

Public Diplomacy, Cultural Interventions & the Peace  
Process in Northern Ireland

Track Two to Peace?

Edited by  
Joseph J. Popiolkowski and Nicholas J. Cull



**Public Diplomacy, Cultural Interventions & the Peace Process in  
Northern Ireland: Track Two to Peace?**

by

the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School  
University of Southern California

Published by

**FIGUEROA PRESS**

840 Childs Way, 3rd Floor

Los Angeles, CA 90089

Phone: (213) 743-4800

Fax: (213) 743-4804

[www.figueroapress.com](http://www.figueroapress.com)

Figueroa Press is a division of the USC University Bookstore

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Cover, text and layout design by USC Graphic Design Studio

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN-13: 978-1932800-37-1

ISBN-10: 1-932800-37-9

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## Foreword

This volume began with a conference, and that conference began, in its turn, with a dinner. In the Fall of 2006 the British Consul General in Los Angeles, Bob Peirce, gave a dinner for his friend Paul Arthur who was about to begin a spell as Fulbright professor at Stanford University. Bob drew together a number of people in Los Angeles with an interest in the Northern Ireland peace process and the role of cultural work in bridging divides. Nick Cull recognized that group as an ideal core for a useful one day conference on the subject, and shortly thereafter set the wheels in motion to bring together scholars of international relations, public diplomacy and participants in the inter-community peace-building efforts in Northern Ireland.

The conference took place in Los Angeles on 4 May 2007 at the USC Annenberg School for Communication. It brought together experts, practitioners and a number of commentators. The objective was to understand the achievements and the limits of track two diplomacy in Northern Ireland and assess how these lessons were applicable to other conflicts. This volume is a collection of the papers presented.

One of the great pleasures of the original conference was the combination of people involved. Many of the speakers knew of one another but had never had the chance to meet until transported to Southern California. On top of this, the conference was blessed with first class discussants including Professor Matt Bonham of Syracuse University, Mike Chinoy (formerly of CNN), Émer Deane, the Consul General of Ireland at San Francisco, Ali Fisher (then of the British Council) and Peter Kovach of the U.S. Department of State. The wider audience included diplomats, scholars and practitioners from a range of backgrounds from across the region. The spirited debate which was part of the day has not been summarized here, but has been part of the framing of this volume and the editors hope that this final incarnation of the papers will help carry that debate forward.

Joseph J. Popiolkowski & Nicholas J. Cull



## Acknowledgments

Our first debt is to contributors to this volume who took time out of their busy and demanding schedules to travel to and present at the original conference on 4 May 2007 and then graciously contributed a written account of their ideas to this volume.

We are grateful to Martin Melaugh at CAIN for permission to use his photograph on the cover, and to Yael Swerdlow who photographed the original conference and provided most of the author images in this book. Anna Berthold ensured that we ended the conference with an accurate record of the day. Rima Tatevossian transcribed the remarks. Sherine Badawi Walton at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy oversaw the whole operation. Tiffany Quon and Salvador Yvellez managed the production of the volume at Figueroa Press against an unexpectedly tight deadline.

This project would not have happened without the endorsement and financial support of our conference sponsors: the USC Religion, Identity and Global Governance Project; the USC Center for International Studies; the USC Annenberg Knight Chair on Media and Religion; the British Council in Belfast and London, and especially its cultural relations Think Tank: Counterpoint; the British Consulate General in Los Angeles and – of course – the USC Center on Public Diplomacy and its directors, Josh Fouts and now Geoffrey Wiseman, who funded this publication. Our final special thanks go to the British Consul General at Los Angeles himself, Bob Peirce who had a special part in the initial imagining of this conference and has been an enthusiastic supporter throughout. Bob's term in LA ends in the summer of 2009. He will be missed.

Joseph J. Popiolkowski & Nicholas J. Cull  
Editors  
March 2009





## Introduction

### **Mapping the Miracle: Northern Ireland, Public Diplomacy and Track Two Diplomacy**

Nicholas J. Cull

Children notice them: the words that make adults uncomfortable. There are the diseases whose very name seems laden with contagion; the social blights whose titles evoke dread dangers, and the places synonymous with impenetrable chaos and deadly mess. Each generation has its own vocabulary of horrors: cancer, redundancy, and Lebanon; AIDS, homelessness, Bosnia; Alzheimer's, foreclosure, Iraq. For anyone who grew up in the western world during the quarter century following 1969, Northern Ireland was such a word: a synonym for violence, small mindedness, intolerance and insolubility. For anyone who grew up in Northern Ireland – or who served there – there was more. Beyond the personal losses that flowed from the astonishingly high levels of casualties for such a small place, there were the legion intimate names, places, dates, which lay heavy with meanings of injustice, menace, and tragedy or, in the symmetry of the sectarian divide, raw with justification, assertion and vengeance: 30 January 1972, Warrenpoint, Enniskillen, Miami Showband and so on. The landscape, the language and even things that would be benign anywhere else – like a choice of flowers in a bouquet, a piece of music or the choice of a particular football shirt, were charged with meaning. That it was possible to move beyond such a history is one of the miracles of our times. Exactly whose miracle is open to question. No less moot is the wider issue of what lessons, if any, learned in Northern Ireland could be applied to ease the crises that haunt this and future generations. The essays in this volume start the process of mapping the miracle, focusing especially on the tactics deployed in the process of peace building. They find no instantly exportable cure-all or single presiding genius, but identify approaches which others engaged in similarly intractable crises would do well to consider.

The essays collected here describe a variety of new additions to the arsenal of statecraft and diplomacy. They are written by a mix of scholars, practitioners and witnesses to the peace process. Every writer falls into at least two of these categories and some fit all three descriptions. Their essays combine first hand observation with analysis and reflection. They are presented in the hope that they will provide a starting point for future scholarship and a record of thinking at a moment of real transformation. The original conference was nearly overtaken by events. In the course of planning, the organizers like the rest of the world learned that 8 May 2007 would see the inauguration of a new Northern Ireland Executive based on principles of power sharing. Several participants who were supposed to bring a journalistic perspective to the peace process were obliged to remain in Northern Ireland to report on that milestone. The authors of these essays have updated their remarks to reflect the changes since that date.

These essays fall within one or more of the overlapping circles covered by the terms public diplomacy, Track Two diplomacy, and conflict resolution. The exact boundaries of these categories are not clear, as the terms have evolved even as they have been brought to bear. The term public diplomacy is of special relevance to this volume as it is the central concern of the organization which brought these contributors together: the USC Center on Public Diplomacy. As such, it merits explanation. Public diplomacy is simply the conduct of foreign policy by engaging with a foreign public. It is a fairly new term – coined only in 1965 – but one which embraces a cluster of five time-honored practices. International actors engage foreign publics by *listening* to them, and factoring that intelligence into their policy making; through effective *advocacy* of the policies and the values they think are important; through *cultural diplomacy*, enabling the export of particular cultural practices or intervening in the cultural sphere; by facilitating the *exchange* of people with the target public or between target publics and *international broadcasting*, the creation of news channels that cross frontiers. Several of the essays in this book fall exactly into the territory of public diplomacy. Sharon Harroun presents a straight-forward case study of an exchange program mounted by an American NGO to promote peace from the ground up; Advocacy is a major element in Tim Lynch's case of Clinton-era diplomacy. Greg McLaughlin's account of television and the peace process brings in elements of advocacy and broadcasting across community frontiers if not for all parties' international frontiers. Other essays show the value of the qualities emphasized by public diplomacy theory and may be read as extensions of public diplomacy practice or public diplomacy by analogy. Listening, especially, is at the heart of the work described by

Paul Arthur, Bob Peirce, Neil Jarman and, in the most secret of contexts, Niall O Dochartaigh. Culture looms large throughout but most constructively in the person of Seamus Heaney – a one man cultural diplomacy NGO – who figures prominently in Paul Arthur’s essay.

The second thread running through these essays is that of Track Two diplomacy. Neil Jarman’s essay provides a convenient summary of the development of this concept, which was originally coined by Joseph Montville in 1981 to cover, as Jarman quotes: ‘unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve the conflict.’ This original iteration has considerable overlap with public diplomacy work. Subsequent versions of the concept, however, have drawn a distinction between work which seeks to bring together the leaders within a conflict situation and those reaching out to the wider population. The broader focus is now termed Track Three by some observers. The events recounted by Arthur and O Dochartaigh are firmly located amid the leadership echelon of Track Two. Jarman and Peirce document community engagement, perhaps a ‘Track Two-and-a-half’ approach. Harroun documents Track Three.

These essays capture a moment of global transition. The diplomatic actors described here are more diverse than the uninitiated might imagine. The authors write about more than the mutual engagement between the leaders of Northern Ireland’s communities or other immediately interested entities such as the British and Irish governments. Tim Lynch considers the role of the United States and Paul Arthur’s odyssey through the Track Two process brings in players as diverse as South Africa and emerging nations of Eastern Europe. It is also fascinating to see the rise of new kinds of actor – the increasingly ubiquitous NGOs – and new levels of actor: the regional and international organizations. Peace in Northern Ireland is plainly the product of the public and private diplomacy of many players.

Finally, it is fascinating to see the impact of new technology. Jarman’s essay includes a wonderful account of the contribution of the mobile/cell phone to the process of peace building. He relates the creation of networks to allow leaders from opposite communities to speak to one another immediately in order to obtain authoritative reassurance in the event of minor flare-ups along sectarian dividing lines. The new media are also part of the story. This volume includes an important contribution from Mick Fealty, creator of a blog called *Sluggie O’Toole*, which since 2002 has set out to provide a space in which the issues of the Northern Ireland peace process and community relations could be

explored and explained. Fealty's essay stresses the impact of the arrival of a medium which actively engages its audience, opens the way for a really frank discussion and by its plural nature reveals the extent to which all truth is contested. Fealty's readers were swift to add their own context to any item on his website, injecting a local perspective neglected by even the regional media. Fealty recounts how one reader was able to illuminate his community's perspective of a particular issue by the simple expedient of walking fifty yards from his front door, videoing what he saw and up-loading it to the site. Such a variety of perspectives shatter the impression of a monolithic block of enemies and allies and thereby mitigates against both sectarian fear on one hand and swaggering community self-confidence on the other.

Taken as a whole these essays return to repeated themes: the importance of listening; the power that lies in the opportunity to speak one's own story and to know that it is heard; the need for trust and the tortuous process necessary to gradually create or recreate it; the strength that lies in community-based organization and the ability of new experiences to trump old dogma. These essays also show the role of the wider international context in a situation like Northern Ireland: the potential role of external brokers, of positive examples in parallel conflicts, and even of broad shifts of international context including the end of the Cold War, the transformation in South Africa and coming of the 'global war on terror.' In the last analysis the volume suggests that even the worst of situations can run its course, and the bitterest of enemies can be led to common ground with appropriate help. Therein is hope.



**Neil Jarman** is the director of the Institute for Conflict Research, an independent, not-for-profit, policy research unit based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is an anthropologist by training and has written extensively on the use of cultural practices in developing and sustaining collective social identity. He has researched numerous issues associated with the political transition in Northern Ireland, including police reform, hate crime, public order, migration, human rights and equality issues. He was an adviser to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during the disputes over parades in the 1990s, and a specialist adviser to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee for their inquiry into hate crime (2004-2005). He is chair of the panel on freedom of assembly at the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, part of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, based in Warsaw, Poland.

## **Policing the Peace Community-based Peacebuilding and Political Transition**

Neil Jarman

The experience of the past decade in Northern Ireland illustrates the complexity involved in attempting to bring a conflict to an end. The processes of peacemaking and peacebuilding require the active engagement of a variety of actors, groups and organizations, over a sustained period of time, and it must necessarily happen across many levels and dimensions of society. The key elements include a political process; institution building and reform; attention to human rights and equality issues; economic development; demobilization, demilitarization and reintegration of the armed groups; and a means of involving the wider population in the process. The transition from armed conflict to a peaceful society requires engaging with groups and individuals who may be cautious or suspicious about participating in the process and with those who are actively opposed to it. The transition will also produce unexpected events and generate unforeseen consequences that may threaten, stall or even derail the process. It may also be a time of uncertainty and insecurity: as outbreaks of violence punctuate periods of peace and may threaten a return to armed violence. The period of transition thus needs to be considered as a distinctive phase in the process of bring a conflict to an end.

In Northern Ireland the long duration of the Troubles (as the armed conflict was known locally), which lasted for some twenty-five years between 1969 and 1994, ensured that there was little trust

between the members of the two main ethno-political communities, the Protestant Unionist Loyalist community who favored retaining Northern Ireland's membership of the United Kingdom, and the Catholic Nationalist Republican community who favored the unification of Ireland as a single state. Much of the basic social fabric, such as housing and schooling, had become highly segregated, reducing both the opportunities for interaction between the two communities and the development of any real understanding of the other's culture. Furthermore, there were few cross cutting networks and poor inter-communal relationships. Over the course of a generation violence and the use of force had been widely adopted as a means of advocating or defending political positions (by the state as well as by a diverse array of armed groups), but also for dealing with social problems. For example, the use of 'punishment' violence by paramilitary groups in response to low level crime and disorder was well established during the Troubles, while following the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 reports of domestic, racist and homophobic violence rose significantly (Jarman 2004).

One of the underlying difficulties of securing a peaceful transition and an agreement on a future trajectory for Northern Ireland was that there was no broadly accepted understanding of the nature, cause or outcome of the Troubles. This meant that for many people the peace process did not signal an end to the conflict, but rather that it simply shifted to other dimensions of activity. On one side this involved a focus on politics, debate and negotiation, which resulted in the Agreement being signed in 1998, while on the other hand it resulted in community or street level tensions related to issues of territoriality, culture and identity, and which served to sustain, and indeed extend, hostility and suspicion between members of the two communities. In particular the disputes over parade routes, which began in 1995, were immediately established as part of the rituals of marching season and at the same time punctuated the process of political negotiation towards devolved government on an annual basis. Over the course of the transition the political and community levels of activity have moved in erratic and occasionally parallel paths, at times each has provided a positive influence of the other, at time it has been the opposite. This paper explores some of the activities that have taken place over the course of the period of transition at the community level which have served to help challenge and reduce street level tensions and disorder and thereby develop networks of relationships that have proved to be important elements in providing a foundation for sustained peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

## Track Two Diplomacy and Peacebuilding

Joseph Montville initially coined the concept of track two diplomacy in 1981 as a counterbalance to traditional or track one diplomacy, which involved the work of governments and high level international bodies such as the United Nations, Montville defined track two diplomacy as ‘unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict’ (Montville 1991: 162). For Montville track two activity was to be regarded as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, track one diplomacy. Its informality was to be considered an advantage as it provided for flexibility in approach and, because it involved both the grassroots and middle leadership of a political constituency, it could be a means of empowering and involving otherwise marginalized or disenfranchised groups and thus increase their commitment to the process of dialogue and change. This definition and interpretation of track two diplomacy is both sufficiently broad and sufficiently clear to enable it to encompass much of the work and activity that will be discussed in this paper (Mapendere 2006: 68).

However, the growth in the academic, practitioner and theoretical studies of conflict intervention and transformation activities over recent years has led to an increasingly diverse classification system for public diplomacy and interventions by different sections of the community. On the one hand the concept of track two diplomacy was expanded into multi-track diplomacy, with the activities of different sectors being classified as distinct tracks of interconnecting activities; while from another perspective, the Carter Center expanded the gap between tracks one and two to create the concept of track one and a half diplomacy for its specific range of activities (Mapendere 2006). Over recent years track two activities have often been defined as, and limited to, the work of various forms of middle level or international conflict professionals and NGOs (Clements 2001) and increasingly community or grass roots level activities have been classified as a distinct and separate range of track three activities (Lederach 1997; Reimann 2004). In some of the literature the separation into tracks two and three appears to reflect a distinction between the activities of the international non-governmental sector and the work of the indigenous community: track two actors provide support, expertise and professionalism as capacity building for track three actors (Miall 2001).

In Northern Ireland such divisions have not been so clear or so evident. While track one diplomacy involving the British, Irish and

American governments was an important driver of the political process, the international conflict transformation sector did not play a prominent role, although numerous connections were made with groups and organizations in other locations and lessons were sought from other jurisdictions. Instead diverse sections of the extensive local civil society took a lead in many of the peacebuilding activities. Furthermore, the small scale and close-knit nature of Northern Irish society meant that grass-roots activists and the political elite were always closely interconnected and thus the diversity of peacebuilding activities that have been developed can be more readily understood within the original dual track framework suggested by Montville, than the more complex multi-track models that have been developed subsequently.

## **Disorder and Violence**

Outbreaks of street violence, rioting and serious public disorder, mostly linked to disputes over parades organized by the Orange Order and similar bodies, and tensions between neighboring unionist and nationalist residential communities, have been a persistent problem in Northern Ireland over the course of the period of political transition. The cyclical nature of the annual parades, over three thousand of which are held to mark a diverse range of anniversaries and activities each year (Jarman 1997), meant that contentious events occurred on a repetitive and recurrent basis. Furthermore, the increased segregation of many urban communities had created a fragmented and contentious social geography, with numerous interface areas at the boundaries of sectarianized territories, which are often demarcated by physical barriers or symbolic displays. All too often tensions related to parades led to outbreaks of violence at interface areas far from a parade route, and once the hostilities arose it could prove difficult to stop them.

In July 1996 Northern Ireland erupted into a week of rioting, disorder and attacks on property in response to the policing of the Drumcree Orange Order parade (Jarman 2007) and on more than one occasion in the following years outbreaks of disorder were so serious that they were regarded as having the potential to disrupt the peace process and lead to a return to armed violence. A few figures will give a scale of the disorder that was documented during this time. Between 1996 and 1999 the Royal Ulster Constabulary fired 10,823 plastic baton rounds in incidents across Northern Ireland, while 1,646 police officers were injured in public disorder and 3,214 petrol bomb incidents were recorded. Furthermore, in north Belfast, an area of intense social fragmentation, the police recorded 316 outbreaks of riot-



ing, 409 assaults and 1,444 incidents of criminal damage to property in just seven interface areas over the same period (Jarman 2006a). Tensions increased as the summer 'marching season' approached and this in turn meant that political negotiations and attempts to establish new institutions of governance were put on hold on an annual basis as political and community leaders retreated to their trenches to uphold the rights of their people to defend their interests.

In situations of rioting and disorder it normally falls on the police to intervene to restore order. However, the Royal Ulster Constabulary had little acceptance or legitimacy on the ground among working class communities. People in the nationalist community regarded the police as a partisan and militaristic force, and viewed them as key actors in the conflict and as opponents of the republican campaign. Furthermore, even though the RUC was overwhelmingly Protestant in its make up and was widely perceived as historically working to the interests of the Unionist state, it had come to be regarded with suspicion and hostility by many unionists due to its role in policing the conflict. As a result police intervention at contentious parades or at interface disorder often served merely to introduce a third party to the conflict, which in turn led to an escalation, rather than a reduction of violence. Many people therefore felt that they could not rely on the police to take the lead in trying to prevent violence and maintain a semblance of order, but rather they assumed that they would have to take the initiative themselves.

## **Community-based Policing in Northern Ireland**

The initial response by the community sector to the outbreaks of violence and disorder during the summer of 1996 was ad hoc and unco-ordinated. People struggled to deal with the rapid transmission of rumors, incidents of violence and intimidation, as well as numerous outbreaks of disorder and rioting at many interfaces. However, by the following summer staff at the Community Development Centre North Belfast (CDC) had devised a novel strategy to respond to any trouble, which involved equipping a network of community activists with mobile phones (at that time still a novel and expensive device) to enable them to maintain communication between and within different residential areas. The phones allowed people to remain on the streets at flashpoints but also to maintain contact with colleagues elsewhere, as well as with people from the other community. The activists, who included local residents, community workers and former prisoners, as well as people with connections to paramilitary groups, spent many summer nights patrolling the streets into the early hours of the morn-

ing. Their main aims were to reduce the possibilities of violence, to move young people away from flashpoints, to respond to rumors and to keep their own areas reasonably calm. They were also able to provide reassurance and dissuade people from retaliatory attacks, while their ability to manage tensions within their own community helped consolidate credibility with the other side. On many occasions activists from both sides were able to co-ordinate and synchronize their work by using the phones to speak to each other in situations where face-to-face contact was not possible. In effect the community networks had effectively created a community-based policing scheme based around the maintenance of foot patrols at flashpoints to deter troublemakers and prevent disorder. Although the community-based networks did not prevent all outbreaks of disorder, they did have an impact on the scale of the violence and, in contrast to the previous year, the summer of 1997 was not marked by people being forced from their homes and days of disruption to daily routines.

Over subsequent years, this model of mobilizing activists to maintain a presence at key locations developed as a normative practice in the many interface areas across Belfast and elsewhere. Furthermore, in a number of areas people extended their activities and mobilized their networks to help reduce the potential for disorder at parades. Rather than operating in small numbers late at night, as was needed at the interfaces, the parades required larger numbers of people to be present during the afternoon or early evening to act as a steward as a parade passed a sensitive location or near to a nationalist neighbourhood. Such operations often involved little more than the passive presence of a large number of men, sometimes linked arm in arm across a road, or acting as a buffer between a crowd and a deployment of police officers. Usually the simple presence of the stewards was enough to deter any troublemakers, but sometimes they had to intervene in response to verbal abuse or an occasional stone thrower. While the community stewards took responsibility for policing the actions of crowds and protesters, many members of the loyal orders involved in organizing the parades also took a greater interest in managing their own events. Whereas in the past the role of marshal had largely been an honorific position, now it began to be taken seriously and many Orangemen took advantage of courses that were offered to train them in marshalling skills. Between the work of the community stewards and the parade marshals the level of disorder at parades was extensively reduced.

In some areas the community-based policing activities have developed into a year round phenomenon and have become a key component of localized public order management. There has also been

an expansion of the interface approach to preventing disorder within the nationalist community through a programme called Community Watch. This involves activists patrolling or maintaining a street presence at local flashpoints to reduce low-level disorder and is primarily intended to reduce alcohol-fuelled disorder or problems caused by young people. The difference between the interface work and the Community Watch is that the former aims to reduce tensions and violence between the two main communities, while the latter focuses on tensions within the Catholic community. However, all the various forms of community-based policing activity have been built upon a desire to consolidate the peacebuilding process and on a willingness of local activists to take greater responsibility for managing public order in their communities.

