



# NORTHERN IRELAND

## A Balanced Approach to Amnesty, Reconciliation, and Reintegration

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PHOTO: Democratic Unionist leader Ian Paisley (left) and Sinn Fein chief Gerry Adams (right) speak to the media after agreeing to set aside animosities and share power in a new Northern Ireland government. Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and England's Tony Blair called the agreement "historic," "reconciliatory," and "transforming." Belfast, 26 March 2007. (AFP, Paul Faith)

**S**INCE 1969 the United Kingdom (U.K.) has attempted to resolve conflict in Northern Ireland through amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration (AR2). Conflict resolution in Northern Ireland presents valuable lessons for any student of AR2 because it is a rare example of such processes in the context of a Western liberal democracy. This discussion surveys British AR2 efforts, framing them as a case study to help with understanding how these three concepts functioned in leading to peaceful resolution.

### Terms and Processes

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines amnesty as “a general pardon, esp. for political offenses.”<sup>1</sup> In this paper, however, I widen this definition to include a “weapons amnesty” or, as referred to in Northern Ireland, “decommissioning,” which represents a critical part of the peace process as a whole. “Reconciliation” often signifies the breaking down of social barriers within communities.<sup>2</sup> While that meaning remains important in this case, the term also betokens opposing groups managing their political agendas so that meaningful and progressive dialogue becomes possible.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in the context of Northern Ireland, “reintegration” suggests the coming together of opposing sides to form a viable polity and society, allowing those granted amnesty to play a part in AR2.

Given this understanding of terms, AR2 is still happening in Northern Ireland, and it will take some time to determine whether it will be fully successful. Even though the political process appears to have been concluded with

the reconvening of the Northern Ireland Assembly on 8 May 2007 and the ending of the British military's security operations the following July (after 38 years), AR2 will continue for years to come.

While the British military's role in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Northern Ireland has received the lion's share of attention and analysis, it was only a part of the wider AR2 process. This article will look at the wider whole, highlighting military force as an important factor rather than narrowly focusing on it. By suggesting ways in which the British military made positive contributions to the AR2 process, and sounding cautionary notes where it arguably had an adverse impact, the hope is that this case study provides insight for future military planning for similar situations.

The roots of the conflict in Northern Ireland were chiefly political and economic.<sup>4</sup> Resolution of the so-called "troubles" there has, for the most part, come by way of political agreements encouraged by economic incentives. But AR2 has not taken place in a vacuum of politics and economics; rather, it has transpired in an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and violence, with far-reaching consequences. As David Bloomfield writes: "The protracted nature of the violence has, through a process of institutionalization that has spanned a generation, produced profound effects in structural and societal aspects that are less amenable to quantification; for example, the spread and normalization of paramilitarism, the growth of intimidation as a constraint on social behavior, [and] the growth of the 'security' industry."<sup>5</sup> Resolution of the conflict required a security component to cope with the violence and intimidation that engendered fear. Fear in turn impeded political and economic progress. These three dimensions—political, economic, and security—influenced one another in the dynamics of societal progress in AR2 in Northern Ireland.

As Michael Cunningham writes: "Political progress, aspects of social reform, the defeat of terrorism and economic progress are mutually reinforcing and advances (or regressions) in one area can have a knock-on effect in others."<sup>6</sup> The U.K. Government was unable to make real progress in Northern Ireland until it achieved a balance between security operations and progressive political dialogue encouraged by economic growth. In examining this balancing act, the following analysis describes the

security, political, and economic dimensions of AR2 as they influenced one another and combined to shape the resolution process in Northern Ireland.

After discussing this dimensional model, the article moves to examining amnesty, reconciliation, and reintegration processes in Northern Ireland to assess their contribution to conflict resolution. This part of the article explores the importance of existing conditions at the commencement of the process. The key conclusion of the case study is that, in planning for and conducting conflict resolution operations, governments, and in particular militaries, must consider every action in light of its impact on the longer-term success of AR2. For militaries, COIN operations should not be considered as an "end in itself" but, rather, as a key ingredient in laying the foundations for AR2.

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## Background

After power devolved from the U.K. Government to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1920, the side in favor of political union with the United Kingdom, the unionists (mainly Protestants), dominated.<sup>7</sup> Their opposition, the nationalists (mainly Catholics), desired political union with the Republic of Ireland, from which they derived much of their strength.<sup>8</sup> Considerable animosity existed between the two communities, with the unionists discriminating against the nationalists in voting rights and housing.<sup>9</sup> As political and social divides grew, the Catholic community appealed to the U.K. for protection. In 1969, the unionist-dominated authorities responded to Catholic civil rights campaigns in a particularly hostile way. Consequently, the British military was deployed to the province, ostensibly as an impartial force tasked to protect the Catholic community. When an initial attempt at political reconciliation failed, the U.K. Government again assumed responsibility for



British troops set up barbed wire fences between Catholic and Protestant quarters in Cupar Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 10 September 1969.

