From Sunningdale to Good Friday: The Challenge of the Relationship Between Politics and Paramilitaries for Achieving Peace in Northern Ireland During The Troubles

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Abstract

The British government made three official attempts to end the conflict in Northern Ireland, known as The Troubles: the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Drawing on media coverage and the actual text of each agreement, as well as the considerable body of scholarly research on each individual process, this project identifies the issues confronting the British government in all three instances: which organizations in Northern Ireland to include at the negotiating table, what role the British government would play in Northern Ireland in the treaty’s aftermath, what security measures to take to stop the violence while ensuring human rights, how to address the political challenges posed by paramilitary organizations, and whether or not to include other nations in negotiating the peace, as well as in Northern Ireland’s affairs once the Troubles ended.

The Good Friday Agreement succeeded where its predecessors failed primarily because of the decision to include representatives of paramilitary groups despite their history of complicity in violence. All sides finally agreed to participate in a political power-sharing arrangement that militants on both sides long viewed as a betrayal to the cause for which they willingly killed and died. The Good Friday Agreement’s utilization of the Republic of Ireland and international authorities strengthened the commitment to new political structures. Finally, the British removal of Direct Rule and military occupation, as well as reforms to Northern Ireland’s policing and justice, signaled the end of The Troubles. This project concludes by discussing recent events since the end of The Troubles that potentially affect the maintenance of peace in Northern Ireland.
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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>AIA</td>
<td>Anglo-Irish Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIIC</td>
<td>Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference</td>
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<td>APNI</td>
<td>Alliance Party of Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>BIA</td>
<td>British-Irish Agreement</td>
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<td>BIC</td>
<td>British Irish Council</td>
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<td>BIIC</td>
<td>British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference</td>
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<td>DUP</td>
<td>Democratic Unionist Party</td>
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<td>ECHR</td>
<td>European Convention on Human Rights</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GFA</td>
<td>Good Friday Agreement</td>
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<td>IICD</td>
<td>Independent International Commission on Decommissioning</td>
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<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>LVF</td>
<td>Loyalist Volunteer Force</td>
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<td>MRF</td>
<td>Military Reaction Force</td>
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<td>NICRA</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NILP</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Labour Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIWC</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition</td>
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<td>OIRA</td>
<td>Official Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army</td>
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<td>PSNI</td>
<td>Police Service of Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUP</td>
<td>Progressive Unionist Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUC</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary</td>
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<td>RUCSB</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>Sunningdale Agreement</td>
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<td>SDLP</td>
<td>Social Democratic and Labour Party</td>
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<td>UDA</td>
<td>Ulster Defence Association</td>
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<td>UDP</td>
<td>Ulster Democratic Party</td>
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<td>UDR</td>
<td>Ulster Defence Regiment</td>
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<td>UFF</td>
<td>Ulster Freedom Fighters</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>UKREP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Representative</td>
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<td>UKUP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Unionist Party</td>
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<td>UPNI</td>
<td>Unionist Party of Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>UUP</td>
<td>Ulster Unionist Party</td>
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<td>UUUC</td>
<td>United Ulster Unionist Council</td>
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<td>UVF</td>
<td>Ulster Volunteer Force</td>
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<td>UKUP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Unionist Party</td>
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Introduction

The protracted violence in Northern Ireland during The Troubles that lasted from 1969-98 found its roots in the Anglo-Irish War fought from 1919-21. During the war, the British passed the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 that partitioned Ireland into six mostly Protestant northern counties, referred to as Ulster, and 26 mostly Catholic southern counties. The British and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, making the 26 southern counties an Irish Free State in exchange for the IRA’s ceasefire, but they remained part of the British Commonwealth. Immediately, a civil war broke out in the Irish Free State between pro- and anti-treaty factions. Pro-treaty supporters believed its imperfect terms would remove British troops from the south and act as a “stepping stone” to Irish unity. Anti-treaty factions, referred to as republicans, felt the treaty betrayed the fight for an Irish Republic and alienated Catholics in the north.

Eventually Free State supporters won, but the Irish Constitution of 1937 preserved the republican goal of Irish unification. Articles Two and Three of the Irish Constitution staked a claim to the whole island of Ireland stating:

Article 2. The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas.

Article 3. Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory, the laws enacted by that Parliament shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws of Saorstát Éireann (Irish Free State) and the like extra-territorial effect.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 16.
5. Ibid.
The Irish Free State then declared its independence in 1949, becoming the Republic of Ireland. The Northern Ireland Act of 1949, on the other hand, declared the British government’s continued sovereignty over Northern Ireland as part of the UK.7

Within Northern Ireland, Protestants represented about two thirds of the population, and Catholics made up the other third.8 As a result, Protestants dominated Northern Ireland’s parliamentary body called Stormont and its legislation often favored Protestant needs.

Catholic recognition of discrimination slowly developed through the decades leading up to the 1960s. This accelerated when the British government made the UK a welfare state after WWII, introducing new health and educational reforms that encouraged Northern Ireland’s working class, both Catholic and Protestant, to seek further redress of social and economic disparities.9 Voting and housing discrimination, in particular, disproportionately affected Catholics.10 Though these issues seem unrelated, housing directly influenced voting rights. Because Northern Ireland’s Protestants wished to maintain their political majority, they refused to build public housing outside of majority Catholic districts.11 More Catholics qualified for public housing than Protestants because of their larger family sizes.12 If more Catholics moved into Protestant districts through public housing allocations, then Catholics might win more Council or Stormont seats.

10. Ibid., 19.
12. Ibid.
To further prevent Catholics from gaining seats in Stormont, unionists used gerrymandering to redraw voting districts, ensuring a winning Protestant vote. For example, Stormont divided Londonderry into three wards. Although Catholic voters vastly outnumbered Protestant voters in Londonderry as a whole, with 14,429 and 8,781 voters respectively, the ward boundaries ensured two wards’ voters achieved Protestant majorities, while only one ward achieved a Catholic majority.\(^{13}\) As a result, the Protestants ended up with 14 seats in Stormont, and Catholics secured only eight.\(^{14}\) Without fair representation, Catholics’ issues continued unaddressed.

Beginning in the late 1960s, activists in Northern Ireland created the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). University students formed NICRA and based its ideas and tactics on the American Civil Rights movement, also practicing non-violent civil disobedience to force political and social changes.\(^{15}\) NICRA supported a variety of reforms, but discriminatory housing and voting laws directly hindered the political representation needed to enact further reforms to civil rights.\(^{16}\)

Within the diametrically opposed Protestant and Catholic communities, two prevailing political ideologies existed: unionism and nationalism. Mostly Protestant, unionists considered themselves British citizens, and wished to remain under British rule as part of the United Kingdom. Most Catholics saw themselves as Irish and nationalist. They wanted to unite with the Republic of Ireland and achieve independence from British rule. Within unionism, radicals referred to as loyalists touted the necessity of violence to preserve the union with the United Kingdom. Radical nationalists called republicans, on the other hand, believed they must utilize armed struggle to achieve an Irish union.


\(^{14}\) Ibid.


With the rise of the civil rights movement, two major moderate political parties gained majorities in their respective Protestant and Catholic communities. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) held a more liberal unionist Protestant attitude toward concessions for the Catholic community.

The second moderate party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), represented nationalists. Because of the unequal representation in Stormont since partition began, Catholic parties maintained a policy of abstention. This meant that even when Catholic parties earned seats in Stormont or Westminster’s parliament, they refused to participate in the government. In 1969, though, Catholics elected civil rights leader John Hume to Stormont, helping the SDLP rise in popularity. SDLP leaders combined socialist ideology with an economic focus in improving Catholic conditions. The SDLP also recognized that refusing to participate in government brought nationalists no closer to the Irish union they desired, so they attempted to end abstentionism.

In analyzing Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement and its devolution into protracted violence, Michael Byrne explains in “Politics Beyond Identity: Reconsidering the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland,” that many historians focus on the sectarian politics discussed above. He argues that NICRA focused not on sectarian issues, but on widespread issues of inequality affecting both Catholics and Protestants. Byrne explains that NICRA openly argued against the growth of sectarianism in their movement, which meant that their “refusal to equate civil rights with Irish nationalism made [sectarianism] a virtually unknown quantity in politics.” Apparently, NICRA feared the growth of motivating factors, such as “Catholic unity” and “community defence,” desiring instead to promote a cross-community movement focused on working class issues in line with the tenets of social

18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 474.
21. Ibid.
democracy. The People’s Democracy, for instance, developed during the civil rights movement and listed the following demands: “one man, one vote; a fair drawing of electoral boundaries; freedom of speech and assembly; repeal of the Special Powers Act; and a fair allocation of jobs and housing.” None of these demands represented purely Catholic concerns, nor did their achievement rely on paramilitary violence.

Unfortunately, events out of NICRA’s hands led to increased sectarianism and violence. As the movement grew, mostly Catholics joined its causes and marches. Then, a seminal event started turning the civil rights movement from solely exercising civil disobedience to all-out armed struggle. In August 1969, Protestants held an Orange Order march that went through Catholic Bogside in Derry. The Orange Order, a Protestant organization dating back to 1795, held many marches in Northern Ireland. Often, these marches deliberately went through Catholic areas, frequently leading to violence. Civil rights workers tried to prevent potential violence with barricades, but three days of violence followed between Protestants and Catholics. Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers, Northern Ireland’s police force, and British troops failed to overtake the Catholic Derry Citizens Defence Association, a republican organization that saw the “Battle of the Bogside” as a victory for Catholics against pro-Protestant forces.

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22. Ibid., 477.
25. Michael Byrne, “Politics Beyond Identity,” 473.
26. Ibid., 477.
27. Michael Byrne, “Politics Beyond Identity,” 475.
29. Michael Byrne, “Politics Beyond Identity,” 475.
The rise of sectarianism and militarism during the civil rights movement showed in new demands including “the abolition of Stormont; abolition of the B-Specials; abolition of the Special Powers Act; and the disarming of the RUC.” These demands clearly espoused Catholic-centric issues of distrust towards Northern Ireland’s police and the Protestant dominated Stormont. Byrne explains this shift toward more militant demands in quoting Robson who said:

Attempts to build a grass-roots organization of youth from the ranks of those most active in confronting the British Army and RUC failed in the main because the Labour Party and Young Socialists could not provide them with the means to extend their resistance. The republican movement, on the other hand, did.

This meant that though NICRA and like groups tried to avoid sectarianism and militancy, forces beyond their control led to the devolution of the civil rights movement between 1969-72. Increasing numbers of Catholics felt civil disobedience failed to elicit change, where armed struggle forcibly confronted Protestant mistreatment. NICRA marches resulted in no changes in Stormont’s make-up or legislation. Orange marches and other Protestant counter-protests created street violence that led RUC officers to fire indiscriminately into crowds. More and more Catholics decided to fight back.

In 1969, Northern Ireland’s Home Secretary James Callaghan called for British troops to aid the RUC in combating the violence. The British government called the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland between 1969-2007 Operation Banner. Catholics initially welcomed the troops, believing they came to protect Catholics from the Protestants. Unfortunately, clashes quickly arose

30. Landon Hancock, “Northern Ireland: Troubles Brewing,” CAIN Web Service, last modified January 2, 2018, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/landon.htm. The B-Specials were a corps within the RUC. Exclusively Protestant, and given a wide berth in tactics, the B-Specials targeted the Catholic community from partition until their disbandment in 1972.
31. Michael Byrne, “Politics Beyond Identity,” 475.
32. Ibid., 480.
34. Ibid., 29.
35. Ibid., 9.
36. Ibid., 30.
between civil rights activists and the troops because Catholics accused the British of siding with
Protestant groups.\textsuperscript{37}

The pivotal event that ultimately crushed the civil rights movement and deepened The Troubles
took place on January 30, 1972.\textsuperscript{38} The event, known as “Bloody Sunday,” started with a peaceful,
although illegal, civil rights march. British troops arrived to arrest leaders that often incited violence at
such events, but soon fired on the marchers, killing 14 people.\textsuperscript{39} Republican violence immediately
escalated exponentially during what became the bloodiest years of The Troubles.

