcome in Northern Ireland is also unlikely to hold. But both the forms and consequences of the application of these lessons are likely to vary widely. ■

➤ Counterterrorism and Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland

Martin Mansergh

The results of the recent election to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the first visit in 100 years by a British monarch to what is now the Republic of Ireland represent a consolidation of what has been achieved by the peace process. The Unionist community emphatically endorsed the leadership of Peter Robinson and the DUP and the political arrangement that they manage, with Robinson extraordinarily invoking the spirit of murdered PSNI constable Ronan Kerr in his victory comments. If Sinn Féin is losing its hold in Republican areas, as dissidents claim, there was little sign of it in election results, with the gain of one seat, including the win of five out of six seats in West Belfast with two-thirds of the vote, despite the departure south to the Dáil by Gerry Adams. As was realized up to 30 years ago, political harmony in Northern Ireland has to be embedded in a strong and positive British-Irish relationship, underlined by last week's visit of British Queen and Prime Minister. Traditional hesitations meant that the visit was not rushed into, but nor, 13 years after the Good Friday Agreement, could it have been indefinitely deferred.

I am delighted to share this platform with Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's chief of staff, who did an incredible amount of groundwork in relation to Northern Ireland, and who came to the problem without hidebound ideological or inherited attitudes, and who was prepared to venture places where none before him were able or would have chosen to go. I was only one of his opposite numbers on the Irish side, and at an early stage not the most important. Our paths diverged in 2002, when I went for election, in what turned out to be a nine-year membership of the Irish Parliament, first in the Senate, then in the Dáil. We spent a few days together in December 2007, sharing and discussing insights with Greek and Turkish Cypriot negotiators on the peace line in December 2007. Like others who were involved, both of us have been drawn into comparative analysis, relating to conflict in other parts of the world.

Counterterrorism and conflict resolution, while clearly related, are not the same thing. Terrorism was a word used sparingly, if at all, by Irish Governments over the quarter century of conflict between 1969 and 1994. It implied not just a strong rejection of the IRA campaign of violence, but it could also have signalled a narrow view of the solutions, more anti-terrorism laws and security force personnel, and more ruthless tactics up to and beyond the rule of law. Whether or not such measures contained the spread of conflict, they also helped prolong it, by creating new landmark causes, such as Bloody Sunday, the hunger strikes, shoot to kill, collusion, the legacy of all of which has been difficult to clear up even today. In fairness, the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, at vast cost and over many years, did finally achieve its objective to the satisfaction of most reasonable people, including the majority of victims' relatives.

The point made by Professor Daniel Wilson in an article on the failed Fenian invasion of Canada in 1866 in the November/December 2008 issue of *History Ireland* about the problem facing

Thomas D’Arcy McGee, former Young Irelander, later Canadian cabinet minister, ‘how could they defeat a revolutionary minority inside an ethno-religious group without alienating the moderate majority within that group’, and without creating public sympathy for extremists, has a universal contemporary validity. Indeed, the whole purpose of the peace process was to shift from trying to inflict defeat on an isolated section of the population, to trying to find a new and far-reaching accommodation for the many legitimate and powerful conflicting interests and identities in Northern Ireland, while leaving the long-term future open. Nothing less than a substantial replacement of the 1920-1 settlement was needed. The boundary remained in place, but the basis on which it rested was thoroughly overhauled.

There is a separate discussion about how the situation was allowed to fester, then get out of hand, and whether the conflict needed to be so prolonged. The dominant inter-governmental effort for more than 20 years was to try and create a centre ground, rigorously excluding and condemning paramilitary movements, with a view to achieving an agreement that would isolate extremists and legitimize a tough and conclusive security end-game. With the exception of Brian Faulkner, unionists never bought into a strategy which required major concessions from them, without any guarantee of an end to violence.

Both the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements of 1973 and 1985, respectively, were in that mould, the first aspiring much more than the second to provide comprehensive conflict resolution. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was more of a counter-terrorism strategy, and not only from the rather obvious security orientation of Mrs. Thatcher. Dr. FitzGerald had a burning sense of danger that the nationalist community might give majority support to Sinn Féin, while the IRA was still at war, enabling it to claim further legitimization of armed struggle. The Agreement, which created a channel for the constitutional nationalist SDLP, through the Irish Government’s representing it at the Intergovernmental Conference and through a permanent secretariat, was actually a far more successful counterterrorist strategy in the political sense than any initiatives, including extradition, on the security front. The check to Sinn Féin’s electoral advance in Northern Ireland,

and, south of the border, their minimal showing in the 1987 General Election with 1.2% of the vote, were an important part of the background to the start of the peace process.

People engage in conflict, as they do in politics, to obtain something for themselves and for their supporters, and hence to be able both to deliver and to protect. As long as insurgent movements believe that some of their maximal demands are achievable through force, or, alternatively, that they have something that they need to protect (for example, territories and populations largely under their *de facto* control), their main interest in dialogue will be in seeking confirmation that they are winning. Dialogue has dangers that can reinforce violence. The difficulty is in judging when it might genuinely be the start of a search for a way out and for a credible political alternative.

The question may be asked, from the point of view of the insurgent movement, should the dialogue be with the enemy or enemies, who hold most of the power, should it be with *bona fide* and disinterested third parties; or should it be with other political forces that represent the population or community from which they come. The Northern Irish and indeed other experiences would suggest that all three elements are necessary in constructing a package, which would end or suspend conflict and lead to negotiation.