## **Social Networks and Social Capital**

The phone networks were effective as forms of track two intervention not because of the conflict transformation or mediation skills of the people who were involved, but rather because of their status within local communities and their membership of extensive and diverse social networks. They were effective and successful because of what Robert Putnam (2000) has defined as their social capital and their capacity to utilize and deploy that capital through networks of social relationships to have a positive impact on a situation of violence and disorder (see also Varshney 2002). This initially involved primarily being able to influence people within the own community, but also to engage with members of the other community and, as will be discussed below, with the police. The first mobile phone network was set up by the Community Development Centre, a long-established organization which had contacts with a diverse range of groups and individuals in both nationalist and unionist communities. The conflict intervention work was a recent development for CDC and differed in focus from the broad range of community development work undertaken through the organization. However, the community relations team was able to draw upon both the wide range of social networks linked to the organization and the networks that individual members of the staff team brought with them, it was also critical that they could adapt, utilize and mobilize these networks in response to the new circumstances.

A key element of the effectiveness of the community relations team was that it employed two former prisoners as primary field-workers, one from a republican and one from a loyalist background, while the third member and team leader had a track record of com-

munity relations work across the city. The status of the fieldworkers as former prisoners, as people who had served time for their political beliefs, ensured that the project immediately had a degree of credibility and authority with key people and organizations on the ground. The former prisoner community played a significant role at various levels in the transition from war to peace and was also important in a wide range of peacebuilding activities (Shirlow and McEvoy 2008). Many people had used their time in prison to debate political strategy and also to further educate themselves, and upon their release some of these people became involved in political and community activities and were often in the fore of developing initiatives that were designed to help underpin the transition away from armed violence. The CDC already had an extensive network of contacts among community workers and the main statutory agencies, while the former prisoner staff brought with them contacts within the diverse movements of republicanism and loyalism, including members of the main armed groups and representatives of the political groups associated with loyalism and republicanism. This meant that the team who were co-ordinating the mobile phone network were at the hub of a diverse range of overlapping social networks and could help co-ordinate responses within and between the nationalist or unionist communities as well as between communities and the statutory sector, such as the police, housing bodies, social services and government. For example, at times the people out on the street did not have sufficient authority to prevent the slide to violence, but they had the access to other individuals such as senior politicians, and on more than one occasion figures such as Gerry Kelly (now a Sinn Féin junior minister) or Billy Hutchinson (formerly a representative of the Progressive Unionist Party in the Stormont assembly) would appear to bring extra authority to help calm down a tense situation or to liaise with a senior police officer.

Both Robert Putnam and Ashutosh Varshney have highlighted the importance of different forms of social capital and social networks and have noted that to be most effective social capital has to include networks of associates within one's own community (bonding capital), but also connections with other communities (bridging capital) and with bodies with authority for governance (linking capital). It is the capacity to draw upon and utilize all three forms of social capital that ensures the most effective interventions in a social context, particularly at times of tension and disorder. The CDC team were able to draw upon and mobilize an array of different forms of social capital in attempting to manage tensions and violence on the ground. Individuals themselves both had and could mobilize extensive bonding capital,

which came from their status as former prisoners and as established activists within their own communities, while the team collectively could mobilize the bridging capital which came from the presence of people from different backgrounds and the diverse cross-cutting community networks, but they could draw upon forms of linking capital through extensive individual and organization relationships with the state sector. Furthermore, as the interventions proved successful so the levels of social capital increased, thus building the potential of the networks to intervene still further.

## **The Impact of Community-Based Policing**

The concept of community-based policing has become established as a normal and expected practice over the course of the past ten years. It is now assumed that each summer the community-based networks will mobilize to try to ensure that the marching season passes peacefully and tensions in and around interface areas are monitored and thus prevented from spilling over into violence. The various community-based activities have had an impact in at least four key ways. First they have helped reduce the outbreaks of violence; second they have helped build capacity and acceptance of the community interventions in both nationalist and unionist communities; third they have been instrumental in fostering broad inter-community networks; and fourth they have enabled communities to build better relationships with the police. Collectively these four outcomes have been important elements in building the peace at a local level and thus in helping to consolidate the wider political transition. I will briefly elaborate on each of the four outcomes of the community-based policing work.

**Reducing Violence:** The outbreak of violence associated with parades and interfaces peaked in the late 1990s, but until about 2001 most community-based policing activity focused on ‘fire-fighting’, that is responding to local crises and outbreaks of disorder. From around 2002 (it is difficult to be more precise because the patterns of disorder differed in different areas at different times) the various networks were more able to act in a preventative manner, that is to intervene before violence occurred, rather than simply reacting to incidents. Furthermore, due to the effective mobilizations, incidents in one area were less likely to provoke either supportive or retaliatory action in other parts of the city. For example the summer of 2005 witnessed some of the worst violence for a number of years with two incidents in north Belfast in June and July and then another in west Belfast in September. These involved both attacks on the other community as well as petrol bomb, pipe bomb and live-fire attacks on the

police. However, each incident remained localized apart from a few minor cases of vehicles being hijacked and burnt out. The community networks were able to prevent any acts of retaliation and also prevented the launching of further provocative attacks on the other community or the police. After a few days the situation had calmed down, in contrast to similar outbreaks of violence in the 1996-1999 period when violent incidents occurred for weeks and sometimes months afterwards. Despite the extreme violence in 2005, the summers of 2006 and 2007 passed very quietly with only very minor incidents due in large part to effective and sustained community mobilizations.

**Community Capacity Building:** When the community networks were first established they drew upon a relatively small number of activists, but over the course of a number of years they were able to involve a wider range of people and to mobilize people from a diverse range of organizations. In the first few years after 1997 the activists were drawn from non-aligned community groups, but also from the mainstream republican community, those associated with Sinn Féin, and on the loyalist side with groups and individuals associated with the PUP and the Ulster Volunteer Force. However, significant local actors such as the constituencies associated with the Irish National Liberation Army and with the Ulster Defence Force were less supportive and at times were obstructive of attempts to reduce violence. This had most impact in unionist areas due to the strength of the UDA, which had long been the largest loyalist paramilitary group, although its political party, the Ulster Democratic Party, was less successful and was dissolved in 2001. For a number of years after 1997, trouble was most likely to erupt and be most difficult to control in those interface communities with a strong UDA presence and, while local UDA commanders did not always actively encourage disorder, they often did little to prevent it occurring. However, by 2004 UDA activists also began to develop a more active policing presence at sites of tension and they formalized this work into the Protestant Interface Network (PIN) as the means to demonstrate their changing position. Although PIN refused to engage with activists from nationalist communities at this stage, they did work with other loyalists and also liaised with the police in trying to maintain the peace.

**Inter-Community Networking:** The first mobile phone network involved people from both nationalist and unionist communities working on the streets, although it often proved difficult to get them to meet together or discuss problems and difficulties face-to-face. Many of the participants were content to try to control troublemakers in their own community, but it proved difficult to move beyond the fire-fighting stage and begin to develop more preventative or strategic ap-

proaches. By 1999 the networks had largely fragmented into a number of small informal networks, although a small number of activists still tried to sustain wider levels of engagement between people from republican and loyalist communities. In early 2003 a core group of activists in north Belfast began to meet to explore how they might develop a wider network that would move beyond the fire-fighting work. This group met on a monthly basis and began to invite other groups and individuals to participate. In June 2004 the group established itself as the North Belfast Conflict Transformation Forum, a diverse group that included people involved in community and armed groups, church and political networks from both Catholic and Protestant communities. The group used their meetings to consolidate existing relationships and develop new ones and then to discuss a wider range of peacebuilding activities. In 2005 even members of PIN, who had previously been reluctant to engage with republicans, joined the Forum while similar broad networks of activists were established in most interface areas of Belfast (Jarman 2006b) and in a number of areas outside of the city.

Relationships with the Police: When rioting first occurred in the late 1990s, relations between both republicans and loyalists and the police were virtually non-existent, in fact on many occasions the rioting involved republicans and or loyalists attacking the police. Nevertheless even at this time, there were some lines of communication available, although it often took a long and tortuous route. The arrival of mobile phones enabled discrete real-time communication to take place on the streets between activists and police commanders, although face-to-face contacts were still not possible. The phone contacts did allow the police and the activists to begin to establish the first elements of a pragmatic relationship however, and they began to be used to synchronize and co-ordinate responses to disorder. In some contexts the police were prepared to respond to community concerns and they repositioned vehicles or delayed the deployment of officers in situations where a more assertive police presence would have been likely to provoke an aggressive response. From such actions each side began to develop trust in the other. Over a period of years the police often came to rely on the community networks to take the first steps in trying to defuse growing tensions or to intervene in contexts of low-level disorder, while the community networks grew more confident of their role and of their relationships with the police. The instigation of police reforms following the Patten Report of 1999 and the generally improving political situation allowed Sinn Féin politicians to engage in face-to-face dialogue on the streets with officers of the reformed Police Service of Northern Ireland from around the summer of 2003,

and soon afterwards the community activists were arguing for a lower profile police presence at sensitive events, with greater responsibility to be given to the community-based policing networks. Even the serious violence of 2005 did not destroy the relationships that had been created, and in 2006 the police in north and west Belfast allowed the community networks considerable scope to manage the contentious events, which passed off without problems. The practical relationships and experiences of managing difficult situations that had developed on the streets of Belfast over a period of a decade was a significant factor in enabling Sinn Féin to take the decision to engage fully with the police in early 2007.

## **Conclusion**

The Northern Ireland transition from a protracted armed conflict to a sustained peace with democratically accountable institutions has been a long drawn out process, during which time recurrent outbreaks of violence and disorder associated with the highly polarized divisions of the two main communities regularly threatened to undermine progress. The antipathetic relations between nationalist and unionist working class communities and with the police only created further difficulties in managing the disorder. However, over the past decade a variety of community-based policing initiatives have helped to reduce and control the street level violence and have also helped to build and develop relationships both between the two rival communities, but also between the communities and the police

The initial basis for the development of community-based policing activities was the network of locally based groups and individual activists that had been established by the community development sector in Belfast over a period of years. After the ceasefires these networks became more openly associated with wider political and paramilitary networks across the city, particularly through the presence of former prisoners working in the field of conflict resolution. These interconnecting networks had considerable social capital, more than the community or political networks had alone, and they were able to utilize this in responding to the disorder that began to break out with some regularity after 1996. Over the course of a decade the community-based policing networks were able to build and develop their activities and their capacity to intervene effectively at times of tension by extending their engagement within their own community, with members of the other communities and with the police. This range of activities has developed to the extent that the community



networks are now often in the front line in trying to prevent disorder, whereas in the past they had been limited to reacting to violence.

This community-based policing work can be considered as an fine example of a simple but effective track two process, if one follows Montville's initial definition of this type of activity as: "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict". The work has been sustained and developed over a considerable number of years and over that time has been effective in helping to consolidate the wider process of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. It has been able to do so by drawing upon existing social networks, and on individual and collective forms of social capital, but then by adapting and reutilizing them in an innovative manner. Furthermore, the practical engagement of such networks has led to a strengthening of social relations, which has fed back into the peacebuilding process and also increased the effective social capital of the community-based policing networks to engage in a wider variety of activities.

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## **Reciprocity and Recognition: Exercises in Track Two Diplomacy**

**Paul Arthur**

Success has many parents, but failure is an orphan. It is well to bear this in mind as we look at political developments in Northern Ireland since the creation of a coalition government in Belfast in May 2007 dominated by two seemingly intractable enemies, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin (SF). That government remained remarkably buoyant in its first year of operation, overcoming even the change in leadership within the DUP when Peter Robinson succeeded Rev. Ian Paisley – leader for more than fifty years – in June 2008. What may not be as obvious is the fact that it took nearly a decade after the signing of the Belfast Agreement in April 1998 to create the conditions that enabled the coalition to be formed; and further that it took thirty years of bloody conflict before we arrived at that Agreement.

This chapter is concerned with some of the elements that converted failure into success. It is based on some personal reflections of my own involvement in Track Two exercises beginning in January 1990 and concluding in June 2004. The very first workshop has to be set against two decades of political violence (1969-89 inclusive) where there had been 2,771 conflict-related deaths, over 31,000 injuries, almost 8,200 explosions and 8,300 malicious fires, and approximately 14,000 armed

robberies in a territory no larger than some of the smaller states of the United States like Delaware or Rhode Island. Those statistics suggest a state of political pathology. Among other constraints were at least four failed internal political initiatives between 1972-85; and a political culture that was intimidatory, underdeveloped, factionalized and demotic – a culture that did not encourage the acquisition of negotiating skills (Arthur, 2001).

The result was political underdevelopment that manifested itself not in the ‘inability to dominate rival ethnic communities but their common vulnerability to internal factionalism’ that undermined political leaders’ capacity to lead. So fraught with internal dissent and suspicion, each community was ‘incapable of presenting leaders who can negotiate and institutions that can accurately represent the community’s views’ (Enloe: 1973, 169-71). It is in that context that conventional diplomacy had to take the lead and resulted in the British and Irish governments signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November 1985 and the Belfast Agreement in April 1998. It was as if Britain and Ireland with the blessing of the international community had established themselves as a prestigious third party to oversee (and bring a sense of urgency to) the Northern Ireland problem:

Third parties who are prestigious, powerful and skillful may deliberately facilitate a constructive resolution of a conflict by using their prestige and power to encourage such a resolution and by helping provide the problem-solving resources (institutions, facilities, personnel, social norms and procedures) to expedite discovery of a mutually satisfactory solution (Deutsch: 1973, 376).

Deutsch listed seven functions that a third party must perform in helping conflicting parties come to a constructive resolution of their conflict. One of these concerns the need to alter the asymmetries in motivation, power or legitimacy between the parties. Another necessary precondition for conflict regulation to develop is to make both sides of a conflict part of a common community. It is at this point that the role of track two diplomacy comes into play in the interstices between “high politics” (strategy steered by politicians and officials) and “low politics” (the adaptations of civil society). Track Two is not a substitute for government-to-government or leader-to-leader contact. At a general level ‘it seeks to promote an environment in a political community, through the education of public opinion, that would make it safer for public opinion to take risks for peace’ (Montville, 1986: see too Arthur, 1990, and Jarman 2008).

Diplomacy is not a precise science, so we have to allow for the role of unpredictability, of serendipity, of randomness and, above all, confu-

sion. In that respect only limited claims should be made on behalf of unofficial diplomacy. Much of the three decades before the 1998 Agreement was signed was spent analyzing the nature of the problem. The political scientist, Richard Rose, famously wrote in 1976 that the problem was that there was no solution. The four failed internal initiatives lent credence to this view and demonstrated that having no cognitive framework about a conflict is perhaps better than having a wrong cognitive framework, ‘which is what happens when you prematurely close in on an understanding. There are no correct understandings but there are very bad ones’ (Arthur, 1998). Searching for an understanding was one of the functions of unofficial diplomacy.

## Dialogue

In its formative years Northern Ireland was described as ‘a society without empathy’ where in the absence of peace it enjoyed at best ‘a tranquillity of communal deterrence’ (Wright, 1987). It displayed a lack of self-reflection, an inability to engage in dialogue:

It is ideally via dialogue that we become clearer who we are, that we express what is important to us, that we check out the intelligibility and the appropriateness of our goals and purposes, and so forth. Dialogue is the vehicle par excellence of the search for authentic self-interpretations, not least because it is constituted by relations of reciprocity and recognition. Such relations are so important because their absence goes a long way towards explaining why individually and collectively we often find ourselves struggling with frustrating self-interpretations, perhaps ones that demean us (Porter, 1996).

Establishing relations of reciprocity and recognition is at the heart of Track Two exercises and is approached through an analysis of the particular conflict. Analysis takes many shapes and forms. It can be part of the normal thrust of political discourse; of informed commentary in media and academia; in exercises in track two diplomacy; or in our capacity to tell stories one to another. That is why it is so appropriate that this seminar is being conducted in a School of Communication.

Telling stories, creating narratives, is non-threatening. It can be done in a structured manner- as it was in South Africa for example, in what was known as the Mont Fleur project, which was described by one of its progenitors as ‘the gentle art of re-perceiving’ – how we have to re-perceive our fixed positions. It was about establishing networks and understandings and, ultimately, changing hardened opinions. It was about

communication. If I can quote one expert on this question of political communication: “Communication entails recognition of the other, and the awareness of being separate and different from and strange to one another opens up potentials of creative searches for dialogue, and for understanding the other” (Sofer: 1997). This is also the essence of negotiations. Reaching common ground is not necessarily a product of similar opinions. And that precisely is where unofficial diplomacy has a major role to play. It produces the luxury of time and of privacy where we can begin to recognize the ‘other’.

But it can be conducted in the public domain as well. It is encapsulated in John Hume’s Nobel Lecture (1998), which was directed to his co-winner, David Trimble: “I think that David Trimble would agree that this Nobel prize for peace is in the deepest sense a powerful recognition of the compassion and humanity of all the people we represent between us. Endlessly our people gathered their strength to face another day, and they never stopped encouraging their leaders to find the courage, and resolve the situation so that our children could look to the future with a smile of hope.”

To take another example: Seamus Heaney’s 1995 Nobel lecture, called “Crediting Poetry”, was a wonderful example of bringing politics and art together. Essentially he was concerned with political negotiation in the context of transcendence. Heaney mused on the fact that only the ‘very stupid or the very deprived can any longer help knowing that the documents of civilization have been written in blood and tears. Blood and tears no less real for being very remote. And when this intellectual predisposition coexists with actualities of Ulster and Israel and Bosnia and Rwanda, and a host of other the wounded spots on the face of the earth, the inclination is not only not to credit human nature with much constructive potential, but not to credit anything too positive in the work of art’. And so he goes to look at how the poet sitting at his desk can deal with the harsh realities. He paints a very bleak picture, but at the end he says ‘art can rise to the occasion.’

He took one very harrowing incident that occurred in 1976, in what was known as the Kingsmills massacre, when ten workmen on a winter’s night returning from their work were stopped in the dark of evening and shot dead. They are held at gunpoint on a lonely stretch on the road on their way home. One of the executioners asked that if there were any Catholics among them they were to step out of line. As it was, there was only one Catholic, and the assumption was that this was a loyalist gang intent on killing only Catholics. Heaney continues, “It was a terrible moment for him- caught between dread and witness. But he did make a motion to step forward. Then – the story goes – in that split second of

decision, and in the relative cover of the winter evening darkness, he felt the hand of the Protestant worker next to him take his hand and squeeze it in a signal that said ‘No. Do not move. We will not betray you. Nobody needs to know what faith, or party you belong to.’ All in vain however, for the man stepped out of line. But instead of finding a gun at his temple, he was pushed away as the gunmen opened fire on those remaining in the line; for these were not Protestant terrorists, but members, presumably, of the Provisional IRA’.

Now, having told that story, he reflected that it is difficult at times to repress the thought that history is about as instructive as an abattoir. That Tacitus was right, and that peace is merely the desolation left behind after the decisive operations. But then he carried that through with a sort of moment of light. He said ‘the birth of the future we desire, is surely in the contraction which that terrified Catholic felt on the roadside when another hand gripped his hand – not in the gunfire that followed, so absolute and so desolate. It is also so much a part of the music of what happens.’

Heaney was describing an act of transcendence, and it can take many forms. It can be an act, it can be a narrative, it can be a person. Its importance lies in a definition provided by Byron Bland “connecting what violence has severed”. This particular incident was important in its own right- that many acts of heroism are by their nature, unnoticed. They do not make the history. But it is these small acts of transcendence that have a major role to play in moving a conflict forward.

I stress the role that the ordinary person can play simply because it has been underplayed. The high politics is much better known. One can easily list the landmarks on the road to the 1998 agreement: a statement by President Jimmy Carter in August 1977; the burgeoning British-Irish diplomatic relationship from 1980 culminating in the signing of Anglo-Irish Agreement (November 1985); talks between the SDLP and SF in 1988, and between an emissary of the British government and a republican representative in 1993; the creation of a Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in the Republic of Ireland which brought SF into the democratic process; the Downing Street Declaration; the Framework Document and finally the Agreement itself.

Equally credit has been paid to the exogenous factors: the collapse of the Berlin wall, the demise of communism as an aggressive ideology in geopolitics, the end of apartheid and South Africa’s removal from pariah status; the Oslo Accord; the role particularly of the Clinton presidency. All of these freed republican and loyalist paramilitaries to reassess their old modes of thinking and to learn from peace processes elsewhere.

## Track Two

The Carnegie Convention on Preventing Deadly Violence report (1998) acknowledged that Track Two was ‘increasingly the diplomacy of choice for problems beyond the reach of official efforts’. But we should not give it too much credence, because there were instances where it went very badly wrong. One was in 1972, when two American academics brought a group of people out of Northern Ireland into Scotland for a week, and the whole thing was an absolute disaster. It was just very badly organized.

A second was in 1988 when a Lutheran pastor brought together four players from the main parties – that is from the SDLP, the DUP, the UUP and the Alliance Party – to a workshop in Duisberg, Germany. We need to remember that Track Two is not about negotiation: it is simply about trying to find some common ground. It is not about mediation. The pastor introduced, without the knowledge of any of the others, a representative for the provisional SF – and the whole thing just broke up disastrously. And then it was leaked to the media. And the people who had participated in that had to go to some lengths to save their own political careers. When we consider that one of them was Peter Robinson of the DUP who has played a crucial role in getting us to where we are today – we can see that these things can go very badly wrong (Arthur: 1990).

I have been engaged in many Track Two exercises since 1990 and I want to describe some of the activity. I will not be comprehensive in at least two respects: I am not going to give equal weight to each exercise since some have been more useful than others, and it has to be remembered that the series of workshops that I have been involved in have been more agglutinative than sequential. That is, they were not conceived initially as part of a package. What were generally in response to offers from external third parties to assist the political process. The sum total of these meetings had, I believe, a positive incremental effect on the formal political negotiations.

Secondly, given the discreet nature of Track Two initiatives, it is possible that others have taken place without my knowledge. For example the NDI – the National Democratic Institute – held a number of workshops with the Northern Ireland parties, but the emphasis had been on training and technique, rather than peer learning. They organized a very famous Track Two initiative, in South Africa in mid-1997, when all the parties were brought together. On that occasion Nelson Mandela found that he had to re-impose apartheid because the loyalists refused to be in the same room as SF, and he had to do the same speech twice.