The Troubles fueled the growth of more hardline unionist and nationalist political groups
including the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin. The DUP broke away from the UUP in
1971 under the leadership of Ian Paisley who felt the UUP failed to sufficiently promote unionist aims.
Sinn Féin existed since the partition began as a left-wing nationalist party, but because of its frequent
association with the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a republican paramilitary organization, the British
government and unionists deemed it an illegitimate political party for much of its history. They also
observed an abstentionist policy for many years.

The DUP and Sinn Féin maintained associations with loyalist and republican paramilitary groups
throughout their existence and especially during The Troubles. The main republican paramilitary group
in Northern Ireland since the 1920s was the IRA. It later split in 1970 into the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and
the Official IRA (OIRA).\textsuperscript{40} PIRA immediately became synonymous with the IRA, with both names used
during the Troubles. The OIRA was a Marxist organization and remained small.\textsuperscript{41} Other smaller
republican groups emerged, but none garnered the numbers and recognition of the PIRA.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 38.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{40} James Dingley, \textit{The IRA: The Irish Republican Army} (California: Praeger, 2012), 89.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Several loyalist groups also operated during The Troubles. Three major groups executed most of the violence and killing of the period, though. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) originally formed in 1913 to combat nationalist support for Home Rule (self-governance in Ireland within the United Kingdom), but fell apart after World War I, reforming in 1966 in opposition to liberal unionism. The larger Ulster Defence Association (UDA) formed in 1971. The UDA worked more closely with unionist political parties, such as the DUP to thwart power-sharing and other peace initiatives threatening the British union. Its more covert and militant wing, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), often targeted the Catholic community through targeted assassinations.

The scale of paramilitary violence during The Troubles shocked Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland, and international powers like the United States because it was so close to home for many. Successive British governments of the period faced considerable pressure to resolve the conflict. This paper examines the evolution of British attempts to end the conflict by comparing the negotiations that resulted in the three peace agreements of the period. These agreements included the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. By focusing on the agreements and their negotiations, this paper identifies the factors responsible for the success or failure of each attempt to end the protracted violence of The Troubles.

Each chapter analyzes a different peace process to understand how they addressed common factors that arose before, during, and after each process. These factors include the participants in each process, British Direct Rule, security, policing and justice, human rights, and paramilitary activity.

44. Ibid.
Additionally, this paper discusses recent events since the end of The Troubles that potentially affect the maintenance of peace in Northern Ireland.
1. Sunningdale Agreement

Increased violence after “Bloody Sunday” forced the British government to seek political, as well as security solutions in Northern Ireland that resulted in the Sunningdale Agreement (SA) of December 1973. Although Secretary Callaghan\(^1\) called in troops to help the RUC in 1969 under Operation Banner, events like “Bloody Sunday” proved that the pro-Unionist and anti-Catholic British troops targeted Catholics, exacerbating already tense relations between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Security actions also failed to address underlying issues such as employment, voting, and discrimination. Both Catholics and Protestants demanded changes to the security situation, and their arguments took up a major part of the discussions during the Sunningdale peace process.

Conditions

An extremely controversial British security measure for Catholics was the reinstatement of internment in August 1971 by Northern Ireland’s last Prime Minister of Stormont, Brian Faulkner.\(^2\) The policy allowed police forces to arrest anyone suspected of paramilitary activity and affiliation, and to incarcerate them without trial and without limits on jail time in an effort to control the violence. Stormont drafted the policy in the 1922 Civil Authorities Act, in which Regulation 12 states that anyone “who is suspected of acting or having acted or being about to act in a manner prejudicial to the


preservation of the peace and the maintenance of order in Northern Ireland” is subject to indefinite internment without trial. ³ Such language gave Northern Ireland’s authorities a wide berth of interpretation in deciding who to arrest.

Faulkner’s internment policy, supported by the Westminster government, quickly led to the arrests of over 300 Catholic men. ⁴ According to Faulkner, “all internees [were], on the evidence available, either members of the IRA or otherwise involved in terrorism.” ⁵ However, Rosa Gilbert argues in “No Rents, No Rates: Civil Disobedience Against Internment in Northern Ireland, 1971-1974,” that many of the first detainees were “political activists involved in the civil rights movement rather than the Republican armed struggle.” ⁶ Gilbert’s claim that authorities targeted civil rights workers explained the “Bloody Sunday” disaster of a few months later where the British troops’ planned arrests resulted in the deaths of several civilian activists. The eventual Saville Inquiry of 1998 found that troops indeed “[launched] an unjustifiable and unprovoked attack on unarmed civilians.” ⁷

Gilbert goes on to explain that, when Brian Faulkner implemented internment, he personally reviewed every case. ⁸ He knew the arrest lists included no loyalist militants’ names, and many nationalists suspected that the initial arrests, known as Operation Demetrius, amounted to nothing more than a political attempt to placate angry and potentially militant unionists pushing for solutions to the increased violence. ⁹ Faulkner, though, according to Cabinet notes in August 1971, claimed, “the Attorney General had informed him that the police had been unable to furnish him with any information

⁵. Ibid., 20.
⁶. Ibid., 20.
⁹. Ibid., 419.
suggesting that a subversive organization existed in the Protestant community.”

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA)/ Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) had over 80,000 members by early 1972, so there is no way Faulkner and his government lacked knowledge of their existence. Such numbers suggest that internment undeniably targeted Catholics, and that possible collusion existed between authorities and loyalist groups.

M. J. McCleery claims in “Debunking the Myths of Operation Demetrius: The Introduction of Internment in Northern Ireland in 1971,” that several Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch (RUCSB) reports warned Faulkner of the danger of targeting republicans before the introduction of internment, stating that both republican and loyalist militants presented a danger, and that they strongly advocated using internment only as a last resort. The evidence therefore suggests that authorities understood that Faulkner’s government planned to target suspected republican militants, and that they knew such actions could only result in increased violence.

After the initial wave of Catholic arrests, authorities eventually interned a small number of Protestants, but apparently, few belonged to loyalist groups. Recent scholarship supports claims that the policing situation and internment gave the appearance of collusion between authorities and loyalist paramilitary groups. Mark McGovern wrote in “State Violence and the Colonial Roots of Collusion in Northern Ireland,” that evidence of collusion between British security forces and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), a mostly Protestant military arm of the RUC, dated to the early 1970s. For example, a British military intelligence unit, the Military Reaction Force (MRF) worked with loyalist militants in

10. Ibid., 422.
13. Ibid., 425.
events such as the 1971 McGurk’s bar bombing.\textsuperscript{15} On December 4, 1971, a loyalist UVF bomb went off in a Catholic-owned bar, killing 15 people.\textsuperscript{16} The RUC investigation convicted only one person by 1978. New inquiries by the current Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) determined the bias of the previous case in failing to fully investigate and made one additional arrest in 2014.\textsuperscript{17}

Aside from failing to investigate loyalist crimes, many police officers joined loyalist paramilitaries. For example, the loyalist Glennane Gang, responsible for 120 deaths between 1971-78, included many members of the RUC and UDR.\textsuperscript{18} Catholics reasonably suspected that the various security groups and measures employed in Northern Ireland favored Protestants. As a result, Faulkner’s internment policy met with increased violence from the PIRA as the RUCSB reports predicted. According to Martin McCleery, “In the two years leading up to internment 66 people were murdered, while in the first 17 months after internment 610 were murdered.”\textsuperscript{19} The issue of ending internment would constitute a major nationalist goal in the Sunningdale peace process.

By 1972, the British government increasingly took matters into their own hands in dealing with Northern Ireland. British Prime Minister Edward Heath\textsuperscript{20} increasingly felt the only viable option meant scrapping the ineffective Stormont parliament, and creating a new, more representative government of Northern Ireland’s two communities. Heath’s plan also required the implementation of British Direct

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid., 6.
\item McCleery, “Myths of Operation Demetrius,” 416.
\end{enumerate}
Rule over Northern Ireland until an improved security situation allowed renewed devolution of powers.²¹ Heath dissolved Stormont and instituted Direct Rule in March 1972.²²

Participants

Prime Minister Heath then seized the opportunity presented by Direct Rule to orchestrate a peace process. His attempt to create a power-sharing government within Northern Ireland and some form of cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland resulted in the signing of the SA in December 1973. Before the peace talks began, though, two documents laid out the issues for discussion. Northern Ireland’s Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, wrote a preliminary document, for the British government to discuss, called The Future of Northern Ireland, more commonly known as the Green Paper, explaining his perspective of the situation in Northern Ireland, differing political perspectives there, and possible solutions.²³ The British government responded with Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals, known simply as the White Paper, which included proposals to Parliament for constitutional changes to improve the Northern Ireland situation.

One of the White Paper’s proposals called for a new 78-member Assembly in Northern Ireland based on proportional representation of Catholic and Protestant groups.²⁴ Elections in June 1973 created a body much more representative of the two major communities in Northern Ireland than the

²¹. Ibid.
The prominent parties in the election included representatives for unionists, nationalists, and non-sectarian moderates. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the Ulster Vanguard Party represented unionist ideology, while the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) represented nationalist ideology. More moderate parties included the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) and the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). The British government planned for the election’s largest parties to participate in the Sunningdale Conference that would decide its initial powers until Direct Rule ended with full devolution of powers.

The largest Protestant party in the election, the UUP, formed with Northern Ireland’s creation, and Brian Faulkner led the party during the Sunningdale Conference. Faulkner, though firmly opposed to republicanism, as seen with his reintroduction of internment, shifted the party to a moderate unionism more willing to work with Catholics. Although his party gained 31 seats in the 1973 election, making it the largest party in the new Assembly, his policies led to contention among more hardline members of the party. Ian Paisley, for instance, broke from the UUP and founded the DUP in 1971. Ian Paisley strongly opposed any move toward Irish unity and any involvement from the pro-Catholic Republic of Ireland in political affairs in Northern Ireland. His party gained eight seats in 1973. The Ulster Vanguard Party, or the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party, split from the UUP in 1972.

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26. Jackson, "Faulkner, Brian."

More moderate Catholic nationalists placed their support in Gerry Fitt and the SDLP, a social democratic nationalist party founded in 1970. While Stormont still operated, the SDLP suspended the traditional nationalist policy of abstentionism by participating, but dropped out after failing to make any political headway. The anti-abstentionist attempt showed, though, that the SDLP realized the ultimate potential value of political participation versus absenteeism in protecting Catholic interests. Their 19 seats in the 1973 election made them the second-largest party in the new Assembly.

Other moderate political parties generally included more non-sectarian membership, so they varied in opinion on Irish union over time, but supported Northern Ireland remaining a part of the United Kingdom during the Sunningdale Conference. Oliver Napier helped start the APNI in 1970.

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32. “Gerry Fitt,” *Culture: Northern Ireland.org* (Derry), May 10, 2004, http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/792/gerry-fitt. From Northern Ireland, Gerry Fitt helped found the SDLP, leading it until 1979. He eventually left the party as its platforms focused more on nationalist ideas than socialist ones.
which consisted of mostly middle class, former UUP members with less extreme unionist views. While perhaps the most supportive of power-sharing and the new Northern Ireland Assembly, they only gained eight seats in the 1973 election. The even smaller liberal NILP picked up only one seat due to the popularity of larger sectarian parties, despite its long history as a mostly unionist working-class party.

Following the Assembly’s election, the UUP and SDLP dominated its seats. Though the UUP gained far more seats than the SDLP, the UUP held split opinions over the White Paper. The White Paper’s proposed power-sharing body between the North and South of Ireland, and that of proportional representation in Northern Ireland’s new assembly, angered many in the UUP because they understood the proposal as an attempt to undermine their political dominance and as an open door for eventual Irish unification. The anti-White Paper UUP, combined with the DUP and the Vanguard Party, split unionists along pro- and anti-White Paper lines. Ultimately, more assembly members at least reluctantly supported the White Paper and the British government’s attempt to end hostilities in Northern Ireland.

The convention that met on December 6-9, 1973 to create the SA included British officials and officials from the Irish Republic. Also included were members of the largest pro-White Paper Northern Ireland political parties: the Catholic SDLP, the Protestant pro-White Paper UUP, and the liberal APNI. To stand a chance of creating the governmental bodies discussed in the White Paper in a matter of days, the British government excluded parties totally opposed to its proposals. Unfortunately for unionists,

40. Coogan, The Troubles, 192.
that meant negotiations for the SA lacked proportional unionist representation. Though the anti-White Paper UUP, DUP and Vanguard leaders could not participate in the Conference, they received invitations to share their views. They declined.