One of the advantages in the Northern Ireland situation is that the British Government, implicitly or explicitly, has always recognized the legitimacy of a united Ireland, provided it is brought about peacefully by agreement and consent, something easier perhaps to concede because of the unlikelihood of its achievement at an early date. This contrasts with the situation in the Basque Country, Sri Lanka and, indeed, Palestine, where the radical solution is out of the question. The issue in the early stages of the peace process was, could enough be built around this recognition of a united Ireland as a legitimate aim to construct an ideological bridge that would allow a cross-over into politics. Two ideas were developed in dialogue, part in the open with the SDLP, part in secret with both Governments separately. The first strand was the British Government explicitly stating,

in the context of the ending of the cold war, that it had no selfish strategic (i.e. defence) interest in holding onto Northern Ireland, unlike perhaps the late 1940s, and then, more obviously, that it had no economic reasons either. A political interest in maintaining the Union is another matter. The second strand was to develop the idea of self-determination, never accepted by Britain at the time of the Anglo-Irish Treaty; this was to be exercised concurrently as would have to be the case in all long-partitioned countries. Ideological positions do matter. One of the comments made recently regarding Al-Qaeda has been the loss of traction regarding the theocratic aim of restoring the Caliphate, especially in the light of the Arab Spring. If ideological conflict can be softened, better still if some accommodation can be reached, then more practical issues for a peace settlement can be addressed.

There were three stages in the Northern Ireland peace process. The first, from 1987 to 1994, was the slow establishment of principles and understandings that would lead to definitive ceasefires. The second, from 1994 to 1998, including a period when the IRA ceasefire broke down, was to negotiate a political peace settlement that would underpin the ceasefires, in which powerful, and relatively neutral, US brokerage was an important element. The third stage, from 1998 to close to the present, has been to flesh out and implement the Good Friday Agreement, one of the best examples being the reform of policing and then the successive buying into by different sections of the nationalist community.

One of the main obstacles to maintaining rapid momentum was the difficulty of obtaining clarity about renunciation of both the threat and the means of renewed violence. The section on weapons decommissioning in the Good Friday Agreement was weak and aspirational, albeit the best that could be obtained at the time, but subsequent events forced the issue and rendered it central to the survival of the overall political strategy. I remember a few years ago being asked on local radio if I trusted the Sinn Féin leadership. My answer was that I trusted the necessities they were under. For all the criticisms that might be made of them, the Sinn Féin leadership in the North have, in the absence of any sort of a military victory, achieved what few other insurgent groups around

the world have succeeded in doing, making a convincing transition into exclusively democratic politics. The political process, and the agreements underpinning it, have overwhelming support throughout the island, even with the initially sceptical DUP having taken over on the unionist side. However, there remains the threat and the reality of limited but persistent terrorist violence, demonstrated 13 years ago by the major casualties of the Omagh bomb, and more recently by three security force murders in the last three years.

Should violent dissident organisations be treated the same or differently? I was intrigued to hear Gerry Adams recently compare the Real IRA and related organisations to the Baader Meinhoff gang and the red brigade, – by implication, on par with marginal groups that could be contained, that would eventually go away, and that did not need to be negotiated with. Many governments have learnt the importance of avoiding counterproductive overreaction that might generate emotive secondary causes. These can be gratefully seized upon as a substituted and more plausible basis for violence. The most effective countermeasure remains the continued, overwhelming rejection of their methods by the community from which they spring, and avoiding situations which allow them to claim that they are gaining popular ground.

Undoubtedly, the fortunes or misfortunes of well-known groups employing similar methods around the world have some impact on morale. Unless there is some point, some potential gain to be made from a campaign it may, under continued security, political and popular pressure, eventually implode. Integral to terror is the making of bombastic claims by small groups about the number of potential targets and victims, often given credibility by the awe with which they are covered in the media and by a carefully nurtured mystique, largely inaccessible to challenge. In an age when at any rate European Governments have outlawed both capital and corporal punishment as incompatible with human rights, such groups arrogate to themselves reactionary powers and methods. Governments change, when the electorate from time to time so decide. Paramilitary groups are impervious to lack of electoral support, and put up pseudo-historicist or -legal arguments

that would not survive searching analysis and that are not often enough challenged. The notion that continued recourse to terrorism, even on a much reduced scale, will eventually wear down the opposition, whether unionist or British, ludicrously underestimates the staying-power of both.

Democratic conflict resolution, underpinned by a firm but not excessive security policy, is by far the most effective way of dealing with a terrorist problem. Ireland today faces other existential challenges. For the moment, Britain and America present friendly faces, compared to some of the demands emanating from France and Germany as the leading European countries.

It is not obvious that a united Ireland, even were it now achievable and however desirable from a longer-term point of view, is immediately relevant to the resolution of our financial and economic problems, or even credible in that context. The peaceful accommodation that has been achieved, and that seems likely to last, can and does contribute, and has the capacity, if unforced, to evolve much further in reducing barriers. Incremental progress will go on, but with the input sought of all involved, and with all significant political forces on board. ■

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➤ Collective Amnesia and the Northern Ireland Model of Conflict Resolution

John Bew

Northern Ireland, as we all know, is often presented as a model for conflict resolution around the world. That it should be is a reflection of the success of the peace process there, the key moment of the success of the peace process which was the Belfast Agreement of 1998. There are numerous exciting stories about Northern Ireland's transition from war to peace which translate well in other conflict zones and have a certain appeal to them and, in some instances, even an element of glamour. The job of the historian is to re-insert some complexity into these stories, and to balance contending narratives about 'what brought peace'. Before we begin to discuss the 'lessons' of Northern Ireland for other trouble-spots around the world, it seems important that we get over that hurdle first.

To say this much is to risk striking a discordant note from what might be called the 'peace process industry'. It also carries with it the danger of going against prevailing political fashion and to be labelled as somehow anti-peace process. This is a symptom of the poor quality of the debate and the collective amnesia which underpins it. My view is that it is admirable that the ending of the conflict in Northern Ireland is examined and it is to be welcomed that thought is given to what lessons it might hold for Israel/Palestine, Iraq, East Timor, Sri Lanka, or other places. Yet for these efforts to be genuinely helpful and intellectually honest, it is important that we also consider the less 'glamorous' sides of the story.

