



National Committee on American Foreign Policy

Where Leaders Meet

Northern Ireland Peace Initiative

JOURNEY TO BELFAST AND LONDON

Report and Policy Recommendations by William J. Flynn and George D. Schwab
February 1999

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At the invitation of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a National Committee on American Foreign Policy mission consisting of William J. Flynn, chairman, and George D. Schwab, president, spent a week (November 2-7, 1998) in Belfast discussing the peace process in Northern Ireland and in London where we also discussed U.S. and British global security interests with leading statesmen, politicians, diplomats, and academics. The meetings took place at Stormont Estate, 10 Downing Street, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the House of Commons, think tanks, and the American embassy in London, among other sites.

Before embarking, Dr. Schwab was briefed at the State Department by James I. Gadsden, deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs; James M. Lyons, special adviser to the president and the secretary of state for economic initiatives in Ireland; Katharine E. Koch, special assistant, office of the special adviser to the president and the secretary of state for economic initiatives in Ireland; and Patricia Nelson-Douvelis, Ireland desk officer.

Although this report and the policy recommendations it contains focus on Northern Ireland, the material gathered on U.S. and British national security interests will be incorporated in relevant NCAFP publications, including those forthcoming on NATO and the Middle East.

The sensitivity of some of the issues discussed led a number of people to request that they not be quoted by name or identified in other ways. We therefore decided not to include any attributions in the report. In Belfast we met with Gerry Adams, M.P.; Mervin Bishop; Sir Kenneth Bloomfield; Richard Buchanan; Aidan Canavan; David Ervine; Dr. Barbara Erwin; Ronnie Flanagan; Alistair Graham; Frank Guckian; David Hewitt; Bill Jeffrey; Hugh Logue; Seamus Mallon, M.R.; Brendan McAlister; Chris McCabe; Chris McGimpsey; Eddie McGrady; the Right Honorable Dr. Mo



Mowlam, M.P.; Paul Murphy, M.P.; Chris Patten; George Patten; Robert Pierce; Gerard Rice, Bruce Robinson; S. Leslie Ross; Professor Clifford Shearing; Peter Smith, Q.C.; David Trimble, M.P.; and Cedric Wilson.

In London we met with Robert Bradtke of the American embassy; the Right Honorable Peter Brooke, M.P. (who was joined by members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee in the House of Commons); Simon Dannreuther; George Fergusson; Blair Parks Hall, Jr., of the American embassy; Paul Harvey; John Holmes; George Joffe; Professor Brendan O'Leary; Jonathan Powell; Christopher Prentice; Philip Reed; Adam Thomson; Professor David Wall; and David Warren.

We wish to express our deepest appreciation to them and other individuals who briefed us in Washington, D.C., Belfast, and London, and we especially thank the British consul general in New York, Jeffrey Ling; the director of the British Information Services, Gerry McCrudden; and the British consul for Northern Ireland in New York, Paul Johnston. Without their diligence, patience, and advice, the NCAFP's fact-finding mission would not have come about.

FOREWORD

A question that has often been asked is why an organization such as the National Committee on American Foreign Policy (NCAFP) came to concern itself with the troubles in Northern Ireland, a speck on the map whose population is well under two million. After all, almost all of our interlocutors remind us, the NCAFP is a privately funded, activist foreign policy organization that articulates American foreign policy interests from a nonpartisan perspective and within the framework of political realism.

What American foreign policy interest, they ask, is involved in Northern Ireland? We reply that the organization's mission statement provides the precise reason for its involvement in the peace process in Northern Ireland.

In the late 1980s we began to question publicly whether the vast resources that Britain was committing year after year in Northern Ireland—estimated in dollar terms to be between six and ten billion dollars annually—were affecting Britain's vital security interests that converge with ours in Europe and elsewhere. Just as we concluded that the vast resources of the rich United States were not sufficient to wage the cold war in much of the world without adversely affecting the country's well being and its vital global interests, we concluded that the United States could not and must not stand by and watch a key friend and ally across the Atlantic squander precious resources where its national security interests did not warrant it.