The SA’s key governmental representatives included British Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath, Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Liam Cosgrave, and Northern Ireland’s Secretary of State Francis Pym. Northern Ireland’s political leadership comprising the new Northern Ireland Executive included the UUP’s Brian Faulkner, the SDLP’s Gerry Fitt, and the Alliance Party’s Oliver Napier.

Noticeably absent was Northern Ireland Secretary of State William Whitelaw, the Green Paper’s author and a man deeply involved in Northern Ireland’s current issues. He missed the Conference because Heath removed him from his post to deal with economic crises in Great Britain, making him the Secretary of State for Employment in the British government on December 3, days before the Conference began. Francis Pym took his place, but with only three days in office, likely added little to the Conference. According to Tim Pat Coogan, one of the foremost Irish historians, the change upset

46. Garnett, “Whitelaw, William Stephen Ian.” Whitelaw worked hard as the NI Secretary of State to bring a solution to The Troubles. Though his Conservative Party was tied to unionist parties in NI, he tried to reach out to as many Protestant and Catholic groups as would talk to him, including the PIRA, to broker a suitable agreement, and regretted his removal on the eve of the Sunningdale Conference.
47. "Pym, Francis Leslie."
both unionists and nationalists who felt this move proved Heath and his government cared more about the affairs of Great Britain than those in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{48}

Outside of political organizations, another important voice in the conflict was that of republican and loyalist paramilitary groups. At the time of the Sunningdale Conference, though, the British government’s policies barred them from officially communicating with terrorist groups. Unbeknownst to the public at the time, however, the British government engaged in secret talks with paramilitary groups in the years leading up to the SA. In fact, the British government negotiated a short-lived 1972 ceasefire with the PIRA.

Before the dissolution of Stormont, the British government created the Office of the UK Representative (UKREP) to keep a closer eye on Northern Irish communities and violence.\textsuperscript{49} Beginning in October 1971, MI6 officer Frank Steele, the UKREP’s deputy, began making contacts with various community leaders to build relationships with people connected to paramilitary groups.\textsuperscript{50} According to the UKREP, the PIRA approached them as early as January 1972. The PIRA Chief of Staff, Sean MacStíofáin, sent a note stating, “The British Army could not defeat the IRA, the IRA could not defeat the British Army. In the event of a Protestant backlash the Roman Catholics could not defeat the UVF. Therefore [MacStíofáin] proposed a truce between the British Army and the IRA.”\textsuperscript{51} Though the British government likely disagreed with MacStíofáin, Steele successfully brokered a ceasefire between June 26 and July 9, 1972. Unfortunately, the ceasefire ended with the Lenadoon Affair that barred Catholic families from moving into housing in Protestant neighborhoods, sparking renewed PIRA violence.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{48} Coogan, \textit{The Troubles}, 197.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 103.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 105.
In any event, the short-lived ceasefire allowed PIRA leaders and British representatives to meet for talks, helping each to better understand the others’ political motives. These talks involved Whitelaw, and Heath undoubtedly thought the communication, whether successful or not, might help shore up support for the SA peace process. Whitelaw’s participation in these talks constituted another reason why his absence from the SA Conference was so noticeable.

Negotiations

The lack of a truly representative delegation, the absence of William Whitelaw, and the exclusion of official communication with paramilitary groups weakened the delegation that met in December 1973, but the British government pressed on, nonetheless. In the opening session of the Sunningdale Conference on December 6, 1973, Prime Minister Heath opened by summarizing the British government’s three main objectives of the White Paper:

1. acceptance of the present status of Northern Ireland and of the possibility – which would have to be compatible with the principle of consent -- of subsequent change in that status;
2. effective consultation and co-operation in Ireland for the benefit of North and South alike; and
3. the provision of a firm basis for concerted Governmental and community action against terrorist organizations.  

The White Paper previously addressed the first objective on Northern Ireland’s status proposing, “The Bill will declare that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as that is the wish of a majority of its people.” Though controversial for both unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland, the British government sought a position that encouraged Catholic political participation, in particular, to build a new, more inclusive governmental body, but without alienating Protestant supporters. This new principle of consent would hopefully pacify both sides.

53. Hennessey, Northern Ireland Peace Process, 111.
In addressing the status of Northern Ireland during the Conference, the nationalist SDLP agreed to the fact that for the foreseeable future, Northern Ireland’s status would remain unchanged. Prime Minister Heath held a referendum on the border issue in March of 1973, and almost 99 percent of voters (representing approximately 58 percent of the electorate) elected to remain a part of the United Kingdom. Even if the whole of Northern Ireland voted, the nationalist minority lacked enough voters to break from the United Kingdom any time soon. Additionally, Schedule 1 of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act of 1973, enacted after the dissolution of Stormont, only allowed new referendums to occur every ten years. Therefore, the SDLP accepted the SA’s reiteration of the White Paper’s language that nothing regarding status would change until the majority of the people in Northern Ireland desired its change.

With the confirmation of Northern Ireland’s status, conference members moved to discussing the potential Council of Ireland. The controversial Council would include the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland’s governing affairs on a yet undefined level. The White Paper said little about the makeup of the Council, or its powers.

Unionists approached the Republic’s involvement warily, worrying that any involvement from the pro-Catholic Republic would risk Irish unification. They also feared that instead of focusing on economic, social, and security matters felt in both the North and South, the Republic might interfere with purely Northern Irish matters, and give the Catholic minority too much power. Therefore, the British government needed to reassure the UUP “in its rejection of any attempt by the Republic to

interfere in Northern Ireland’s internal affairs, and... not allow any Council of Ireland to ‘become a stage on the road to Irish unity.”

According to the SA, the planned bipartite Council of Ireland included a Council of Ministers and a Consultative Assembly. The 14-member Council of Ministers comprised seven members each from the governments of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Required to act in unanimity, their roles included “executive and harmonizing functions and a consultative role,” with rotating chairs from each government. The Consultative Assembly would include 60 members, 30 from the Republic’s Dail (Parliament), and 30 from Northern Ireland’s Assembly, chosen by proportional representation in each government. Their proposed roles dealt mostly with the economic, social, and security issues facing both governments, but the Conference left the assignments of exact roles to later studies and negotiations between the governments.

The Conference then moved to its final objective to address terrorism. Cosgrave, Faulkner, and Napier all spoke during the conference about problems with PIRA fugitives seeking protection in the Republic of Ireland after committing murders. They denounced the inadequate prosecution of these fugitives by blaming current extradition laws that prohibited sending those accused of political crimes to Northern Ireland. Unionist and Alliance representatives at the conference wished to amend the extradition laws in the Irish Constitution to allow Northern Ireland to retrieve the fugitives and try them in Northern Ireland’s courts. Other options discussed included creating a Common Law Enforcement Area under the jurisdiction of an all-Ireland court or extending the jurisdiction of domestic courts.

The SA addressed the violence in Item 10 stating that, “It was agreed by all parties that persons committing crimes of violence, however motivated, in any part of Ireland should be brought to trial

59. Ibid., 77.
60. “The Sunningdale Agreement.”
61. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 123.
64. Ibid.
irrespective of the part of Ireland in which they are located." The parties decided the Conference did not provide adequate time to achieve legal agreement on the extradition issue, though, so they decided to appoint a commission to investigate the matter further later. The Republic of Ireland agreed to crack down on fugitives in the meantime, but the lack of decision-making during the Conference gave little comfort to the already splintered and disillusioned unionists in Northern Ireland.66

The next issue concerning violence involved policing and ensuring its widespread public support.67 Catholics deeply distrusted the overwhelmingly Protestant RUC, believing it openly discriminated against their community. The RUC’s original tasks in 1922, according to C. Ryder’s book, *The Fateful Split: Catholics and the Royal Ulster Constabulary*, were “to protect the new state from armed subversion, internally and externally; and to provide a service of more routine law enforcement.”68 In 1970, the British government added to the RUC’s tasks by implementing an “Ulsterization” policy, meant to place more security responsibilities in the hands of local enforcement through the RUC with aid from the UDR.69 Nationalists and republicans, according to G. Murray and J. Tonge in their book, *Sinn Féin and the SDLP: From Alienation to Participation*, saw the RUC as a “Unionist

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
defender of the state rather than as a police service.”70 The religious makeup of the RUC in 1970 further supported their claims as Catholics represented only 10 percent of RUC officers.71

The SA did very little to address Catholic concerns on policing issues such as the RUC and internment, justifying inaction by stating that “no single set of proposals would achieve these aims overnight.”72 The British government stated more than once that devolution of policing and the end of internment would be achieved “as soon as the security problems were resolved and the new institutions were seen to be working effectively.”73 The British offered no actionable steps to reach that goal during the Conference or in the SA, though.

Aftermath

After addressing the three British objectives, parties approved the Sunningdale Agreement on December 9, 1973. Following the SA’s release to the public, unionists were furious. Unionists felt the SA met none of their goals because it failed to guarantee the status of Northern Ireland would remain unchanged. Additionally, extradition laws continued to block the retrieval of Northern Ireland fugitives from the South, and no clear policies existed to improve security or stop the violence in Northern Ireland.74

Unionist parties made several attempts to undermine the SA with no real success. For example, unionists tried to prove the unconstitutionality of the SA’s statements regarding the status of Northern Ireland due to its contradiction of Articles 2 and 3 in the Irish Constitution. The High Court in Dublin

70. Switzer and Graham, “From Thorn to Thorn,” 155.
73. Ibid.
disagreed, stating that the SA was “no more than a statement of policy.” \(^{75}\) Unionists went on to try rallies, petitions, and disruptions to Assembly meetings. \(^{76}\) Unionists then discussed a potential strike, but the goals of different political, Labour, and paramilitary groups clashed. \(^{77}\)

Finally, the Ulster Worker’s Council strike began on May 15, 1974, targeting essential services, such as electricity. The strike’s initial success led to participation from figures like Ian Paisley. \(^{78}\) British and Northern Irish leaders underestimated the strike, believing it would end after a few days on its own. \(^{79}\) The British army and local authorities appeared to do little to stop the strike, as well, until several days passed and the deteriorating sewage system became untenable. \(^{80}\) Meanwhile, increasing loyalist violence culminated in the single bloodiest day of violence during The Troubles on May 18, 1974, when two loyalist bombs went off in the Republic of Ireland, killing 33 people. \(^{81}\)

As a result of the strike and loyalist violence, the Northern Ireland Executive that created the SA officially fell apart in late May 1974 with the resignation of Brian Faulkner. \(^{82}\) The only path to removing British Direct Rule at the time disappeared with the breakdown of the SA’s Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Council of Ireland never materialized because Faulkner’s unionist supporters ended up demanding changes to Articles Two and Three of the Irish Republic’s constitution as a prerequisite to participation. \(^{83}\) In accessing the Council, the Sunningdale Conference at the very least needed to clearly define the roles for the Council of Ireland because anything delaying its implementation stood to undermine the already weakly-supported governing body. Tim Pat Coogan argued the Dublin

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75. Ibid., 43.
76. Ibid., 44.
77. Ibid., 45.
78. Ibid., 46.
79. Ibid.
government’s mere inclusion in Northern Ireland affairs doomed the Council of Ireland from the start. The SA’s vague language and delayed decision-making in including Ireland’s government meant the days and weeks following the SA’s signing were integral to the peace process’s success.

Protestant resistance to the SA’s governmental bodies proved they still held a stronghold over the Northern Irish government, giving them veto power over the Catholic minority. The inability of the Conference to galvanize the SA’s bodies against Protestant resistance constituted one of the major failures of the Sunningdale peace process.

Another disappointment of the SA was its lack of change and direction in dealing with policing and justice issues. The governmental bodies collapsed too quickly to allow the further conversations planned in the SA to seek solutions to the extradition problem, among other matters. The British also promised “to bring detention (internment) to an end in Northern Ireland for all sections of the community as soon as the security situation [permitted]” and to release some detainees before Christmas 1973. Internment continued, though, and the prisoner releases did not happen. Consequently, nothing changed, and the elevated levels of paramilitary violence did not decrease. Ulster University’s Cain Web Service created graphs showing the numbers of deaths and their responsible parties during five-year periods of The Troubles (see Appendix A). According to the graphs, more than 1,800 people died in Northern Ireland between 1969-78, half of the killings taking place after the SA.

