

The Road to Peace?

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT AND THE CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

By STEFAN WOLFF

The conflict in Northern Ireland is one caused by incompatible conceptions of national belonging and the means to realize them. The conceptions are a united Ireland, pursued by Nationalists and Republicans, and continued strong constitutional links between the province and the United Kingdom, desired by Unionists and Loyalists. Historically, these traditions have been associated with Catholicism and Protestantism. Labels have played a significant role in the conflict; they have made possible the systematic pursuit of discrimination and segregation. Yet, this has not made the conflict an ethno-religious one. The same holds true for language. Although less significant, the equality and preservation of Gaelic and Ulster Scots have mobilized some sections of the population in Northern Ireland, yet overall, the conflict is not ethno-linguistic either. Similar cases could be made for other dimensions of the conflict. What they all have in common is that they have polarized Northern Ireland's society for decades, leaving no room for cross-cutting cleavages and eventually aligning all of the dimensions of the conflict behind two fundamentally different conceptions of national belonging.

Defining the Northern Ireland conflict as an ethno-national one has important implications for analysis of the conflict and attempts to settle it, as well as for identifying suitable comparative cases. Causes for failure and success in conflict resolution need to be sought at more than one level. Although the situation in Northern Ireland is of great significance, it must not be seen in isolation from the political processes in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Increasingly over the past two decades, factors in the international context—international connections of paramilitary groups, the influence of diasporas, and the consequences of

European integration—have become more important. The interplay between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the international context can explain why the various conflict resolution attempts that have been made ever since the conflict in Northern Ireland escalated violently have faced extreme difficulties in negotiation and implementation. This only changed with the Good Friday Agreement concluded in April 1998. After more than two years, it appears that despite numerous difficulties facing its supporters, the agreement provides sufficient stability and flexibility to allow a political process to take place in Northern Ireland that is regarded by the vast majority of the population as representative of its interests.

In this article, I analyze more than thirty years of unsuccessful conflict management in Northern Ireland that preceded the Good Friday Agreement. Following a brief exploration of the debate about the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict and the solution it requires, I trace the various attempts to settle the conflict, from the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and finally to the Good Friday Agreement. This makes it possible to assess the reasons for the success so far of the Good Friday Agreement and its future prospects.

THE CONFLICT ABOUT THE CONFLICT AND ITS SOLUTIONS

Explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict vary widely between and within the two principal communities in Northern Ireland.¹ Generally, a line can be drawn between external and internal accounts. The Nationalists, and especially Republicans, contend that the involvement of the British state in what is essentially described as internal Irish affairs is the major cause of the conflict; the Unionist and Loyalist

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version is that the Republic of Ireland, in upholding its constitutional claim to the whole of Ireland in Articles II and III of its 1937 constitution, unnecessarily fueled tensions and encouraged the Nationalist/Republican tradition to strive for Irish reunification.²

Internal explanations, in contrast, see the roots of the conflict in a variety of factors within Northern Ireland itself, focusing on the implications of economic, religious, and cultural conditions in the province. Economic deprivation and systematic discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland are the most common argument to account for the conflict; economic opportunism on the part of those who profit from the ongoing conflict is another. Religion is seen either as a phenomenon that deepens and aligns existing social divides, making positive intercommunal relationships virtually impossible, or religious fanaticism of certain sections within each community is interpreted as the driving force behind the conflict. Cultural accounts, finally, treat the conflict as either inherited—the tradition of being in conflict with the other community or the authorities—or as an ethno-centrist clash of two fundamentally different cultures.

As a consequence of this conflict about the conflict, proposed solutions have differed widely. They range from full integration of Northern Ireland into Great Britain, to devolution, independence, repartition, and eventually to Irish unification, with a variety of models for each major proposal.