This paper makes the case that much of what has been said about Northern Ireland has been either over-simplified, or, over-conceptualised in a way that fails to acknowledge the ragged edges of real historical experience. The over-simplification is partly the product of the enthusiasm of eager participants in the peace process who wish transfer their experience elsewhere; in some instances, though not all, their efforts are over-laden with preconceptions about other conflicts. The over-conceptualisation is perhaps more the responsibility of academics, who insert post-facto rationalisation and schema to interpret the peace process, in a way which is remote from the reality on the ground at the time.

The Northern Ireland peace process cannot be separated from the conflict that preceded it and, indeed, overlapped with it. That conflict was often dirty, messy, morally dubious, and confusing. But it was also very important in creating the conditions in which the political settlement could be constructed. Equally, the peace process itself was often unexciting, painfully slow, and constructed with great care. But the political architecture needs to be fully understood before we try to recreate it elsewhere. In summary, therefore, this paper stresses two dimensions of the Northern Ireland story, which are often sidelined in the prevailing narratives – the *unpalatable* and the *boring*.

THE ULSTER TALE

There is a common theme among evangelists of the Northern Ireland model; or perhaps, to put it another way, there is a version of the Ulster tale which has so far proved more compelling than others and which goes as follows:

1. In Northern Ireland, the British State faced an organised terrorist threat from the Provisional IRA that demanded a British withdrawal from the province. The British state tried to defeat the IRA through security policy only, but found that it could not do so; both parties became locked in a military 'stalemate'.
2. After three decades of stasis, the British Government changed approach and decided to negotiate with the terrorists.
3. This made possible an 'inclusive peace settlement' that brought in the 'extremes' and ended the violence.

The key lessons derived from this basic narrative – and assumed to be applicable to other conflict zones are as follows:

1. The state should be prepared to talk to terrorists. Lines of communication should be maintained at all times.
2. Talks should not be predicated on rigid pre-conditions, because they discourage terrorists from taking up the process of dialogue.
3. In a conflict, a settlement can only be achieved by the accommodation of the 'extremes', even if this risks undermining 'moderates'.

Rather than discuss the 'lessons', what I am primarily interested in is the 'what happened' side of things. Above all, I want to question the influential and oft-stated idea that the magic solution in Northern Ireland – and the key lesson for the rest of the world – was that 'talking to terrorists', engaging with the extremes, was the key variable in the search for peace: that this is what changed in the 1990s; there was a shift from an unwinnable military war; and both sides put aside their moral scruples for the greater good and gathered around the table.

This is not to dismiss the importance of bringing in the 'extremes'; this was part of the story and part of the success in Northern Ireland. Evidently, with the 'extremes' on board, a peace deal was given another level of durability. However, other aspects have been forgotten and – in some respects – willfully neglected, which also form part of the story.

First, the idea that talking to terrorists was an innovation of the 1990s is probably the most misleading of all the commonplaces. Talks between the British government and the IRA – both direct and indirect – occurred on a number of occasions through the 1970s and 1980s. When it was part of a wider and clearly defined strategy, as it was in the 1990s, talking to the IRA became an important fabric of the eventual deal. Strategically, this made sense in 1993 and, arguably, earlier than that. However, in the first fifteen years of the conflict, the act of talking to terrorists was too often a symptom of policy drift, a sign of exhaustion, or part of a simple desire on the part of the British government extrication from the Northern Ireland problem. On these occasions, such as 1972 and 1975, it risked strengthening the IRA's perception that it was their violent campaign that had delivered results. In addition to providing a boost to the IRA, some of these early communications encouraged loyalists to mobilise and ratchet up their campaign in the 1970s.

More importantly, they also risked undermining more reliable partners for peace, including mainstream nationalists or Unionists, whose support levels fluctuated at various times. It is sometimes forgotten that the Irish government was very much opposed to direct British negotiations with the IRA for most of the 1970s and much of the 1980s, particularly when they were left out of the loop. Prominent figures such as the late Garret FitzGerald believed that they undercut legitimate voices and contributed to instability.

THE ORIGINS OF THE PEACE PROCESS

There are also a number of misleading commonplaces about the origins of the peace process. Some view it through the prism of the DUP-Sinn Féin, which characterised the final stages of the process. Others see it as the outcome of a lengthy bi-lateral dialogue between the British state and the IRA that went back to the late 1980s. Yet bringing in the terrorists was not the absolute priority at the outset of the Northern Irish peace process. Sinn Féin involvement was preferable but it was not the be-all and end-all of any projected deal. The settlement train, to adapt a phrase from Tony Blair, had a momentum of its own. Crucially, there were a number of important 'preconditions' placed on Sinn Féin involvement in the peace process. Article 9 of the Downing Street Declaration – a joint initiative announced by the British and Irish governments on 15 December 1993 – established that the conditions for peace negotiations were as follows:

The British and Irish governments reiterate that the achievement of peace must involve a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence. They confirm that, in these circumstances, democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics and to join in dialogue in due course between the governments and the political parties on the way ahead.

While there was to be some ambiguity as to how this commitment to "exclusively peaceful methods" was to be demonstrated, it did serve to establish some ground rules for conduct before the IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994.

BORING REALITIES: PRE-CONDITIONS AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE PEACE PROCESS

Conventional wisdom now holds that pre-conditions slowed up the peace process, were manipulated by obstructionists, and stored up problems to be dealt with later on. On the contrary, there is compelling evidence that the pre-conditions were crucial to the eventual deal because, without them, there may not have been a sustainable peace process in the first instance. Once again, it is worth reiterating that 'constructive ambiguity' was no bad thing; flexibility about the precise meaning of certain pre-conditions was a useful device for government to have. But without any pre-conditions at all, it is hard to imagine how the foundations of the peace process could have been constructed.

This brings me to the boring point I adverted to in the introduction – which is that a key component in Northern Ireland was that normal politics (by which is meant democratic and peaceful politics) was preserved and protected by the process.

One might, in fact, say that there were two peace processes running side-by-side in the early 1990s, but that we are in danger of forgetting one of them. On the one hand, as we are all aware, the British had some stuttering and stop-start contacts with the IRA, which were to become increasingly more important. At the same time, there had also been multi-party talks going on with all the main constitutional parties from the early 1990s, and these were also to become increasingly important.