The SA hardly addressed economic and social issues, leaving those tasks to the Council of Ireland. Maybe if the SA’s bodies endured the Protestant backlash in early 1974, they would have addressed some of the generalized economic and human rights issues listed in the SA. Unfortunately,
the SA’s collapse halted all progress on those issues. Another decade passed before a new agreement started breaking down the Protestant barriers to basic human rights for Catholics.

Finally, the lack of official communication with paramilitary groups meant that their only perceived option in seeking attention for their demands was through violence. Groups like the PIRA continued to use violence as a common strategy. PIRA, though, began to realize an increasingly political strategy might reach some of its goals without alienating the larger Catholic community unsupportive of violent operations.88 In the following decade, the growth of the hardline nationalist Sinn Féin started threatening the popularity of the more moderate SDLP, and gave a political voice to republican militants.

Gordon Gillespie in “Sunningdale and the 1974 Ulster Workers’ Council Strike,” blames the SA’s failure on the unwillingness of parties within Northern Ireland, including those in the Northern Ireland Executive, to compromise enough to make decisions that would improve the security situation.89 The overall vagueness of the SA evidenced the fact that parties failed to compromise during the Conference. Thomas Hennessey in The First Northern Ireland Peace Process places the ultimate blame, though, on republicans and their refusal to accept the principle of consent in changing Northern Ireland’s status. He argues status was the most important issue of compromise in the 1970s.90 This oversimplifies the conflict as it stood in the early 1970s, however, because no one could expect the excluded republicans to accept any compromises. Additionally, an agreement on status alone directly addressed none of the other major concerns including Direct Rule, security and policing, economics, or human rights. The totality of necessary conditions for peace simply did not exist in 1973, and all parties whether direct participants in the Sunningdale peace process or not, shared the blame.

88. Tony Craig, “Laneside, Then Left a Bit?,” 98.
90. Hennessey, Northern Ireland Peace Process, 239.
2. Anglo-Irish Agreement

The high levels of violence seen after the Sunningdale Agreement’s power-sharing government collapsed eventually waned with around 450 deaths between 1979-1983, half the deaths seen in the previous five-year period.¹ Though certainly not characteristic of an optimal security situation, the relationship between the British government and the Irish government was the issue that characterized this period. The British government took an increasingly tough stance against Northern Ireland’s violence, and the Irish government struggled to intervene because of the British government’s stranglehold on sovereignty in Northern Ireland. International criticism of British security policies eventually forced British leaders to seek a British and Irish solution that resulted in the peace process for the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), also known as the Hillsborough Agreement, signed on November 15, 1985.

Conditions

Several factors in the years between the SA and AIA influenced the new peace process. For example, changes in the British government’s leadership shaped British attitudes towards The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Sir Edward Heath’s Sunningdale failure helped lead to the demise of his government in the 1974 elections. The Labour² government took over under two Prime Ministers between 1974 and 1979, with Harold Wilson³ and James Callaghan respectively. The Northern Ireland problem and severe economic issues in the United Kingdom monopolized their attention. When the

¹ “Deaths- Clustered- Northern Ireland.”
Labour government failed to significantly improve the British economy, the Conservative\textsuperscript{4} government returned to power under the first female British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, elected three consecutive times between 1979 and 1990.\textsuperscript{5}

One of the major trials of Thatcher’s government resulted from Prime Minster Callaghan’s government. His Northern Ireland Secretary of State Merlyn Rees\textsuperscript{6} decided in 1976 to change strategies in dealing with paramilitary violence by ending internment while removing the Special Category Status enjoyed by political prisoners.\textsuperscript{7} Ending internment meant authorities could not imprison paramilitary members without trial. The price, though, was an end to the Special Category Status that included the right to wear civilian clothes, freedom from prison work, open communication amongst prisoners, shorter sentences, and unrestricted special privileges such as visits.\textsuperscript{8} William Whitelaw originally granted the status during the backchannel negotiations of the 1972 PIRA ceasefire with the hopes of


\textsuperscript{5} Dennis Kavanagh, "Thatcher, Margaret," \textit{The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195117394.001.0001/acref-9780195117394-e-0746. Conservative party leader Margaret Thatcher, known for her abrasiveness, represented the change British society desired after two Labour PMs failed to improve the economy. She served between 1979 and 1990, elected a rare three consecutive times because of her success in improving the British economy. Perhaps less successful in dealings with Northern Ireland, Thatcher shared a close relationship with U.S. Republican President Ronald Reagan, whose guidance and pressure contributed to the AIA.


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 456.
reducing republican violence.⁹ The Special Category Status essentially treated the political prisoners like prisoners of war instead of ordinary criminals.¹⁰

Rees removed the status as part of a Labour plan to reduce violence and “depoliticize the situation, painting The Troubles as the work of thugs and gangsters.”¹¹ More than 340 mostly republican prisoners reacted by launching a series of protests against the loss of their special privileges.¹² First, prisoners initiated the “dirty campaign,” refusing to wear prison uniforms, choosing instead to wear nothing but a thin blanket. Next, internees rejected showers and other hygiene rituals like shaving. Finally, they smeared their feces on the cell walls.¹³ The prisoners refused to end the dirty protests until Thatcher’s government met their “five demands,” including the return of their Special Category Status and its requisite privileges.¹⁴

When the demands met with Thatcher’s consistent refusals, prisoners launched the first of two Hunger Strikes on October 27, 1980.¹⁵ The first strike ended with no deaths on December 12, 1980, when the strikers mistakenly believed Thatcher agreed to their demands.¹⁶ A second strike commenced on March 1, 1981, and ten prisoners eventually died before Thatcher approved medical intervention, per the families’ wishes, and the strike ended in October of 1981.¹⁷ The strike ended without concessions from Thatcher on Special Category Status. Stephen Kelly wrote in “‘Mr. Haughey’s Silence Condemns Him’: Charles J. Haughey and the Second Republican Hunger Strike, 1981,” that “In the short term, the British government under Thatcher’s leadership won the hunger strike,” but “in the long term,

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⁹. Ibid.
¹². Ibid.
¹³. Ibid., 457.
¹⁴. Ibid., 456.
¹⁵. Ibid., 458.
¹⁶. Ibid.
¹⁷. Ibid., 464.
however, the Republican leadership benefitted the most…. [because] the significance of the protests had far reaching consequences beyond issues around the granting of political status.”18

In response to the Hunger Strikes, popular support for the republican cause increased. The PIRA targeted law enforcement and British military personnel in their various assassination and bombing campaigns, killing at least 60 people during the Hunger Strikes alone.19 Sinn Féin, a long outlawed republican political group with direct ties to the PIRA, began to threaten the SDLP’s domination of Northern Ireland nationalism.20 This troubled both the Irish and British governments because it meant the political legitimization of the PIRA.

The British long held a non-negotiation policy with terrorists on any official level, and Sinn Féin’s growing size might create an environment with no further foreseeable peace negotiations. The Irish government stood to lose from a new PIRA political stronghold, as well because of the threat of a rise in paramilitary activity in their country.21 Fears heightened for both governments in the 1983 general elections when Sinn Féin votes soared to their highest point with a little more than 13 percent of the vote, rivaling the SDLP’s nearly 18 percent.22 These results sent shockwaves through the SDLP and the Irish Republic’s nationalist community. Sinn Féin’s popularity strengthened pressures on the British government to seek another peace deal meant to bolster the SDLP in hopes of undermining Sinn Féin.23

Aside from fears of Sinn Féin’s growth, the Irish government also felt immense pressure among Irish Catholics to speak out against Thatcher’s handling of the Hunger Strikes, and in support of the

18. Ibid., 471.
19. Ibid., 458.
23. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 45.
republican protests and violent retaliation against authorities. As a result, the role of Taoiseach switched off between Charles Haughey of the Fianna Fáil party and Garret Fitzgerald of the Fine Gael party between 1979 and 1992. Charles Haughey led the Irish government during the Hunger Strikes, and his treatment of the issue led to a political upset in 1981 when he failed to denounce Thatcher’s government and demand that she grant the strikers’ “five demands.” Stephen Kelly notes that the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, though opposed to republican violence, condemned his silence, thus losing him the 1981 election to Fitzgerald and the Fine Gael party.

Despite the negative press and outside pressures regarding the Hunger Strikes, the British government made several attempts in the years between the SA and the AIA to create a power-sharing government within Northern Ireland. Not long after the SA fell apart, the British Parliament passed the


Northern Ireland Act of 1974 laying out plans for a 78-member, proportionally represented Constitutional Convention in Northern Ireland. On May 1, 1975, elections for the 78 seats took place, resulting in 47 seats for the anti-Sunningdale United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC), 17 nationalist SDLP seats, 8 liberal APNI seats, 5 pro-Sunningdale Unionist Party of Northern Ireland (UPNI) seats, and 1 liberal NILP seat. Unfortunately, though the Convention met twice between 1975-76, the UUUC refused to share power with the SDLP, demanding majority rule and the return of Stormont. Therefore, the British government dissolved the Constitutional Convention in March of 1976.

Several political developments impacted further peace negotiations in 1979. These included the election of Margaret Thatcher as Conservative British Prime Minister and the election of DUP leader Ian Paisley to the European Parliament. A conservative British government meant a hardline crackdown on terrorism, and Paisley’s election only added to Catholic fears. The European Parliament elections of June 1979 included Northern Ireland as a “single constituency” for the first time, granting them three seats. In the elections, proportional to Northern Ireland’s two communities, Ian Paisley won with nearly 30 percent of the vote. A hardline Protestant unionist in the European Union potentially hurt support for human rights concerns in the Northern Irish Catholic minority.

32. “Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention.”
33. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
Increased international attention supported Catholics, though. The United States intervened, in response to the Hunger Strikes, by blocking the sale of arms to the RUC due to its human rights violations towards prisoners.36 This and other means of intervention showed that in spite of the United States’ “special” relationship with Britain, political leaders felt it necessary to put pressure on the British government to reevaluate their security policies.

Pope John Paul II visited the Irish Republic in September 1979 to plea with paramilitaries to end the violence.37 He was the first Pope to visit Ireland. He originally hoped to visit Northern Ireland specifically, but the security situation made that impossible.38 A PIRA bomb killed the English Queen’s cousin, Lord Mountbatten, in August, and authorities feared loyalist retaliation.39 Regardless, his visit showed the Pope’s support for Irish Catholics, and his desire for reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

These political and international developments encouraged renewed efforts in the British government. The Northern Ireland Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins40 published a White Paper called The Government of Northern Ireland: A Working Paper for a Conference in November 1979 where he laid out plans for a conference on governance in Northern Ireland.41 Atkins invited Northern Ireland party leaders, but unionists once again balked at the prospect of sharing power with the SDLP. The SDLP resisted talks because of the initial lack of discussion of an ‘Irish dimension,’ the inclusion of the Irish

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
government in Northern Ireland’s governance. Atkins convened the Constitutional Convention in January 1980, with participation from the DUP, SDLP, and APNI. Unfortunately, the UUP refused to participate, and the talks reached no consensus. 

Though eclipsed in the media by the first Hunger Strike, Prime Minister Thatcher met with Taoiseach Haughey and Northern Ireland Secretary of State Atkins in Dublin for a Summit meeting in December 1980, agreeing to launch joint-studies on Northern Ireland issues. The meeting ended disastrously for the relationship between Haughey and Thatcher because Haughey insinuated to the media that the new level of joint cooperation between the governments might allow a change in Northern Ireland’s status. This threatened Thatcher’s desire to include the Irish government at all as it endangered unionist support for her government. After the Summit and joint studies, Thatcher reluctantly agreed to the creation of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council in 1981, paving the way for further planning on an Irish dimension in Northern Ireland affairs.