It is not my intention to cover all of these activities but simply to draw out some commonalities. Our first two meetings – in the U.S. and



France in January and August 1990 respectively – illustrate the merits of proactivity. We chose ‘Northern Ireland in Europe after 1992.’ as the central discussion point for both meetings because the Single European Act was being enacted in 1992, and we wanted the participants to begin to think where will Northern Ireland sit in this new political dispensation. We had to recall that the EU was a model of conflict resolution - that is, with the exception of Northern Ireland and the Basque country. The EU was moving ahead with the notion of a Europe of Regions and the politicians there were asked to think ‘what is Europe going to look like after 1992? What can you do that will give Northern Ireland a more prominent role to play in this wider entity?’ It was a good topic because it meant that people could spend a week in seclusion, where they could tease out potential scenarios and deal with something which was non-threatening but which had great potential for them.

That is why we followed through in August in Grenoble in France, because Grenoble is in Region Rhone-Alpes, and Region Rhone-Alpes had already begun its own axis of development with Bad-Wurtemberg in Germany, with Catalonia in Spain, and Lombardy in Italy. They were demonstrating that it was possible to bypass central government and take their own initiatives. These two meetings produced a product - the Northern Ireland Center in Europe (NICE) – that enabled politicians and the business community to establish their own office in Brussels in the interests of Northern Ireland. After our first meeting I commissioned a paper on the feasibility of such an office; and the time in Grenoble was used to examine the practicalities of how such a Center would work by studying the experience of Region Rhones-Alpes.

NICE was a cooperative venture between the business community and the political class. Here was an example of a group of much maligned politicians producing a product which has had a positive impact, and which exists (in different form) to this day. One of the reasons why it did succeed was there was no media attention. I had informed some journalists privately that a few academics were putting this together. So they ignored us. At the end of the process the politicians released their own statement but not until the commissioned Report on NICE had been produced. We need to keep in mind that these workshops were taking place against a backdrop of continuous tension, where politicians have often adopted adversarial positions. The absence of the media means there was no need to strike poses.

A parallel can be drawn from the Oslo process. If I can quote from that: “Our quiet meetings proved to have several advantages. The news media, which focus on what divides, rather than what unites, were not involved. There was no time consuming diplomatic protocols to be fol-

lowed and no speeches to the gallery. The participants in the official and public negotiation appeared to spend 100 per cent of their time blaming one another, whereas the negotiators in Norway spent 90 per cent of their time awake, meals included, in real negotiation. The many mutual acts of provocation and acts of violence in the field did not derail the efforts of the negotiators as they did the official channel in Washington” (Egeland: 1994).

The parallel with Oslo is not precise because it was about negotiation. The Northern Ireland workshops were more modest. But the absence of the media and the opportunity to build on a collegial spirit should not be underestimated. The workshop settings tend to be formal and formidable. They enabled the participants to hone their political skills. Leisure time allowed for building personal relationships and trust. And the location was important – in particular the need to move out of Northern Ireland, and away from the continuing hostilities.

So, Track Two can be helpful. It is there to work in parallel with Track One. As one of its progenitors explains it is:

conceived of as several levels of process designed to assist official leadership in the task of resolving, or in the first instance managing, conflict by exploring possible solutions out of public view and without the requirement to formally negotiate or bargain for advantage. Track two diplomacy on its more focused level seeks political formulae or scenarios which might satisfy the basic security and esteem needs of all parties to a dispute (Montville: 1986).

The question of participation is a vital matter in terms of the workshop teams and the role of assisting third parties. Ideally, politicians need to be tolerant, respected, and representative. Now, all of those are relative terms. It has to be dictated to some extent the relationship between the third party and individual politicians. Tolerance simply means a willingness to listen to and work with others. Since the politicians were willing to participate, they were, ipso facto, tolerant. Dialogue could be robust at times, and some workshops reflected, more than others, rising tensions on the ground in Northern Ireland at the time. But it was always pursued in a civilized and inquiring manner. In a divided society, a respected politician who has the capacity to transcend that division is a very rare bird indeed. In this context, “respected” means within one’s own community. They need not necessarily hold official positions, and it may be an advantage to target emerging talents.

Two criteria were adopted in the workshops under discussion, the delegates were either potentially part of their respective negotiating

teams, or were perceived as emerging leaders. The result was that the workshops were dominated primarily by the secondary leaderships.

The question of representation is more problematic and may have some relationship to the role of a third party. My standing with individual politicians was crucial. Besides a sustained effort to involve the same cadre of politicians throughout, the selection of politicians tended to be self-fulfilling. Initially I approached politicians with whom I had some previous relationship- either from interviewing them for academic projects, or from being involved with them in other conferences. The common denominator was a degree of trust and mutual respect had been established. In every instance, I called on the same cadre of politicians and if leading members were not available they would nominate like-minded individuals. The result was that a small group of politicians became versed in a process of shared learning.

Clearly there was a certain arbitrariness in the selection of participants. It was my judgement that two party leaders were hostile to the process. Instead I made a conscious effort to identify those who would make a political impact in the longer term and who represented a newer generation. Total consistency was impossible because much depended on the vagaries of parliamentary and personal timetables. More important was that parties had accepted that this type of initiative complemented track-one efforts.

Rather than describe all our meetings I will concentrate on three and draw out a number of lessons. Some workshops (those concerned with a Bill of Rights and human rights culture) were more technical and academic than political. Some were set in academic surroundings – a problem-solving workshop at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard that became an annual event. All reflected the political realities on the ground. It was impossible, for example, to engage with SF and loyalist representatives until decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons entered the equation. And all were about being as inclusive and collegial as possible.

One case study illustrates the potential that track-two carries. In 1994 the four major constitutional parties (UUP, SDLP, DUP and Alliance) were represented at a fact finding mission to South Africa organized in conjunction with the Council of Europe and IDASA (Institute for Democracy in South Africa). In South Africa we looked at every point on the political spectrum and consulted widely with civil society. It was a very valuable experience that taught us three lessons that played into the peace process in Northern Ireland.

First thing we learned was the significance of technical committees when there is a highly politicized problem. If left in the hands of poli-

ticians a solution may not be available. I have policing in mind. The root-and-branch reform of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was a prerequisite of the peace process and the government appointed a Commission chaired by Lord Patten. Political opinion was so divided on the issue that only a third party with a great degree of expertise could rescue the situation. Patten made 175 recommendations, most of which have been implemented, and the RUC was replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). It has been one of the successes of the whole process and demonstrates the utility of technical committees.

The second was a concept – “sufficient consensus” – that is there at the heart of the 1998 Agreement. It stresses a shift from majoritarianism towards the notion of concurrent majorities. Indeed in a major speech in May 2007 the former First Minister, David Trimble, argued that sufficient consensus was an important factor in bringing the UUP to the table.

The third lesson was learned by the DUP with the bald question: is it safe to be outside the process? This followed meetings in particular with the Inkatha Freedom Party and the Conservative party. Both of those had remained outside the South African negotiations and were judged to be impotent. The DUP recognized the futility of being on the outside – better to be inside to modify it so that you change it. Hence in 1998 the DUP opposed the Agreement but took their seats on the Executive. Over the following decade the party worked to change the nature of the 1998 Agreement; by 2007, as the largest party in the new Assembly, they felt confident enough to go into coalition government with SF, the UUP and SDLP.

The third I wish to allude to was held in Belfast in June 1995 on the back of the republican and loyalist ceasefires of August and October 1994 respectively. It was organized by “The Project on Justice in Times of Transition”, a United States NGO, of which I was a member of its international advisory board. We sought support from U.S., the British and Irish governments. We had one specific rule and that is that no party had the right to veto. We were going to invite every party including SF and representatives of the loyalist paramilitary parties. We held a three-day meeting in the center of Belfast and got very serious media coverage from it. We brought people from other conflicts from around the world. The South African government was represented We had people from troubled spots in Latin America - El Salvador and Nicaragua. We had people from Eastern Europe coming out of communism. Israel and Palestine was represented. We had a very simple methodology: tell your story. How did you make a breakthrough? What were the mistakes that you made? What are the lessons that might be learned? You are not here

to preach, you are simply here to tell stories. And that is what they did.

Out of that some very important alliances were established. So that meeting took place. The opening address was given by the Nobel Peace Prize winner, President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica. His address was inspirational. In that room we had representatives from across the political spectrum including some who were not on ceasefire. Everyone agreed that this was a very useful meeting. It led to the first public handshake between a British Minister and senior SF representatives. The symbolism was crucial. Its success enabled us to build up a whole series of workshops. We held annual meetings at Harvard every summer. We started in 1990 with only three political parties. Towards the end of the decade we had representation from fifteen parties from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.

My general point is that all of these exercises were incremental. They start with very modest aims. They end with very modest achievements. But there was something going on behind the scenes when the official dialogue appeared at times not to be going very far. And because the official dialogue was being conducted in public, politicians were playing to the media. So these exercises can be important in simply building up trust over a period of time - in trying to relate to who are the key people; in trying to make them totally inclusive when the official process is not necessarily inclusive; and in getting the support of the governments.

## **Conclusion**

The final workshop with which I was involved was at Harvard University in June 2004. It was unusual in that it was for one party only, the DUP. Its sessions were concerned with 'Negotiating in the Face of Resistance', 'The Science and Art of Persuasion' and 'The Art of Leadership'. The composition of the workshop and the session titles were revealing. Normally Track Two does not concern itself with final status issues; these sessions were preparing a political party for that process. The fact that the DUP attended indicated a trust in the process and suggested that that party was in the serious business of contemplating the unthinkable - entering into government with SF. It also suggested the degree to which the DUP was made up of a coalition of interests who were heavily reliant on the charismatic leadership of the Rev. Ian Paisley. Indeed their final decision was that any decision taken would mean the imprimatur of their party leader.

That workshop demonstrated again that track two has the potential to make dialogue more open and brainstorming more creative. Because it is not restrained by formal protocols, it can "generate new ideas for

settlement,” which can eventually be fed back into political debate. The face-to-face character of unofficial contacts is important because it allows individuals to build trust and overcome isolation. It can be a crucial factor in the success of track one. Track two also assisted the formal initiative in that the modest ends of “process promotion” (and less frequently “problem solving”) were not considered to be threatening either to the participants or to those in control of the official process.

The experience of all the workshops suggests that while they may be studied discretely we should not ignore their incremental effect. In that respect, they helped a key cadre of politicians gain from the process at a technical level and learn to trust one another. At the very least, the politicians became familiar with one another in the official bilateral and multilateral meetings conducted by government. It may be that they participated without very high general expectations. Yet, in some instances, there were palpable products – emotional, intellectual and institutional. Common themes emerged, and there was a commonality on how to use the process.

The process was credible and reflective – credible in that participants became advocates for the process, and while naturally they used it to present their own positions, they also demonstrated a capacity to grow and learn. The process was reflective in that participants absorbed considerable new information, technical and otherwise. Many of them matured as a result of the process. With the passage of time, the process became more inclusive of diverse voices from Northern Ireland. Indeed, a group dynamic had been established as early as 1990. On the last day of the Grenoble meeting, one politician asserted that “contacts are now established and we do not need academics to keep them up”. Nevertheless academics were called upon in the intervening years.

While the initiatives did not complement directly the official mediation, participants certainly used their unofficial experience to rehearse positions taken up at the formal level. In particular, unionist politicians realized that they were in danger of being marginalized by the intergovernmental dynamic; and that gave track two an added urgency. Again it is important to remember that the process is meant to complement the formal negotiations rather than be a constraint. The same comments from two participants from opposing camps – that people should not get engaged in “solution-mongering” and that matters can be much more relaxed when participants realize that there is no hidden agenda - suggests that the process has a real role to play.

It is impossible to quantify the success (or otherwise) of track two initiatives because once we move outside a tiny elite of politicians, questions have to be asked about its utility in the wider community. There

is little evidence that many of the participants attempted to disseminate their experience to a wider audience. We have noted some successes and failures. If one is to take any satisfaction out of the process it can be found in the surprising number of the present Northern Ireland Executive who had been participants in many of these workshops.

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**Bob Peirce** began his appointment as British Consul General at Los Angeles in June 2005. Before that, from October 1999, he was head of the Political and Public Affairs sections of the British Embassy in Washington.

He joined the British Diplomatic Service in 1977 and has served in China and Hong Kong and at the United Nations in New York, and has also done a consultancy in Uganda. He was Private Secretary to three British Foreign Secretaries (equivalent of the U.S. Secretary of State) – Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr. John Major and Mr. Douglas Hurd.

Bob Peirce was twice a member of the Hong Kong Government, in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, and from 1993 to 1997 he was the Secretary responsible for Hong Kong's external affairs under Governor Chris Patten. He was involved for most of the period from 1979 to 1997 in the negotiations with China culminating in the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

Before going to Washington, Bob Peirce was the Chief Executive, under Chris Patten's Chairmanship, of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland whose 1999 report has formed the basis of policing reforms in Northern Ireland, following the peace agreement reached in 1998. The report has been hailed by policing experts around the world as a seminal document for policing in a democratic society. In Washington he continued to work with police departments in the United Kingdom and the United States, developing strong links and best practice exchanges between the two countries, which have proved invaluable since the attacks of the 11th of September 2001 and subsequent events.

## **The Patten Commission and Policing in Northern Ireland**

**Bob Peirce**

I am going to talk about policing in Northern Ireland and in particular about the Patten Commission: technically the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland. Let me start with an observation about the wider context drawn from my three years working on the UN Security Council in the early 1990s. That was the time when the United Nations emerged from the cold war and suddenly started actually to do things, and achieved quite a lot of good, but then had a whole lot of extra tasks heaped on top of it. It was clear that in every conflict situation, policing was critical; and if you did not plan for a policing element in any UN intervention, then things did not go at all well. One of the flaws in planning for the Iraq war was that people forgot the importance of policing until very late in the day. I say that up front because I think that what has happened in Northern Ireland

can inform conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations in any part of the globe.

## Background

In early May 1998 right after the Good Friday agreement, the Northern Ireland Secretary asked Chris Patten to chair the policing commission, and he called me and asked me if I would do it with him, as basically his right hand man and I was very glad to do it. I had no particular prior connection with Northern Ireland, and while I had some experience of working with police, I certainly was not chosen for my policing credentials. I was chosen because Chris wanted someone he trusted, and I had worked with him for some years in Hong Kong. We had then a number of other commissioners. We had one very senior representative of or rather *from* nationalist community of Northern Ireland. Nobody was representing anything other than themselves. A former civil servant and sort of polymathic figure, Senator in the Dublin parliament, wonderful man, Maurice Hayes. Peter Smith, who was a senior lawyer from the unionist tradition in Northern Ireland. We had a retired British police officer; we had two Americans, one of whom was head of John Jay College of Criminal Justice; we had a lady who was the Secretary for Public Safety in the Massachusetts government who had been a police officer; we had an academic; and we had a businesswoman. So, it was a mixed commission with everybody representing themselves. We were basically a technical commission. We were set up because the politicians found the issue of policing too difficult because, in Northern Ireland, policing had become completely politicized.

The issue of policing turns on two things: the first is who the police represent or who they are seen to represent. The second is how they perform. In Northern Ireland the main problem was what they were seen to represent, to both parts of the community. It was not so much about how they were performing in terms of keeping crime levels low.

The police had become a symbol of the constitutional argument at the root of the Northern Ireland problem: the argument of whether Northern Ireland was a part of Britain, or part of Ireland. The police represented the state, which is not something that normally happens in policing English style/British style, or in America. The police do not represent the state. In America there is the police of Los Angeles, of Chicago, county police and so on. In Britain there are regional police departments; we have London's Metropolitan Police and police for Manchester and so forth. They represent different pieces of the state;

different pieces of the country. Elsewhere in the world, police can be, and usually are, coterminous with the state. But that is not the Anglo-American way. In Northern Ireland, for historical reasons, the police were coterminous with the state, and I think that was a problem.

In Northern Ireland the police force was very centrally organized. There was also something about its name – the Royal Ulster Constabulary – and we heard a lot of views about whether the name was really that important or whether it was an excuse to have a problem with the police. But the fact of the matter is that the name was, in some ways, a constitutional statement. It said something about Britain rather than Ireland. The other way in which the police were not representative of the community as a whole was the composition, of the police. They were only 8% Catholic in a country which is 45% Catholic, and the rest were Protestant or “other”. I do not quite know who the “others” were, but there were one or two. Maybe that is where the atheists were hiding. So the police were seen by many in the nationalist community as representatives of Unionism and Britain. Many in the mainstream unionist community regarded the police, and some of them were crass enough to talk about the police, as “our police”, not meaning “our” as Northern Ireland police, but “our” as in Unionist police.

The loyalist community – the people who wanted to defend the Union by violent means – had as much of a problem with the police as the extremists on the other side of the argument. It is worth remembering that the first of the 302 police officers killed in the Troubles, and the last, were both killed by loyalist paramilitaries, not by the IRA or others on the nationalist side of the argument. That is an important fact because it reminds us that police are very often stuck in the middle. If you think about the old scenes of marching and public order – difficulties in Northern Ireland – you have got police in the middle, trying to separate two communities who want to have at each other. Both communities have a problem with police. From the nationalist side, the police represent unionism, and from the loyalist side, the police were protecting the Catholics. We heard this all the time when we spoke with cops. They were fed up with being stuck in the middle, of basically being the center of the constitutional debate, and not policing in a normal way.

## **The Commission at Work**

We decided to go about our duties by talking to the people rather than by talking to the politicians. That is not to say we did not talk to the politicians – we did; we talked to all of them – but they had handed

the problem to us because they could not sort it out. When you talked to the politicians they took the position that you would have expected. On the one side, the police had to be dramatically transformed or disbanded, and on the other side it was absolutely nothing must be done to change the Royal Ulster Constabulary. So, that was going to be a pretty sterile route, and there was no point in trying to build a bridge between those two positions. So what we decided to do was go straight to the people.

People are very often more intelligent than those they elect to represent them. And I think this was a classic case of that. We went to talk to the people. We did about 40 town hall meetings, to which I would give mixed reviews, as not everybody would be totally frank in public and some tended towards grandstanding. We also had hundreds and hundreds of private meetings with ordinary folk, as well as more elevated folk. What came through, whether they were Catholic, nationalist, loyalist or whatever, was that everybody wanted the same kind of policing. Everybody wanted their schools to be safe, they wanted to see cops on the streets, they wanted cops to be responsive to their problems and they wanted cops that they could relate to. But what they had was cops who were hidden behind fortified walls in their police stations and who would emerge from there when they had to in armored vehicles. When the police responded it would be a different team every time. There was no continuity. People did not feel that they had what has now come to be termed 'community policing.' People felt remote from the police. This was an extreme form of what happened everywhere in policing in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. It was something that resonated very strongly with the Americans on the commission, and with the police departments in the United States and elsewhere which we visited to learn about what was happening in policing.

Our travels were significant in themselves. We travelled because we decided that our objective should be not just to sort out this problem and compromise, but to create a model for policing everywhere in the world. We wanted Northern Ireland to have a police department that was not only acceptable to the people in the communities there but one that would be the best police service in the world. And we wanted the commission's report to be something that people all over the world would look at if they were considering how to police a divided society. Whether it was something new – like a former republic of Yugoslavia, or whether it was something established – like Los Angeles or Baltimore. Every society has something of the problems that Northern Ireland has; there are always divisions. The American police departments, and the UK ones as well, all told us that they had

come to realize that ‘response driven’ policing was not the way to go. Everybody had been driven off the beat and into their police stations. While not everyone had fortresses like those in Northern Ireland, all seemed to be mainly in their police stations responding to calls and then whizzing all over town in cars rather than talking to people on the street. The standard of performance had become response time – how soon could you get to the scene of the incident. They were not in the business of problem solving policing. They were not in the business of knowing a neighborhood and understanding what was going on in that neighborhood to cause crime and to cause various public safety issues. And you just cannot do that unless you are really in the community, getting to know people.

Now one can understand how it happened in Northern Ireland, and sympathize a lot with officers who decided not to go in to certain areas and hobnob with the people and understand the problems, because, as you know, they were getting stoned, they were getting shot at and it would not have been a smart thing to do. Northern Ireland was simply an extreme form of something that had happened to policing elsewhere in our societies, in Britain and in the United States. There is been a lot of progress in policing since the early 90s in this country and in my country and we were able to tap into that; and not only to tap into it, but leapfrog over what was going on elsewhere, because we had an opportunity for a dramatic transformation of policing because it was generally recognized that that was necessary in Northern Ireland. When we talked to people, it was very clear that they wanted a different kind of policing. They wanted a police station you could actually walk into. They wanted cops to be attending to issues, like domestic violence and drugs being peddled outside of schools, that cannot be handled from an armored car. There was a general underlying wish to see a major transformation in Northern Ireland. We had that opportunity.

## **Recommendations**

What did we recommend? First of all we recommended the reorientation of the mission of policing: a reinvention of the wheel. If you go back to Robert Peel, who basically invented modern policing first in Ireland and then in Britain, and read what he wrote about policing, you could be reading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He saw the purpose of policing as to guarantee the rights of all citizens. Our first chapter of recommendations just placed policing back where it should be, with its purpose as maintaining order and creating a framework in which everybody can enjoy their legitimate rights,

not “policing people”. We recommended that that principle should be drilled into officers throughout their training. We believed that the trainees needed more than a course with an hour on human rights on day 17; it should be the underlying point of policing.

## Accountability

We made an enormous number of recommendations on accountability. This is an area where Northern Ireland now truly leads the world. To achieve this we changed the structure of the police. I mentioned before how centralized it had become. This inevitably happens in a conflict situation; the police become militarized and the structure hierarchical. We flattened the structure and we broke up the basic commands around the country. And we had accountability at the local level as well as the central level. The main instrument of accountability is a thing called the policing board which we called the *policing* board, not the *police* board. It is now frequently referred to as the police board. I think a lot of people forget that what we were addressing here was policing, not just the police, because at the core was our message that policing was not something that needs to be done by a disciplined force *to* a community, but *with* the community. Everybody has a responsibility in that respect. And it starts with the policing board, which includes both elected politicians – a slight majority of elected politicians in the proportion with which they are in the Northern Ireland Assembly – and also a number of unelected people who are selected (a mixture of expertise or representing different sectors of the community, like trade unions or whatever). It is a development of the police board system in England and Wales but it goes much further; it has more powers than the police boards in England and Wales. And, I think that has proved to be a tremendous success.