Integration into Great Britain, defined as direct government by Westminster, is an idea supported by parts of the Unionist community and is based on the conflict being caused by the "Irish dimension." Full integration, in one version, aims at making Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom such that it would neither be treated any differently from any other part of the country nor have separate, or independent, or different institutions. Supporters of electoral integration propose a slightly different model, according to which the main British political parties should expand into Northern Ireland to create a party-political "normality" above sectarian divisions and thus eliminate or at least gradually realign Northern Irish political parties on other issues. Both of these models of integration suggest a modification of the system of direct rule, which, at the time of its introduction in 1972, was to be temporary, but lasted for almost three decades. However, there is a third group of integrationists who argued

that instead of being changed this system should have simply been made permanent.

In contrast to the various types of integration, which were supported almost exclusively by Unionists, the idea of devolving powers held by the Westminster government, in various forms with different degrees of support, has been favored by sections of both communities. Although return to majority rule, as it existed between 1921 and 1972, is favored among significant sections of the Unionist community, notably the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and some parts of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), this proposal enjoys no support within the nationalist camp. Majority rule with safeguards such as a bill of rights and an election system based on proportional representation is a more moderate approach that tries to take account of the historic concerns of the minority community. However, any significant support for such a solution has always been confined to unionism. Another proposal for a devolutionist arrangement, supported by the explicitly cross-communal Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and some sections of the UUP, was power sharing—giving political representatives from both communities the opportunity to be involved in the executive and legislative branches of a new system of government in Northern Ireland. Although the moderate nationalist community, primarily the Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP), supported the idea of power sharing, they wanted it to be qualified by some sort of executive and legislative involvement of the Republic of Ireland, which was unacceptable to Unionists before the 1990s.

Somewhere between suggestions for integration into Britain and Irish reunification stand proposals for repartition along the major demographic divides in the west and southwest of the province, the independence of Northern Ireland from both Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and joint authority of both states over Northern Ireland. With the exception of joint authority, which found significant support among nationalists, none of these proposals was attractive to a majority within either of the two major traditions in Northern Ireland.

In contrast, the idea of a united Ireland has always been very popular as a long-term goal in the nationalist community. Although moderate nationalists favor uniting Ireland by consent, in peaceful, constitutional, and democratic ways, Republican paramilitary groups, most notably the IRA, have tried since 1921 to force the issue through violence. This approach is reject-

ed by large sections of the nationalist community, but a majority of the same community is nevertheless united on the desirability of Irish unification, which in turn, is strongly opposed by Unionists and Loyalists.

All of these positions have developed and gradually changed over time. Nevertheless, they provide a general understanding about the origins of the distinct political traditions and parties. As such, they form the context in which the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements were concluded and the Good Friday Agreement approved.

THE FAILURE OF SUNNINGDALE

With the Northern Ireland conflict at its early climax in 1972 and 1973, the British government published *The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion* shortly after the introduction of direct rule.³ This publication was followed by a consultation process in Northern Ireland, after which constitutional proposals for the province that were to provide a power-sharing executive and closer, formal links between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were introduced in Parliament.⁴ After the proposals were approved in Westminster, elections to a power-sharing assembly were held on 28 June 1973. The system provided for the election, by proportional representation, of five to seven delegates in each of the twelve parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. With a turnout of 72.5 percent, the elections returned seventy-eight representatives of eight parties to the new assembly. The official Unionists won 29.3 percent of the vote and sent twenty-four members to the assembly, followed by the SDLP with 22.1 percent and nineteen successful candidates. Together with the Alliance Party, which won 9.2 percent of the vote and eight seats, they formed a coalition government (Northern Ireland executive), initially supported by fifty-two of the seventy-eight members of the assembly, which was in favor of both the idea of power sharing and of a Council of Ireland to be established subsequently.