Northern Ireland (in 1972). This marked the beginning of over 25 years of paramilitary violence that eventually led to the deaths of over 3,600 people (of a population of just over 1.5 million) and countless more injuries and bereavements.

### Impact on Society

Bloomfield notes, in his “structural approach” to the study of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, that “community relations work operates to develop more inclusive communal relationships that will facilitate politics in working out more inclusive political settlements.”<sup>10</sup> Such a structural approach reveals that political developments give society mutually beneficial goals to aim for in AR2.

A “cultural approach” can complement a structural approach by studying events from the grassroots up to the political level. From this perspective, economic developments contribute to the political process and give society incentive to believe that AR2 is preferable to continued interfactional strife. Society in general gains from the synergy of freer economic development and goals of increasing political harmony.

When security operations are applied effectively and discourage a resumption of hostilities, they establish an environment in which mutual trust can become part of that societal synergy. On the other hand, heavy-handed tactics and allegations of partiality create distrust and obstacles to progress in society. In *Beyond Violence: Conflict Resolution Process in Northern Ireland*, Mari Fitzduff claims that in Northern Ireland “the security forces increasingly realized that their own occasionally hostile interface with the communities . . . and the tactics that they sometimes employed became a problematic of the conflict itself.”<sup>11</sup> The goal of security forces should be to focus on enhancing the interconnected progress of political and economic goals. As an important dimension of AR2, security operations should avoid becoming an impediment to the other two lines of operation.

### The Political Dimension

There are four key areas to AR2 in the political dimension:

- The political process.
- Interaction of the key political parties.

- Involvement of regional powers.
- Involvement of outsiders as brokers.

**The political process.** The political process has been critical to AR2 in Northern Ireland. Initially, a focus on security and the perception of the conflict as a zero-sum game in which one party would win and the other would lose hampered AR2. Security, or at least a commitment from the warring factions to cease violence, renounce it, and decommission weapons, became a precondition for political dialogue. With the establishment of the Anglo-Irish Council in 1983, the U.K. Government began to move toward achieving a political settlement. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 established an intergovernmental conference to discuss affairs of mutual interest in Northern Ireland. In December 1993, a joint declaration created the basis of a peace process, eventually termed “A New Framework for Agreement,” which was implemented in February 1995. The process proposed a method for arriving at a future settlement that would not prejudice the aspirations of the opposing sides in Northern Ireland. As such, it paved the way for political dialogue that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 10 April 1998. That agreement, as Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern put it, was “a precise mechanism for achieving a united Ireland, possible only with the consent of Irish people, defined and accepted by all sides.”<sup>12</sup> The political process ended with the Northern Ireland Assembly’s reestablishment in May 2007.

The negotiators considered each agreement in light of previous achievements and drew up goals, with attendant deadlines, for future progress. Even if the deadlines were not met, the existence of agreed timetables gave the political process hope and direction.

**Interaction of key political parties.** The timetables notwithstanding, vehement disagreements between the main political parties, fuelled by the parties’ positions as representatives of increasingly militant and divided communities, inhibited political development. Indeed, such was the strength of the vitriol that many saw the 2007 meeting of Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams as merely the first sign of progress.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the reconciliation of Northern Ireland’s two main political parties was quite another matter.

After three decades of fervent opposition, this first physical meeting between the nationalist and unionist leaders was a watershed event. It demonstrated the commitment of these bitter enemies to work together. The close association of political parties and paramilitary organizations—Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) on the nationalist side and the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) on the unionist side—had been a considerable obstacle to political progress. The United Kingdom had refused to deal with political parties so closely associated with terrorist and criminal groups. As Fitzduff wrote in 2002, “The objectives of the politicians [did] not differ significantly from the objectives of many of the paramilitaries, and during the conflict, the constitutional political parties frequently accused each other of colluding secretly with the different paramilitaries.”<sup>14</sup> Such were the difficulties facing the key political parties.

**Involvement of regional powers.** Arguably, British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s decision to drop arms decommissioning as a condition to dialogue and his subsequent invitation to Gerry Adams to meet with him at 10 Downing Street finally broke the deadlock. Bringing Sinn Fein into the political process when its association with the IRA still tainted it was a bold move only made possible by Blair’s landslide victory in the general election of 1997.<sup>15</sup> Yet Blair, by doing so, made real progress toward AR2.