The policing board has worked surprisingly well, and its first great victory was to be able to agree on something that we in the Patten Commission had not been able to agree on: the issue of the name and the symbols. We slightly dodged that question because we thought quite honestly that the people of Northern Ireland should agree on their own symbols for the police, rather than have us design something with the correct balance of harps and crowns. We just handed that question over to the policing board. It was quite a test but they passed it in two seconds flat. They got off to a good start and I think they have been *generally* quite a success. The system filters down to the district levels, where there is a sort of mini policing commission/board, called the District Policing Partnerships, interacting with the commander of each division. Without actually breaking up the police department into several different departments, because, after all, we

are talking about a small place – we are talking about a place with only 1.7 million people – so we would not want to have 20 different police departments. But, because each division has a local accountability mechanism, there is a sense of ownership and consultation at that local level.

The accountability mechanisms go way beyond that. This was absolutely crucial to the whole enterprise. It was an essential part of the process of conveying the message that these are your police. And they need to hear from you regularly on what you want them to do. And it works both ways; it is very good for the police. Normally if you talk about the police becoming more accountable there is, understandably, a lot of wariness beforehand: ‘how are these people who do not know anything about policing going to tell me what I should be doing...’ Actually, it is very good for a Police Chief to have a group like that to consult, because then the buck does not completely stop at his desk; and when difficulties occur, the fact that you have taken your priorities from a community board can become your explanation for why you were focusing on this, and not focusing on that. The community will have to set the priorities for the police, and help them allocate the resources; and the community will have to change those allocations and those priorities in response to difficulties that occur. It is not just the police officer’s responsibility to anticipate all the difficulties that might occur in the region. So, accountability actually strengthens a good police chief: a police chief that has good relations with his community.

## **Policing *with* the Community**

We said a lot more about policing with the community: the principle of consultation and finding solutions to difficulties collaboratively. Because, the solution to a public safety difficulty may have nothing to do with actual policing, it may have something to do with traffic flow, or street lighting, all kinds of things that would require people other than the police to work with the police.

## **Normal Policing**

We made a lot of recommendations about what I might call ‘normal policing’, including more user-friendly police stations, getting out of the armored cars, getting out onto the streets. All that was dependent on improvements in the security situation; you could not ordain that somebody should walk unprotected into an area that was still extremely dangerous. Though it was remarkable to me the extent to which, even when we started our work, there were some officers who were prepared to do that. Extraordinary bravery.

## **Public Order Policing**

We looked closely at Public Order policing and especially the issue of less-than-lethal weaponry. It was not that plastic baton rounds had killed people recently. The old style ones certainly did result in a few deaths in the early years, but they had become a relatively usable weapon in certain circumstances. In Northern Ireland you need some kind of accurate way of dealing with somebody who was about to throw a petrol bomb, or a nail bomb at you. In the U.S.A. that way would be live fire. There was not a single police chief anywhere in America who told us that they would even think of a less lethal option but, in the British Isles that is not good enough. There has to be a less lethal option. Pepper spray and the chemical methods used for crowd-dispersal do not have that kind of accuracy, so we struggled to find an alternative to plastic baton rounds. We could not find anything better. Technology was improving baton rounds, but the really good news is that the Northern Ireland police have not used the baton rounds much, if at all, recently. Moreover, although we were not able to recommend alternatives to baton rounds, we did recommend changes to the way in which they were used.

## **Management and IT**

We made a lot of recommendations about how the police department was managed, and especially the use of information technology (IT). The police in Northern Ireland were hopelessly behind in IT. The old RUC had dropped behind because the money was going to security and IT was not seen to be security. IT is actually very important to security. It is certainly important for normal policing. Information is the absolute key to informed, sensible policing. It should guide how you deploy and how you organize police work and it has been one of the key things in policing reform in this country. The police departments that have really begun to bring crime down in this country, all of them have a superb IT system. It takes a few years before the information that you gather starts to pay off in terms of improved policing. But it is absolutely critical. That is more or less a work in progress in the police department now.

## **Composition and Recruitment**

In terms of composition and recruitment; I mentioned the RUC was only 8% Catholic, which was obviously completely unacceptable.



And so we recommended a controversial system of recruitment. First of all recruitment is not done by police, it is done by an outside agency. And, more importantly perhaps, we ordained that there should be a ratio of 50-50% recruitment of Protestants and Catholics. It works like this: you have to pass an examination and qualify in terms of merit; nobody wanted to sacrifice merit. Then you get into a pool and the recruiting agency draws from the pool in equal numbers. It is the same system used by Harvard University so it had impeccable credentials. We got a little flak for that, but much less flak than we had expected. The new recruitment system is working very well. Plenty of Catholic men and women were applying for the police even before Sinn Féin agreed to support policing and even from Sinn Féin's communities. Now that Sinn Féin have signed up, it is only going to improve further. In the first five years of the system we went from 8% Catholic officers to 20%. That is very fast. I have been to police departments all over the United States and none changed its ethnic composition as fast as that. How did we do it? We created a lot of vacancies by offering generous packages to people who wanted to get out of the police. But we also had the difficult task of having to reduce the size of the police department and yet also increase the composition of the not-so minority community. That meant increasing the amount of recruitment overall. That too is working surprisingly well.

## Gender

One other encouraging result for which we cannot claim a whole lot of credit is the shift in the recruitment of women to the police. There was a lot of stuff in the commission report about how it would be good to have more women in the police, but we were unable to make very powerful recommendations on that point because we were hamstrung by European law. We were able to do this 50/50 thing on religious recruitment because there was no law against that, but we could not get around European law to encourage female recruitment. Undoubtedly a law that was supposed to protect women actually had the perverse effect of not allowing us to help them join the police in larger numbers. But the overall effect of the new situation in Northern Ireland, and the reforms in the report succeeded in making policing a more attractive job for women. Now policing is seen as something where people can actually use interpersonal skills, which is hard to do through armor. Women are applying now in quite large numbers. About 40% of each recruitment class is now female. I was talking to the chief of the Northern Ireland police recently about this and I asked "well how is retention going?" He said it is still early days but that

the signs were looking extraordinarily good. So, we may find that this formerly macho paramilitary and hierarchical police department that was certainly not known for having large numbers of women in it may now be an example of how to recruit and keep women in policing. It is a work in progress; but that is a really interesting development.

## **Judgment**

What is happening now is that the police in Northern Ireland are increasingly being judged by their performance, rather than by what they are and who they are. That is as it should be. What usually happens when you reform a police department is that crime statistics go up. That may seem odd, but the reason is that if you have a police department that is distrusted by a significant section of the community, people do not report crime. Murders get reported, but you do not report domestic violence to a paramilitary police that you hardly ever see. Why would you? We were told while we were going about our work that there was not much domestic violence in Northern Ireland. That was just because there was not much reported domestic violence. Of course there is exactly the same amount of domestic violence as in any other society. Now it is getting reported. And there are one or two other types of crime where the statistics started to go up. Complaints against the police also go up. That is a good sign, initially. If you get more complaints against the police it tells you that people think there is some point in lodging a complaint against the police, because there is an investigative process. But after initial rises in some of these statistics, there has been quite a good rate of decline in a lot of prime categories. And I think that, again, nothing is ever as good as it should be, but the good news is that that is the way the Northern Ireland police are being judged. And I think that is a really great development.

## **Conclusion**

That in a nutshell is the story of the Patten Commission and its recommendations. So far, it has worked out very well for policing in Northern Ireland and for the wider peace settlement there. I think it holds lessons for conflict resolution and divided societies around the world.



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## **Changing Hearts and Minds? Television, the Paramilitaries and the Peace Process<sup>1</sup>**

**Greg McLaughlin**

On Tuesday, 8 May 2007, Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness were confirmed respectively as First Minister and Deputy First Minister of a new Northern Ireland executive, providing the international media with images few people dared predict. For the local newspapers the next morning, it was 'The Day No One Thought Would Ever Happen' (*Belfast Telegraph*), a day for 'Shaking Off the Chains of History' (*News Letter*). And as Irish journalist, Tommy Gorman, put it later, it was a day when "politics became the art of the impossible".<sup>2</sup>

Hard political negotiation and a dramatic realignment of politics had indeed brought these irreconcilable enemies to a power sharing agreement but there is little doubt that a more relaxed and open political and cultural atmosphere also played a part in making it possible. The media, especially public service broadcasting, certainly felt freer than previously possible to revise the interpretative and representational frameworks they traditionally employed to report the conflict. But the true effects of this paradigm shift – on shaping the politics of the process and influencing broader public opinion – are much more open to question and difficult to test in hindsight.

The question at issue in this paper, then, is this: can we take the media's role in the peace process as an example of a cultural intervention that transformed public opinion in favor of a political settlement? Or

should we consider it only in the most limited sense of an informational role? Previous academic research has accepted the importance of the latter but there are clear disagreements about whether they played a more ideological, propaganda role as “persuaders for peace”.<sup>3</sup>

There is, of course, a range of media forms such as film, television current affairs and documentary, television drama and situation comedy that offer various examples of the changing media paradigm.<sup>4</sup> However, for reasons of space, I will restrict my comments in this article to television current affairs and documentary. First, however, it is important to take a brief look at how things used to be if we are to fully understand the nature and extent of this paradigm shift and the challenges it presented to broadcasters in Britain and Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

## Historical Context

In many ways, the more relaxed representation of the paramilitaries during the peace process seems extraordinary in the historical context of the conflict in Northern Ireland. In the 1970s and 1980s, British government policy sought to criminalize paramilitary violence and empty it of political content. Censorship and propaganda were key functions of this policy and had a deadening impact on how the media were able to report the conflict. The 1980s, in particular, saw public service broadcasting come into direct confrontation with the government over a number of current affairs programmes and documentaries that appeared to be insufficiently critical of, or even sympathetic to, terrorists.<sup>6</sup> Notable examples here include a programme in the BBC’s documentary series *Real Lives*, “At the Edge of the Union” (BBC, 1985) and “Death on the Rock”, a Thames Television investigation into the shooting of an IRA unit in Gibraltar, in 1988.<sup>7</sup>

“At the Edge of the Union” was set in Derry, Northern Ireland’s second city, and looked at the lives of two men on opposite sides of the conflict: Martin McGuinness, Vice President of the Irish republican party, Sinn Féin, and Gregory Campbell, a loyalist politician and member of Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The programme provoked controversy ostensibly because it gave voice to Martin McGuinness whom many suspected was a prominent IRA leader. More precisely, in the words of the programme producer, Paul Hamann, it showed McGuinness with “a human face”,<sup>8</sup> living life in a domestic setting with his wife and children.

The British government initially opposed the broadcast of the film and prompted the BBC Board of Governors to review its contents. This

brought the governors into direct conflict with the BBC's Director General, Alasdair Milne, who saw the government's interference as a direct threat to the Corporation's independence. Some of governors objected to the programme's "domestication of the IRA" and their portrayal as "loveable people with babies" (O'Carroll) and only relented when the producers agreed to re-cut it to include images of IRA violence. Controversies such as these highlight how difficult it was at this time for media producers to work outside of the prevailing and very restrictive, anti-terrorist propaganda framework: depicting the paramilitary with a "human face" or as a "family man" was strongly discouraged.<sup>9</sup>

The most famous and controversial conflict between the commercial, Independent Television network (ITV) and the government over Northern Ireland involved Thames Television and its *This Week* programme, 'Death on the Rock', which set out to investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting by British undercover soldiers of three members of the IRA in Gibraltar in 1988. The producers came under fire from the British government and the right-wing press even before their programme was completed and, when it was scheduled to go out, the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, pressurized the Independent Broadcasting Authority to withhold it. The IBA resisted and allowed the programme to be broadcast as scheduled. Even the government appointed Windelsham and Rampton inquiry cleared the producers of any professional misconduct (1989). BBC Northern Ireland aired its own investigation into events at Gibraltar as part of its current affairs series, *Spotlight*. It was broadcast around the same period as 'Death on the Rock' but was less politically significant in Britain even though it attracted equal measure of condemnation from certain sections of the local media and public opinion.

Broadcasting in and from Northern Ireland was made even more difficult from October 1988 with the introduction of the 'Broadcast Ban', a set of restrictions for reporting paramilitary organisations or their political affiliates and sympathizers. The Ban applied to all British broadcasters and only to material broadcast within the UK. It required editors and producers to replace with subtitles or an actor's voice the directly spoken words of people such as Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, when they appeared as official spokespersons for their organisation. Crucially, the Broadcast Ban placed the onus of responsibility on producers to decide what was official and what was not, a dilemma that made the production process so cumbersome that they fell back on a default position of excluding direct interviews as much as possible. It was widely accepted that the restrictions were aimed directly at the IRA and Sinn Féin; indeed, research has shown a dramatic decline in interviews with Sinn Féin

representatives over a one year period, 1988-89 (Henderson, Reilly and Miller), during which time, unknown to most people, the British government was engaging in secret talks with the IRA about ways to end their military campaign.

Although the Ban remained in force until the first IRA ceasefire in 1994, the peace process demanded a much more immediate shift in official propaganda, away from an anti-terrorist discourse and towards the possibility that paramilitaries could be brought to the negotiating table. The first clue of a change of tone came at the outset of the peace process, not from the media but crucially from the British government in the form of TV advertisements for its anti-terrorist, confidential telephone service.

## **Selling the Peace? Confidential Telephone Advertisements**

The confidential telephone service was set up by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in the 1970s to receive anonymous information from the public regarding paramilitary activity. It was publicized through a variety of media but of most interest here are the television advertisement campaigns. The early campaigns were strictly anti-terrorist in orientation and fitted into the wider British propaganda framework. Terrorism had no political content or context and the terrorists themselves were portrayed as ruthless, psychotic criminals. For example, *A Future* (1988) features a young man reflecting on the future for his wife and child in a community dominated by paramilitary violence. What, he asks on his odyssey around his troubled city, have these “hard men” ever done for him? “They’ve left me with no job and no hope, they’ve wrecked where I live, they’ve hijacked our cars, they’ve fed off our backs, and when I saw their kind of justice, I thought there’s gotta be something better than this.” This voiceover accompanies images of a war-torn urban environment: bombs exploding, punishment shootings in back alleys and paramilitaries collecting funds in local pubs. The lighting is dark and the atmosphere foreboding, an effect heightened by a crime thriller score.

The NIO continued the service into the 1990s and the period of the peace process but the new circumstances brought a perceptible shift in emphasis in the advertisement campaigns. Two adverts from 1993, *Lady* and *I Wanna Be Like You*, seemed to confirm this shift by situating the paramilitary in a more ambiguous position in society.

*Lady* tells the story of two women whose lives are blighted by violence. The ethno-religious identity of the women is not made explicit:

they are both portrayed as victims. One is a widow whose husband is murdered by a paramilitary. The other is married to the paramilitary who is imprisoned for the murder. A female narrator intones, “Two women, two traditions, two tragedies. One married to the victim of violence, one married to the prisoner of violence. Both scarred, both suffering, both desperately wanting it to stop.” As with *A Future*, *Lady* is about the impact of violence on private and domestic relations except, in this instance, violence is presented as equally tragic for paramilitaries as it is for their victims.

*I Wanna Be Like You* also reflects upon the cost of paramilitary violence to family relations, specifically those of father and son. There is no voice-over narrative to this film. Instead it is accompanied by a version of the Harry Chapin song, *Cat in the Cradle*. It presents a man’s journey over a number of years from paramilitarism to his recognition of the futility of violence. In the beginning, he neglects his family, ends up in prison and eventually sees his son follow in his footsteps as a paramilitary. The son in turn becomes remote from the father and is shown gunning down a man in front of his child, emphasising the cyclical nature of the violence. The son eventually loses his life to violence and the advert closes with the image of the father grieving at his son’s grave.

In *A New Era* (1994), the traditional symbols of conflict and division are transformed before our eyes into images of peace and prosperity. A paramilitary gun morphs into a starting pistol for the Belfast marathon; security bollards turn into flower displays; a police cordon turns into ceremonial tape for the opening of a new motorway; and two Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) constables reunite a lost child with his mother, confounding the controversial history and nature of the force.<sup>10</sup>

After the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, the NIO commissioned a very different series of public films that moved away from the anti-terrorist message altogether. Broadcast during the summer of 1995, these made no mention of the confidential phone service or of terrorism. Indeed they appeared to have no specific purpose except to show off Northern Ireland as a place where people enjoyed life without fear of violence. Scored with some of the best-known songs of Van Morrison, a native of Belfast, such as *Brown Eyed Girl*, *Days Like This*, and *Have I Told You Lately*, the four films have the glossy look of tourist advertisements, marketing peace in Northern Ireland as a consumer commodity. In the first film, *Northern Irish Difference*, babies and toddlers play at a crèche, oblivious to sectarian or cultural difference; in the second, *Northern Irish Life*, two boys from both traditions play on a beach and innocently exchange what would, in the conflict of the past, have been seen as sectarian badges of identity – King Billy for Glasgow Celtic Football

Club! The third film, *Northern Irish Quality*, celebrates the sporting and cultural achievements of people like Mary Peters, George Best and Liam Neeson, while the fourth, *Northern Irish Spirit*, reminds people of the region's stunning coastal and rural scenery. All the films in the series end with Van Morrison's epithet from *Coney Island*, "Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time?" and the on-screen slogan, "Time for the Bright Side". The use of Morrison's music in this series of films came with his explicit permission and blessing and reveals much about the heady, optimistic mood that gripped Northern Ireland in the hot summer of 1995.

When the IRA ceasefire ended in 1996, with bombs in London and Manchester, the NIO returned to the violent imagery of the early confidential telephone advertisements. However, the restoration of the ceasefires and the negotiations towards the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 brought a return to optimism. During the referendum campaign, in May that year, the NIO distributed to every home a copy of the Agreement document, its cover showing the archetypal nuclear family silhouetted against a rising sun, symbolising the Agreement as a new dawn for the people of Northern Ireland. It was revealed later that the picture was actually of a sunset and was taken in South Africa, perfect dawns being difficult to catch in Northern Ireland. Still, these idealized, post-ceasefire images marked a radical departure from the violent imagery of 1988 and *A Future*, and even from the more positive confidential telephone ads of the early 1990s, for they dispensed with the anti-terrorist message altogether and held out the prospect of real peace and a final settlement to the conflict.

Martin McLoone (1993, 1996) was one of the first media academics to take a serious look at these government films and spot the subtle change of message in their narrative and photography. As he has argued, they did indeed appear to prepare the public for negotiations with the enemy while at the same time suggest to the IRA especially that they had something to gain by laying down their arms. However the films may also have had the effect of giving the media licence to explore the ongoing transition from war to peace in ways unthinkable just years before. One of these was to interview former paramilitaries about their role in the conflict, to show us the gunmen with a human face without provoking a public backlash.

## Talking to the Enemy

The lifting of broadcasting censorship in Britain and Ireland in 1994 was widely seen as part of the deal to bring about the IRA ceasefire in August



that year but it took some time for television producers to come to terms with the more relaxed regime. They still demonstrated a knee jerk reflex to confront and cajole republican and loyalist figures about their history of violence rather than try to understand their motivations.

A good example of this was an edition in late 1994 of *The Late, Late Show*, Irish television's longest running chat show (modelled on America's *Tonight* show with Johnny Carson), which had as a guest, Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Féin. There were two unique and controversial aspects about his appearance that had more to do with editorial policy than with Adams himself. First, the presenter, Gay Byrne, declined to greet him with a handshake, as he usually did with all his guests, and described him in a deeply uneasy introduction as 'the most controversial man in Ireland'. Second, after a short interview, Byrne proceeded to moderate a confrontation between Adams and four hostile panellists. The encounter was tense and heated but Adams was widely perceived by the live audience and by television critics to have handled it calmly and expertly. Indeed, in the following days, RTE received a record number of viewer complaints that the treatment of Adams was imbalanced and unfair. The following year, *The Late, Late Show* invited Adams back for an exclusively one-to-one interview with Byrne in which he discussed his background and politics, his thoughts about the peace process and his private interests.

Like the political process itself, television was taking time to change and adapt to the new circumstances that peace afforded. But change it did and in the late 1990s, the BBC broadcast three major series that examined the conflict from the perspective of the principal protagonists: *Provos* (BBC, 1997), *Loyalists* (1999) and *Brits* (2000). Public reaction to them was muted, although critics expressed concern about the BBC's timing of *Provos*, that it might in some way undermine the peace process in a crucial and delicate phase – the beginning of formal multi-party talks on 15 September 1997 – and that the producers were giving airtime to active members of the IRA. Executive producer, Steve Hewlett, claimed that the producers '(did not) seek interviews with people currently active in the IRA but it is not an open organisation; people do not wear badges and there is a distinct possibility that some were not telling the truth. But if we knew they were active, we wouldn't use them' (*Times*, 6 August 1997).

Whatever the political objections, television series like *Provos* and *Loyalists* boast all that is best in British broadcasting production values. The programmes are made up of interviews mainly with ex-paramilitaries but there are also contributions from their victims and from other politicians and public figures who were prominent in the 1960s and

1970s when the violence was at its most sustained. These are intercut with a narrative history of political violence and punctuated with some remarkable and hitherto unseen archive film footage of key moments in the history of the conflict. However, in other respects both series are ultimately safe and uncontroversial. They merely confirm prejudice and assumptions rather than challenge them. They are case studies in murder, narratives about ‘mad IRA bombers’ and ‘Loyalist death squads’. Conducted in stark light against a black background, they are at once interrogative and at times voyeuristic.

The series *Loyalists*, in particular, features some brutally frank, matter-of-fact admissions of murder from ex-paramilitaries. Jim Light, a former member of the Ulster Freedom Fighters, tells the presenter, Peter Taylor, how he led the abduction and murder of a young Catholic man in retaliation for the murder by the IRA of six Protestant pensioners. It must be said here that the rendering of this interview in print lacks the impact of viewing this doleful, deadbeat exchange between Taylor and Light:

*Taylor:* What did you do?

*Light:* I went out with a group of other volunteers from the UFF (Ulster Freedom Fighters) and we picked up a Catholic and we took him away and we executed him.

*Taylor:* Murdered him?

*Light:* Yeah

*Taylor:* Shot him dead?

*Light:* Yes

*Taylor:* A Catholic?

*Light:* Yes

*Taylor:* Any Catholic?

*Light:* Yes

*Taylor:* Why was he selected?

*Light:* He was selected for no other reason than he was a Catholic

*Taylor:* No reason to believe he was involved in the Republican movement?

*Light:* No

*Taylor:* Just an innocent, 17 year old student?