Since the National Committee's involvement in Northern Ireland in 1988, it has sponsored four major conferences, including the one on February 1, 1994, that was attended by Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein. Thanks to President William J. Clinton who decided to issue him a visa for forty-eight hours, Adams was able to enter the United States for the first time. It is now commonly agreed that his presence at the conference was the turning point that initiated the peace process.

At that conference, at other conferences, and at private and public meetings and gatherings, the NCAFP was privileged to receive and hear the views of Dr. John T. Alderdice, leader of the Alliance party; John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party; the Reverend Ian Paisley, head of the Democratic Unionist party; James Molyneaux and David Trimble, heads of the Ulster Unionist party; David Ervine, Gusty Spence, and Billy Hutchinson of the Progressive Unionist party; Gary McMichael, Joe English, and David Adams of the Ulster Democratic party; Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Sir Patrick Mayhew and Dr. Marjorie Mowlam; Senator Edward M. Kennedy;



Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith; Senator George J. Mitchell; and Arthur M. Schlesinger, jr., dean of American historians, and others.

Moreover, a score of articles and NCAFP policy recommendations have appeared in the last decade in the pages of the National Committee's *American Foreign Policy Interests*. And, as far as we can perceive, the NCAFP will continue to be actively involved in promoting the peace process.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The ultimate goal of U.S. foreign policy toward Northern Ireland is the establishment of a warm peace in the area. To obtain this end it is in the interests of U.S. policy

(a) to respect the wishes of the Northern Irish people and remain involved in the peace process,

(b) to help promote a genuine civil society and all that that implies, including strict adherence to the rule of law and human rights, and

(c) to help promote economic growth;

2. The disengagement of Britain from the politics of Northern Ireland;

3. The introduction of a curriculum for primary and secondary school children that stresses a common past;

4. The expansion of educational and cultural exchange programs designed to demonstrate how people of distinct traditions live together and interact harmoniously and peacefully;

5. The reformation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary both symbolically and structurally to include the name of the organization, the composition of the force, and the separation of policing duties from security concerns;

6. The decommissioning of paramilitary arms according to the terms of the Belfast Agreement. Symbolic decommissioning to be encouraged prior to May 22, 2000;

7. The development of a comprehensive plan to commemorate the victims of the violent past, including compensation for the maimed and the psychologically wounded, and

8. The release of political prisoners.

FROM HATE TO HOPE

Hope is the mood that governs Northern Ireland. This found expression at the polls in May 1998, when more than 71 percent of voters in Northern Ireland endorsed the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement of April 1998, which was signed by the leaders of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and the eight political parties in the North.

Commonly known as the Belfast Agreement, this political document provides the basis for building a genuine liberal democratic society. Central to an entity worthy of the name is the absolute commitment to religious, cultural, and political pluralism, to human rights, and to the rule of law; and of significance to a divided society such as Northern Ireland, the Belfast Agreement contains a firm commitment "to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences. . . ."



Despite the overwhelming endorsement of the Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland is still riven by dissension over a plethora of issues that should be overcome because the will of the people mandates that outcome. In short, the movement toward genuine peace is a work in progress, and addressing the problems in this process and making recommendations constitute the purposes of this report.

Northern Ireland is a society that is divided by two religious traditions that diverge in interpretation of Christian doctrines. But whereas a considerable segment of the Catholic minority (approximately 47 percent) and Protestant majority (approximately 53 percent) is prepared to live in peace, hatred flamed by vocal minorities in both camps has led to violence and even murder. Hence however much the majorities in both communities have learned to tolerate each other, injections of virulent hatred extinguish the harmony that has flared in the two camps from time to time, affecting public institutions and all other facets of life.