In 1982, Northern Ireland Secretary of State James Prior attempted to create another power-sharing Assembly in Northern Ireland on a small-scale, hoping to gradually grant powers to the Assembly in a plan known as “rolling devolution.” Under rolling devolution, the Assembly would commence with

42. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 49.
“consultative and scrutiny powers,” that would steadily increase to actual devolved powers if the Assembly proved stable.\textsuperscript{49} Assembly elections took place in October 1982.\textsuperscript{50}

Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald headed the last major political initiative before the AIA Conference by creating the New Ireland Forum, a meeting of Irish and Northern Irish political parties in 1983. Though only the Irish Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties, along with Northern Ireland’s SDLP attended, the Forum published the \textit{New Ireland Forum Report}, a document laying out three governmental options for peace in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{51} These included a unitary state, a federal/confederal state, and joint authority.\textsuperscript{52} A unitary state meant the reunification of the island of Ireland under the Irish Republic, a federal/confederal state created a two-state option based on current borders with devolved government in an all-Ireland context, and joint authority gave equal authority over Northern Ireland to the Irish and British governments.\textsuperscript{53} Thatcher already thought the forum undermined the British government, but she refused all three proposals outright because they required derogation of British sovereignty in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{54}

Participants

Even though Thatcher’s government rejected the Forum’s proposals, she continued with talks in 1985 to create the AIA. This time, though, only the British government and the Irish governments officially made and signed the deal. The official committee included Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{54} The \textit{Anglo-Irish Agreement}, 24.
The committee met with Northern Irish political leaders, except Sinn Féin, during the peace process but excluded them from official participation like that seen during the SA Conference.

The British continued to exclude paramilitary organizations from any official negotiations. Before the removal of Special Category Status disrupted their backchannel relationship, the British continued privately negotiating with both loyalist and republican paramilitary groups through agencies like MI5 and MI6. This relationship brokered the significant PIRA “Feakle Ceasefire” that lasted between December 1974 and January 1976. Though talks broke down, and some intermittent violence continued, Tony Craig argues the British intended to use ceasefires to undermine the militant campaigns by attempting to “mainstream these organisations, by slowly replacing their violent tactics with peaceful ones, all the while avoiding the negotiation of constitutional ends.” In other words, the British still had no intention of negotiating with “terrorists,” but thought paramilitary leaders needed to believe the British government planned to cooperate in order to reduce violence. Unfortunately, an uptick in violence disrupted their relationship.

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58. Alan Allport, "MI5," Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195176322.001.0001/acref-9780195176322-e-1022. In 1909, the British government created MI5 as their intelligence agency, and MI6 as its foreign arm. During The Troubles, MI5 and MI6 agents worked with agencies such as the RUC to track paramilitary activities and create lines of communication with paramilitary leaders.


60. Craig, “From Backdoors and Back Lanes,” 112.
paramilitary violence forced the UKREP’s headquarters in Northern Ireland to shut down in 1976, hinder ing further private communications between British representatives and paramilitary leaders.  

Negotiations

In 1984-85, several meetings took place to create the AIA. The overall objectives of the AIA included reiterating the British policy on Northern Ireland’s status, formally establishing the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (AIIC), and addressing security concerns through social and policing reforms. In addressing status, the British and Irish governments reaffirmed that no change to the status of Northern Ireland would take place without the consent of the majority. However, the governments signed two official versions of the AIA. “The British version described the AIA as an agreement between the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the government of the Republic of Ireland; the Irish version described the AIA as an agreement between the government of Ireland and the government of the United Kingdom.” Therefore, the British recognized Northern Ireland as theirs, but the Irish did not.  

For Unionists, the Irish omission of Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom potentially meant the Irish planned to enforce Articles Two and Three of their Constitution that claimed sovereignty over “the whole island of Ireland.” Ultimately, the British insistence upon maintaining their sovereignty over Northern Ireland throughout its dealings with the Irish government invalidated such fears.

61. Lynn, “IRA Truce.”  
63. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 73.  
64. Ibid.  
In creating the AIIC, the British and Irish governments planned to work together on crafting possible policies to address issues in Northern Ireland. To protect sovereignty, the AIA stated that “there is no derogation from the sovereignty of either the Irish Government or the United Kingdom Government, and each retains responsibility for the decisions and administration of government within its own jurisdiction.” Such strict language likely resulted from the unfortunate Thatcher/Haughey Summit Meeting of 1980. Therefore, the British government agreed that the Irish government could make suggestions on Northern Ireland’s policies and issues through the AIIC, but the British government ultimately decided policy.

Perhaps more influential than the AIIC’s formation, the AIA called for an Anglo-Irish Secretariat “to service the Conference on a continuing basis in the discharge of its functions.” Located at Maryfield in Belfast, near Stormont, the Secretariat physically symbolized the permanent place of the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland’s political affairs. This proved controversial for unionists because it gave nationalists a place to voice grievances previously ignored in Northern Ireland’s various governmental bodies and led to significant backlash after the AIA’s signing.

The governments then moved to addressing security concerns. The AIA first approached the threat of violence by stating that both governments “reaffirm[ed] their total rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence and their determination to work together to ensure that those who adopt or support such methods do not succeed.” This pointedly addressed the Hunger Strikes’ violent fallout and the rise of Sinn Féin, but the document went on to recognize “the object in particular of making the security forces more readily accepted by the nationalist

67. Ibid.
community.”\(^{70}\) The British and Irish governments recognized that part of reducing violence included reducing the perception that security forces favored the Protestant community and targeted the Catholic community. The AIA expressed plans to better train and diversify the RUC, but also carefully addressed unionist concerns with plans to address judicial and extradition concerns left unresolved after the SA.\(^{71}\) Unfortunately, the AIA made no immediate official changes, leaving the work to the AIIC after the AIA’s signing.

Finally, the AIA addressed needed reforms on social, cultural, and economic concerns. This section proved vaguer than the security section. The AIA stated that many issues still fell under the Northern Ireland Secretary of State’s roles but left open the possibility of devolution on plans and decisions to the AIIC.\(^{72}\) The document also briefly mentioned seeking international financial assistance in improving the economic situation in Northern Ireland.\(^{73}\)

In undertaking human rights, the AIA encouraged the AIIC to “concern itself with measures to recognize and accommodate the rights and identities of the two traditions in Northern Ireland, to protect human rights and to prevent discrimination.”\(^{74}\) This included seeking the removal of symbolic discrimination like the Flag and Emblems Act of 1954 that only allowed the display of Union symbols.\(^{75}\) Unfortunately, the revocation of the Flag and Emblems Act was one of the few changes made after the AIA peace process.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.
\(^{71}\) Ibid.
\(^{72}\) Ibid.
\(^{73}\) Ibid.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
Aftermath

When the British and Irish governments signed the AIA on November 15, 1985, skeptics wondered if the new agreement’s AIIC and the Northern Ireland Assembly could endure the backlash the SA’s bodies crumbled under. The unionists represented a major political obstacle to the AIA’s success. The agreement outraged unionists because they felt betrayed by the British Conservative Party that traditionally supported their interests. Though Thatcher later deemed the AIA a mistake, her conservative government orchestrated its creation after “the realization that progress toward devolution within Northern Ireland was unlikely, combined with the ongoing security concerns in Northern Ireland.”76 This provided little comfort for unionists when the AIA, as Jonathan Tonge explains in The Anglo-Irish Agreement: Re-Thinking its Legacy, “promised consultation with the Irish government on political, legal, security and cross-border matters, (i.e. virtually everything) [and] it was clear that the parameters of scope for Irish involvement were hardly constrained.”77

Unionists reacted with many of the same tactics employed against the SA including abstention, protests, and strikes.78 Where Northern Irish political parties controlled the bodies of the SA, Anglo-Irish representatives controlled many of the provisions of the AIA. This meant unionists held no political veto over the AIIC because the British government’s stance on sovereignty over it meant they ultimately controlled all decisions regarding Northern Ireland. Thus, unionists failed to destroy the AIIC.

Unionists successfully dismantled the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1986, though, by withdrawing and refusing to participate in elections, forcing the British government to dissolve the Assembly.79 Tim Pat Coogan blames the Assembly’s failure on the fact that Northern Ireland lacked

76. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 26.
77. Ibid., 111.
78. Ibid. 114.
cross-community support for cooperation at the time.\textsuperscript{80} In other words, until unionists agreed to participate in a power-sharing Assembly with nationalists, no Assembly would succeed.

The Thatcher government’s attitude during the AIA peace process made it clear Direct Rule would continue. For nationalists, the AIA symbolized an incomplete victory. The British inclusion and recognition of the Republic of Ireland as a partner in the AIIC, along with its insistence on unchanging sovereignty over Northern Ireland, led many nationalists and republicans to believe the AIA “copper-fasten[ed] partition.”\textsuperscript{81} Others, though, saw the agreement as “perpetual and gradual progress towards Irish reunification.”\textsuperscript{82} Regardless, the AIIC and Secretariat gave nationalists a permanent outlet for concerns, and the unionist “resistance to change had been surmounted for the first time in this century.”\textsuperscript{83}

Additionally, the aim of undermining Sinn Féin’s growth succeeded to the benefit of the SDLP. In the 1985 election, Sinn Féin earned only 11.4 percent of the vote against the SDLP’s 21.1 percent.\textsuperscript{84} The AIA widened the gap of nationalist support between the SDLP and Sinn Féin.

The AIIC successfully reformed some social and human rights policies in favor of Catholics, like abolishing the Flag and Emblems Act, as well as electing far more nationalists to public offices.\textsuperscript{85} Unfortunately, little changed in policing and justice. Although internment ended, political prisoners lost their Special Category Status. Authorities treated them in many ways like ordinary criminals. Additionally, plans to diversify the RUC failed to work because by 1993, Catholics represented only seven percent of RUC officers, a drop from the 10 percent in 1970.\textsuperscript{86}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{80} Ibid., 215.
\bibitem{82} \textit{The Anglo-Irish Agreement}, 91.
\bibitem{83} Ibid., 85.
\bibitem{85} \textit{The Anglo-Irish Agreement}, 58.
\end{thebibliography}
The AIA also did little to curb republicanism. Unpopular British security policies, as well as increased loyalist violence, led to continued republican violence. British and Irish security measures failed to stop the PIRA from receiving multiple shipments of arms (often through the Republic) from Libya during the late 1980s.87 Gerry Adams reflected republican views of violence in 1986 saying, “in the six counties armed struggle is a terrible but necessary form of resistance.”88

Loyalist violence also grew after the AIA, nearly equaling republican violence for the first time by 1987.89 Surprisingly, loyalist paramilitaries even turned on the RUC. Loyalists believed the RUC complicit in implementing the hated AIA and deserved “community loyalty” only if “they defended the sovereign people.”90 This resulted in a loss of RUC sympathy for their aims and increased force against loyalist groups.91

Despite mixed reviews, the AIA impacted Northern Ireland’s future in a way the SA never did. For example, the AIA proved Northern Ireland unionists could no longer thwart all peace attempts. Irish involvement, and British support of its involvement, gave Northern Ireland’s nationalists the support they needed to gradually achieve their aims. Though few initial policy changes took place, gradual changes occurred over the next decade because of the AIA’s AIIC and Secretariat, enabling the future Good Friday negotiations.

Jennifer Todd argues in “Institutional Change and Conflict Regulation: The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) and the Mechanisms of Change in Northern Ireland,” that “gradualist institutional change” is what proved the AIA’s impact on Northern Ireland’s peace process.92 She further claims that the British and Irish governments utilized “wedging” through the mechanisms of layering, displacement,

87. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 48.
88. Ibid., 102.
89. Ibid., 47.
90. Ibid., 118.
91. Ibid., 118.
and conversion to “set in motion a path of institutional change that was later to cohere with, and be accelerated by, other processes of public and paramilitary change.” The wedging of the AIA included such practices as using the AIIC and Secretariat as forums for Catholic issues, including the Irish government in Northern Ireland’s affairs, and the recognition of both Northern Irish communities. The AIA’s layering allowed nationalists to gain necessary reforms without facing unionist opposition in local government. The AIA displaced the British government’s direct control over Northern Ireland by allowing the Irish government to influence and negotiate policy, as well as opening issues to international influence, such as that of the United States. Finally, the AIA converted views that nationalists caused their current situation, by legitimizing nationalist aims through political and media representation alongside unionist or British arguments, expanding nationalist options from violence and subversion to political opportunity. For Todd, the AIA was the wedge that strengthened nationalist faith in constitutional change, while forcing unionists to negotiate to stay in the game, and it eventually created the environment necessary for the Good Friday Agreement and permanent paramilitary ceasefires.