Between 6 and 9 December 1973, representatives of the British and Irish governments and of the parties involved in the designated executive met at Sunningdale and agreed to the setting up of the Council of Ireland. The provisions foresaw a Council of Ministers with executive, harmonizing, and consultative functions, consisting of an equal number of delegates from the Northern Ireland executive and the Irish government, and a Consultative

Assembly of thirty members from each of the parliaments, chosen by proportional representation on the basis of the single transferable vote system within each parliament. The council was to have executive functions, by means of unanimous vote in the Council of Ministers, in the fields of environment, agriculture, cooperation in trade and industry, electricity, tourism, transport, public health, sport, culture, and the arts. The conference also agreed on closer cooperation in security-related matters, on inviting the Council of Ireland to draft a human rights bill, and on the possibility of a future devolution of further powers from Westminster to the Northern Ireland assembly and the institutions of the Council of Ireland.

The initial, widespread support for these arrangements began to change dramatically early in 1974. The Westminster elections on 28 February had been turned into a referendum on the new constitutional status of the province and the more formal links with the Republic of Ireland. Opponents of any change in the status quo, united in a coalition called the United Ulster Unionist Council, won 51 percent of the vote and eleven of the twelve seats in Northern Ireland, with the remaining seat going to the SDLP. Shortly afterward, the recently established Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) called for new elections to the Northern Ireland assembly. When a motion against power sharing and the Council of Ireland was defeated in the assembly by forty-four to twenty-eight votes on 14 May 1974, the UWC called for a general strike. The following two weeks of the strike brought Northern Ireland to an almost complete standstill. The British government failed to break up the strike and was unwilling to negotiate a settlement with the UWC. This led to the resignation of the Northern Ireland executive on 28 May 1974. The assembly was prorogued two days later, and direct rule was resumed.

The conditions for success of power sharing and a formal institutional involvement of the Republic of Ireland in the affairs of Northern Ireland were not stable enough to endure the pressures exercised on them. Even though the initial elections to the Northern Ireland assembly seemed to be a clear vote in favor of the new constitutional status, the situation in the province betrayed this impression. The cooperating elites had a rather secure two-thirds majority in the assembly, but their influence and control over their (former) electorate on the *outside* was far less permanent and stable, espe-

cially among Unionists in favor of the new arrangements and the Alliance Party.⁵

To further complicate the situation, Harold Wilson, the Labour prime minister, condemned the UWC strike in a television broadcast as a "deliberate and calculated attempt to use every undemocratic and unparliamentary means for the purpose of bringing down the whole constitution of Northern Ireland." He also accused the strikers of "sponging on Westminster and British democracy,"⁶ a remark that broadened and deepened the alienation of the unionist community. Even after this statement, no decisive steps were taken to end the strike, either by entering into negotiations with the UWC, as Brian Faulkner, head of the Northern Ireland Executive, demanded, or by deploying and using security forces, as the SDLP requested. The Executive lost its confidence in the willingness and ability of the British government to preserve the constitutional arrangements put in place at the beginning of the year.

The situation in the Republic of Ireland also did little to promote the success of Sunningdale. Not only was the Sunningdale Communiqué vague in its wording, it lacked a guarantee by the Irish government concerning the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. This was further aggravated by a 16 January 1974 ruling of the Irish Constitutional Court on the compatibility of Article 5 of the Sunningdale Communiqué with Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.⁷ The court declared that Article 5 was merely a statement of policy, but that any attempt to implement it might be in violation of the constitution.⁸ Realizing the potential dangers for the situation in Northern Ireland, the Dail rejected a motion against partition on 25 February; and on 13 March, then Irish prime minister William Cosgrave gave further assurances, stating that "the factual position of Northern Ireland is that it is within the United Kingdom" and that his "government accepts this as a fact."⁹ In the eyes of loyalists, this was too little, too late.

The effects in Northern Ireland were devastating. As neither the Northern Ireland Executive nor the British government sought clarification from the Irish government on this issue, the SDLP's interpretation of the new constitutional arrangements—that they were merely transitional on the road to Irish unity—was significantly strengthened and fears within the unionist community about the constitutional future of Northern Ireland were compounded.