Crucially, when the situation came to a head, the government prioritised the latter talks – those with non-violent parties – time and time again over the 1990s, even if it did want to abandon the other contacts. In other words the process was painstakingly constructed, with great care and patience, and a sense of balance. In this respect, advocates of the Northern Ireland model might be better placed to revisit the importance of the Downing Street Declaration, the 'principle of consent', the notion of 'sufficient consensus', the Heads of Agreement in January 1998, and the very negotiation of the Belfast Agreement itself. The real achievement was not only the fact that Sinn Féin got on board the train as it was leaving

the station, but it was the fact that the government kept the train on the rails at all, when bringing in Sinn Féin risked derailing it.

There is, in fact, a tendency to undersell the achievement. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was a triumph for moderation and a triumph of normal politics. What makes it unique in the history of all previous attempts to bring peace to Northern Ireland was *not* that the extremes were engaged with for the first time but the fact that it was ratified by a majority of people north and south of the Irish border.

THE UNPALATABLE: WAS IT A STALEMATE?

Talks between the British Government and the IRA became part of the success story in 1998. That is undeniable. However, this needs to be seen in context. The terms of the dialogue between the British government and the IRA were set by the war that preceded it. By the early 1990s, it had become increasingly clear that the IRA had been heavily infiltrated by informers and was subject to a strategy of containment by the British security services.

To say that the IRA was beaten or that hard power won the day is a vast exaggeration and a misleading one. Hard power came with great costs and its ineffective and misbegotten application in the early phase of the conflict exacerbated the violence considerably. There are also many things which the British state did which were dubious both in moral and strategic terms. But when we are asking ourselves the question, 'what brought peace to Ulster?', to write hard power out of the equation is simply to ignore reality.

Hard power has been written out of many accounts of the peace process presented round the world. This is particularly the case in the accounts by key government officials involved, such as Jonathan Powell, or in the narrative of leading members of the Republican movement. But it is also replicated in many academic accounts of the peace process and in large swathes of the political establishment. The truth is that the importance of hard power is blurred because of a lack of official documentation about it in the public domain. Moreover, those who refer to the importance of hard power are often charged with

preferring hard power to negotiation. But if Northern Ireland is to be taken seriously as a model for conflict resolution, a dose of reality is needed about the more unpalatable events which also formed part of the story. In fact, one could go so far as to say that there is a collective amnesia about the murkier elements that went into the conflict and which were deployed to bring it to an end. It suits the British state to forget many of the dubious things it did as part of the dirty war. And it suits the Republican movement – at the other end of the spectrum – to play down the extent to which they were in a stranglehold by the efforts of the security services (above all, by infiltration of their ranks with informers).

Further, it is understandable – and highly politic, indeed – that elements of the British government have allowed the IRA to maintain the notion that the military conflict ended in a stalemate. But the whole idea of a stalemate is in itself something of a misnomer. While the IRA was far from beaten, there is incontrovertible evidence that counterterrorism operations were taking a heavy toll on the organisation. In military terms, it was a movement that was squeezed and weakened, and which had lost momentum. In political terms, it was a movement that had the potential for electoral expansion but which was being held back by its military actions. Thus, Sinn Féin preferred to be part of a political process that did have momentum, even at the risk of not being able to control that momentum themselves. It was not an ameliorative process of dialogue and trust-building which brought them to the table. It was a calculation based on realpolitik. And, to a great extent, their sense of realpolitik was shaped by their declining military fortunes and the increasing success of the security services. There were numerous failures and embarrassments in the British state's counterterrorism efforts against the IRA. Yet there were also many successes about which we have heard a lot less.

CONCLUSION

When discussing the lessons of the Northern Ireland peace process, it is simplistic and misleading to say that the key to success was the bringing in of extremes. Despite the obvious temptation to bring

them in, during the crucial phase from 1993 to 1998, the needs of the moderates were prioritised at crucial junctures, thus creating the conditions for a sustainable deal. Though it is now unfashionable to say so, preconditions were very important to that process – albeit preconditions with a useful element of constructive ambiguity. Meanwhile, the British state’s counterterrorism strategy evolved significantly over the course of the Troubles, with covert (and controversial) methods used to increasing effect. This took a significant toll on the IRA, through fair means and foul.

It is very hard to argue against the sentiment that it is good to talk or that it represents the best way forward to end violent conflict. This is certainly part of the story in Northern Ireland. However, the act of ‘talking to terrorists’ has been given a disproportionate weight in explaining how violence was brought to an end. The main problem with the Northern Ireland model – as exported around the world – is that it presents the talking process as a self-contained and ameliorative activity on its own terms – removed from the less palatable ingredients of the conflict and the precarious political balancing act which helped bring it to an end. ■

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➤ Security is Not Enough: Ten Lessons for Conflict Resolution from Northern Ireland

Jonathan Powell

Northern Ireland is of course *sui generis*. Its conflict was unique and so was the solution. There is no Northern Ireland model that can be picked up and imposed on conflicts elsewhere and drawing facile parallels can be misleading.

But it is equally wrong to suggest that there are no lessons to be learned from Northern Ireland, from the mistakes we made and from the successes we achieved. Those lessons can be applied elsewhere, with care, by those seeking lasting settlements to armed conflicts so they can make their own mistakes rather than repeating ours. This paper sets out ten lessons I learned from over a decade of involvement in trying to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

First, there are no purely military solutions to insurgencies. Hugh Orde, the former Chief Constable of Northern Ireland, has wisely pointed out that there are no examples anywhere in the world of terrorist problems being 'policed out'. In the end if there is a political problem at the root of the conflict then there has to be a political solution. That is not to say that security measures have no place. On the contrary, they are essential. Without security pressure downwards, insurgents will find life comfortable and have no incentive to make the tough decisions necessary for peace. But security pressure by itself without offering a political way out will simply cause the insurgents to fight to the last man.