93. Ibid., 840.
94. Ibid., 847.
95. Ibid., 848.
96. Ibid., 850.
97. Ibid., 852.
98. Ibid., 854.
3. Good Friday Agreement

Between 1985 and 1998, the improving relationship between the Irish and British governments helped foster conditions for lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Several attempts led to the inclusion of groups previously excluded from the peace process. Legitimate Northern Ireland political parties, as well as those with paramilitary connections, gained inclusion in the political process. Efforts leading up to the Good Friday Agreement created actionable steps for the inclusion of these groups. The steps also led to official negotiations between the British government and paramilitary groups that agreed to verifiable ceasefires. Though often fragile and contentious in its creation, the British and Irish governments signed the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), also known as the Belfast Agreement, on April 10, 1998.

Conditions

The Brooke-Mayhew talks of 1990-92 formed the first major peace attempt between the AIA and the GFA. Northern Ireland Secretaries of State spent the years after the AIA attempting to maintain communication with all major political parties except Sinn Féin, still considered illegitimate because of its ties with the PIRA.¹ In his talks with various political leaders, Northern Ireland Secretary of State Peter Brooke² decided “enough common ground existed to justify an attempt to open substantive discussions.”³

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3. O’Grady, “Forcing the Question,” 75.
At a speech in November 1990, Brooke attempted to secure nationalist support for talks by declaring the British had “no selfish, economic, or strategic interest in Northern Ireland.” Most nationalists approved of the statement, but unionists increasingly feared British abandonment of the union between Northern Ireland and the UK. Ultimately, Irish Taoiseach Haughey agreed to enter talks with Brooke, causing nationalists to follow suit under the SDLP leadership of John Hume. Unionists, afraid of appearing to impede progress towards peace, reluctantly agreed to join the talks.

Brooke planned for negotiations to take place in three strands: talks between Northern Ireland’s political leadership, North-South negotiations, and British-Irish talks. To pacify unionists, Brooke promised the requirement of majority consent before any final decisions, and the postponement of the hated AIIC meetings during talks. The major Northern Irish parties, including the nationalist SDLP, unionist UUP and DUP, and the liberal APNI participated in Strand One and Two. The only exception included the hardline DUP’s departure after Ian Paisley felt the talks failed to prioritize his demands for changes to the Irish Constitution.

Several delays including meeting deadlocks, general elections, and scheduled AIIC meetings ended talks more than once. In 1992, new Prime Minister John Major appointed Sir Patrick Mayhew as Northern Ireland Secretary of State from 1992-97.

4. Ibid., 78.
6. O’Grady, “Forcing the Question,” 78.
7. Ibid., 79.
8. Ibid., 83.
to replace Brooke.11 Also, Albert Reynolds12 replaced Haughey as Taoiseach. These constant interruptions, and the inability of unionists and nationalists to compromise their positions, meant that talks ended for good in November 1992. Joseph O’Grady argues in “Forcing the Question of Northern Ireland: The Brooke-Mayhew Talks, 1990-1992,” that although the world faced major changes during these years, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, nothing of substance changed in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, O’Grady suggests the Brooke-Mayhew talks’ three strand approach profoundly influenced later peace attempts that culminated in the GFA.13

Brendan O’Duffy argues in “British and Irish Conflict Regulation from Sunningdale to Belfast Part II: Playing for a Draw 1985-1999” that one cause for the failure of the Brooke–Mayhew talks was the exclusion of republicans and loyalists, instead opting for negotiations with moderate groups. O’Duffy explains that the British government repeatedly used this tactic through the years to no avail.14 Additionally, he asserts the unwillingness of the British government to address issues of sovereignty with the Irish government regarding Northern Ireland, stating that not until the Joint Declaration of 1993 did necessary conditions exist for unionists and nationalists to feel adequately represented by the governments.15

The Joint Declaration, also known as the Downing Street Declaration, signed on December 15, 1993, again addressed Northern Ireland’s status. This time, the British placed the determination of

15. Ibid., 410.
status fully on the Irish and Northern Irish people. Changes to their constitutional status would require concurrent majorities in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, stating, “The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish.”16 The Joint Declaration reiterated the need for the three-strand approach, agreeing that peace required “consent and encompassing arrangements within Northern Ireland, for the whole island, and between these islands.”17

The Joint Framework Documents, created in February 1995, constituted the next major peace process. These documents strengthened the principle of consent on changes to Northern Ireland’s status because both the Irish and British governments agreed to rewrite the language of sovereignty in their respective constitutional documents, the Irish Constitution of 1937 and the Government of Ireland Act (1920).18 For the first time in the history of partition both the British and Irish governments seriously considered constitutional changes to their sovereignty over Northern Ireland.

The Joint Declaration and Joint Framework documents represented a major departure from previous peace attempts. The Joint Declaration invited paramilitary representatives to official talks for the first time.19 This, linked with the 1991 census that showed nationalist population growth “from approximately 37 per cent of the population in 1971 to approximately 42 per cent in 1991” made republicans believe Irish union was within reach.20

16. Ibid., 413.
17. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 412.
Continuous back-channel talks between the British government and the PIRA throughout the period encouraged official ceasefires. For example, the PIRA began a ceasefire on August 31, 1994, after the British and Irish governments agreed to the releases of all PIRA prisoners “not guilty of the murder of a Garda officer.” The PIRA’s ceasefire resulted in the release of nine prisoners in late 1994, and the rest in 1995. The prisoner releases encouraged republicans to continue the ceasefire so they could participate in further peace negotiations.

Republican political views also started shifting in 1988 from armed struggle to constitutional nationalism because of meetings between Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams and SDLP leader John Hume, and their endorsement of the 1992 Sinn Féin document “Towards a Lasting Peace.” Constitutional nationalism supported the concept of consent to achieve Irish unification versus violent means, highlighting a major shift of opinion among republican leadership.

Participants

In preparation for the official GFA negotiations, political debate arose on how to include paramilitary groups without alienating mainstream political parties. Reacting to the Joint Declaration and the Framework Documents, unionists demanded paramilitaries (specifically the PIRA) decommissioning.

22. A Farewell to Arms?: Beyond the Good Friday Agreement, eds. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 204. The Garda was the police force in the Republic of Ireland.
23. Ibid.
25. A Farewell to Arms?, 51.
all weapons before further peace talks.\textsuperscript{26} “Decommissioning in the context of the Irish Peace Process referred to the hand-over, or verified disposal, of weapons by paramilitary groups.”\textsuperscript{27} Since this threatened to derail the peace process and reignite republican violence, the British and Irish governments sought third party intervention through U.S. President Bill Clinton\textsuperscript{28} in the form of Senator George Mitchell’s\textsuperscript{29} International Body on Decommissioning, or Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD).\textsuperscript{30}

George Mitchell’s experience on the Senate Select Committee for the Iran-Contra Affair in 1987, as well as his appointment to a trade conference on Northern Ireland investments, led to his post in the IICD.\textsuperscript{31} After talking to all GFA political party leaders, except the DUP who refused to meet, Mitchell developed the “Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning,” known simply as the “Mitchell Report” in January 1996.\textsuperscript{32} In it, Mitchell developed six principles of democracy and non-violence for decommissioning as follows:

Accordingly, we recommend that the parties to such negotiations affirm their total and absolute commitment: a. To democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues; b. To the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations; c. To agree that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission; d. To renounce for themselves,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{26} O’Duffy, “British and Irish Conflict Regulation,” 416.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 17.
\end{itemize}
and to oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all-party negotiations; e. To agree to abide by the terms of any agreement reached in all-party negotiations and to resort to democratic and exclusively peaceful methods in trying to alter any aspect of that outcome with which they may disagree; and, f. To urge that 'punishment' killings and beatings stop and to take effective steps to prevent such actions.  

Despite Mitchell’s recommendation against pre-talks decommissioning, the PIRA ended their ceasefire shortly after the report’s release. This barred Sinn Féin from negotiations, and the PIRA refused to renew the ceasefire until the British government dropped the pre-condition of decommissioning.  

Loyalist parties faced similar obstacles to participation in the GFA talks. With the start of official negotiations, though, republican and loyalist political and paramilitary groups received invitations to participate based on regulated ceasefires. The talks officially barred no group that agreed to exclusively political means of negotiation, but some elected to abstain, such as the DUP and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) who left negotiations when Sinn Féin officially entered talks. George Mitchell explained that, although the absence of any party potentially threatened the acceptance of a peace agreement, the lack of participation from the DUP and UKUP probably helped the more moderate UUP move negotiations forward; “No one can ever know for certain what might have been, but I believe that had Paisley and McCartney stayed and fought from within, there would have been no agreement.”

33. “International Body on Arms Decommissioning.”  
34. O’Duffy, “British and Irish Conflict Regulation,” 419.  
37. A Farewell to Arms?, 91.
Two new loyalist political parties that participated in the GFA talks included the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). Both formed from the memberships of loyalist paramilitary groups seeking political legitimization.

The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC) formed in 1996 to make sure the GFA peace process represented both Catholic and Protestant women’s concerns. Among non-sectarian groups, the liberal APNI participated in GFA talks, but the liberal NILP did not since they dissolved in 1987.

During the negotiations, mainstream nationalists and unionists held blocs of support within the Irish and British governments respectively. The Irish Republic “solidified the nationalist bloc by releasing political prisoners (on license) and maintaining an open line of communication with the Sinn Féin leadership.” Fianna Fáil Taoiseach Bertie Ahern’s election in 1997 also garnered favor with nationalists because of their support for Irish nationalism.

Unionists failed to fully undermine the AIA, so moderates chose to participate to represent their interests and protect the union with the UK. The 1997 election of British Labour Prime Minister Tony

41. “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 34.
42. O’Duffy, “British and Irish Conflict Regulation,” 419.
Blair helped encourage unionists. O’Duffy explained this election’s importance by pointing to a fundamental change in Labour policy toward Northern Ireland’s status. Blair shifted from supporting Irish unification to neutrality, which attracted pro-Agreement unionists critical of the Labour party’s past support of consent. In other words, more unionists would support Blair’s Labour government because it no longer appeared to support Irish union. Blair’s government coupled with Ahern’s pro-nationalist Fianna Fáil government created a balance between unionism and nationalism that stimulated unionist participation. Tony Blair also turned away from previous British policy that strove to keep Northern Ireland issues internal by welcoming international intervention, such as that of the United States.

Negotiations

The GFA talks took place between September 1997 and April 1998. The talks followed the three-strand approach. Strand One involved negotiations between Northern Ireland’s political leadership to create power-sharing structures in Northern Ireland. Strand Two would take place between representatives of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. They planned to create a North/South Ministerial Council. Strand Three involved negotiations between the British and Irish governments that would create a British-Irish Council and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, replacing the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Further sections addressed concerns such as human rights, security, policing, and justice.

46. Ibid., 418.
47. *A farewell to Arms?*, 53.
In its first two sections, the GFA covered two key issues that brought both nationalists and unionists to the table and ensured the continued ceasefires of republican and loyalist groups. The first section addressed support for the GFA through recognition of the suffering in both communities, and the commitment to addressing human rights issues. This section affirmed all parties’ “total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and [their] opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose.”

The second section focused on constitutional issues through the replacement of the AIA with a new British-Irish Agreement (BIA). This agreement affirmed the process for changes to Northern Ireland’s status, and solidified plans for changes to both the British and Irish constitutions. The new policy on Northern Ireland’s status stated that participants:

recognize that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right to self-determination on the basis of consent freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Annexes to this section included drafts for the proposed amendments to the British Government of Ireland Act of 1920 and the Irish Constitution of 1937. Perhaps most important to acceptance of the GFA, the Irish constitutional amendment removed the language so abhorrent to unionists. The new wording of Articles Two and Three surrendered the Irish Republic’s right to the whole island of Ireland, agreeing that “a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with a consent of the majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island.” Though not a total victory for unionists, the Irish amendment helped allay fears of impending Irish unification while confirming to nationalists that a path to unification still existed.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
The GFA then moved to Strand One, the democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. It proposed a Northern Ireland Assembly of 108 members, led by a First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Assembly decisions must protect human rights and any future Northern Ireland Bill of Rights. The Assembly’s responsibilities included all devolved powers (non-devolved powers still fell to the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Secretary of State in conjunction with Westminster Parliament legislation), and any cross-community decisions fell to proportional votes.⁵²

An Equality Commission would monitor the Assembly in accordance with the GFA, and a Civic Forum comprised of Northern Ireland civilian representatives would consult on “social, economic, and cultural issues.”⁵³ Further, Strand One declared that ministers “who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office.”⁵⁴ This safeguarded the integrity of non-violence in the new Assembly against political parties such as Sinn Féin.