The Labour government under Harold Wil-

son also did little to assure loyalists of its desire to find a settlement acceptable to all parties. Instead, British policy statements increased loyalist fears of a sellout. In a speech in Newcastle-under-Lyme, then secretary of state for defence, Roy Mason, acknowledged the pressure on the government to set a date for the army to be withdrawn from Northern Ireland, which would increase the leverage on politicians in the province to seek a solution to their differences.¹⁰ Even more difficult to explain was a letter by the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees, which was presented at an IRA press conference on 13 May 1974, in which Rees had stated, "We have not the faintest interest to stay in Ireland and the quicker we are out the better."¹¹

The Sunningdale Agreement was not a treaty between two states, but an agreement reached between two states and a selected number of political parties. To work, it would have required substantial support for those partners in the agreement who were most volatile to pressures from their own communities. The pro-agreement parties in both blocs were vulnerable to outflanking by hardcore radicals. That this support for pro-agreement politicians was not forthcoming was one of the major reasons for the failure of this early attempt to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict. In contrast to the situation two-and-a-half decades later, there was little international pressure to implement the agreement.

THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

After the failure of Sunningdale, the British government undertook several other initiatives. In an attempt to eliminate what was seen as the reason for the failure of Sunningdale, these initiatives were either strictly limited to Northern Ireland itself, such as the 1974–75 constitutional convention, or, when they had cross-border implications, they did not involve any Northern Irish political parties, as with the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council set up in 1981. Yet, none of these initiatives was any more successful in resolving the conflict than Sunningdale had been.

Between 1982 and 1984, another attempt was made by reintroducing a scheme of "rolling devolution" involving an assembly and a committee-style executive. The devolution of powers to elected representatives in Northern Ireland was to be gradual and subject to a 70 percent majority in favor in the assembly to be elected. As there was no adequate recognition

of the nationalist tradition in Northern Ireland, both Sinn Féin and the SDLP participated in the 1982 elections on an abstentionist platform and subsequently boycotted the assembly.¹²

In 1983, the Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and Labour parties of the Republic of Ireland met with the Northern Irish SDLP in Dublin at the so-called New Ireland Forum to discuss the future of Northern Ireland.¹³ Eleven public meetings were held extending up to February 1984. Delegates from the forum visited Northern Ireland in September 1983 and the United Kingdom in January 1984. The forum then produced a report in which the members gave their analysis of the problem, examined the situation in Northern Ireland, and presented three potential solutions to the conflict—a unitary Irish state, a federal or confederate Irish state, and joint British-Irish authority over Northern Ireland.¹⁴ Although this report represented a determinedly nationalist interpretation of the conflict and its solutions, it signaled to the British government that there was a basis for negotiation and compromise.

Given this and the British desire to involve the Republic of Ireland in the responsibility of running the province amidst the continuously serious security situation, and the growing Irish interest in stabilizing the situation in the north and preventing a spillover of violence or Republican influence, a new, joint approach to the conflict seemed possible. Both governments faced a growing appeal of Republican ideology within the nationalist community, particularly after the hunger strikes of the early 1980s. Based on these considerations, both governments decided to enter into negotiations, which resulted in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement dealt with a variety of issues, including an intergovernmental conference, a human rights bill for Northern Ireland, security and judicial policies, and cross-border cooperation on economic, social, and cultural matters. The British attempt to address concerns of the nationalist community was apparent, but as the implementation of the agreement did not produce any dramatic or even particularly noticeable results, the reward for Britain's alienating the Unionist community was not forthcoming. Although the influence of Sinn Féin within the nationalist camp decreased toward the end of the 1980s, activities of the IRA increased.¹⁵ The declining electoral appeal of Sinn Féin in the mid to late 1980s set in motion a rethinking process among the leadership of the party. Eventually, the party moved

away from its unqualified support for, or at least tolerance of, republican violence to become one of the participants in the peace process of the 1990s that finally brought about the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. At the same time, strong Unionist opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement failed to secure one of the central objectives of the British government, namely strengthening moderate Unionism in the form of the UUP and marginalizing the radicals in the DUP. Similarly unsatisfactory were the working of the intergovernmental conference, the hoped-for improvement in the security situation,¹⁶ and the envisioned cross-border cooperation.