In Northern Ireland the British army and the police could have contained the IRA indefinitely, but they were never going to wipe them out. It was only the offer of negotiations that eventually brought the violence to a close. Some commentators, largely on the right, believe that the IRA was badly penetrated by the security services and that if only they had been allowed to get on with the job unencumbered by political interference they would have finally defeated the IRA. That is what I call the 'security delusion'. Its adherents believe that one more heave would have solved the problem. But it is a delusion. It is true the IRA were infiltrated and true they were exhausted by the long military campaign, but they were not going to collapse however long we kept fighting them.

Some point to Sri Lanka as proof that there can be a purely military solution to an insurgency. It is true that Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers, appears to have been insane enough to believe he could win a conventional military campaign against the Sri Lankan armed forces. He was proved wrong. But it is a mistake, unfortunately, to believe that this conventional military victory will be the end of the story. Unless the underlying Tamil grievances are addressed politically it is probable that the terrorist campaign will start all over again and such a campaign will be impossible to resolve by purely military means.

The second lesson is that you cannot stop the violence without talking to the men with guns. We were criticised in Northern Ireland for undermining the political centre by focussing on the IRA. But that was exactly the point. Unless we could get the IRA to stop we would not bring peace to Northern Ireland.

There is however a Catch 22 to this need to talk which leads governments to do it in secret, as the British government did from 1973 to 1993. Democratic governments cannot be seen to be talking to terrorist groups while they are killing their people; but terrorist groups will not give up fighting unless the governments can convince them there is a political way forward to achieve their aims. If it had been known that John Major's government was communicating with the IRA, just as the IRA were letting off their bombs in Warrington in which they killed two young boys, there would have been public revulsion. John Major was quite right to say that it would turn his stomach to talk to the IRA. But he was also quite right to be communicating with them even as he said those words. If he had not done so there would have been no peace. The secret correspondence with Martin McGuinness offering a political way out led to the IRA ceasefire in 1994.

Governments are sometimes accused of appeasement for talking to insurgent groups. That is to misunderstand the nature of appeasement. Chamberlain's mistake at Munich was not in talking to Hitler. That was a sensible thing to do. It was to believe that by offering Hitler a slice of Czechoslovakia he could buy him off. Accepting the terrorist demands under the threat of violence would be appeasement. But talking to terrorists is not the same as agreeing with them. We talked to the Republican movement but we never offered them the united Ireland that they had been seeking by force. On the contrary we persuaded them to accept the principle of consent whereby the status of Northern Ireland could only be changed by the will of the majority.

Of course talking to terrorists can be counterproductive if badly handled, as for example in the past with the FARC in Colombia. It can legitimise the armed group; it can provide perverse incentives – one terrorist leader with whom I have dealt announced he was going to “pile bodies on the table” to increase his negotiating

leverage with a burst of violence before negotiations started; and the offer of talks can convince the terrorists that they are winning and encourage them to intensify their campaign. But all of these are questions of timing and tactical handling rather than arguments against speaking to terrorist at all.

Third, insurgent groups will not just surrender. In December 2004 we got very close to brokering an agreement between the DUP and Sinn Féin but it fell apart at the last minute when the DUP demanded photographs of the decommissioning of IRA weapons and Ian Paisley made a speech calling on Republicans to wear ‘sackcloth and ashes’. For the IRA that smacked of surrender and they refused to sign up.

Insurgent groups need a narrative to explain to their supporters what they have achieved and why all the sacrifice was worthwhile. If an agreement looks like abject surrender they will reject it. For that reason it is a mistake to insist on preconditions before beginning talks. As I said above, democratic governments find it very hard to be seen to talk to insurgent groups until there is a ceasefire. But to demand additional pre-conditions before talks can start is usually a mistake. In Northern Ireland it is easy to see how the Major government came to make decommissioning of terrorist weapons a pre-condition, but it was a mistake to do so. John Major did not want to find himself negotiating under the threat of violence and so he demanded a permanent ceasefire. When it became clear that would not be forthcoming, he demanded instead that they decommission all their weapons. Not surprisingly they refused to do so, and the government watered down its demand to decommissioning the majority of its weapons, to decommissioning some of its weapons and finally to decommissioning a token amount of its weapons. All of these demands were rejected too and talks were stymied. It took us more than ten years to work our way through the problem caused by the precondition of decommissioning. It is far better to address these issues in the negotiations themselves rather than making them a prior condition to be met before the talks can commence.

Fourth, there are many conditions that need to be in place before negotiations can succeed, but perhaps the most important is that both sides need to believe that they cannot win militarily. If either side thinks

it can win, it will not negotiate seriously but instead seek tactical advantage from the negotiation. In Northern Ireland the British army was clear by the early 1980s that it could contain violence at 'an acceptable level' indefinitely but it could not win an outright victory. They therefore understood the need to seek a political settlement. On the other side, Adams and McGuinness had joined the Republican movement very young, but by the mid 1980s they were well past fighting age. The IRA had tried the short sharp shock, the long campaign, the mainland campaign, and the armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other, but none of them had driven the Brits out. They knew the IRA could never be defeated but they also realised they could not achieve their objectives by purely military means. So they too started casting around for a political solution first by talking to John Hume and the Irish government and later by seeking entry to the all-party talks process.

Fifth, there needs to be political leadership on both sides. In Northern Ireland Adams and McGuinness risked not just their political careers but their lives in leading their movement into a peace the movement would not have accepted at the beginning of the process; David Trimble and John Hume both sacrificed their political parties and their careers in order to achieve peace; Ian Paisley, having contributed to the start of the Troubles, decided after a close encounter with his maker in 2004 that he wanted to end his life as Dr Yes rather than Dr No; John Major stood to gain nothing politically from starting a peace process in Northern Ireland and yet decided to do so; and the fact that the British and Irish Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, were willing and able to work seamlessly together for a decade made peace possible. Without political leaders prepared to take risks there will be no peace.