*Light:* Yeah

(EDIT)

*Taylor:* Who pulled the trigger?

*Light:* I pulled the trigger

*Taylor:* You pulled the trigger?

*Light:* I did, yes.

*Taylor:* Without any hesitation?

*Light:* (Pause) No, actually, no. I would not say I had any hesitation at that time.

Of course, this style of interview is quite common in television's 'true crime' genre. It may reveal much about the psychological state of the killer but little of the political impulses behind his action. The focus is on 'coming clean': close ups invite the viewer to judge the demeanor of the interviewee and render a verdict on their honesty and the plausibility of their remorse. Then, as if to prejudice the verdict, each interview closes with a prison photograph and details of conviction and sentence: "Jim Light was sentenced to life for murder".

Yet there are entry points for further enquiry here that are tantalisingly followed up only for the trail to go cold. Bobby Morton, once a Loyalist paramilitary, tells Taylor that some prominent Unionist politicians of the day had much to answer for in stirring up Loyalist violence:

*Morton:* They were only too happy to lead us by the nose at one stage – 'Get into them boys! Protestant Ulster!, we will fight and we will die!' Well, they never fought and they never died. It was left to people like me.

Taylor then takes this point up with the Reverend Ian who admits that paramilitaries like Morton were among the ranks of his supporters in those days but insists that he could not be held responsible for their crimes which, he says, he condemned outright and duly disowned.

In this important respect, therefore, the *Provos* and *Loyalists* series failed to look at the politics and ideology that motivated and sustained the paramilitaries and see them in some instances fixed and unbending but, in others, fluid and flexible. Nonetheless, they marked a new permissiveness in current affairs broadcasting, taking advantage of the end of censorship to give voice and a human face to people who, until recently, issued terse statements to the media behind balaclava masks.

## **Remembering the Past for the Needs of the Present**

The need for accountability and remorse for violence during the conflict is one of the most difficult and, so far, unresolved issues of the peace process in Northern Ireland; there is yet no agreement about how to bring about constructive encounter between perpetrators and victims of violence. However, in 2006, the BBC tried with *Facing the Truth*, a series of three programmes aired over successive nights and moderated by a panel of three experts including Bishop Desmond Tutu. The pro-

grammes featured encounters between loyalist and republican paramilitaries, and also British soldiers, and the victims of their past violence, whether survivors or bereaved relatives, and encouraged the participants to work towards some kind of reckoning or reconciliation.

For critics such as Rolston, the series was 'a bold and imaginative step' on the part of the BBC but was not without its problems (p.335). Firstly, the format and the type of encounters it generated bordered on 'reality television', a potentially exploitative and voyeuristic form of entertainment. For example, an encounter between Loyalist paramilitary, Michael Stone, and the widow and brother of one of his victims, Dermot Hackett, took up the entire third programme and made for uncomfortable and dramatic viewing. But there is evidence of a significant degree of editorial manipulation to create the drama at the expense of very vulnerable participants. Secondly, although billed as an opportunity for victims to tell their story, to be heard and remembered, there was no doubt that editorial control remained firmly with the broadcaster, in this case the BBC, whose role during the conflict was hardly neutral.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, the programme's definition of victim does not allow for the possibility that the perpetrators of violence might be themselves victims of the conflict and the extreme circumstances that brought it about. And fourthly, Rolston argues, the religious overtones to the experiment, underlined by Bishop Tutu's persistent references to God and God's forgiveness, 'allowed no space for those with more secular definitions... (and) became in effect a denial of a political approach to dealing with the past that looked beyond interpersonal encounters to the structural causes of conflict and violence' (ibid. p.359).

In fact, there are very few examples of such a political approach in current affairs programmes about the conflict and its aftermath. One of the most interesting and, I would argue, genuinely enlightening in recent years is *Somme Journey*, a short documentary produced by BBC Northern Ireland and first broadcast in 2002. The programme brought together former enemies, Tom Hartley of Sinn Féin and the late David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and once prominent member of the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), for a visit to the First World War graves of the Somme, in France. The encounter was not only politically unprecedented for television but also provided both men, and therefore the viewer, with new insights into how loyalist and republican versions of history have been couched more in myth than in fact. As David Ervine saw it, this was an opportunity to 'switch on the light' and 'explore' the past.

Commemoration of the war dead has always been central to the identity and cultural expression of the wider Ulster Unionist family but tra-

ditionally taboo for the Irish republican movement. So while Unionists would commemorate annually the mainly Protestant men of the Ulster divisions and those serving in other British regiments, republicans and, indeed, the whole nationalist establishment, North and South of Ireland, denied totally the sacrifice of young Irish nationalists who joined other regiments of the British Army and fell alongside their Protestant compatriots. At the same time, and until very recently, the Unionist history and mythology of Ulster's sacrifice rarely made reference to that of Irish nationalists. For Ervine and Hartley to acknowledge all this on camera, in a spirit of grace and generosity and without compromising their core values, marked a genuinely unique moment on television and underpinned efforts North and South to promote more inclusive models of commemoration of this key event in unionist and nationalist history. But the programme also showed that it is possible for television to move away from the adversarial model so typical of current affairs coverage of the conflict; and it illustrated by some of the examples above the potential for the medium to promote insight through dialogue rather than entrenchment through confrontation.

## Conclusion

It is clear from this review that various sections of the media have responded positively to the new political and cultural dispensation allowed by the peace process over the past 14 years. They have moved from the restrictive parameters of the anti-terrorist paradigm to a less censorious, more exploratory analysis of the motivations and objectives of the paramilitaries. They have availed of the absence of direct censorship and propaganda to allow paramilitaries public space to express their attitudes, positive or negative, to the negotiations towards a final political settlement.

In some sense, therefore, we can see this as evidence of a form of cultural intervention in a process of conflict resolution. However, it is much more difficult to assess how effective this has been in transforming mindsets among the wider, divided communities of Northern Ireland. Academic research has questioned the media consensus about the peace process that appears to bear little or no reflection of the political and material conditions at grass-roots level (Baker and McLaughlin, 2008; Spencer). For example, the peace process and its optimistic portrayal in some sections of the media have done little to quell the sectarian tensions that have always bubbled under the surface, flaring up from time to time at sectarian interfaces in urban centres such as Belfast, Derry and Portadown. And for large sections of the population, issues such as education,

health and social services, or economic and community development, seem much more pressing than a peace process that has moved from crisis to crisis over abstract political and constitutional questions.

The media have already moved through three major interpretative frameworks for reporting the conflict – from civil rights to anti-terrorism and then to peace process. These have all been inadequate for some of the reasons discussed here and they should warn us against optimistic conclusions about the media's role in conflict resolution and transformation. We should adopt similar caution when monitoring the move to a new and necessary fourth media paradigm, that of building consent for post-peace process politics. With no effective party of opposition in the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is left to the local media to fill the vacuum and they still offer space in print and on television for hard, political journalism and current affairs. However, they also face serious commercial pressures to chase and compete for fragmenting readerships and audiences, which in turn may force a softening of their editorial content and undermine their democratic functions at such a crucial historical juncture.<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

1. This essay is based in part on the author's work in progress with Stephen Baker towards a book on the media and "The Propaganda of Peace" in Northern Ireland.

2. Cited in 'Paisley: From Troublemaker to Peacemaker', RTE1, 2008.

3. See, for example differences of emphasis between Baker and McLaughlin; Spencer; and Wolfsfeld.

4. See the much wider survey in Baker and McLaughlin.

5. For more detailed analyses of media politics in this period, see Butler; Curtis; and Miller.

6. This should be seen in wider historical context of Thatcherite hostility to the very concept of public service television in general, funded by the public, and to news reporting of other controversial events in the 1980s such as the Falklands War in 1981 and the U.S. bombing of Libya in 1986.

7. For detailed, academic accounts of the media politics surrounding these controversies, see Miller; and McLaughlin, 2000. Also, from a journalist's perspective, Ian Jack (1988) provides an impression of the prevailing professional and political pressures put upon journalists to report the official propaganda version rather than the facts of what really happened on the Rock of Gibraltar in 1988.

8. Interviewed in "The Information War", *Late Review*, BBC2, 1993.

9. For professional perspectives on local broadcast news and current affairs coverage of the conflict see Baker; Bolton; Cathcart; Francis; Kyle; and Leapman.

10. Policing in Northern Ireland had always been a difficult issue, especially among republican and nationalists whose leaders long suspected the traditionally Protestant force of collusion with loyalist paramilitaries. It has since been reformed as part of the peace process, with new structures of public accountability, a representative recruitment strategy, a community dimension and a new name, The Police Service of Northern Ireland or PSNI.

11. See Butler for a cogent critique of the BBC's ideological, political and institutional difficulties in broadcasting to Northern Ireland's 'divided community'.

12. See McLaughlin, 2006, for a critical survey of the local media market in Northern Ireland.

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# **‘The Contact’: Understanding a Communication Channel between the British Government and the IRA**

Niall O Dochartaigh

## **Introduction**

On the 1st of November 1993 John Major, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, declared in the House of Commons that “to sit down and talk with Mr. Adams and the Provisional IRA... would turn my stomach. We will not do it”. In the context of rumors that the British government had been in contact with the IRA he reinforced his point in a public speech several days later when he stated that he would “never talk to organizations which did not renounce violence”. By the end of that month however, Sir Patrick Mayhew, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, had admitted at a press conference in Belfast that a secret channel of communication between the British government and the Provisional Republicans did exist (Mallie and McKittrick, 1996: 234-40).

From this distance in time it is difficult to remember now just how controversial and secretive this contact was. In the approach to public disclosure the British government denied repeatedly that such contact had taken place. One British government statement proclaimed that “This allegation belongs more properly in the fantasy of spy thrillers”. And even as this channel was being publicly exposed, attempts were made to cover the traces of these contacts (Mallie and McKittrick, 1996: 234).

Much has subsequently been written about this channel of communication. Excellent and detailed accounts based on extensive interviews with key participants have been provided by Peter Taylor (1998; 2008) and by Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick (1996; 2001). More recent-

ly Jonathan Powell, a key figure in the peace process of the 1990s, has added to these accounts (2008). Nonetheless, there is much that remains unclear. Peter Taylor's accounts of the activities of Brendan Duddy, the man he calls 'the contact' or 'the link' fit with Powell's account but are sometimes difficult to reconcile with the account in Mallie and McKittrick's *Endgame in Ireland* of the work of 'the link'. There is also continuing disagreement on the character of these contacts. Most recently dissident Irish republicans opposed to the peace process have begun to characterise this channel as the key mechanism through which Sinn Féin was duped into surrender by the British government, or even as the key mechanism by which British intelligence agencies penetrated the leadership of the IRA. Messages passed through this channel were also at the heart of renewed public controversy in 2006 and 2008 over the IRA hunger strike of 1981.

When these contacts were first revealed in 1993 public debate centred around whether contact between the British government and Republicans began in that year or whether it should be dated back to 1990. Taylor and Mallie and McKittrick's accounts made it clear that in fact it dated back to the early 1970s. The channel used during the peace process of the 1990s was the same channel used for intermittent bargaining in 1973, for sustained official dialogue in 1974 and 1975 and for negotiations during the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981.

This paper begins by outlining the origins of this channel and identifies some of the key elements that were present from the very beginning. It goes on to address two key issues in relation to this channel. It examines the extent to which this was a primary and privileged channel of communication that took precedence over other means of communication, and the relationship between this channel and tensions between opposing policy tendencies within the British state.

## Origins

The deployment of British troops in Belfast and Derry in August 1969 was accompanied by increased British government involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland. As senior British officials steered the Unionist government towards reforms in policing and other areas, the British government established the office of United Kingdom Representative in Northern Ireland. The UK representative was to provide political counsel to the British government and to British military commanders in Northern Ireland and to liaise with the Unionist government. This new office was headed successively by senior British diplomats with extensive international experience and was strongly associated with Britain's

Foreign Office. It was also strongly associated with MI6, the Secret Intelligence Service of the Foreign Office. In the course of 1970 and 1971 the UK Representative’s office gradually became more important as conflict escalated and the British government began to consider taking direct control of Northern Ireland.

We can identify a number of key characteristics of this office that were present from the earliest stage. The first was the fact that the UK representative provided a direct channel of communication to the highest levels of the British government, a direct route to the home secretary and when necessary to the British Prime Minister. As such, the UK representative’s office acted as the principal channel of communication between the Unionist government of Northern Ireland and the centres of power in London. At the same time, the office had a remit to act as a channel for direct communication between representatives of the Catholic minority and the government in London that effectively bypassed the Northern Ireland government at Stormont and was often conducted secretly.

It was in the office of the UK representative that this channel of communication with the IRA originated. Crucial to the development of this channel was the relationship between this office and Chief Superintendent Frank Lagan, commander of the RUC in Derry, who promoted a strongly conciliatory policy in the city and who maintained regular contacts with a wide range of forces in the Catholic community.

In August 1971, as violence in Northern Ireland escalated in the wake of internment, UK representative Howard Smith travelled to Derry with the GOC, General Harry Tuzo, the head of the British army in Northern Ireland. Like his predecessors, Smith was a senior Foreign Office diplomat. He went on to act as British ambassador in Moscow and subsequently became Director-General of MI5. Frank Lagan arranged for them to meet a group of Catholic moderates who opposed the harshly repressive security measures in force in the city and urged restraint on the army. For these senior figures who were used to constant pressure from the Unionist government for greater repression, this was a rare opportunity to experience the depth of fury within the Catholic community at the effects of repression. In direct response to the urgings of Chief Superintendent Lagan, General Tuzo agreed to significantly restrain army activity in the city if the moderates would use their influence to try to prevent violence. This agreement subsequently drew furious criticism from the Unionist government and Tuzo and Smith came under huge pressure to bring it to an end. It is striking that this deal, aimed at reducing violence on the ground by restraining security force activity, was brokered between local Catholic representatives and senior British political and military figures at a time when the Unionist government was still officially in control of

security. It illustrates both the power of the UK representative's office in shaping security policy at the highest level, and its role in dealing directly with elements of the minority community.

In October 1971 Frank Steele was appointed as deputy to Howard Smith. Steele was an MI6 agent and his remit extended far beyond his public role. His reports on the meetings of the Joint Security Committee that decided security policy in Northern Ireland in late 1971 illustrate the extent to which he and Smith were the voice of the British government in Northern Ireland, wielding a great deal of power (see file CJ4/82 at the UK National Archives). Simultaneously he was involved in contact with oppositional forces on the ground and with a range of opinion in the minority Catholic community from a very early stage. In one communication to London in November 1971 for example, he mentions "...conversations during the last few days [on policing], for example in Londonderry yesterday afternoon with a group of people who included Catholics (admittedly moderate ones) living in or working in Creggan" (Steele to Woodfield, 1 November 1971). Creggan at that stage was a no go area surrounded by barricades, behind which the IRA operated openly.

Given that Howard Smith had dealt directly with Frank Lagan in brokering a major negotiated compromise in Derry in August 1971, and given Lagan's strong contacts in the Catholic community it seems highly likely that it was through Lagan that Steele was meeting Catholics from Creggan on occasions like this, particularly since policing was the topic of discussion. Thus, it seems highly likely that contact between Lagan and Steele began almost immediately after Steele arrived in Northern Ireland. The bridge that Lagan provided between the UK representative's office and elements in the Catholic community in Derry was central to the subsequent development of the channel of communication between the British government and the Provisional IRA.

As one of the few senior Catholic RUC officers Frank Lagan had been appointed to head the RUC in Derry in 1970 in order to rebuild relationships with the Catholic community. He had extensive personal connections in the city. In a sense he was the representative of a conciliatory reformist policy originating in London in 1969 and strongly opposed by many Unionists. Lagan promoted a policy of restraint in the city that by late 1971 was at odds with the increasingly repressive thrust of British government policy and was the subject of public criticism by unionists. His extensive informal, and often secret, links in the Catholic community stretched as far as the Official Republican movement whose armed wing was then engaged in an armed campaign against the state (Ó Dochartaigh 2005; 269-89).

Throughout the early 1970s Lagan came under intense pressure from other elements in the security forces and from Unionist politicians. In the wake of Bloody Sunday, when Lagan made determined efforts to avert confrontation, there were suggestions from senior military figures that he was too sympathetic to the Catholic community and that he should resign. Despite this, Lagan was promoted and remained in charge in Derry until the mid 1970s. According to Brendan Duddy, one of Lagan’s key contacts in the Catholic community “Lagan’s power did not come from Derry”. That is, it did not derive from his position in the RUC but, according to Duddy, from the direct protection and support of MI6 agent Frank Steele. While Lagan’s conciliatory approach was opposed by other powerful elements within the security forces, it enjoyed secret support at the highest levels of the British administration in Northern Ireland (Duddy, personal interviews).

Brendan Duddy was a local businessman who had been active in the civil rights campaign in the city. He was a member of the Derry police liaison committee in 1971 and, as such, part of an extensive group of moderate Catholics in the city who were prepared to work with the kind of reformist and conciliatory state forces personified by Frank Lagan. According to Duddy’s account he worked closely and secretly with Frank Lagan to attempt to try to prevent the escalation of violence in the city, through maintaining strong lines of communication and often through restraining security force activity. It appears that through these contacts a strong relationship of trust was built up. This relationship between Lagan and Duddy was crucial to the establishment of the channel of communication. Duddy had strong connections to Official Republicans and to senior Provisional Republican leadership figures. Given the strength of his existing relationship with Lagan and the degree of trust established, Duddy provided a potential bridge between the reformist edge of the security forces and figures involved in the highest levels of the Provisional republican movement (Duddy, personal interviews).

After the introduction of direct rule from London in March 1972, the office of the UK representative became division three of the Northern Ireland Office, based at Laneside in north Co. Down and staffed by Foreign Office officials. Laneside became a centre for informal and often secret meetings between these officials and a wide range of forces across the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. Steele subsequently acted as the main British representative in the brokering of the Provisional IRA ceasefire of June 1972. The initial secret meeting between Steele and another British representative and two Provisional Republican representatives, Daithí Ó Conaill and Gerry Adams, took place on the outskirts of Derry city (Woodfield, 21 June 1972) and it seems certain that Lagan

as the local RUC commander, was involved in the practicalities of these arrangements. After the breakdown of this ceasefire and the revelation of the secret talks between the IRA and the British government, British representatives were barred from further contact with the Provisional IRA (Taylor 1988: 166).

Despite this ban on contact, several approaches were made to Steele in late 1972 by people offering to act as intermediaries with the Provisional IRA. In one case, Steele rejected such an approach on the basis that even indirect contact "...might be held to be tantamount to negotiating with the IRA" (Steele, 28 November 1972). Despite the political fallout from the June 1972 ceasefire, Steele clearly remained the key point of contact for secret approaches in relation to the Provisional IRA, and he appeared to enjoy a high level of authority in dealing with these approaches. Thus, in rejecting one approach he notes that "...there was no need to use my status as an official who had to seek instructions to stall with them to get further information (as there had been in the case of Mr. McAteer)". Despite the rejection of these approaches, Steele nonetheless offered answers to some of the questions posed by those seeking to act as intermediaries and suggested in late 1972 that it might be useful to have "...an assessment of these various approaches" (Steele, 28 November 1972). Despite the ban on contact with the IRA it appears that the British government maintained an interest in such approaches and that Steele remained the key contact for any such approaches.

It appears that some time in early 1972 Frank Lagan introduced Frank Steele to Brendan Duddy in Derry. On perhaps the first occasion when Duddy acted to indirectly convey a message from Steele to the IRA, Frank Lagan asked Duddy to ensure that IRA weapons be removed from the Free Derry area prior to Operation Motorman in July 1972, and indicated that the request came from Frank Steele (Duddy, personal interviews). Regular contact through this channel did not begin under Steele however but under his successor. In 1973 Frank Lagan introduced Duddy to Steele's successor, MI6 agent Michael Oatley. By late 1973 this channel of communication was in regular use.

The involvement of Frank Lagan in the establishment of this channel locates this initiative at the interface between the Catholic community and conciliatory pro-reform elements of the security forces and the state who were themselves involved in a major internal struggle against elements in the security forces that were much more enthusiastic about repression, and much more sympathetic to the political position of Unionists. From the beginning, the channel was associated with a tendency within the security forces and the British state that was less convinced of the effectiveness of repression, more aware of the dangers of alienat-

ing the minority community, and more willing to conciliate than other tendencies were. One of the most important reasons why knowledge of this channel was so tightly restricted on the British side was the fact that there were such powerful forces within the security forces and the government opposed to such an approach and arguing for the necessity for increased repression. To a certain degree, a preference for conciliation and compromise was built into the very existence of such a channel.

Through Steele’s involvement the genesis of this channel can be traced back to the original remit of the UK representative’s office to feed back the input of a range of forces in the Catholic community directly to the centre of power in London, serving as a direct route between oppositional forces of all kinds and the very highest levels of the British government.

## **A Primary ‘Official’ Channel**

Given the secrecy surrounding contact between the British government and the IRA, a secrecy that ensured that only a few people on either side of the divide were aware of the existence of such contact, a central difficulty for both sides was ensuring that they were talking to the right people, that the chain of communication reached up to the highest levels at the other end of the chain. When the Provisionals asked British representatives during their first secret contacts in 1972 how they could be sure the British government had agreed to the terms for their proposed ceasefire for example, they were not willing to accept personal assurances. Instead it was agreed that a specific phrase inserted into a speech in the House of Commons by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw would indicate government assent, and provide proof to the IRA that they were dealing with the highest levels of the British government (Ó Brádaigh, personal interview).

For the British government too, knowing if they were talking to the right people was a key consideration, given the internal divisions within the IRA. Rejecting one overture from intermediaries in late 1972 Frank Steele argued that “...there was not any one man or group in the IRA who were both willing and able to deliver an effective and lasting ceasefire” (Steele, 28 November 1972). There was no point in negotiating with people who did not have the power within their organization to deliver.

Contacts through the new channel in 1973 and 1974, resulting as they did in the release of people held captive by the IRA (Taylor 1998; 170-1; Ó Brádaigh, personal interview), demonstrated to the British government that those at the other end of this channel were in a position to exert power within the Provisional IRA, delivering outcomes that clearly

required the exertion of power at high levels within their organizations. It confirmed that this channel reached directly to the top of the IRA's command structure. Much of the value of this channel rested with the simple fact that it provided a guaranteed route of communication to the IRA Army Council and to those in a position to make the decisions.