Attitudes toward the Anglo-Irish Agreement also revealed the persistent, deep divisions within Northern Irish society. In a survey of January 1988, 55.1 percent of those who declared themselves as Protestants voiced their opposition to the agreement, compared with 7.9 percent of those describing themselves as Catholics. Only 8.7 percent of Protestants opted more or less in favor of the agreement, as compared to 31.8 percent of Catholics who did so. Asked in the same survey for the biggest problem in Northern Ireland, only 8.6 percent of Catholics, but 29.5 percent of Protestants pointed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Although the Anglo-Irish Agreement had not failed as badly as Sunningdale, it did not produce a significant breakthrough in the political stalemate in Northern Ireland. In some respects, such as the increasing alienation of parts of the Unionist community, it worsened the situation and prevented major progress for years to come. Although the stalemate continued, it did so on a different level. The agreement had shown that there were possible solutions to which the two governments and a significant part of the nationalist community could agree. This had a positive long-term effect on the opportunities to reduce the level of violent conflict and to increase the chances to achieve an inclusive agreement for the future of Northern Ireland, because it made uncompromising, hard-line unionism less credible as a strategy to preserve Northern Ireland's link with Great Britain. It also showed that there was overwhelming support for constitutional, nonviolent politics within the nationalist community, the latter finding its expression in the poor electoral performance of Sinn Féin in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The limited success of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was mostly a consequence of its being reached and implemented at the inter-

governmental level. This was a recognition of the situation in the mid 1980s in which cross-communal agreement was virtually impossible; the British and Irish governments had to accept the fact that no stable and durable solution would be possible without the involvement and consent of the parties representing the two traditions in Northern Ireland.

FROM THE FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS TO THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

By 1994, the situation in Northern Ireland had changed significantly. Following a joint declaration by the British and Irish prime ministers in 1993, a number of confidence-building measures were introduced, leading to cease-fires by the major paramilitary organizations that did not cover a specified period of time, as they had in the past, but seemed, if not permanent, at least longer-term. In addition, the British government had entered into official and formal talks with representatives of the paramilitary organizations of both communities, and Sinn Féin was heading back into the political process, being recognized as a necessary partner by both governments. However, both governments realized that the causes of conflict in Northern Ireland had not been removed and that a more comprehensive settlement was necessary to achieve that. Thus, they developed "A New Framework for Agreement," which proposed structures for North-South (or, Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland) and East-West (British-Irish) institutions and sought to integrate the suspended talks with the political parties in Northern Ireland with a new effort of peacemaking.¹⁸ Both governments recognized that a settlement would not be possible without substantial compromise from all conflict parties and reaffirmed the basic positions of the joint declaration. Self-determination and consent, peaceful and democratic means, and recognition of the fundamental rights and identities of both traditions were the only acceptable political strategies. In addition, the British government proposed its own ideas for a possible solution of the conflict within Northern Ireland in a document called "A Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland."

Throughout 1995, contacts continued between the British government and Sinn Féin, but no major progress was achieved.¹⁹ The end of the IRA ceasefire in February 1996 and the resumption of (Republican) violence through-

out the region, targeting primarily the security forces, and in England proved a major setback. Despite this, the British and Irish governments announced that there would be elections in May 1996 for delegates to all-party talks to be held in June. Although Sinn Féin polled a record 15.5 percent of the vote in the elections, the party was not allowed to take its seats at the negotiation table²⁰ because IRA violence continued and the party did not sign the Mitchell principles of nonviolence.²¹ The multiparty talks commenced as planned, but there were no significant results in the first year.

The election of a Labour government in the general elections in May 1997, the emphasis Labour put on reaching a settlement in Northern Ireland, and the perception, primarily among the nationalist community, that there was a new approach in Northern Ireland policies offered new opportunities. In July 1997, the IRA renewed its cease-fire. After Sinn Féin signed the Mitchell Principles, the party was allowed into the multiparty talks at Stormont, which, however, resulted in the DUP and the United Kingdom Unionist Party walking out. After more than six months of intensive negotiations, eight political parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish governments agreed on what has become known as the Good Friday Agreement.