Strand Two addressed the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland through the creation of a North/South Ministerial Council to act on issues on an “all-island and cross-border basis.”⁵⁵ The main parties to the Council included the Irish Taoiseach and the Northern Irish First Minister and Deputy Minister. The GFA subjected Council decisions to approval by each government’s legislative body, making the North/South Ministerial Council and Northern Ireland Assembly inter-dependent structures. It designated a Joint Secretariat to service the Council. Future recommendations for Strand Two included a European Union dimension.⁵⁶

Strand Three tackled the British and Irish government dimension through the formation of a British-Irish Council (BIC) and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIC). The BIC comprised

⁵². Ibid.
⁵³. Ibid.
⁵⁴. Ibid.
⁵⁵. Ibid.
⁵⁶. Ibid.
“representatives of the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and if appropriate, elsewhere in the United Kingdom, together with representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.” The GFA outlined plans for a secretariat and suggested subjects for Council discussion.

The new BIIC replaced the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference of the AIA. The BIIC allowed the British and Irish governments to consult on all non-devolved powers regarding Northern Ireland. It derogated no sovereignty in either nation, so final decisions on Northern Ireland’s non-devolved powers still fell to the British government. The GFA planned a BIIC review after three years to evaluate the implementation of the GFA, and to make recommendations for next steps.

The next several sections of the GFA addressed the issues that continuously plagued the Northern Ireland peace process. In the first section on human rights, involved parties affirmed several human rights guaranteed to all people in Northern Ireland regardless of their community, including “the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means,” and “the right to freedom from sectarian harassment.” In order to protect these rights, the British government agreed to complete the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into all Northern Ireland political and judicial structures to ensure their laws met Europe’s established standards for human rights. Additionally, a new Northern Ireland Human Rights commission, created from both Northern Irish communities, would handle issues specific to Northern Ireland and draft a Bill of Rights to enhance the ECHR standards.

A planned British Equality Commission replaced several separate bodies to streamline improvements. The GFA encouraged the Northern Ireland Assembly to create their own Department of

57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
Equality. The Irish government agreed to take similar steps, and the GFA envisioned a Joint Committee between the North and South, as well. The GFA also stressed the necessity of the Northern Ireland Victims Commission as an outlet for both communities in recognizing their past and supporting the healing process.  

The next section on economic, social, and cultural issues primarily addressed economic instability and employment by stating that the British government would implement economic policies to improve Northern Ireland’s economy and promote employment equity. The section went on to garner agreement among involved parties to protect linguistic diversity, along with other cultural expressions.

The decommissioning section acknowledged the continuing work of the IIDC and the involved governments in the “decommissioning of [all] illegally-held arms in the possession of paramilitary groups” within two years of the agreement. Throughout the peace process, the issue of decommissioning threatened to derail negotiations. Unionists continued demanding decommissioning in exchange for Sinn Féin’s involvement in talks, and Sinn Féin relayed PIRA demands for inclusion in exchange for decommissioning. Andrew Sens, a member of the IIDC, argues in “A Commission to Decommission Paramilitary Arms: Northern Ireland’s Example,” that “demanding decommissioning before political issues could be addressed gave too much control to those on both sides most likely to oppose political compromises.” This meant that placing the onus on the PIRA to decommission threatened to delay or destroy GFA negotiations. Sens summarizes the Mitchell Report’s claims as suggesting “decommissioning was unlikely to succeed unless it could be arranged so as to indicate

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62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
66. Ibid., 77.
neither surrender nor defeat.” The PIRA needed to believe that decommissioning did not equal an admission of defeat. That is why, as decommissioning got underway, its details often remained unpublished.

The IICD attended the peace talks with the goal “to facilitate the decommissioning of fire-arms, ammunition, explosives, and explosive substances provided to [the IICD] voluntarily by the paramilitaries operating on the island of Ireland.” Although no decommissioning took place during GFA talks, the IICD facilitated the process in subsequent years, leading to completion of PIRA decommissioning by September 2005. Despite its slow implementation, the presence of an independent body of international leaders at GFA talks served to assure an unbiased commitment to decommissioning.

The GFA then moved to issues of security, tackling the necessary conditions for a normal security situation in Northern Ireland: the reduction of British Armed Forces in Northern Ireland, the closure of security installations, the removal of emergency powers, and a review of the British Offences Against the State Act 1939-85. Issues of policing and justice needed significant reform to achieve a normal security situation because the nationalist community lacked confidence in security forces. The GFA called for a formal review of the RUC by independent commission, and the creation of a new effective force fully representative of both communities. To further garner nationalist and republican confidence, the GFA called for the scheduled releases of all paramilitary prisoners belonging to groups maintaining ceasefires within two years.

In addressing validation, implementation, and review, the British and Irish governments agreed to rapidly sign the BIA. A referendum organized by all involved governments and scheduled for May 22, 1998, would ask, “Do you support the agreement reached in the multi-party talks on Northern Ireland

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67. Ibid., 78.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 79.
70. Ibid., 82.
72. Ibid.
and set out in Command Paper 3883? British and Irish constitutional changes set forth in the GFA would also face approval by referendum. Pending consent in the referendums, the GFA scheduled the Northern Ireland Assembly’s initial elections for June 25, 1998.

Aftermath

British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern signed the GFA on April 10, 1998 as the official representatives of the involved governments. The main political parties endorsing the Agreement included the moderate Catholic SDLP and Protestant UUP. Hardline Sinn Féin endorsed the GFA, while the DUP was the main party to reject it based on Sinn Féin’s participation in the impending Assembly. Other signers included the loyalist UDP and PUP, the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC), and the liberal APNI.

When the planned referendums took place on May 22, 1998, over 71 percent of Northern Ireland’s population and over 94 percent of the Irish Republic’s population endorsed the GFA. More importantly, Northern Ireland’s results came from an 81 percent turnout, meaning that many unionists also supported the GFA, an historic moment given the lack of unionist support for the SA and AIA.

The GFA garnered unprecedented initial support, but fears remained over its potential longevity. Although much more comprehensive than previous agreements, many needed to see the GFA’s changes implemented before calling it a success and an end to The Troubles. In the first 10 years after the GFA’s signing, parties took major steps in the implementation process.

73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
76. “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 34.
77. Ibid., 8.
78. Ibid., 32.
In the immediate wake of the GFA, paramilitary splinter groups threatened to derail the GFA’s ceasefire’s decommissioning plans. Hardline PIRA members, for example, disgusted that leaders like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness abandoned the armed struggle, formed groups like the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA.\(^7^9\) The most egregious example of violence came in August 1998 when the Real IRA set off the Omagh bomb, killing 29 people.\(^8^0\) Thankfully, PIRA members stayed loyal to their leaders’ promises of nonviolence and decommissioning, and major instances of paramilitary violence ended. As a result, in the period between 1999-2001, fewer than 50 deaths occurred from paramilitary violence.\(^8^1\)

In addition to the decrease in violence, several actions by British and Irish governments successfully implemented the GFA’s structures. The British and Irish governments signed the BIA and amended their constitutions in late 1998. The British and Irish governments signed treaties in March 1999 allowing the implementation of the Strand Three structures.\(^8^2\)

The first Northern Ireland Assembly elections took place on June 25, 1998, and though not without interruptions, British Direct Rule ended on December 2, 1999 when they devolved several powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly.\(^8^3\) The remaining issue facing the new Assembly was the DUP’s refusal to serve in a power-sharing government with Sinn Féin. When Sinn Féin and the DUP received the largest majorities in the 2003 Assembly elections, the DUP refused to meet or serve with Sinn Féin, causing a prolonged suspension of the Assembly.\(^8^4\)


\(^8^0\). Sens, “A Commission to Decommission,” 81.

\(^8^1\). “Deaths-Clustered-Northern Ireland.”


\(^8^3\). Ibid.

\(^8^4\). “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 25.
The implementation of plans in other areas of the GFA, such as security and policing, led to further controversy. For example, the releases of paramilitary prisoners in accordance with the GFA began in September 1998. This issue raised public outcry, especially among families of murdered police officers.\textsuperscript{85} Prisoner releases formed a key element to garnering support for the GFA, though, and they supported permanent ceasefires of various paramilitary groups.\textsuperscript{86} Also, the releases required the maintenance of peace and “individuals who [broke] their release conditions by re-involving themselves in political violence [would] be required to serve out their sentences in full on top of any new sentence.”\textsuperscript{87}

The British also replaced the RUC with the new Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in November 2001. By 2012 Protestants made up about 67 percent of police officers, and Catholics represented about 30 percent.\textsuperscript{88} While some feel the gap between Catholic and Protestant representation is still too wide, the significant rise in Catholic representation from seven percent in 1993 speaks volumes on the work done to integrate, and surely encourages support for the police force among nationalists.\textsuperscript{89}

The GFA achieved mixed progress on the issue of decommissioning, as well. Although the PIRA decommissioned all weapons by 2005, the only loyalist group to give up its arms was the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) in 1998. Andrew Sens wrote that “no mainstream loyalist paramilitary group [had] begun to decommission” by 2006.\textsuperscript{90} Regardless, all major paramilitary groups sustained their ceasefire agreements after the GFA.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{85} A farewell to Arms?, 207.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 43.
\textsuperscript{89} McKittrick, “Catholics Make Up 7%.”
\textsuperscript{90} Sens, “A Commission to Decommission,” 83.
The British government demonstrated some of the GFA’s progress on human rights through recognition of violence against Northern Irish citizens, such as on “Bloody Sunday.” The 1998 Saville Inquiry found that British forces opened fire on unarmed citizens without provocation. As a result, the British Prime Minister officially apologized to affected families. Unfortunately, few other commissions took place in the decade following the GFA.

International powers celebrated the historic GFA. John Hume and David Trimble received Nobel Peace Prizes in December 1998 for their part in its successful negotiations. In his acceptance speech, John Hume echoed the sentiments of many:

We in Ireland appreciate [the] solidarity and support -- from the United States; from the European Union, from friends around the world -- more than we can say…. Two major political traditions share the island of Ireland. We are destined by history to live side by side. Two representatives of these political traditions stand here today. We do so in shared fellowship and a shared determination to make Ireland, after the hardship and pain of many years, a true and enduring symbol of peace.

David Trimble remarked during his acceptance speech that “There are two traditions in Northern Ireland. There are two main religious denominations. But there is only one true moral denomination.

And it wants peace.”

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92. “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 52.
93. Ibid.
International powers offered monetary support, too through the International Fund for Ireland, that gave “£628 million from the United States Government, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand” by 2013.\(^9^8\) The money inspired all GFA parties to continue their work.

The last major negotiations in the decade after the GFA’s signing resulted in the confidence-building decisions of the St. Andrews Agreement signed on October 13, 2006.\(^9^9\) In the agreement, the British and Irish governments, along with Northern Ireland’s major political parties, sought to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and its devolved powers.\(^1^0^0\) The Agreement also addressed further issues on security and policing in Northern Ireland.\(^1^0^1\) The St. Andrews Agreement ended the DUP’s abstention and restored the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007.\(^1^0^2\) As a result, the hardline Protestant DUP’s Ian Paisley became First Minister and hardline Sinn Féin’s former PIRA leader Martin McGuinness became Deputy First Minister, an historic compromise in power-sharing for such deeply divided political parties. The British government also officially ended military operations in Northern Ireland in 2007.\(^1^0^3\)

The GFA addressed many of the problems facing the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. O’Duffy claimed that the GFA’s structures bridged the gap between the opposing national demands of nationalists and unionists because of its flexibility on Northern Ireland’s status.\(^1^0^4\) In other words, the document “reflects the persistence of (opposing) nationalisms” by “moving from coercive to consensual” means.\(^1^0^5\) Its inclusion of all political parties, paramilitary groups, and international groups allowed the GFA to make progress where other agreements collapsed or stalled.