Although Unionists favor the preservation of what may be called Britishness, Protestantism, and the economic advantages of the British link, a vast spectrum within this camp differs on the extent to which they are prepared to fight for their way of life. Hear the Reverend Ian Paisley: "I am loyal to Jesus Christ, the only Head and King of the Church. I am loyal to the Bible, which I believe in every part is the infallible rule of faith and practice. I am loyal to the principles of the great Protestant Reformation, and refuse to barter my heritage for a mess of ecumenical pottage. I am loyal to the Queen and the throne of Britain, being Protestant, in the terms of the Revolution Settlement."¹ And note the moderate Protestant and head of the Alliance party, Lord John T Alderdice: "A couple of years ago, when I was trying to persuade both the British and the Irish governments to change their views a little and move forward together, I said to the British government, 'Please do not back the Unionists. Please try to take into account the sensitivities and the desires of all the people of Northern Ireland.' And I said to the Irish government, 'Please do not back the Nationalists. Please take into consideration the sensitivities and the aspirations of all the people of Northern Ireland.' If the British government were to back the Unionists and the Irish government were to back the Nationalists, they would deepen the partisan split in the community."²

An undogmatic view similar to Lord Alderdice's has been expressed by the Catholic John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, the largest Nationalist party in Northern Ireland. As he sees it, "The border in Ireland is the psychological barrier between the two sections of the community in the North built on prejudice, sectarianism, and fear. To remove it requires the eradication of sectarianism and prejudice. This can only come through the development of understanding and friendship. This is the real task which faces everyone who genuinely wants to solve the Irish problem. The weakness of this approach is that it is undramatic. It does not offer an instant and glorious solution. It offers only a hard unpopular road of accepting that it will take patience and a long term plan which should be worked out painstakingly. Its virtue is that it is the only road.... It cannot come about by coercion, because a problem of sectarian division and prejudice is only deepened and strengthened by violence."³

The overarching goal of the left-leaning Sinn Fein party is to reunify Ireland, a Nationalist aim shared by many Catholics in both the North and the South. To obtain this end Sinn Fein, at least theoretically, justified proceeding on a dual track: the legal as well as the illegal, including violence.

In explicating his party's goal, Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein, stated before the National Committee on American Foreign Policy on his first visit to the United States on February 1, 1994, that "Britain's role in Ireland has never been benign"⁴; for as long as Britain continues to ignite the flames of conflict "the central cause of the conflict, partition and the denial by Britain of the right of the Irish people to national self-determination," the "military and political deadlock" will not be broken.⁵ According to Adams, "The right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination is supported by universally recognized principles of international law. Sinn Fein considers the



realization of the right of our people, all the Irish people, to national self-determination to be our primary political objective. We also consider that the denial by the British government of our right to exercise this right is a major source of conflict."6

As is well known, sectarian violence in Northern Ireland has in the past thirty years claimed the lives of more than three thousand human beings. But because leaders of the Protestant Loyalist parties that represent the mainstream of the Loyalist paramilitary forces have conducted responsible campaigns in support of the Belfast Agreement, it can be assumed that "David Ervine and Billy Hutchinson, leaders of the Progressive Unionist party, and Gary McMichael, the leader of the Ulster Democratic party, may well play invaluable roles in the new political life of Northern Ireland."7 And it may also be assumed that they have counseled the leadership of their respective paramilitary forces to desist from resorting to violence.

Because the Belfast Agreement goes a long way toward meeting Nationalist demands, Sinn Fein leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have strongly counseled the leaders of the mainstream Irish Republican Army (IRA) to desist from the use of arms. And because both "have been welcomed to 10 Downing Street and to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue [and] have become prominent and popular strategists for a segment of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, it is anticipated that they will play leading roles in the political life of Northern Ireland."8

Religious toleration and commitment to cultural and political pluralism as well as to the rule of law and human rights are hallmarks of civil societies in liberal democracies. A common educational curriculum emphasizing those values and the duties and obligations of citizenship constitutes, therefore, the uniform core at primary and secondary schools in open-society countries.

But because of the schism in Northern Ireland, most lower level schools are exclusionary, that is, attended either primarily or exclusively by Catholic or Protestant children. And each school curriculum usually mirrors its own religious and cultural traditions at the expense of the other as well as at the expense of a common past.