Given this need to maintain contact with the right people, it was in the interests of both sides that there be a single authoritative channel of communication. In the early 1970s several different people sought to act, and occasionally acted, as intermediaries between elements in the British government and various figures within the IRA. In some accounts of the peace process the channel of communication discussed here is treated as one of a number of channels, simply one route among several (Moloney 2002). I want to suggest here, that despite the existence of various other channels over the years, this channel enjoyed primacy and acted as a kind of official channel of communication.

One of the most striking pieces of evidence for the primacy of this channel, comes from Ruairí Ó Brádaigh. Ó Brádaigh describes how, at one stage in the early 1970s, the Provisional leadership sent a message through an alternative channel as well as through 'the contact', in order to ensure that the message reached the intended recipient, the British Prime Minister. According to Ó Brádaigh they then received a message from the British government through the contact, Duddy, requesting that they not use alternative channels again, but that they communicate only through Duddy. For Ó Brádaigh this confirmed that messages through the contact were reaching their intended recipient and confirmed the primacy of this channel (personal interview).

The need to maintain a single authoritative channel also had implications for the way in which the channel operated. While some accounts of the channel have characterized it as involving a group of three intermediaries, the 'Derry link' (Mallie and McKittrick 1996; 2001), other accounts, including Peter Taylor's, describe the activities of a single individual. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh confirms Taylor's account, that the contact was a single individual, and argues that there is a very simple practical reason why a single individual acted as intermediary, that the nature of the communication required a simple clear route and that multiple voices would have caused confusion (personal interview). While other individuals were intimately involved in the operation of this channel and in the practicalities of communication, it was a single individual, Brendan Duddy, who acted as the key intermediary.

The detailed accounts of the way in which this channel operated in the 1990s provide strong evidence of the centrality and the primacy of this channel despite the fact that a variety of other initiatives to establish



dialogue and communication were underway. Mallie and McKittrick’s account in *Endgame in Ireland* presents a picture of a channel of communication that was managed in the early 1990s by the most senior civil servant and the most senior MI5 figure in Northern Ireland under the direct control of the secretary of state for Northern Ireland and that, in a few short steps, connected the IRA Army Council to British Prime Minister John Major, quite unlike any of the other routes of communication in existence.

Given the character of this channel as a primary official route between the IRA and the British government, valuable for the fact that it reached to the centres of power on both sides, the use of the channel itself constituted a very powerful signal, indicating a seriousness of intent that was not conveyed by public speeches and written statements.

## **Internal Divisions**

Contact through this channel can be very revealing of the internal divisions that constrained both the British government and the IRA. While both sides had an interest in emphasizing the internal difficulties they faced in making compromises, it is clear that these internal divisions often constituted a major obstacle to compromise. I want to look here briefly at what they tell us about internal divisions on the British side.

From the beginning of direct British government involvement in Northern Ireland in 1969 there was a tension between two competing political priorities, the need to restore public order and the sovereignty of the state on the one hand, and the need to conciliate the Catholic minority on the other. While these aims were inter-related there was also a clear tension between them. In the course of the conflict the balance between these two priorities regularly shifted. In the early stages, for example, there was a consensus that reform and conciliation was the priority. As the IRA campaign gathered strength in 1971 the dominant consensus shifted towards repression, and reform even came to be seen as destabilizing and dangerous, to the extent that it encouraged further challenges to state power.

Although the consensus shifted in response to events, certain individuals and agencies remained persistently identified with these competing priorities. Thus, Chief Superintendent Frank Lagan, appointed to Derry when the dominant consensus supported conciliatory measures aimed at winning Catholic support for the security forces, remained an agent of and an advocate of that approach even after the dominant consensus had changed. Similarly, during periods of conciliation, powerful forces within the security forces expressed their discontent and pushed

for a change in policy. Thus the comment by General Robert Ford, Commander Land Forces in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s that he ‘hated every minute’ of the low profile approach adopted by the army in early 1972 in order to reduce Catholic alienation in the wake of Bloody Sunday (Ford, interview with Desmond Hamill).

And while some agencies such as the RUC Special Branch were clearly identified with the aim of militarily defeating the IRA, agencies such as the UK Representative’s Office became associated with a more conciliatory approach and a concern to avoid the intensification of Catholic hostility to the state.

Inherent in the prioritizing of conciliation was a willingness to consider major reform to the state, and significant political compromise. Divisions within the security forces and within the state were directly related to the tension between these two competing priorities. Inherent in the channel of communication with the IRA was a commitment to restrain or reduce security force activity and to reduce repression in response to IRA actions, to concede to the IRA, in however small a way. For those committed to this approach these concessions were justified by the benefits they brought, in reducing violence, in contributing to the conciliation of the minority, in possibly laying the foundations for a political compromise and a lasting peace. For those who opposed such contacts, the very fact that compromise was inherent in such contact damned them as a concession to ‘terrorism’. The very existence of such a channel ran counter to the commitment of large sections of the state and its security forces to a military defeat of the IRA, and a policy that regarded widespread Catholic alienation as the acceptable price of successful repressing the challenge from the IRA.

Opposition to the kinds of concessions made through this channel was at times intense. In the course of secret negotiations between the British government and the Provisional Republicans in 1975, the British government gradually released large numbers of internees. In retrospect this has been characterized as a clever ploy to gain concessions from the IRA in return for a phasing out of internment that the British government was determined to bring about in any case. This view assimilates the concessions made through this channel to a repressive security approach to the conflict. However, this view underestimates the extent of resistance to these releases, a resistance openly expressed at the time by the British Army GOC Frank King who characterized the IRA ceasefire as a ploy by the IRA to regroup (Lee 1989; 450). Brendan Duddy argues that every single concession on prisoners made during the talks in 1975 involved intense struggle, that cases were dealt with individually and that the evidence against individual internees was discussed (Duddy, person-

al interviews). The extent to which concessions on the issue of prisoners were far from inevitable is illustrated by the fact that in certain key cases the British representatives stated that these concessions could not be made because of the intensity of resistance on their side. Thus, the attempts by Republican negotiators to secure the transfer of hunger-striker Frank Stagg to a prison in Ireland failed as the British negotiators argued that they could not overcome resistance to the move within the British government (O Brádaigh papers). Frank Stagg subsequently died, the first Republican hunger-striker to die since the 1940s, an outcome that arguably was just as much against the interests of the British government as the continued detention of internees. And although the ending of internment can be characterized as a calculated move influenced primarily by security considerations, for decades afterwards elements within the security forces argued that they were fighting ‘with one hand behind their back’, that the IRA could be quickly and easily crushed through a burst of severe repression, and that the reintroduction of internment was the key to this.

The argument that the key to ending the conflict was intensified repression and the military defeat of the IRA enjoyed continuing and significant support within the security forces and the British administration. Thus, at the same time as the British government was secretly reopening contact with the Provisional Republicans in 1991, a senior British army officer told Mallie and McKittrick “If we don’t intern it’s long haul... You can break up the command structure by picking up key individuals... I would say to Peter Brooke (NI SOS), we can deliver, given a favorable or at least not unhelpful climate in the south; and if you can keep the Americans off our backs, and deal with the EC and the human rights people and so on... and if you do that you’ve brought peace” (Mallie and McKittrick, 1996: 126-7). That is, there were still strong voices arguing in the 1990s that the conflict could and should be brought to an end through a burst of intense repression and who dismissed the idea that the IRA would end its campaign after a process of negotiation. Increased repression remained a serious alternative option right up to the very end. It was a realistic enough prospect that when news first broke of the secret contacts with the IRA in 1993 and the head of Government Information Services in Northern Ireland received an urgent call, his first thought was that internment had been reintroduced and that he was being called in to deal with the consequences (Mallie and McKittrick, 1996: 237).

At this distance it is difficult to recall the strength of opposition to any kind of contact with the IRA and the intensity of the internal opposition that must have been faced by those who advocated such contacts. According to Brendan Duddy, for example, Michael Oatley “... was trying to get

permission” to open contact with the IRA from the very beginning but was facing strong opposition (Duddy, personal interviews). The role of MI6 and MI5 agents in actively influencing and shaping policy through the assessments they made, rather than simply following government direction, is also evident in the process by which contact was opened again in 1990 and 1991. Thus when Peter Brooke made a public speech carefully and deliberately signalling the willingness to take an ‘imaginative’ approach if the IRA campaign came to an end, and refusing to rule out future talks with Sinn Féin, he did so on the basis of intelligence reports of fresh thinking within the IRA (Mallie and McKittrick, 1996: 101-2). By Brooke’s account, the intelligence services’ analysis of the IRA was the crucial factor in producing this significant shift in British policy. In a sense we can see this as a major policy shift driven by the intelligence services, as opposition to such an initiative weakened towards the end of Margaret Thatcher’s term of office.

And the story of how the channel of communication was reopened also illustrates the important role of the intelligence agencies in steering and shaping policy. According to Peter Brooke, John Deverell, the head of MI5 in Northern Ireland, asked him for permission to designate a substitute for Michael Oatley who was retiring, a person who would continue Oatley’s role as a contact with Brendan Duddy, and via Duddy to Sinn Féin and ultimately the IRA. Brooke’s account presents the decision as a technical issue, replacing one agent with another (Mallie and McKittrick 2001: 88). But although Oatley had maintained contact with Duddy, and Duddy had maintained contact with the Provisional Republican leadership throughout the preceding years, the channel had apparently not been used since 1981. That is, in suggesting the designation of a successor to Oatley, the head of MI5 in Northern Ireland was not simply dealing with a technical issue but taking a significant political initiative by effectively proposing the reopening of a channel of communication that had been dormant for a decade, in response to the indications that the IRA might be willing to end its campaign. While this proposal could certainly be justified on technical grounds as a potentially effective way to bring the conflict to an end, there is no doubt either that it was directly contrary to the preferences of other powerful elements in the security forces and the state that favored increased repression, and that rejected the prospect of compromising with and negotiating with the Provisional Republicans.

One of the clearest indications that the use of this channel was the outcome of internal struggles came after this channel had been exposed to public view. In the wake of the 1994 IRA ceasefire, as the British government insisted that the IRA decommission its weapons before the peace process went any further, Michael Oatley made a rare contribu-

tion to the public debate, arguing strongly for the British government to moderate its position (Oatley 1999). His arguments fitted well with the dominant consensus among moderate Irish nationalists at the time, and ran counter to the arguments of the British government. It provided a public glimpse of the kind of arguments that Oatley and others involved in this channel must have been engaged in internally in their efforts to persuade others that negotiation and communication with the IRA might provide a path to the resolution of the conflict.

The depth of the divisions between opposing tendencies within the security forces is nicely captured by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh’s account of his arrest by the RUC in Co. Armagh after the ending of secret contact with the British government in early 1976. In the course of the truce the RUC, dominated by Northern Irish Protestants, many of whom were strongly Unionist in their sympathies, had carried out certain actions that seemed deliberately calculated to disrupt the IRA ceasefire and it seems clear that there was strong opposition within the RUC to the ceasefire arrangements. According to Ó Brádaigh his RUC interrogators were intensely interested in his contacts with the British government and questioned him extensively about them, asking him “What were you saying to the British?” According to Ó Brádaigh the interrogators expressed opinions along the lines of “this is all very fine but we are going to be left high and dry”, expressing the fear that the British government was thinking of withdrawing from Northern Ireland. Ó Brádaigh was subsequently released from RUC custody. He received a call from Duddy some time afterwards who told him that “My friends have been reading the transcripts of your interview. They are very pleased...that you committed no indiscretions” (Ó Brádaigh, personal interview). Ó Brádaigh’s evidence on this point presents a picture of deep division within the state, between agencies identified with opposing policy tendencies and political preferences.

## Conclusion

The importance of the channel of communication described here rests above all with the fact that it was a primary privileged channel of communication that reached by a few short steps from the leadership of the IRA to the British Prime Minister. Both the IRA and the British government used this channel to initiate contact in 1980 and 1990 respectively, after long periods when it was dormant, because it was a proven way to reach those at the very top on the other side. Given this fact, there was no point in using other channels of communication. It was used so rarely and intermittently partly because its very use involved major political

risks, not only for the British government but also for IRA leaders who had seen the leadership of the 1970s discredited within the movement because of the contacts they had engaged in through this channel (Bishop and Mallie 1988; 275-9). The very fact of communication through this channel served to indicate seriousness and a willingness to compromise. The use of this channel at various periods can be seen as an achievement of a policy tendency that prioritized conciliation and that sought to mitigate minority hostility to the state, in opposition to other powerful tendencies that prioritized the short-term restoration of order and often regarded minority hostility as a price worth paying to secure that. The origins of this channel in the UK representative's office, an office dominated by Foreign Office diplomats, wielding immense power, but also centrally concerned with addressing the grievances of the minority and acting to channel the opinions of that minority to London, give it a particular political character.

This channel was associated with agencies and individuals that gave a higher priority than other agencies to conciliating the minority community, not least because of a concern to maintain good relations with the Republic of Ireland and a concern with the United Kingdom's standing in the wider world. Ultimately the use of this channel represented a hard-won victory for a policy tendency that was prepared to restrain repression and that was ultimately prepared to make significant compromises in order to secure a lasting peace.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the National University of Ireland, Galway Millenium fund and the USC Center for Public Diplomacy for travel funding to allow me to present this paper at the 'Track Two to Peace?' conference at USC. A special thanks to Josh Fouts and to Daniel Sokatch and Dana Reinhardt for their company and hospitality. Thanks too to Nicholas Cull and Joseph Popiolkowski for the work they put into the organization of the conference.

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# **‘We don’t care if they’re terrorists’: Sinn Féin in Anglo-American Relations, from Clinton to Bush**

Timothy J. Lynch

## **Introduction**

This paper explores U.S. policy toward Sinn Féin, Ireland’s largest republican party, in two episodes: 1) the British government’s over-reaction to the initial Gerry Adams visa in 1994; and 2) the response of the Bush administration to news of IRA-FARC intrigue in 2001. I make two central arguments. First, that British diplomacy was essentially negligible in both episodes; American diplomacy or American power was the explanatory variable in each case. And, second, that both administrations have been complicit, with successive British governments, in the destruction of middle ground politics in Northern Ireland – an ironic by-product of a war on terror waged against extremes. In making these arguments I will suggest that the genesis of ‘track-two diplomacy’ in the Northern Ireland peace process is misunderstood leading to its explanatory power being overstated.

## **Adams Visa**

The granting of a 48-hour entry visa to Gerry Adams upset London, its press and government, very much indeed. Clinton, of course, was not the first U.S. president to do something the British did not like. Eisenhower

confronted the British government over Suez in 1956. Reagan failed to inform Margaret Thatcher about his rescue mission to the British Commonwealth island of Grenada in 1983. George Bush gave his war a name New Labour never liked. Clinton was however the first president to interfere in Northern Ireland, as much a part of the UK constitutionally as is England, Scotland and Wales, as LA is part of the United States.

British diplomats expressed astonishment that no IRA ceasefire preceded the visa which, according to John Major, actually delayed by seven months that eventual, partial ceasefire on August 31, 1994 (broken February 9, 1996 when the IRA bombed Canary Wharf and again just over a week later when a London double-decker bus was blown up – apparently accidentally – and again on June 15, when they attacked Manchester city centre).<sup>1</sup> Clinton's decision – presented to him as a 'win-win' scenario – was communicated to the British embassy via Reuters.<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Office was apoplectic. 'This was an unacceptable way to proceed,' said the British ambassador Robin Renwick. 'It was absurd to lay down conditions for the granting of a visa, and then still to grant it when, manifestly, the conditions had not been met.'<sup>3</sup>

One of the world's most 'formidable diplomatic services,' (the words of a former Irish ambassador to the U.S.)<sup>4</sup> was reduced to bluster, outsmarted by a handful of Irish-American activists who found an administration receptive to their cause. According to Nancy Soderberg, NSC staff director:

When the President ultimately decided to go with the visa, the entire State Department just had a fit as did the entire British Empire and they were so angry about it they just really weren't capable of coordinating anything more . . . They just hated the [visa] idea. They thought we were nuts.<sup>5</sup>

British arguments against the visa failed for good realist and good political reasons: the UK government's power was insufficient – even on an issue as close to it as Northern Ireland – to affect a change in American thinking. Indeed, the heated response merely served to convince Clinton officials that proximity to the Troubles – a key British diplomat during the visa episode was the cousin of a man killed by the IRA<sup>6</sup> – had blinded London to their resolution. 'Calm down. We are here to help,' was the implicit message the White House was sending out. Major, of course, had hardly bought himself favors with the new administration by authorizing a search of Clinton's 1960s passport record during the election.

Whilst the Clinton intercession is praiseworthy on a number of levels it is susceptible to the charge, which has only grown with

hindsight, that it failed to turn the screws on Sinn Féin as the British had demanded and expected. Again, British influence was insufficient to transform American appeasement of Irish republicanism into something more robust. (In time, even the British government came to learn that appeasement and concession bought peace.) There are several factors, beyond the essential power differential and personal animosities, that explain Clinton’s reluctance to put the squeeze on. First, he did not have to: the IRA delivered a ceasefire to order. The Good Friday Agreement followed within five years; and a disjointed power-sharing continues today. Lives were undoubtedly saved.

Second, though Irish republicanism is rhetorically opposed to most of America’s foreign agenda (see pretty much any edition of *An Phoblacht*; the movement was predictably outraged by the Iraq war, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and the use of Shannon airport by U.S. forces on route to the Middle East) it has always been extremely careful not to kill Americas and thereby harm its Irish American base. The only American citizen to be killed in the Troubles was a shopper in Harrods in December 1983.<sup>7</sup> Being anti-American is, of course, no crime. What shifted American attitudes, if only temporarily, was 8/11, when Sinn Féin intrigue with a group that had killed American became public.

## **8/11 not 9/11**

On August 11, 2001 three Irishmen – James Monaghan, Niall Connolly and Martin McCauley – traveling under false passports, were arrested by Colombian authorities as they left a jungle area – ‘a Marxist ruritania’<sup>8</sup> – controlled by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), an anti-government, anti-American, cocaine-producing, ‘renegade and terrorist group’ (Bush).<sup>9</sup> They skipped bail and in their absence were sentenced to 17 years imprisonment for lending bomb making expertise to FARC,<sup>10</sup> a group responsible for the targeting of U.S. personnel and listed, alphabetically, after the Real IRA on the State Department’s List of Designated Terrorist Organizations. All three were active or recently active members of Sinn Féin – admittedly a broad church but members nonetheless.

Unlike the IRA, the Colombian group was designated a direct threat to the ‘security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States.’<sup>11</sup> The definition is the State Department’s. Again, actualized threat and/or the targeting of American personnel and populations will harden American attitudes to terrorism and has formal, legal import. The enemy-of-my-friend doctrine, however, does not oblige a legal response. U.S. support

for the British line – which Clinton had already rendered very flexible – depended on diplomatic will, personality and context; it can be, and in this episode was, a transitory phenomenon.

Richard Haass, the Bush envoy to Northern Ireland at the time, gave a flavor of what a hard-line attitude to Irish republicanism might look like. As the 9/11 hijackers boarded their planes, the following exchange took place between Haass and Gerry Adams:

After a few minutes of talking about ‘inching forward’ the peace process, Haass . . . eyes blazing . . . finally snapped. ‘If any American, service personnel or civilian, is killed in Colombia by the technology the IRA supplied then you can fuck off,’ he shouted, finger jabbing towards Adams’ chest. ‘Don’t tell me you know nothing about what’s going on there, we know everything about it.’<sup>12</sup>

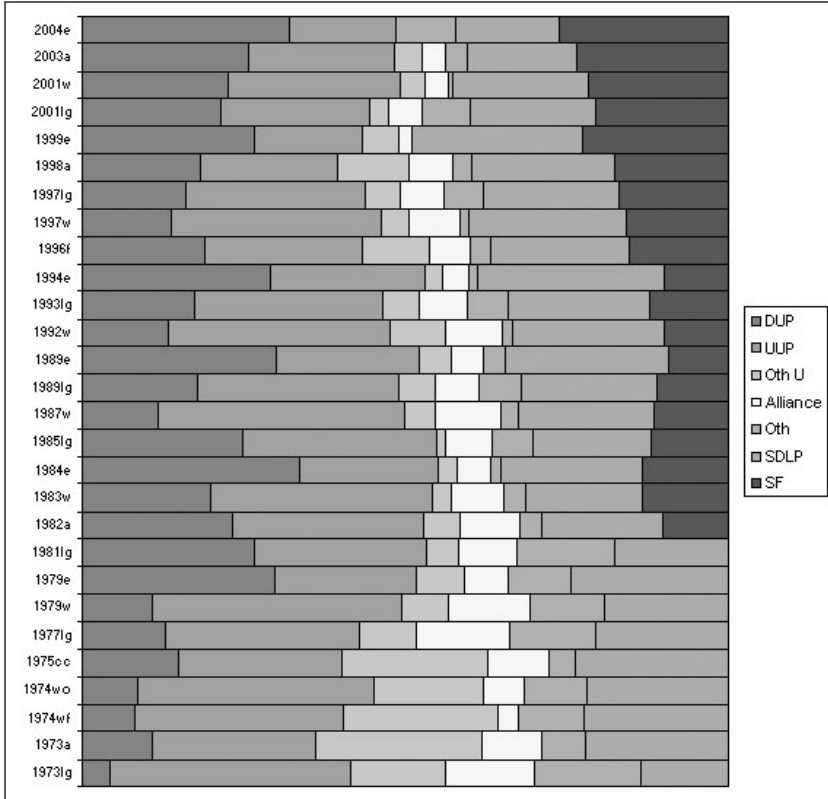
9/11 provided a rhetorical context to turn the screws on Sinn Féin but it was 8/11 that forced a revised American posture. Without IRA-FARC intrigue, revealed (if not proven then or thereafter) on August 11, 2001 the American line would have likely *not* changed. The Bush administration changed its emphasis as a direct result of 8/11. It was more willing to threaten Sinn Féin and less keen to appease it. British diplomacy was irrelevant to this decision.

8/11+9/11 (not 9/11 in isolation) caused the IRA to ‘bite the bullet’ said SF’s U.S. representative Rita O’Hare and its offer to ‘deal in pure politics.’<sup>13</sup> Again, the paramilitaries responded to the rare application U.S. pressure (governmental and from within the Irish American community), despite British pressure, not because of it. This invites the ironic conclusion that the peace process has produced paramilitary concessions – a ceasefire in 1994 and an act of decommissioning in 2001 – when the British line is ignored. The IRA has shown itself susceptible to threat but only when the threat is American – never when it has been British or Irish. Why America consistently fails to realize its enormous power potential is a mystery fundamental to the study of its foreign policy. American foreign policy is often the sin of omission.