More than that there needs to be political momentum to achieve peace. Tony Blair deliberately used the magnitude of his landslide election victory in 1997 to jump-start the process. His first visit out of London as Prime Minister after the election was to Northern Ireland to reassure the Unionist population that the new government would not sell them out in his speech in Balmoral. And he set a clear deadline for an agreement one year after the election, and stuck

to it despite calls to abandon the deadline as too dangerous. If he had left it until later, when he was politically weaker, he may well not have succeeded. In his biography Tony Blair accuses me of saying he had a 'Messiah complex'. In fact it was Mo Mowlam who said to me that he thought he was "f...ing Jesus". But if he hadn't believed that it was possible to reach an agreement in Northern Ireland and believed that he could achieve it, there would have been no agreement.

Sixth, peace is a process not an event. When I wrote my book on Northern Ireland, the cabinet secretary allowed me to read back through the No. 10 files for the ten years between 1997 and 2007. One thing above all else jumped out of the files at me, and that was the importance of having a process in place. With a process there is cause for hope and parties are kept busy. Without a process a vacuum opens up and is rapidly filled by violence. If nothing else a process allows you to manage the problem even if you cannot solve it. In the Middle East the outlines of an eventual settlement are pretty clear in terms of land and of refugees and even of what should happen to Jerusalem. But there is no process. Shimon Peres summed up the problem neatly, saying, "the good news is there is light at the end of the tunnel. The bad news is there is no tunnel".

Once you have the process up and running you must not let it stall. This is what I call the bicycle theory. Once the bicycle is up and moving do not let it fall over. If you do, you will find it incredibly difficult to pick it up again. Keeping it moving however requires ingenuity, coming up with a new way forward every time you meet a blockage, an ability to absorb political pain, as we had to do over the release of prisoners in 1998 and the Northern Bank robbery in 2004, and most of all a refusal to take no for an answer.

Seventh, there is a role for third parties. The British government had long refused to countenance any international role in Northern Ireland, just as other governments around the world refuse to allow external actors to play a role in their conflicts. The British government however changed its mind in the early 1990s by inviting Ninian Stephen, an Australian,

to chair the talks. Later they invited George Mitchell to play the role of referee, a role he fulfilled with remarkable patience and balance. Third parties can also be crucial in guaranteeing independence. The IRA found it far easier to put their weapons beyond use through an international commission on decommissioning chaired by a Canadian General than they would have done handing them over to the Brits or the Unionists. And an independent Monitoring Commission reassured the Unionist population that here was an independent arbiter of whether or not the IRA had gone out of business in a way the British government could not.

Eighth, breakthrough agreements are the beginning not the end of a peace process. If as our helicopters took off from Stormont on the morning of Good Friday 1998 we thought that the job was done we would have been sadly disappointed. It took another nine years to get the agreement implemented. The same lesson can be learned the other way round from the Oslo Accords. When they were announced there was a burst of enthusiasm on both sides. But neither side did anything to implement the agreements or even to sell them effectively, and disillusion soon set in and the process collapsed into another Intifada. It is exactly when the breakthrough agreement is announced that efforts should be redoubled rather than both sides collapsing in exhaustion and doing nothing.

Ninth, there will only be a lasting settlement if both sides can break through the political zero-sum game. If one side comes out of the negotiation looking cheerful then the other side feels that it has lost, regardless of the substance. The most bizarre example of this was the 1994 ceasefire. When the ceasefire was announced it was the Republicans driving around town honking their horns and waving their flags and the Unionists who were sunk in gloom, even though the ceasefire was exactly what the Unionists had been demanding for decades. This zero-sum game dogged us right through the negotiations and we only finally got to a settlement when the Republicans realised they had to think about the constituency on the other side as well as their own and participate in selling the agreement to that other constituency. Agreements will only stick if both sides come out of the negotiations feeling like winners, rather than feeling they have been forced to give in.

My last lesson is that there is no conflict in the world, however long lasting, however bloody, however frozen that cannot be resolved. Successive British prime ministers from Churchill, to Wilson, to Thatcher believed that Northern Ireland was insoluble. A series of previous attempts from Sunningdale in 1973 to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 to the Downing Street Declaration in 1994 had all failed. The eventual agreement in 1998 was correctly described by Seamus Mallon as "Sunningdale for slow learners" and contained many of the same elements as in 1973. But all of those attempts at peace were not in vain. The eventual success was built on those failures. It required the parties to exhaust all the other alternative options and for the cycle of blood to go through a full revolution before both sides were prepared to make the painful concessions that were required for a lasting peace. In the right conditions, with patience and political leadership the Northern Ireland conflict was solved. And so can all other armed conflicts if the same effort is applied at the right time. ■

➤ Bad students learning the wrong lessons?

Roger MacGinty

PREMATURE HISTORY?

Sitting at the LSE IDEAS 'Lessons of Northern Ireland' event, it was fanciful to think of 'who was bugging who' during the peace process. Around the table at the seminar we had Jonathan Powell (Tony Blair's chief of staff for the Northern Ireland talks), Martin Mansergh (the Irish Taoiseach's special representative on the Northern Ireland talks), Tim Dalton (from the Irish Ministry of Justice who collated Irish government intelligence files), David Trimble (the former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and a leading player in the peace process), and Barbara de Bruin (a member of Sinn Féin's negotiating team). Is it beyond the bounds of possibility that Jonathan Powell, or Tim Dalton, were privy to the transcripts of telephone calls and other surreptitiously recorded conversations of the people with whom they now shared a seminar room? My educated guess would be that Jonathan, Tim and many others know a lot more than they are prepared, or allowed, to tell us.

This gets to the heart of the matter of the lessons to be learned from a peace process: what information is available to allow us to draw lessons? Some information is in the public domain, and other information is not. But even the information that is in the public domain may not be as helpful as we imagine. There is a difference between having access to information and identifying those parts of that information that might be useful to others.

There has been no shortage of politicians, policymakers and academics (myself included) travelling the world to explain the 'lessons' from the Northern Ireland peace process. But it is worth asking if we are in a position to identify 'lessons' from the Northern Ireland peace process? A number of barriers mean that politicians, policymakers, journalists, and academics may not be able to learn from Northern Ireland's peace process in any meaningful way. Instead, there is a danger that many of the lessons that are shared are superficial and glib.