Because no peace can be well entrenched in a society that promotes divisiveness, a school curriculum that emphasizes the common past rather than a Catholic or Protestant past must be dramatically and rapidly improved and expanded so that it can become the rule rather than the exception that it now is.

Moreover, because segments of the population of both traditions live in self-imposed ghettos where their prejudices remain intact, specific programs targeting youngsters in those areas are urgently needed. Stated succinctly, educational and cultural programs such as those that have brought children from Northern Ireland to the United States to learn and experience first hand how people of distinct traditions, including the three Abrahamic ones, live together and interact harmoniously and peacefully must be considerably expanded.

Deep-seated wounds heal slowly. A centrifugal force in the healing process is the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

Insofar as the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland is concerned, the turning point in its perception of the RUC as a partisan police force that was fast becoming a hostile enforcer of Protestant lawlessness and disorder occurred in the summer of 1969. Recognizing that the RUC was unable to



cope with mounting communal tensions over Orange marches that led to communal disturbances that soon engulfed parts of the North in violence, the British government deployed British troops to quell the violent disturbances. Almost immediately, sharp dividing lines were drawn by the Catholic Republican and the Nationalist minority. Reflecting variations on a theme, they wanted the British out of Northern Ireland, favored secession from the United Kingdom, and supported reunification with the South. In contrast, the predominantly Protestant Unionist camp reiterated its determination to remain part of the United Kingdom.

With law and order severely challenged, both IRA and Loyalist paramilitaries in parts of their respective communities assumed duties traditionally associated with policing. Though both communities in which paramilitary organizations are active criticize the lack of a regular police force to take care of their needs, no public debate has to date taken place on this critical issue.

In the course of the NCAFP's fact-finding mission, what emerged as critical to the peace process and to the maintenance of peace is the need to reform the Royal Ulster Constabulary both symbolically and structurally.

Although a good segment of Republicans and Nationalists favor the abolition of the RUC, an objective assessment of the realities on the ground has led to the conclusion that this may not be possible. Most onerous to Republicans and Nationalists is the word Royal in the title, for it symbolizes everything that is British and all that British implies.

Structurally the RUC needs to be reformed from top to bottom. It must be turned into a regular, impartial, representative, effective, and objective police force capable of preventing armed or unarmed vigilantes from imposing their sense of justice on Northern Ireland. In short, the leaders of Northern Ireland must make every effort to turn that body into a genuine police force that can serve the needs of all without passion and hatred. This would also entail freeing policing from political control, divorcing security considerations from policing, and forming a police force truly balanced between Protestants and Catholics. (The present composition of the RUC is 92 percent Protestant, and roughly 15 percent of this total consist of men from the vitriolically anti-Catholic and anti-Nationalist Orange Order.) The total decommissioning of arms may very well hinge on the creation of a true police force.

The demand for the immediate decommissioning of weapons is a red herring, but it can be explosive. According to the Belfast Agreement, the signatories to the agreement are committed "to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations." It goes on to state that "the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms" must take place "within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement. . . ." In other words, decommissioning can take place any time between May 22, 1998, when voters went to the polls in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, and May 22, 2000. What the agreement does not say is that paramilitary arms must be surrendered any time prior to May 22, 2000.

The problem that recently emerged is not over the principle of decommissioning but over timing. To mollify disgruntled constituents in the largest Protestant political party, namely, the Ulster Unionist party, who have begun to object to parts of the Belfast Agreement in general and to the decommissioning provision in particular, the leader of the party, David Trimble, has demanded that the IRA decommission partially now as the precondition for Gerry Adams, head of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, to take his legitimate seat in the executive government of Northern Ireland. Because of dissension within the IRA over parts of the Belfast Agreement, Gerry Adams,



although committed to decommissioning, appears to be unable and, perhaps, even unwilling to persuade the IRA to subscribe to a precondition that is not provided for in the Belfast Agreement.