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT—A WAY TO A LASTING SETTLEMENT?

The Good Friday Agreement established a 108-member legislative assembly elected by popular vote in Northern Ireland using the single transferable vote system. From within this assembly, an executive is elected using the d'Hondt formula. A first minister and a deputy first minister, also elected by the assembly, lead the executive. The assembly has legislative powers in a wide variety of areas, ranging from economic policy and health care to education and tourism. The Northern Ireland secretary retains a certain measure of power, most crucially in the area of security and justice policy. Within the assembly, qualified majority voting procedures can be invoked on critical issues. The assembly can also veto any proposal by the North/South Ministerial Council that was set up by the Good Friday Agreement to coordinate cross-border cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A new British-Irish Council operates on a similar premise and includes delegates from the two national governments and the three regions

within the UK that have devolved powers (Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). The British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, subsuming both the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council and the Intergovernmental Conference established under the 1985 agreement, was given the task of promoting bilateral co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.²²

Despite the apparent comprehensiveness of the Good Friday Agreement and its endorsement by overwhelming majorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the question remains whether it provides an effective framework for a permanent resolution of the conflict. To answer this question, it is useful to compare the Good Friday Agreement to previous settlement attempts in terms of both their content and the context of their implementation.

Starting with the first of these issues, a comparison between the Sunningdale Agreement, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and the Good Friday Agreement reveals that there is a core of issues dealt with in a similar manner. However, there are also a number of differences among the agreements. The first difference involves the signatories of each. Although the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland have signed all of them, only the Sunningdale and Good Friday Agreements involved political representatives from the communities of Northern Ireland. Clearly, the participation was far broader in the 1997-98 talks process and, even more significantly, included representatives of paramilitary organizations as well as the mainstream constitutional parties.

A second difference concerns the comprehensiveness and detail of the arrangements. The Good Friday Agreement, based on an inclusive negotiation process, addresses the greatest number of issues and goes into detail concerning the operational procedures for their implementation.

A third difference is the character of the implementation process. Only the Good Friday Agreement was proposed to the people in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland in a referendum; the others were implemented by government decree, thus giving the people a sense of imposition. The majority with which the Good Friday Agreement was endorsed by the population north and south of the border and across the communities in Northern Ireland is unprecedented in the history of the conflict. However, it remains to be seen how long this majority will persist under the strains to which the agreement is subjected.

Fourth, since the beginning of the final round of the negotiation process in the autumn of 1997, the major paramilitary organizations on both sides have upheld their cease-fires.

Fifth, what alternative arrangements would be put in place if the Good Friday Agreement fails? A comparison with the situation that existed after the Sunningdale agreement reveals that the incentives for both communities to find a *modus vivendi* within the agreement structure are more compelling than they were before. The failure of Sunningdale meant the reintroduction of direct rule, an outcome that many in the Unionist community preferred to power sharing. Failure of the Good Friday Agreement, however, will mean most likely that the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland will move toward shared sovereignty over Northern Ireland. Clearly, this is not an outcome that Unionists would prefer. Nationalists, however, would also lose, as the influence of both communities on decision making in Northern Ireland would decrease significantly.

Finally, the international context, especially the involvement of the United States, has been a critical factor in the success of the Good Friday Agreement. In particular, the international mediation of the talks process and American pressure on, and incentives for, all parties in the process to come to an agreement and implement it have played a significant role. The vital role of former U.S. Senator George Mitchell in brokering the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and in overcoming the decommissioning impasse in 1999, as well as the support from the European Union must not be underestimated. The endorsement of the post-agreement peace process in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to John Hume and David Trimble was similarly significant. It encouraged the pursuit of a long-term and stable peace in Northern Ireland, putting the spotlight on developments in the province, in which the major protagonists can less and less afford to fail in their efforts to seek accommodation.