\(^9^9\). Ibid.
\(^1^0^1\). Ibid., 223.
\(^1^0^2\). “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 25.
\(^1^0^3\). “Good Friday Agreement- An Overview,” 38.
\(^1^0^4\). O’Duffy, “British and Irish Conflict Regulation,” 428.
\(^1^0^5\). Ibid.
Conclusion

On April 10, 2018, Northern Ireland celebrates 20 years since the signing of the GFA. The GFA brought The Troubles to an end, establishing a power-sharing agreement that preserved the peace, for the most part, during those 20 years. Why did the GFA succeed where its predecessors failed so miserably? The GFA’s success depended on the inclusion of paramilitary groups despite their history of complicity in violence. Their leaders, in turn, convinced fellow militants to honor enduring ceasefires. The GFA elicted further success when all sides agreed to participate in a political power-sharing arrangement that militants on both sides long viewed as a betrayal of the cause for which they willingly killed and died. The GFA’s utilization of the Republic of Ireland and international authorities like the EU and the United States strengthened the commitment to the new political structures. Finally, the British removal of Direct Rule and reforms to Northern Ireland’s policing and justice, helped guarantee basic human rights.

In comparing the peace processes, the first major difference concerns the participants. The SA focused on creating a power-sharing executive within Northern Ireland, proportionally represented by Northern Ireland’s moderate political parties. The Irish Taoiseach participated, but the SA itself included no Irish dimension. Moderate Northern Irish political groups participated, but the British government ultimately decided how each issue concluded. The talks barred the conservative Protestant DUP and some UUP members from participating because they refused to accept the British White Paper’s power-sharing proposals. Sinn Féin received no recognition from the British government because of its ties to the PIRA. Although backchannel talks between republican and loyalist groups and the British government started in the early 1970s, the British policy against official communication with terrorists meant paramilitary groups lacked a reason to support political processes. Finally, the British considered the Northern Irish problem an internal issue, so they welcomed no international help.
The AIA, in turn, included no official Northern Irish participation, opting instead for inter-governmental talks between the British and Irish governments. The British government continued to exclude paramilitary participation beyond backchannel communications, and only privately allowed international influence through U.S. President Ronald Reagan. The British created an Irish dimension through the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, but excluded Northern Irish political parties who saw the AIIC as an imposition. Unionists also believed the AIA constituted a British attempt to support Irish union and abandon unionists.

The GFA clearly included the most participants. All Northern Irish political parties, whether moderate nationalists and unionists, or republican and loyalist parties, received invitations on the condition of adherence to exclusively peaceful negotiations. Therefore, paramilitary groups finally voiced official demands through their respective political parties during the peace process. The British government gave the Irish government a more meaningful role in Northern Irish affairs through the all-island bodies of Strand Two. The United States and the EU, among others, openly supported the peace process and the British welcomed their participation through organizations like the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. The only major group refusing to participate was the DUP, who refused to share power with Sinn Féin. Though no party likely agreed with every aspect of the GFA, all signed it, and the DUP eventually agreed to govern with Sinn Féin in the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2007.

Another major difference between the agreements was British Direct Rule. The SA and AIA moved Northern Ireland no closer to removing Direct Rule. The collapse of the SA’s power-sharing executive displayed the strength of Northern Ireland’s unionist opposition to political compromise, and the British government made little effort to enforce or shore up the executive. The AIA bypassed devolved Northern Ireland governance altogether by excluding their political parties from the peace process. Therefore, no attempt to remove Direct Rule existed in 1985. Only the GFA created and
continuously supported a power-sharing Assembly. The British suspended the Assembly at various points after the GFA because of sectarian disputes, but British officials tried to restore the Assembly as quickly as possible, sometimes in as little as one day.

Security constitutes another major difference in the agreements. Throughout The Troubles, the British promised reduced military presence and security restrictions only when the security situation improved. Neither the SA or AIA reduced violence. In fact, violence spiked during and after those processes. The British offered no short-term steps for the reduction of restrictions in exchange for a decrease in paramilitary violence. By 1998, though, the British government finally negotiated lasting ceasefire arrangements, and the GFA laid out plans for the closure of security installations and reduction of troops, among other measures, with proposed timelines for completion. The British launched those plans soon after the GFA’s signing.

Few changes to policing and justice took place before the GFA. The SA and AIA recognized concerns, but failed to reach any compromises, delaying matters for later discussion. No further discussions made progress, either. The SA, for example, failed to stop Internment. The AIA ended internment but removed the Special Category Status of political prisoners. Both failures increased republican violence and distrust.

Republican militancy intensified unionists’ outrage at the Irish Republic’s extradition laws which allowed paramilitary fugitives to escape prosecution for crimes committed in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, failure to address the RUC’s discriminatory hiring and treatment of the Catholic community increased nationalist distrust in policing. The GFA promised a formal review of the RUC and judicial policies. The British and Irish governments even agreed to release paramilitary prisoners on the condition they remain non-violent. The British and Irish governments upheld their promises through the release of paramilitary prisoners and the creation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland that replaced the RUC.
The issue of human rights constituted another difference among the peace attempts. The SA failed to address human rights directly. The planned power-sharing executive attempted to represent the Catholic and nationalist community more proportionally, but it collapsed. No other measures addressed economic issues, employment discrimination, housing, or cultural protections. The AIA’s AIIC removed the Flag and Emblems Act but did little else to improve minority conditions. Conversely, the GFA enlisted the help of the ECHR to oversee judicial equity. Commissions formed to address employment and other civil rights issues. The British government pledged funds to boost Northern Ireland’s economy, and the United States, EU and others sent billions in aid to Northern Ireland.

Finally, the GFA addressed paramilitary violence like no earlier peace process. The devolution of the SA into large-scale unionist and loyalist violence, answered by increased republican violence, illuminated its failures. The British negotiated a couple of short-term ceasefires in the years surrounding the SA but violence resumed. The AIA’s inter-governmental process largely ignored sectarian demands. Republican tensions remained high after the Hunger Strikes. Loyalist violence spiked in protest of the AIIC’s Irish dimension. Beginning in 1994, republican and loyalist groups agreed to more permanent ceasefires, largely due to the potential inclusion of their political representatives in peace talks. Though brief suspensions interrupted progress, the political advantages clearly outweighed the merits of violence. Brendan O’Duffy explains their choices:

If unionists want less Irish government involvement in Northern Ireland matters it must share power in Northern Ireland and accept cross-border bodies. And if Irish nationalists (including republicans) want less British rule, they must recognize Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, and gain the consent of unionists for the enhancement of links between north and south.¹

Republicans and loyalists chose to repudiate violence to pursue the political opportunities of the GFA. By and large, the ceasefires of the major republican and loyalist groups still hold. Small dissident groups continue to operate, but lack communal support.

¹. O’Duffy, “British and Irish Conflict Regulation,” 422.
These are the primary factors responsible for the GFA’s success and the failures of the SA and the AIA. Northern Ireland’s peace is not guaranteed, though. Unfortunately, recent events threaten the GFA’s achievements. The United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union in 2016 directly impacts the GFA itself, and the maintenance of its structures. The recent prolonged suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly also displays the fragility of the GFA’s political bodies.

Brexit, the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU in June 2016, exposed the continued fragility of Northern Ireland’s peace. Brexit threatens the open border between the North and South allowed by the UK’s former EU membership. Also, the EU’s inclusion in some GFA bodies impacts the stability of those bodies, as well as any EU funding.

The GFA and the United Kingdom’s EU membership created a “soft” border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland “without customs checks or passport control.”² Practically, this removed the heavily defended British security checkpoints of The Troubles. Free flow of people, vehicles, and goods helped Northern Ireland’s economy and softened tensions once exacerbated by paramilitary violence. The UK’s withdrawal from the EU would potentially require the reestablishment of a hard border between the UK and the Irish Republic. This kind of border poses a real risk to the coexistence of Protestants and Catholics in the UK province of Northern Ireland. Security checkpoints were an almost irresistible target for paramilitary attacks during The Troubles, and their return may pose a temptation to paramilitary groups who opposed the GFA. Some argue that even one border attack could set in motion a process that would result in the British army’s return and the reintroduction of Direct Rule.³ Former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, so integral to the GFA, has warned that, “Yes,

there could be serious trouble ahead. No society is immune from the regressive forces that are part of every problem." Others argue such language exaggerates the threat because remaining paramilitary dissidents constitute a minute faction with little public support in Northern Ireland. The new generation born after the GFA likely lacks the extremely divisive feelings of earlier generations that supported armed struggle. Additionally, the British government’s desire to return to security levels of The Troubles seems highly unlikely.

In the wake of Brexit, the European Union outlined a plan for the border to remain soft by allowing Northern Ireland to remain in the EU customs union without derogation of British sovereignty over them. Unfortunately, British politics block the plan’s implementation. British Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May performed poorly in the last general election; a coalition with Northern Ireland’s DUP saved her government. The hardline Protestant DUP wants a hardened border because it protects partition and the union with the UK. Accepting the EU’s border proposal threatens to anger the DUP and may lead to a Labour government takeover in the upcoming May 2018 general elections. The British government needs to tread carefully, though, because a hardened border and the return of violence does not serve overall British interests of maintaining post-GFA conditions in Northern Ireland.

The European Parliament released a report in 2017, written by Jonathan Tonge, called The Impact and Consequences of Brexit for Northern Ireland. The report addressed that the UK’s vote to leave the EU impacts portions of the GFA pertaining to the EU. The British must edit or remove any

6. Ibid.
7. Booth, “Unexpected Hurdle for Brexit.”
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
affected parts of the GFA because failure to do so would invalidate the exercise of some GFA functions. For example, in Strand Two, the North-South Ministerial Council will “consider the European Union dimension of relevant matters, including the implementation of EU policies and programmes and proposals under consideration in the EU framework.”11 Because the UK left the European Union, Northern Ireland is no longer bound to or granted those conditions.

The EU’s report suggests a willingness to work with GFA parties to preserve its institutions. Only some portions involve the EU, and Northern Ireland appears to desire EU membership and privileges.12 Nearly 56 percent of Northern Ireland voted in 2016 to remain in the EU, including 89 percent of nationalists and 35 percent of unionists.13 This majority support decreases the threat to portions of the GFA regarding the EU.

The major concerns listed in the report include the continuing presence of the ECHR and EU funding to bodies like the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The British government pledges to fund the program through the UK Treasury, but the British government may renege on those promises.14

The final threat to the GFA deals with the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Assembly suspended its activities in January 2017 after the resignation of Sinn Féin’s Martin McGuinness. According to the Assembly’s rules, his resignation automatically suspended the Assembly.15 Although McGuinness’s deteriorating health certainly factored into the resignation, DUP leader Arlene Foster’s renewable energy plan also played a role.16 With no agreement, the Assembly continues under suspension, and the

11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
British government even resorted to threatening to withhold Assembly paychecks. The upcoming general elections may bring the deadlock to an end if a British Labour government takes over, as the DUP would lose necessary British Conservative backing.

Much work remains in healing the wounds of each community in Northern Ireland, continuing to improve trust in policing and justice, and improving economic and human rights issues. The residual issues do not detract from the progress, though. After 20 years, many conclusions exist about why the GFA succeeded where the SA and AIA failed. What is clear from this research is that the relationship between paramilitary groups and government policies most affected the success or failure of each peace process. The British government’s willingness to openly negotiate with paramilitary groups and their political representatives, along with paramilitary commitment to ceasefires, decommissioning, and purely political tactics, constitutes the GFA’s legacy. Though problems still exist, Northern Ireland’s overall commitment to peace negates the fears of a return to protracted conflict.

17. Ibid.
Figure 1. This CAIN Web Service graph depicts the number of deaths in Northern Ireland during The Troubles.  

Figure 2. This CAIN Web Service graph depicts the number of deaths in all of Europe related to the conflict in Northern Ireland during The Troubles.²

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NICRA used the slogan “one man, one vote” in their campaign to gain universal suffrage in Northern Ireland.