Perhaps the most prominent of these barriers relates to the instant history that accompanied the Northern Ireland peace process. There has been no shortage of memoirs, insider accounts, television documentaries, and learned wisdom from telegenic historians. This is not a criticism of the politicians, policymakers, journalists, and academics who have given us insights to the Northern Ireland peace process. Many of the insider accounts make gripping reading and are invaluable sources of information. The problem is that a largely accepted version of the peace process was laid down very early, more or less in real time. This narrative has become hegemonic. Indeed, key players in the peace process (individuals and institutions) invest considerable energy in maintaining this accepted narrative, and their crucial role in it. Thus, those who made the peace process, have become gatekeepers to a particular narrative of the peace process.

But is this dominant narrative faithful to events as they truly occurred? It is too early to say. Historians in fifty or one hundred years will revise the dominant version of the peace process and provide a different account or accounts. They will be able to place the peace process in its global and socio-cultural context, and in the long-trends of history. They will be able to disaggregate the truly significant events and processes from the welter of events and 'historic moments' that characterised the peace process. They will also have access to some of the documents (particularly the intelligence documents) that are not yet in the public domain. The implication of this instant – or perhaps premature – history of the peace process is that may be at risk of drawing lessons from an inaccurate account of the peace process.

Certainly, the accepted script is probably too much focused on the elite processes, the crucial hours in Castle Buildings, the set-piece meetings and key documents. As in much history, the social, the economic, the female, and the non-elite risks will, with historical distance, be recognised as under-reported and undervalued. These multiple histories of everyday stories and perceptions formed a vital part of the peace process, particularly in terms of providing an environment of resistance and enablement. The dominant narrative has an emphasis on the making of peace through elites rather than the more general reception, consumption, and subversion of that peace. Although we talk about a peace 'process', the accepted version of the peace seems to characterise the peace process as a series of episodes and key events rather than as a long-term process or series of processes. There is a danger that we are equipped with inaccurate textbooks and we may not be in the best position to learn lessons.

A VERY DIFFERENT CONTEXT

We should be in no doubt that Northern Ireland presents a very different case than most other contemporary civil wars. As a result, we must be cautious about proffering lessons or encouraging mimicry. The Northern Ireland state did not collapse in terms of economic or social provision. The collapse of such public health and sanitation systems has been the big killer in the

civil wars such as those in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Somalia in the past two decades. Northern Ireland has been blessed by first-rate healthcare and infrastructure. Moreover, there were no massive numbers of displaced persons. The casualty rate was low in comparison to other civil wars, and all sides used some measure of restraint. Northern Ireland occupies a very rich part of the world and is a member of the European Union. It is the only conflict that I know of where Marks & Spencer stayed open throughout.

Not only does Northern Ireland present a very different context than many other conflict contexts, it was also treated very differently by the key power-holders. We can see this by contrasting British government policies towards Afghanistan and Iraq with those towards Northern Ireland. Courtesy of its extended peace process, Northern Ireland has experienced 'liberal peace-lite' or a generous and largely consensual form of peacemaking based on negotiation, electoral endorsement and a good dose of Keynesianism. Money and attention were lavished on Northern Ireland and its peace process. The process was not without coercion, but this coercion – even the worst of the British government's outrages – pales in comparison with British government activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Here the version of 'peacemaking' took the form of regime change by force, military occupation, the imposition of a government (later endorsed by elections), and a major international project to re-orient the society, polity, and economy. The ferocity of this 'peacemaking' project is evidenced by the fact that British troops fired just under four million bullets in a year in the 2006-2007 in Afghanistan's Helmand Province.

What is remarkable is that the same British government, and often the same ministers and policymakers, were involved in the disbursement of such wildly schizophrenic variants of 'peacemaking'. The successive British administrations seemed unable, or unwilling, to draw lessons from the Northern Ireland experience and apply them to Iraq or Afghanistan. The exceptionalism of Northern Ireland – as a context and in terms of its treatment – means that it is prudent to be cautious when drawing comparison.

HAS THE WORLD MOVED ON FROM PEACE PROCESSES?

In 2009 only one peace agreement was reached in a civil war situation, the Ituri Accord in Congo. It may be that we live in a post-peace process era, or in an era in which there is little room for inclusive and patient peace processes. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program records an average of nine peace accords annually in the period since 1989, but that figure seems to have sharply declined. Whether this is a blip or part of a wider trend is hard to tell at this stage.

The argument advanced in this brief article is that the Northern Ireland peace process was something of an outlier, or an atypical peace process, in that it was more inclusive and more embedded in the rights agenda than many other peace processes. Of course, the Northern Ireland peace process was not completely inclusive, and sometimes patience was in short supply. However, overall, the peace process was based on the notion of including those who had the capacity to wreck peace from without. Tony Blair famously told Sinn Féin that 'the settlement train'

would leave without them. It didn't. Blair and the others waited for Sinn Féin. There were countless other attempts to make the peace process inclusive, and seemingly endless waiting for various constituencies to be consulted. The result was a big tent peace process. It wasn't exactly 'touchy feely', and the shadow of violence was often nearby, but it was a peace process in which consent and inclusion played very significant roles.

Northern Ireland's 'big tent' peace process can be contrasted with contexts that were much more hostile to peace initiatives. The first decade of the twenty-first century has witnessed many cases where one party in a conflict has sought to secure unilateral victory by violence or authoritarian suppression: Sri Lanka, southern Thailand, Burma, Darfur, Afghanistan, North-West Pakistan, various parts of India, Chechnya, Israel/Palestine, Yemen, and the list goes on. In some of these cases, such as Sri Lanka or Israel/Palestine, there was a nod to a peace process or some sort of negotiated settlement. But often this was subterfuge, or a cover for military action.