## **No More Middle Ground**

In W. B. Yeats poem ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold’.<sup>14</sup> This famous line invites consideration of a more problematic consequence of the U.S.-backed peace process: the destruction of the middle ground of Northern Ireland politics. As peace advanced, the two centre parties retreated. The greatest electoral rewards after 1994 have been for those

parties on the far ends of the Northern Ireland political spectrum. The UUP and SDLP, once the polity’s first and second parties, are now increasingly moribund in third and fourth place. The chart below shows election results in Northern Ireland since 1973 – and how the centre has been squeezed.<sup>15</sup>



The UUP’s former leader and jumper-in-chief is now a British Tory peer. The Democratic Unionists (DUP) and Sinn Féin, the two parties defined in antithesis to one another, are now first and second – and look set to remain so. The power-sharing of the extremes. This is the dynamic the peace process has generated and that the supposedly anti-extremist war on terror has done little to check.

As Christopher Hitchens observed:

Both [Adams and Paisley] have been photographed carrying coffins

at political funerals – funerals that were at one time the main cultural activity in each of their ‘communities.’ One day, their private role in filling those coffins will be fully exposed. In the meantime, they are the recognized and designated peacemakers. If you can bring yourself to applaud this, you are a masochist clapping a well-matched pair of sadists . . . [This phoney photo-op made] me want to spew.<sup>16</sup>

Seamus Mallon, the SDLP’s deputy first minister in the power-sharing assembly established in 1998, has – more diplomatically – bemoaned this state of affairs. Too much of Washington, London, and Dublin’s efforts went into keeping the extremes happy at the price of the centre-ground. The obsession with a *peace* process – to the point of its deification – has reduced violence but at the price of the long-term *political* process which rests now on two mutually antagonistic parties, ‘full of passionate intensity’.

Ponder the model the peace process has delivered up: First, ‘include the extremes.’ Second, reassure the middle. Third, appease the extremes. Fourth, sell-out the middle. Fifth, hope for the best. Sixth, and finally, do this all the under the rubric of ‘track two diplomacy.’ This, as Paul Bew, has argued, is no model at all.<sup>17</sup>

Consider its application in the war on terror: Forsake the forces of Arab moderation, as both realists and left-liberals now demand in Iraq. Appease the jihadists. Hope for the best. According to journalist Peter Taylor there is a strategic equivalence between the terrorists of Belfast and of Baghdad. If the first can be talked into peace so can the second.<sup>18</sup> Again, the ‘*we don’t care if they are terrorists*’ approach. Since, the theory goes, terrorism is a consequence of western failure, its amelioration can be achieved by western penitence and appeasement. ‘As Kevin Myers pointed out, [NI] is the only war in history in which one state paid family benefits to both sides. It is an example of the difficulties faced by a liberal state, the UK – weakened by historic guilt – in dealing with the terrorist extra-legal campaign.’<sup>19</sup>

Northern Ireland is too discreet, too historically specific, too odd to be modeled – despite its recurrent and increasing citation at conflict resolution conferences. Its appeal comes from its uniqueness not its general applicability. The last conflict between English speaking peoples; the most comfortable ‘war’ to study (its scholars can stay at the plush Europa Hotel and journey into and out of conflicted zones with ease).

What the modelers miss was the efficacy of war, of fighting, as a means to bring terrorists to the table. *It was not track two* that divested the IRA of their guns but a bloody, brutal campaign waged against them by British loyalists in the decade before the ceasefire (see following figure).



Somewhere along the line it has been forgotten that killing terrorists might be a necessary first step to talking to them. If the Northern Ireland peace process offers any model it is surely this one. The channeling of leadership into ‘track-two’ was presaged not by the utility of dialogue but, rather, by the recognition of the futility of violence. Violence made track two possible. There would have been no track two (and no conference here today) but for this uncomfortable feature of the peace process.

## Conclusion

It is difficult, of course, after 9/11 not to view subsequent American foreign policy except through the prism of that day. However, Bush’s assessment of Sinn Féin was more altered by 8/11 than by the Al Qaeda strikes one month later. Despite a war on terror, Sinn Féin has suffered little in terms of American censure because the party has defended terror tactics in the past; the war on terror alone was not enough to move the IRA towards politics. Bush’s engagement in the peace process, despite my own predictions, was not changed by the T word and the centrality 9/11 gave it – he even visited Northern Ireland in April 2003. Yes, Adams has been excluded from the White House on St. Patrick’s day but so have his political opponents. Substantially, diplomatically, institutionally, Bush has done very little different in Northern Ireland because of 9/11.

The speeches of his envoys are safe to the point tedium. Differentiating between the scripts of Richard Haass, Mitchell Reiss, or Paula Dobriansky, ‘ambassadors’ to Northern Ireland – three otherwise accomplished scholars, the incumbent a neoconservative – is a fruitless task. It was

not 9/11 but 8/11 that offered the U.S. a new, forceful strategy, quickly abandoned, for dealing with Sinn Féin. Clinton's engagement with Sinn Féin was possible because 'We don't care if they're terrorists. The IRA is separate and distinct.'<sup>20</sup> Bush's response has been similar, 'We don't care so long as my good friend Tony Blair doesn't either.'

This posture is better explained by realism. States act first and last to make themselves secure in an international arena in which such security is tenuous. When security is threatened they maximize their influence. When security is a non-factor – as it was for the U.S. in the entire period of the Troubles – influence is minimized so as to avoid entanglement. American calculation over Sinn Féin was rational before it was moral, and moral, therefore, only in service of the highest morality: national security.

## Notes

1. See <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996Report/europe.html>
2. See Timothy J. Lynch, *Turf War: The Clinton Administration and Northern Ireland* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 37.
3. Renwick, Robin. 'The Search for Peace in Northern Ireland,' manuscript in preparation for publication, 2000, 220.
4. Author interview, Aug. 25, 2001.
5. Author interview with Soderberg, Mar. 7, 2000, 5. Bruce Morrison (D-CT) concurred: 'The State Department is a huge bureaucracy, as such it has an inertia in particular directions or indirections and it is a daunting task to imagine changing the State Department's mind deductively as opposed to inductively by just changing policy at the presidential level.' (Interview by author, May 29, 2002, 2)
6. Peter Westmacott, counselor for public affairs at the British Embassy in DC (1993-97), had lost a cousin to IRA violence. See Owen Bowcott, 'America Hands Over IRA Killer,' *Guardian* (London), Feb. 20, 1992, 3.
7. See Bew, *Chronology*, 176 and [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/17/newsid\\_2538000/2538147.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/17/newsid_2538000/2538147.stm).
8. Henry McDonald, *Observer*, 28 October 2001, 10. Monaghan was a former member of Sinn Féin's National Executive. Connolly lived in Cuba as the Latin America representative for Sinn Féin.
9. Bush, press conference, 22 March 2002. An estimated 90% of cocaine and 65% of heroin sold in America comes from Colombia. Washington blames 'narco-terrorist' organizations, led by FARC for this supply. See [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/2043615.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/2043615.stm).
10. See *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 June 2005.
11. See <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm>.
12. Henry McDonald, Kamal Ahmed, and Ed Vulliamy, 'Disarming Ulster: Special report: How the IRA gave in to U.S. arms pressure: America's threats crucial to historic move,' *Observer*, October 28, 2001, 10
13. *Observer*, 28 October 2001, 10.
14. 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all convictions, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity . . .' (Yeats, 'The Second Coming,' 1919)
15. <http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/gallsum.htm>. Note: On the chart, lg = local government, e = European, w = Westminster, a = assembly, and f = forum. For 1974 f and o



denote February and October.

16. <http://www.slate.com/id/2163217/>

17. Paul Bew, ‘Northern Ireland is no model for peace processes,’ *Sunday Independent*, April 1, 2007.

18. See Peter Taylor, ‘Al Qaeda: Time To Talk?’, BBC series, 2006.

19. In Bew, 2007.

20. Author interview with former (anonymous) U.S. ambassador to Britain, 7 April 2000.





**Sharon Harroun** has spent much of her career in marketing and for many years co-owned a marketing and advertising agency in her native Virginia. She has extensive experience of Northern Ireland, chiefly through her voluntary work with the Children's Friendship Project for Northern Ireland, from 1990 until 2004, latterly as Chairman of that organization. Among many other connections with Northern Ireland, Sharon has also done business development work for the City of Derry and was on the organizing committee for the Vital Voices conference in Belfast in 1998. Her work in Northern Ireland was honored by the U.S.

Department of State in 2000 with the award of their Millennium International Volunteer Award, one of only 32 people so honored.

Sharon is married to the British Consul General in Los Angeles, Bob Peirce. She sits on the Governing Board of LA's BEST, an after-school enrichment program serving 30,000 elementary school children in deprived neighborhoods. She was invited to join the Women's Leadership Board of the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School in 2008.

## **How a Youth Program can Promote Peace, Reconciliation and New Leadership**

**Sharon Harroun**

Well thank you. Thank you for inviting me. It is a real honor to be in this room today with people who have made such great contributions to the peace process in Northern Ireland. I served as a volunteer and then most recently as chairman on the board for a program called the Children's Friendship Project of Northern Ireland. This program had its genesis in what were termed in the 1980s "holiday schemes", by which children living in the middle of conflict were brought out of Northern Ireland for a few weeks during the summer to go to homes in the United States. From that grew a new program called Cross-Community 10, which was actually founded here in California. The idea was to take young people in Northern Ireland, primarily teenagers, pair them up, Protestant and Catholic, and bring them to the U.S. for about a month.

This went on for a few years and the organizers both in Northern Ireland and the United States decided there had to be more. It was great getting the kids out, it was great getting them together, but when they went back that would be it. So CFPNI was developed by a group of coordinators from Cross-Community 10 in 1987. Again, the idea was to take

pairs of Protestant and Catholic teenagers, selected from the same area, and bring them to the United States for six weeks during the summer-time. But then, when they went home, rather than going their separate ways, there would be events to bring them back together. And the parents would also be required to participate.

In 1987, the pastor in my church – a small Methodist church in Virginia – heard about this program and he and his wife decided to host a couple of teenagers themselves. I was very involved at that time in my own business, but I watched this program, I listened to what was happening, and I met the two teenagers who came to our church that year. I thought the program was absolutely incredible. This was right after the Enniskillen bombing. I was amazed how these two kids were coming together, both from that Enniskillen area.

So within a two-year period I started doing a little fundraising. I thought we could get more kids over here. Then I hosted a couple of teenagers myself in 1990. Having a couple of young people living in my home, and seeing the relationship that was building between them, I decided to get really involved in the issue in Northern Ireland. Paul Allen has described the elements of track-two diplomacy as understanding, communication, neutral environment, tolerance. That is what we were trying to achieve on the ground with the youth and their families.

The way that it worked in Northern Ireland was not necessarily through churches. The young people were recruited primarily through volunteers and community groups. They had to live within a few miles of each other. We did not pair a Protestant teen from Belfast with a teen from Fermanagh. They had to live in the same area. There were volunteers on the ground in Northern Ireland. It was not just a U.S. program. It was a partnership between people in Northern Ireland and those in the United States. Teens were interviewed and recruited by volunteers in their own community. Once they were recruited their parents had to agree to meet at least once for a predeparture program and agree to the follow-up program afterward. At that particular time it was, I think, quite a quantum leap to go from just a “holiday scheme” type of program for the teenagers to actually bringing the families together.

In the United States, it was important that we put people in neutral environments. The host parents had to agree to provide a room that they could share. Once the door was closed at night they had an opportunity to be kids and talk about kid stuff. The host parents had to agree not to bring up the political situation in Northern Ireland unless the young people wanted to speak about it. And basically that was it. They were hosting them, they were their parents, they were their guardians for six weeks.

In 1992, after hosting for a year and a half, I went back to Northern Ireland myself for the first time and went to the reunion which took place after the summer program. All the teenagers and their parents would get together. We would find the best neutral location we could find in Northern Ireland – and sometimes it was very difficult gathering everybody together for a celebration. I would try to stay with both of the kids' families during that time. I can remember staying in a town outside Enniskillen. I stayed with this family – they were very excited, very grateful to have their daughter in the program. They said to me, “we are all going to get together. The Shannons have invited us to dinner in Derrilyn. Please understand, Sharon, we like the Shannons, but if we only stay a short while it is because this is a very difficult place for us to come and we cannot stay very long.” I did not quite understand at that time what they were feeling. We went to dinner. The guys started talking about farming. The women started talking about their children. And five hours later we left. It was an amazing sense of commonality that was coming through in spite of all the difficulties. I am sure you understand exactly what I am talking about. Take people out of a difficult environment and they are able to talk.

As time went on the program changed from just peace, reconciliation, and friendship to a leadership program. In 2003, we held a leadership conference at DeSales University. 140 teenagers came together and they talked about how NI is changing and they talked about conflict resolution. They talked about looking toward the future.

This is what we have tried to do in NI over the last 17 years. Teenagers now go through a six-month predeparture program. They do cross-community work. They do volunteer work. They bring together their friends, their family and they are looking forward. The Americans have offered a number of things in addition to promoting understanding and friendship. They also have provided leadership and volunteer training. In Washington DC, where I was coordinator for ten years we did a series of leadership development programs for the young people. Everything from doing volunteer work at homeless shelters to going to Capitol Hill to talk with political leaders. Seeing the world and having a grasp of the world outside their own. Giving them a fresh perspective. Many of the next generation of leaders in Northern Ireland may come from grassroots organizations like CFPNI.

It is amazing the kind of people who gravitated to CFPNI. June McMullin is a woman who volunteered for CFPNI until this year from the early 1990s. She is from a small town in County Londonderry/Derry. In 1982 she was in the hospital outside of Derry having her second child. Her husband was a policeman and after they spent a few hours rejoic-

ing in their child's birth he was assassinated. He was killed as he left the hospital. June lived with that for years. She remarried. As she told me, over the years her mind and heart really started to change. It goes without saying there was a tremendous amount of pain and bitterness and anger, particularly toward the republican community. But she knew, as she looked at her child, that there had to be change. When her oldest child became old enough to join CFPNI she decided to sign him up. After one summer she started to volunteer.

Those are the kind of people that came in off the ground many times for CFPNI – coming out of a very difficult situation, wanting to embrace change. June just this year has retired from CFPNI.

Every summer we had anywhere from 100-150 teenagers to come out. From a small place that is a lot of kids. When you think that you are reaching not just the teenagers but their parents and their friends then the outreach and the effect on the ground really was very substantial. I talked about the parents talking for five hours. Bob and I were just back in Northern Ireland in February and those same parents came to see us. They still keep up their friendship. Sometimes it has been multigenerational. Grandparents get involved. Lots of bridges have been built – friends, parents, friends of parents extending to thousands of people.

In 1997, I hosted a young girl and her partner. She was a young Sinn Féin activist and lived in the North Antrim coast area. Her partner was a daughter of an RUC officer. That was a challenging summer for me, to say the least. It was one of the most volatile relationships that I have had in my house. By that time it had been seven summers that I had hosted. I hosted nearly every year from 1990 until 2004. But that was a tough summer. If we happened to go into a pub with a British flag she would just fly off the handle. If Gerry Adams was mentioned in a conversation, the other girl would just go through the roof. A lot of times it was just personality disagreements between teenagers – kids living together in the same room. But this really was at the core of religion and politics and everything else. However, by the end of the summer, I do not want to say they were best friends but they were starting to talk through things. The absolute incredible outcome, to my mind as we look back almost ten years, is now that little gal who was once so anti-British, so republican, I saw her last night in the movie we were looking at and she was up volunteering at Corrymeela. I knew she had done some different things throughout the years. That summer had changed her so much I had no idea I was going to see her face in the movie “Hope and History,” which was a documentary done by young students. I saw her face and I thought, “How far she has come. How far she has come.”

Clearly there were times I knew that some parents were signing their kids up because they were going to come to the United States for a month. But that was all right with me. They might not have been committed to reconciliation themselves but they still sent their child to spend six weeks living with a young person from another community. That worked out, too. That worked out very, very well.

So where are they today? CFPNI is an all-volunteer organization. I think we have been really scratching for 20 years to try to keep this going. I do not know how financially viable the organization is right now. I think it is very difficult ,when the bombs stop going off and people gravitate to different areas of support, to know how much longer this kind of program can go on. We have a strong track-record. We have an incredible program still going on on the ground in Northern Ireland – in all counties, by the way. I hope that government and foundations will continue to support it to some degree so we can continue the program. Last year there were eight young people here in Southern California. This year we did not have the funding to bring them out. There are 70 going to the East Coast and the Midwest this year. That is down from normally 120 to 140 when I was chairman. It is not because there is no interest. There is huge interest but that is just the difficulty of being an all-volunteer organization and not having someone lobbying for you with staff. And not being supported by a particular foundation.

So CFPNI may soon come to an end. But its legacy will not. Thousands of people have been brought together by it and future leaders have been nurtured by it. I hold it up as a great example of soft diplomacy, of how we as American volunteers, working with volunteers in Northern Ireland, were able to contribute to the building of peace and reconciliation.







**Mick Fealty** is the founder, editor and writer of the Slugger O'Toole blog on politics and culture in Northern Ireland. He also edits and writes the Brassneck blog at the *Daily Telegraph*. He is also an occasional blogger at the Guardian's Comment is Free page. He is a visiting research associate at Queen's University, Belfast with a special interest in participation, social media and politics.

## **‘Slugger O’Toole’: The New Media as Track Two Diplomacy**

Mick Fealty

I left in search of democracy and found it was more like a phantom always shifting and constantly lingering on the horizon. Once it is given to someone, it changes. In fact, it needs to be remade every day. It requires the consistent disruption of silences and the [utterance] of things that people do not want to hear.

Krystof Wodiczko, Artist

### **Where Slugger came in...**

My blog Slugger O'Toole (<http://www.sluggerotoole.com/>) began life on 5 June, 2002. In part it was born out of the simple frustration of spending half an hour trying to locate a feature on the Orange Order's annual parade in Rosstown, Co Donegal in the vast and unfathomable archive of the *Irish Times*. Its larger purpose however was to create a research resource for an academic paper on the future of Unionism in Northern Ireland. It was a relatively sober attempt to track various forms of intellectual capital, news articles, research reports and opinion pieces from across the political spectrum and none. I only once considered the parallel between Slugger and Public Diplomacy: on reading Mark Leonard's advice to the British Council that when confronted with genuine political controversy, you steer directly into the centre the storm, and never away from it; a seminal piece of advice.

The blog itself focuses mostly, although not entirely, on the politics and wider culture of Northern Ireland. As well as charting analogues for Northern Ireland's difficulties elsewhere in the world, it takes a keen interest in the affairs of its political hinterlands in mainland Britain and

the Republic of Ireland. It turns out that a blog is an intensely social tool; each time you write something it ‘pings’ other sites and let’s people know what you have written. After three weeks I figured how to read the site’s logs. By that time, and without having told anyone but a few close colleagues about the site, Slugger was getting an average of ninety visitors a day.

Initially I called it *Letter to Slugger O’Toole*. The title was borrowed from a line in the song ‘The Irish Rover’: “There was Slugger O’Toole, who was drunk as a rule”. More specifically, the title referenced a ‘sock-puppet’ character invented by Irish-American Tim Murphy on a now defunct CNN bulletin board. Slugger, in Tim’s invention at least, was always inebriated and would never listen to reasoned argument. Indeed trying to explain the complexities of Northern Ireland is a little like trying to explain something complex to a drunk man: you have to explain things slowly, bit by bit. You have to repeat yourself over and over. And you have to be prepared to take a very long time.

## **A Three Staged Process**

Slugger arose from the nature of the Northern Ireland peace process. Arguably there were significant three stages to what was to become the Belfast Agreement. Much of the initial thinking began with the moderate republican Social Democratic and Labour Party leader John Hume’s persistent and obsessive emphasis on dialogue with the express purpose of dealing with ‘the problem of relationships’, the ‘accommodation of difference and diversity’ on the island of Ireland (Millar 2009). The process was also somewhat anticipated by the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985. As Paul Arthur notes, that Agreement “raised the question of when is the optimum moment to engage conflicting parties in mediation and negotiation” (Arthur 2000). The second stage was the long and complex process of negotiation, firstly with between the back channel talks between the governments and paramilitary organizations. Finally, with the coming of David Trimble to the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party in 1995, a broader range of talks began, leading finally to the Belfast Agreement itself. A stand-off over the IRA’s retention of its paramilitary arsenal ensured that this negotiation stage would continue to dominate Irish politics for almost ten years after the agreement had been signed.

The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Executive sat for only a little over two-and-a-bit years in the nine years that followed the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. Its stop/start existence finally came to shuddering halt in October 2002, only months after Slugger began. What

followed was a series of interlocking periods of negotiation and apparent inactivity. With attempts at comprehensive agreements failing firstly between Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists in October 2003 and then again between Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party in December 2004. As Peter Hain, the last British Secretary of State with any substantial legislative responsibilities for Northern Ireland famously quipped during that last fraught year of negotiation, “Belfast is the capital of procrastination”.

In May 2007, after more than a year of further negotiations around Sinn Féin recognition of the police and one complete act of decommissioning from the IRA, we finally entered the implementation stage of the process with the two former extreme parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin taking the lead.

## **The Return of Politics**

The election campaign of March 2007 was awash with party manifestos stuffed with ideas about what could be done once they were back inside the local democratic institutions. As it turns out, our once bellicose politicians – so literate and eloquent in the older discourses of conflict – in fact lack confidence in how normal politics are conducted in a dispensation that shows every sign of becoming a settled democracy. After generations of arguing through the same, single transferable row over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, the new ‘consociational agreement’ now requires our politicians – rather than some abstract ‘other’ – to take serious decisions, which have the capacity to enhance or disrupt the lives of those who vote them into office. This is something our politicians were ill prepared for. The last local functional democratic chamber had been prorogued by Ted Heath’s Conservative Government in 1972, more than a generation previously. What existed of local democratic tradition, the parties drew from the relatively powerless local councils.