To move the peace process forward, moderate Unionists, Republicans, and Nationalists favor the idea that the IRA and Sinn Fein agree to a symbolic gesture, namely, to a partial decommissioning of offensive weapons such as plastic explosives and machine guns. The argument advanced by Sinn Fein, on the other hand, is that no matter what compromises the IRA may agree to, Unionists are determined to stall the peace process by introducing a never-ending variety of preconditions.

Based on wide-ranging discussions in Belfast and London, the NCAFP shares the view that to move the peace process forward a symbolic gesture providing for token or partial decommissioning by both the IRA and the Loyalists⁹ is worth making. But the NCAFP is also convinced that this will not take place as long as the new precondition introduced on decommissioning remains the focus of politicians and, therefore, of the media. In order to defuse tensions associated with the issue of decommissioning, politicians need to deflect attention from it and, instead, proceed to implement other terms of the Belfast Agreement. If this new recommendation is followed, the decommissioning problem will undoubtedly resolve itself in due course.

CONCLUSION

This report does not constitute an exhaustive investigation of the troubles of Northern Ireland that prompted the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and subsequently the United States government to step in in order to help resolve the conflict. It is hoped that this report and the recommendations it embodies will at least elucidate the U.S. national interest and touch on some of the most critical issues that need to be addressed.

It is utopian to believe that uncontested, uninterrupted progress will be made by an ideologically riven and spiritually wounded people. Hence as the Belfast Agreement is being implemented, the goodwill and deep faith of those who willed this document into existence must be reinforced. For the peace process to move forward and for peace to become firmly entrenched, a long and arduous process of healing deep-seated wounds must be nurtured.

Although this will entail making difficult decisions on reforming the educational system and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, among other concerns, no healing process can be complete without taking to heart the victims of the violent past: the killed, the maimed, and the psychologically wounded. Hence commemorating the killed and compensating the injured must be integral to the healing process. However unpleasant the prisoner issue may be, the healing process cannot afford to leave them out of the equation.

Because the decommissioning issue is now central to the stalled peace process, a plea for goodwill is appropriate here as well. Both sides to the controversy are right. In the words of Ruairi Quinn, the head of the Labour party of the Republic of Ireland: "The law is on the side of Sinn Fein. But morality is on the side of David Trimble." Because the law is on the side of Sinn Fein, there is no reason to keep the party out of the new cabinetlike executive as provided for in the Belfast Agreement, and it is hoped that the IRA and the Loyalists will then do the morally right thing: make a gesture toward partial disarmament.



NOTES

1. Thomas Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland, 1920 to 1996* (New York, 1997), page 160.
2. Dr. John T. Alderdice, "Speech to the National Committee on American Foreign Policy," *Conference on Northern Ireland*, February 1, 1994, page 9.
3. Thomas Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland, op. cit.*, page 181.
4. Gerry Adams, "Speech to the National Committee on American Foreign Policy," *Conference on Northern Ireland*, February 1, 1994, page 17.
5. *Ibid.*, page 16.
6. *Ibid.*, page 17.
7. Edwina McMahon, "The Belfast Agreement," *American Foreign Policy Interests* (June 1998): 6.
8. *Ibid.*
9. On December 18, 1998, the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), a paramilitary force that came into being only in 1996, handed in a number of illegal firearms, grenades, and detonators to the international commission headed by General John de Chastelain of Canada at the commission's headquarters in Belfast. The LVF's action failed to trigger a similar response from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or from the older, more powerful loyalist paramilitary forces—the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The IRA has continued to maintain that "the priority must be to implement all the provisions of the Belfast Agreement, seats on the executive as of right for Sinn Fein, North-South bodies, the equality agenda, demilitarization. When all these things are seen to happen, decommissioning will follow. The loyalist groups share this view and have made it clear that they will not hand over any weapons in advance of the IRA doing so." (Mary Holland, "Formula Needed to Surmount Latest Peace Hurdle," *The Irish Times*, September 17, 1998, page 16.)