DEBUNKING THE PEACE PROCESS

Richard English

1

PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND DID NOT COME AS A RESULT OF RECONCILIATION.

Northern Ireland remains deeply divided and sectarian, and the reason for peace is more that terrorism was contained by the state, the terrorists were practical and wanted momentum, and terrorist-related politicians therefore sought a Plan B of peace-process politics when the Plan A of violence did not produce the desired results.

2

CONTRARY TO MUCH ASSUMPTION, NORTHERN IRELAND IS NOT A PLACE WHERE TOO MUCH IS REMEMBERED.

In fact, most victims and the circumstances of their deaths are forgotten. Remembering the atrocity of such conflicts (and not euphemizing them) is a vital aspect of responding to terrorism, failing to do so runs the risk of encouraging more terrorism in the future.

There are two interesting contextual factors that have made suppression an easier option than negotiation and may suggest that Northern Ireland is an outlier with limited comparative value. The first is the global War on Terror, which is still being waged although the term is no longer common currency. This gave cover to many authoritarian regimes to label their opponents as ‘terrorists’ and use violent rather than negotiated means to attempt to ‘solve’ their conflict. British and US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan meant that regimes can laugh off lectures on human rights abuses. The War on Terror meant a lessening emphasis on the Clintonian doctrine of democratisation, and instead placed a greater emphasis on the stabilisation of states (as a bulwark against ‘terrorism’) and the securitisation of humanitarianism, development, and peacebuilding.

The second reason that might make suppression more attractive than negotiation is that investment from China – and other locations including Saudi Arabia – means that a number of developing countries can re-orient themselves eastwards towards the boom economies, rather than west towards gloomy lectures

on human rights and aid that is tied to a multitude of conditions. As Mark Duffield has observed, the Sudanese government has been able to frustrate western attempts to intervene over Darfur in part because it has been cushioned by Chinese investment.

Sri Lanka was able to afford to win its war against the Tamil Tigers via cheap money from China and the international markets that enabled it to rearm. It was able to insulate itself against complaints on human rights from western INGOs and governments because they had lost their financial leverage over it. In May 2011, just as the LSE IDEAS event was looking at lessons learned from the Northern Ireland peace process, the Sri Lankan army was hosting its own lessons learned conference. Forty-two countries signed up to hear how to win an insurgency. It is worth stressing that Sri Lanka ‘won’ its war in 2009 through the suppression of human rights and a sustained military offensive. A combination of the international and domestic contexts made this option more palatable to the Sri Lankan regime than another round of negotiations.

3

NORTHERN IRELAND DID NOT DEMONSTRATE THE VICTORY OF EXTREMISM.

In fact, during most of the conflict neither community had a majority in it which supported terrorism. It was only after the IRA effectively ended their war against the British state that their party, Sinn Fein, became the dominant voice of Northern Irish nationalism. Before that, repeatedly and emphatically, the non-violent SDLP easily outpolled Sinn Fein year after year.

4

NO TERRORIST GROUP IN NORTHERN IRELAND ENDED THE CONFLICT GETTING WHAT THEY WANTED.

Terrorists did accomplish certain second-order gains (greater influence for their political party; greater personal influence and even wealth) but in terms of the achievement of central, strategic goals, terrorism did not work very well in Northern Ireland. ■

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ARE THERE ANY LESSONS?

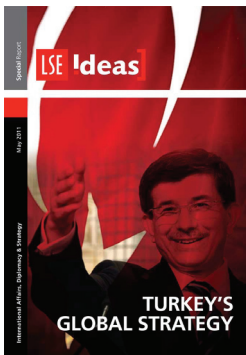
So far the tenor of this article has been sceptical in relation to lessons from the Northern Ireland peace process. Yet there is one lesson that does deserve to be aired, and that is that a peace process is possible, even if the circumstances seem unpropitious. The Northern Ireland of the late 1980s was characterised by a palpable despair. The conflict was described as 'frozen', 'cyclical' and 'pointless'. Few people, if any, could see a way out of the stalemate. Yet within half a decade a feasible peace process was up and running.

A conflict that was seen as 'intractable' seemed to offer the possibility of movement. This movement was not inevitable and was rarely achieved without controversy. But the very idea that a peace process was possible, and that it could have a tangible impact on the ground, was important and is likely the most important lesson that Northern Ireland has to offer. ■

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Upon assuming power in May, the United Kingdom's historic coalition government set in motion three exercises that together aimed to reshape British foreign policy. Taken together, the new National Security Strategy (NSS), the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), seek to lay down the bounds of Britain's future role in the world, to articulate Britain's national interests, establish the goals of policy and set the means by which to achieve them.

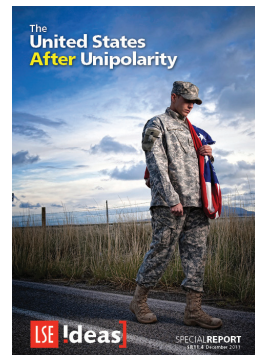
The contributors here – all with long and distinguished careers in British foreign policy – were asked to consider Britain's role in the world in the broadest sense, to identify our core interests and the most appropriate capacities to secure them, and to do so in recognition of the reality of the resource constraints that are coming to define this period in British political history.



After nearly a decade in power, Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has grown increasingly confident in its foreign policy, prompting observers to wonder aloud whether the country might be leaving 'the West', forcing that group to confront the question 'who lost Turkey?'

This is to cast Turkey's role, and its emerging global strategy, in unhelpful binary terms. Turkey's emerging role reflects the changes in the world politics whereby power is becoming decentred and more diffuse, with established blocs replaced by more fluid arrangements that loosely bind states on the basis shifting interests.

For the United States, the two decades after the end of Cold War could not have been more different: the first, a holiday from history amid a long boom; the second mired by conflict and economic crisis. By the end of George W. Bush's time in office, the United States' 'unipolar moment' was over, with emerging powers taking more assertive international roles as the United States looked to cut its budgets. Across a whole range of challenges, this waning of American dominance has defined Barack Obama's foreign policy.





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