In summary, the conflict in Northern Ireland, in all of its aspects and dimensions and in its dependence on factors that can be influenced only to a limited degree by the political actors in Belfast, London, and Dublin, is not certain to be resolved within the institutional framework set out in the Good Friday Agreement. The reason is that the Good Friday Agreement, like earlier agreements, is dependent on cooperation and compromise between two communities that have fundamentally different political aspirations and identities. These, of course, may

change over time provided that opportunities and incentives for such change exist.

NOTES

1. An overview of the various interpretations of the Northern Ireland conflict is John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

2. As part of the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish constitution has been modified in this respect.

3. Northern Ireland Office, "The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion," HMSO, London and Belfast, 1972.

4. Northern Ireland Office, "Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals," Cmnd. 5259, released 20 March 1973.

5. The votes each received in the 1974 Westminster elections were one-third of the votes in the 1973 assembly elections, partly because of the different voting systems—PR for the assembly and plurality rule for the Westminster elections.

6. Quoted in Patrick Buckland, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), 172.

7. The relevant passage of Article 5: "The Irish Government fully accepted and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in that status."

8. Cf. Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden, *Northern Ireland: The Choice* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 120.

9. William Cosgrave in the Dail debate on 13 March 1974, quoted in Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966–1995 and the Search for Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1995), 169.

10. Cf. J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence, 1967–1992* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993), 409.

11. Quoted in Bell, *The Irish Troubles*, 410.

12. Cf. Michael J. Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969–1989: Its Nature and Execution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 150.

13. Invitations had also been issued to all of the Unionist parties, which decided to boycott the forum.

14. New Ireland Forum, *Report* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1984).

15. This was facilitated by a shipment of weapons and equipment from Libya.

16. According to RUC statistics, in the three years prior to the Anglo-Irish Agreement there were 195 deaths, 2,342 injuries, 716 shooting incidents, 607 explosions, and 1708 armed robberies. The respective figures for 1986–1988 are: 247 deaths (+27 percent), 3,661 injuries (+56 percent), 1,132 shootings (+58 percent), 661 explosions (+9 percent), and

2,253 armed robberies (+31 percent). This increase was not necessarily a direct effect of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, as O'Leary and McGarry have shown in *The Politics of Antagonism*, 270–73.

17. Cf. Andrew Hamilton, et al., *Violence and Communities* (Coleraine: University of Ulster, Centre for the Study of Conflict, 1990).

18. Cf. Brendan O'Leary, "Afterword: What is Framed in the Framework Documents," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1995): 862–72, at 867.

19. Part of the reason for the lack of progress was the British insistence that the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons had to precede Sinn Féin's admission to formal multiparty talks. This precondition was set by the Tory Party after the negative response by Unionists to the framework documents. It also reflected the wider problems of the Conservative government and its decreasing majority in Westminster. Cf. Brendan O'Leary, "The Conservative Stewardship of Northern Ireland, 1979–1997: Sound-Bottomed Contradiction or Slow Learning?" *Political Studies* 45: 663–76, at 672.

20. The Conservative Party (by then in office for seventeen years) had suffered for a long time from what O'Leary calls the "talking and not talking to terrorists syndrome." However, under the government of John Major, parts of the Tory elite became more flexible. Although they did not exclude the possibility of negotiations with Sinn Féin (before the 1997 elections were called), their initial talks did not have a positive impact on the peace process. Cf. O'Leary, "The Conservative Stewardship of Northern Ireland," 672f.

21. Section III, Article 20 of the so-called Mitchell Report spells out the principles to which parties participating in the talks should commit: "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, 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." Cf. George J. Mitchell, John de Chastelain, Harri Holkeri, "Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning," 24 January 1996, Belfast 1996.

22. A more detailed discussion of the Good Friday Agreement can be found in O'Leary, "The Nature of the British-Irish Agreement," *New Left Review* 233 (1999): 66–96.