## **The Media Problem...**

Reporting in a troubled space has always been huge problematic for any journalist or newspaper determined to get at the truth. Malachi O’Doherty’s recent retelling of his first year as a journalist in a Belfast Sunday newspaper paints a picture of reporters with little time to do anything other than tell the bare bones of this bombing here, that shooting there. Few had the time, the energy or the ‘mind space’ to probe further (O’Doherty 2007). It occurred to me at the outset of writing Sluggoer

that perhaps the best that might be hoped for was a mapping of various, and often conflicting truths. The sociologist Frank Burton described the press's role in reporting the early Troubles as a series of 'leaps in the dark'; each media outlet limited in its understanding of the context and internalized meaning of events as seen from different sides in the conflict (Burton 1978). That accords strongly with the provisional and 'guerrilla' nature of blogging.

In such circumstance of heightened tensions, it is very hard to get at where the truth lies. And the complications have, if anything, become less easy to track during the period of discrete negotiations, with journalists loitering outside the locked doors like expectant fathers waiting for the arrival of the latest negotiated 'outcome'. And it has set the media with a particularly difficult problem. As the Belfast playwright Garry Mitchell observed of the post troubles, "there was a 'real truth' and an 'agreed truth', and when the 'agreed truth' becomes accepted, the 'real truth' becomes a lie." (Siggins 2007).

During the troubles our journalists were under pressure from government restrictions. Margaret Thatcher's broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin representatives and the Republic's highly restrictive Section 31 provisions introduced a culture of compromise in terms of delivering news across the board. For veteran journalist Ed Moloney this process was not only corrosive but undermining of a key function in a democratic society: "the media exist to tell society what is going on, to challenge power structures of all types when necessary, and to hold accountable those in the public eye and whose activities affect society..." (Moloney 2006).

The peace process brought obligations rather than restrictions. The media have struggled with the sudden abandonment of the politics of the conflict, and conflict transformation. The long slow withdrawal of full-time correspondents from the London papers gathered pace as the world audience ceased to take an interest in a story that had fascinated and appalled for thirty or forty years. But the real challenge of the new media to the established political and media elite is that there is no more agreed truth. Every truth now has to be contested over and over again, whether those elites like it or not. Our responsibility as citizens is to critically examine key questions for our political classes: What is it that they plan to do? What is the basis of their analysis? How do they plan to implement it? And later: how have they implemented it?

## **The Political Problem**

This is the political problem: we had local democracy, imperfect and built on special relationships. It backed up in 1972 and ushered in 30

years of direct rule from Westminster. We have had endless secret negotiations behind doors, and it has stunted our political process. This is not generally something that is acknowledged or understood, even in the mainstream media. Our politicians have become very skilled at the negotiation process, but they have had very little opportunity to actually deliver. The media has had very little evidence on which to judge whether they have actually performed well or not in the way one judges politicians in a settled polity.

There is also the matter of a weakened civil society. One of the corollaries of thirty years of communal violence has been the near total separation of interest between the two communities. As Gladys Ganiel notes:

“...the competition of opposing groups may produce conflict rather than policies geared towards ‘the common good’. Groups may develop relationships with government in which they become dependent on it for funding and support. Then, civil society may lose its ability to work as a check against the government and may contribute to unjust policies. These dangers are acute in divided societies where there is little agreement about what constitutes the common good and in which there may be great disparities in opposing groups relationships with the government.”

## **An Intelligent Commons**

Whilst the Internet has been around in one form or another since 1968, it was not until 1989 that one single connected space was made available with the invention of the world wide web by an English scientist, Tim Berners Lee. From the start, it has implied a different means of communication, different aesthetic from more traditional technologies. Christopher Locke describes the nature and quality of some of the earliest communications:

“On the Net, you said what you meant and you have better be ready to explain your position and how you had arrived at it. Mouthing platitudes meant you would be challenged. Nothing was accepted at face value or taken for granted. The conversation was not only engaging, interesting, exciting – it was effective” (Locke 1999).

Much has been written about the disruptive nature of New Media. In essence it turns the mass media proposition on its head. Communication is rough, increasingly abbreviated and distributed and takes place through interconnected networks using emerging technologies like Twitter.com.

It is largely on a one to one enterprise as opposed to the traditional one to many mass media model. In contrast to a largely passive broadcast audience, online audiences talk amongst themselves, incessantly and in ‘down times’ inanely. The ‘conversation’ is the thing. They relish their newly found capacity to decide for themselves what the nuances of various political statements, or pieces of research. The judgements of the gate keeping intermediary – the professional journalist – are also often held under scrutiny.

This new freedom to express knowledge as well as access it has profound implications for politics. The political classes are slowly coming to recognise this, even if they are not sure how to respond to it. In an interview with the author, the Conservative MP George Osborne, the UK’s Shadow Chancellor, noted:

“In politics and in the media we’ve both assumed that we do the talking and the people listen. Now the people are talking back. It’s exciting, liberating, challenging and frightening too.”

## **The New Media Comes to Northern Ireland**

In the context of Northern Ireland, there is a strange consonance here with the peace process and the popularization of online communication. Internet debate started to become a staple, at least amongst certain political and media elites, around the time of the first IRA ceasefires in 1994. Just two years earlier, people were dependent almost entirely upon broadcast news from just three TV channels and a number of influential newspaper groups feeding undifferentiated messages to the two broad communities.

After forty years of the Troubles people had tended to live apart. According to on study, 71% of people in public housing in Northern Ireland live in segregated areas. (David Dickson 2006), the lack of social contact underlining the pattern of separate development that took hold after the huge disruptions on the early troubles. But in the mid-1990s online, in various disembodied virtual forums people began to confront each other frankly with their own political viewpoints, and began to shock each other as well. Even moderate expressions of belief outside the comfort of ‘the tribe’ had the capacity to shock people from the other side.

Most of these debates happened on large bulletin boards. The most successful of these early attempts at forthright dialogue online was within a Compuserve forum, often informally chaired and moderated by the BBC television and radio journalist Vincent Hannah. This forum brought together knowledgeable experts, political insiders and engaged

citizens to push the soft boundaries of political discourse in ways that neither implied formal political commitments, nor, considering access was by paid subscription, entirely public. But there were limitations. On such a bulletin board, anyone of hundreds, even thousands of members can start any conversation they like. There is not a single particular focus or voice. Often weaker or minority voices get submerged in the cut and thrust of Internet debate. The talkative predominate.

## **The Power of Blogging**

Then came the blogs. These enabled individuals to quickly build their own websites and start publishing within as little as five minutes. The first blogs came into being in the mid-1990s. But it was not until 1998 that the first free blog software became available to non-technological users. The explosion in political blogging in the U.S. came in the aftermath of 9/11, and born largely out of a frustration with a perceived liberal bias of the mainstream media. It has been slower to take off in the UK, and even slower in Ireland. Slugger, in 2002, was amongst the earliest Irish blogs.

Bloggng allows people to select material buried in a newspaper or otherwise obscure research from a university professor and put this up at the very top of the news, making the same kind of editorial choices as a newspaper editor only for an online audience. This recontextualization of knowledge – and with it the realignment of power from stable elites to a less stable commons – has empowered individual citizens to engage large and influential audiences. This disaggregation and re-aggregation of journalism/research papers, has all been inflected with a fresh individual perspective. With Slugger we discovered we would talk about Northern Ireland, political deadlock, and even the football teams. We talked about everything in cultural life. But we would also look at analogues in other places; problems elsewhere; getting beyond the constitutional issue, and indeed getting beyond Northern Ireland itself.

What sets the blogs apart from what came before is firstly the increased importance of the individual voice and perspective, and secondly, the commodification of the hyperlink. The former delivered multiplicity of perspective. The latter gave context. In a strange way, it reintroduces ideas that had emerged previously in journalism. Richard Kapuchinsky was a Polish foreign affairs writer. Dissatisfied with that way journalism reported it stories, he resorted to a more literary style of writing. He was willing to dump the idea that journalists could become objective; someone who can tell an unbiased, neutral, balanced story. He preferred to just go into a country and tell an iterative tale of what he found there.

“I’m interested in the structures of power what I’m interested in is the situation of the structure of power. The country is the theater but the play is universal.” Contrast that with leading British journalist Nick Robinson (before taking up his current position as the political editor of the BBC): “it was my job to report what those in power were doing or thinking, that is all that someone in my sort of job can do.” What blogs have proved over and over again, is that statements from above are actually up for contention.

## **The Experience of Slugger**

So why does blogging work? It brings the reader fresh content, every day. In Slugger’s case we try to offer good links and stories along with sound analysis; often with link backs to the past references to the same story. Something my colleague Pete Baker refers to as building a Baconian history. There is the capacity for audience to answer-back. You put up a story and people respond to it. On a memorable occasion one of our readers created You-Tube video of 50-yard stretch of the largely Catholic Springfield Road. It was the controversial subject of a disputed marching route between the Orange Order and local Catholic residents. The poor quality video showed what neither the broadcast news, nor print newspapers had done, that on one side of this supposedly Catholic stretch of road lay a Protestant church. It also showed that on the other side of the road lay relatively new houses built with no windows facing on the road, because of the semi-permanent conflict in that area. The conversation that followed explored the point of view of the people living in that area. Suddenly what was discreet, hidden knowledge became public. And the reactions were stimulated from ordinary local people not by text, or mainstream journalism, but by crude produced video images of a locally familiar scene.

This has all kinds of implications. There are all kinds of elites. A local neighborhood is an elite of sorts, a voice of authority on its own affairs, but a voice that rarely gets out into the public domain. That voice was reflected in that conversation. We had a new and fresh insight that might not have been available through more conventional means.

## **The Importance of Diversity**

This is what is important about engagement. An engaged audience can talk back with a heterogeneous opinion. From the beginning it was never my intention to broadcast my own opinion to draw from as many strands



of opinions as possible. And, by and large, we have a fairly heterogeneous audience. We have never used that diverse audience to seek any kind of consensus. In fact, one of the problems of the essentially top down peace process is that it has often prematurely assumed consensus on a range of matters, and ended up taking too many things for granted to be able to ginger real bottom-up debate. James Surwiecki in *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Surowiecki, 2004) argues that an intelligent group does not ask its members to modify their positions in order to let the group reach a decision that everybody can be happy with.

Much of the debate on Slugger is about clash of diverse opinion. People fight. Rarely is there agreement, and indeed, we actively encourage people not to compromise but rather to hone their arguments by adhering to the site’s golden rule: play the ball and not the man.

Underlying all of this, regardless of whether it is in Northern Ireland or anywhere else, is that the Internet is changing the way that knowledge is transmitted. It is breaking up the distribution networks. With a soft project like Slugger it is very difficult to gauge precise effects. The site’s main purpose these days is to turn over the hard packed ground of civic debate, rather than to push for more measureable outcomes.

## The Future

In March 2007, the DUP and Sinn Féin won their election victories convincingly. In May 2007 the power-sharing executive began. But the party victories rested on what they had done on the ground, and their achievements as activists on behalf of their constituency base. Neither party was particularly experienced as responsible lawmakers, though the DUP’s experience in Westminster gave them an early advantage in exchanges on the floor of the Assembly over the parliamentary ingénues of the abstentionist Sinn Féin. The longer term test of both parties will be in terms of their capacity to take tough decisions and communicate those to the wider community. Crucial to that communication will be the capacity of the public to pick up on the nuances and understand the context for those decisions when they inevitable come. That is a tall order in most settled democracies. But it is all the tougher when you are talking about a relatively small population that has been used to most of its resources being strained towards a single binary argument that runs roughly: “we are going to win and we are going to get a united Ireland,” or “we are not going to get a united Ireland.” If there is one thing that the blogosphere can do, it can tell those awkward truths that the politicians do not want to hear. My view of it is neither cynical nor sceptical. I believe that is what politics and democracy are all about.

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# Conclusion

## Lessons Learned

Joseph J. Popiolkowski

These conference proceedings bring together scholars of public diplomacy and international relations and participants in the inter-community peace building efforts in Northern Ireland. The previous chapters have covered numerous issues affecting life in Northern Ireland e.g., policing, the importance of a robust civil society and voluntary sector, grassroots community initiatives, and the media, among others. This publication makes clear that exercises in track two diplomacy build up trust and make conflict negotiations inclusive.

In his chapter, media scholar Greg McLaughlin assesses whether television documentaries and public films may be considered a cultural intervention in the peace process. He also looks at the impact of the Broadcasting Ban on airing extremist views and how it led to widespread self-censorship among broadcasters. Television programs were often balanced but lacked real analysis of the political motivations behind violent actions. Northern Ireland's media has undergone a cycle, he argues: civil rights, anti-terrorism, and peace process. A fourth, "building consent for post-peace process politics," is now underway.

With regard to the peace process, McLaughlin couches his skepticism of the media's impact by pointing to the sectarian tensions that continued to bubble up in key interface areas in the late 1990s, which was the focus of Neil Jarman's chapter. Jarman looked at the gradual strengthening of community groups, which allowed them to become an integral part of the peace process. His examples of how to mitigate large-scale civil disorder brought about by public ritual (i.e. parades) through community-based policing – especially in key sectarian interface areas – is a wonderful example of track two diplomacy at work.

Organizers of grassroots efforts to keep the peace operated outside the traditional channels of diplomacy by forging relationships within and

between the two communities. For example, Jarman gives great credit to a mobile phone program, which gave activists greater ability to defuse tense situations – especially during parade season – by communicating within their respective communities and eventually across the sectarian divide. Jarman links all this to a discussion about the importance of the three types of social capital as defined by Robert Putnam: linking, bridging, and bonding. It was the organizers’ effective use of social capital that allowed them to move beyond “firefighting,” preemptively respond to tensions, and construct a working relationship with the police.

With regard to the police, the question of policing became one of the hot button issues in Northern Ireland during the 1990s. How could such a fractured country have effective and respected policing? The answer was to take the restructuring of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (later the more benignly-named Police Services of Northern Ireland) out of the political realm and hand it off to a track two body in the form of the Patten Commission: technically the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, which Bob Peirce played a pivotal role in. Peirce and his colleagues orchestrated an enormous overhaul of the police services in Northern Ireland based on what they heard from people in the community. As Peirce said during the conference, “We went to talk to the people.” Peirce said the Commission consciously tried to construct a model of effective policing that could be replicated elsewhere. And, indeed, it has been.

Tim Lynch, however, takes the slightly cynical view that “Northern Ireland is too discreet, too historically specific, too odd to be modeled – despite its recurrent and increasing citation at conflict resolution conferences.” I alter his argument slightly and maintain that while the nature of this intra-state conflict – religious identity and self-determination – is comparable to other parts of the world, Northern Ireland’s situation was so unique that if its problems could not be solved there was little chance for any other intractable conflict. As Queen’s University scholar Dominic Bryan said, in Northern Ireland, “All the planets were aligned.”<sup>1</sup> As discussed in this book, Northern Ireland had the benefits of a strong voluntary sector and civil society, two friendly and wealthy European Union neighbor countries, and high-profile interested outside parties notably U.S. President Bill Clinton and Senator George Mitchell. And Northern Ireland did not have the complex geopolitical influences that the Middle East has.

Lynch recounts that Bill Clinton’s decision to offer a visa to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams was unanimously viewed in Britain as an infringement on a sensitive British domestic issue. But in his thoroughly researched chapter, Niall O Dochartaigh argues that successive British

governments maintained a rarely used but vital communication channel from top Republican leaders to the Home Office and even the Prime Minister. While the Foreign Office may have been “apoplectic” – to use Lynch’s word – over the Adams visa decision other bodies had been secretly reaching out to the other side.

O Dochartaigh offers a fascinating glimpse into the activities during the 1970s of Brendan Duddy – a moderate Catholic who “provided a potential bridge between the reformist edge of the security forces and figures involved in the highest levels of the Provisional republican movement.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, employing someone like Duddy to act as a point of contact between opposing sides is a prime example of track two diplomacy, which Joseph Montville defined as, “unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, to influence public opinion, organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict.”<sup>23</sup> The social capital Duddy amassed through his peace-minded activities among Catholic moderates allowed him to operate as an intermediary in this case.

Mick Fealty’s account of the creation and impact of the Slugger O’Toole blog is an object lesson both in the power of the new media, but no less in the deficiencies of the politics and the journalism of old Northern Ireland. That Fealty’s blog – begun as part of a college research project – should have taken off so swiftly is a testament to the immense need of the Northern Irish people for such a forum. That the blog has shown staying power is a testament to its continued relevance to the peace process.

Sharon Harroun recounted her experience running the Children’s Friendship Project of Northern Ireland, which started out as a “holiday scheme” program for teens from Northern Ireland to visit the U.S. and later included families and added leadership training. The CFPNI is notable for many successes but mainly for creating bridging capital between members of the two communities. As Harroun said, “Lots of bridges have been built – friends, parents, friends of parents extending to thousands of people.”

The CFPNI employed one of the basic tenets of track two diplomacy: “Take people out of a difficult environment and they are able to talk,” according to Harroun. Similarly, Paul Arthur in his keynote address at the conference reflected on a series of workshops held at distant locations removed from the public eye and conflict zone where delegates could hash out a basic understanding and find some common ground. Arthur found that participants were much more willing to engage in substantial discussion if it was couched in an unofficial setting. His role as an aca-

democratic and outside observer allowed him to empirically report that the workshops had a lasting impact on the peace process. These workshops – and the CFPNI, the mobile phone program, the Slugger O’Toole blog, or any of the many other track two initiatives discussed in this book – provided an opportunity for dialogue and engagement.

Numerous other excellent models of track two diplomacy exist, including the Kashmir Study Group, workshops held between Israelis and Palestinians that culminated in the 1993 Oslo Accords, and the five-stage “public peace process” exemplified in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Track two is an intervention whose successes have been replicated elsewhere as documented in this book.

### **‘An enabling context’**

Northern Ireland remains a highly divided society, as Neil Jarman and others at the Institute for Conflict Research have documented in their reports. Indeed, as *The Economist* recently pointed out, “Protestants and Catholics may sit next to each other at work, and some of them may rub shoulders in swanky restaurants and shopping centers, but they still overwhelmingly educate their children separately, at least until university, and live in discrete neighborhoods.”<sup>5</sup> This creates inevitable divisions in society, which are unhealthy especially during an economic downturn. Many of the ideas inherent in track two, however, can play a role in erasing the segregation in Northern Ireland’s neighborhoods and schools.

The key now is to continue track two initiatives before they stall and interest wanes under perceived stability and a sense of normality. The ten years between the 1998 Agreement and the establishment in May 2007 of power-sharing have created what John Loughran at North Belfast peace building project Intercomm calls “an enabling context.”<sup>6</sup> Much transformative work remains. The role of civil society now – particularly at the community level – is to empower people with knowledge and give them the skills to manage things. One notable example of this ongoing work is the Belfast Conflict Transformation Project, which called for public input into the groundwork for a more integrated city.

R. Scott Appleby in his book “The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation” borrowed Paul Arthur’s phrase “a politics of forgiveness” to describe the need for a religious and cultural approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.<sup>7</sup> Murals of masked armed paramilitaries, flags, parades, and memorials are only a few of the symbols that stand as daily reminders of Northern Ireland’s violent past. Indeed, as Dominic Bryan of QUB pointed out, “In Northern Ireland,

people don't remember, they're reminded."<sup>8</sup> But a willingness to break with the past and reconcile the irreconcilable means future generations will not experience the same pain and raw emotions.

As nearly every author in this book, including Jarman, reiterates, "track two activity was to be regarded as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, track one diplomacy."<sup>9</sup> Pamela Aall similarly notes:

Experience in Northern Ireland with a track two effort to allow parties to the conflict to test some ideas and build relationships in private meetings shows how complicated the matter can be. In this case, the track two effort proceeded without making a strong attempt to keep the British government informed. Consequently, the British government remained unaware of the workshops until it too wished to launch a similar project. 'The result,' says one of the organizers of the track two effort, 'was a minor diplomatic frisson and a salutary lesson in the pitfalls of complex mediation. *In an ideal world there should be strong lines of communication between all points on the mediation chain.*' (italics added)<sup>10</sup>

Where political tools exist to reach agreements among elites, track two may be thought of as a range of tools to deal with conflicts in a society – a means to establish patterns of reciprocity and recognition. It is hoped this volume is a welcome addition to the body of work on track two diplomacy and serves as an informative guide to the limits and achievements of track two diplomacy in Northern Ireland.

## Notes

*Author's note:* I am indebted to Nick Cull for his expert guidance and direction. Special thanks to Neil Jarman and the staff of the Institute for Conflict Research, Dominic Bryan at Queen's University Belfast, Chris Maccabe in the Northern Ireland Office, John Loughran at Intercomm, and Caroline Wilson at the Belfast City Council's Conflict Transformation Project. Research was generously supported by USC's Master's in Public Diplomacy program and USC's Center on Public Diplomacy.

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## About the Editors



**Joseph J. Popiolkowski** holds a dual B.A. in political science and journalism from American University in Washington D.C. (2005) and a Master's in Public Diplomacy from the University of Southern California (2008). He is a print and photojournalist who has been published in AU's student newspaper *The Eagle*, *USA TODAY*, his hometown newspaper *The Buffalo News*, and Stateline.org, which is a project of the Pew Research Center. In 2004, he studied

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**Nicholas J. Cull** is Professor of Public Diplomacy at USC where he also directs the Master of Public Diplomacy Program. Born in the UK in 1964 and educated at the University of Leeds (BA and PhD), he is a well known historian of the media. His books include *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge, 2008) and *Selling War: the British Propaganda Campaign against*

*American Neutrality in World War II*, (Oxford, 1995). In 2000 he edited *Irish Media History*, a special issue of the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* dedicated to the history of film and broadcasting in Ireland. He is president of the International Association for Media and History, a member of the Public Diplomacy Council and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He has a longstanding interest in Irish history and politics which he attributes to the influence of his late granddad Bernard O'Callaghan who, as a child, witnessed the aftermath of the Easter Rising.

## **About the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School**

The USC Center on Public Diplomacy was established in 2003 as a partnership between the Annenberg School for Communication and the college's School of International Relations at the University of Southern California. It is a joint scholarly research, policy analysis and professional training organization dedicated to furthering the study and practice of public diplomacy.

Since its inception, the Center has become an ambitious and productive leader in the public diplomacy research and scholarship community. The Center has benefited from unique international support from the academic, corporate, governmental and public policy communities. And it has become the definitive go-to destination for practitioners and international leaders in public diplomacy, while pursuing an innovative and cutting-edge research agenda.

In 2008, USC received one of four inaugural Benjamin Franklin Awards for Public Diplomacy from the U.S. State Department in recognition of the university's teaching, training and research in public diplomacy.