The changed attitudes of nations with a stake in Northern Ireland were fundamental to progress in AR2. For the U.K. Government, the conflict initially was an internal issue to resolve by imposing its will on the recalcitrant. When this policy failed to make headway, the U.K. handed the reins to local politicians and began to deal with other regional stakeholders, including the Republic of Ireland and the European Union. For its part, the

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Republic of Ireland abandoned its relatively isolated position to deal with the United Kingdom on the nationalists' behalf.<sup>16</sup> Bloomfield suggests that "the partnership between Dublin and London exemplified by the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 represented the single most important change in the parameters of British structural policy."<sup>17</sup> With the positive involvement of neighboring stakeholders and regional powers, the conflict in Ulster saw the possibility of real progress.

**Outsiders as brokers.** Internationalization of the conflict propelled opponents into making resolution genuinely possible. As Seamus Dunn notes, "Although it is difficult to find a measure of the influence of external actors, such as the United States and the European Union, there can be little doubt that interventions by the international community have contributed to the process toward peace."<sup>18</sup> The involvement of the United States (in the person of Senator George Mitchell) paved the way for political dialogue by opening lines of communication between the nationalist political parties and the U.K. Government.

Despite the U.K. Government's objections, President Bill Clinton invited Gerry Adams to the White House in 1994. Adams thereby remained a fundamental part of the AR2 process throughout his tenure.<sup>19</sup> These actions raised AR2 to the international level, forcing the U.K. Government to be more inclusive and more accountable in its approach. That attitude ultimately led to the decision to give Sinn Fein a seat at the negotiating table as a stakeholder, a critical step in the AR2 process.

Once the United States had internationalized the issue, the European Union became increasingly involved in the process. The EU supported AR2 economically and politically. Because of its experience in creating federal institutions, the EU became one of the most influential brokers, guiding the peace process through the GFA and delivering tangible economic development that helped push continued political progress.

The EU's role highlights the overlap between the political and economic aspects of AR2. In essence, the EU tied political progress to economic incentives, which encouraged the political parties to keep the process moving. The people they represented began to see political progress as economically worthwhile. In turn, political development and

cooperation helped open borders and encourage trade. The political dimension thus laid the groundwork for further economic development, and economic development (with the hope it represented for a better future) provided the incentive for further political developments. This cycle proved to be a powerful motivator in Northern Ireland, and it demonstrates the importance of the synergistic relationship between politics and economics in AR2.

Turning to security, if military action is the "continuation of political intercourse," 10 years without actual political dialogue does not mean 10 years without political activity.<sup>20</sup> The longer the military struggle continued, the more politically entrenched the positions became and the more the government's hope of re-engaging the political parties receded. A security operation that divided communities to keep the peace was not conducive to political dialogue. Furthermore, the close association of political parties and paramilitary organizations meant that military actions in Northern Ireland might disproportionately influence the political process. The influence of outside brokers essentially changed the landscape for these associations.

In AR2's initial stages, the emphasis was on security to the detriment of other dimensions of the process. Wherever the parties viewed the conflict mostly in military terms, security forces and paramilitary political arms found it much harder to control militant behavior. Genuine progress in AR2 occurred when the security operation corrected this imbalance by subordinating itself to the political process. It took the influence of powerful outside interests to make that happen. When the opposing sides committed to political interaction with their sworn enemies, they were able to see beyond a zero-sum game, and found an alternative to succeeding through violent means. Pressure from outside brokers helped in getting the security apparatus to back off its dominating posture.

## The Economic Dimension

Economic development was a key condition for effective AR2 in Northern Ireland. Poverty was responsible for many of the root causes of the conflict. Employment discrimination against the Catholic community contributed to growing animosity toward the U.K. Government.<sup>21</sup> As noted earlier, markets opened up for Northern Ireland only after

internationalization of the problem, coupled with economic incentives, stimulated political progress.

The international community's and the EU's involvement was particularly important to economic development in Northern Ireland. Funding for the EU's Program for Peace and Reconciliation (sometimes referred to as the "PEACE Program") reached over €1000 million (American billion). Its aims of social inclusion, economic development and employment, urban and rural regeneration, and cross-border cooperation directly related to AR2.<sup>22</sup>

Because the delivery of aid was made contingent on heeding donor countries' interests, Northern Ireland's economic development made an impact beyond the geographical boundaries of the region. The quid pro quo of aid for interest had the salutary secondary effect of returning Northern Ireland to the world economic system.

The economic dimension also affected the security dimension. Unemployment provided a good recruiting ground for paramilitary groups and drove many of them into criminal activity to fund their campaigns of terror.<sup>23</sup> Fuel smuggling, drug running, and bank robberies placed great demands on the security services, spurring occasionally draconian security measures. With their adverse effect on legitimate trade, these measures exacerbated the economic depression and increased the need for even more security. Waging a military campaign to end terrorism and criminal activity without giving much thought to the economic consequences created a vicious circle, which stunted economic growth in Northern Ireland. In short, economic incentives could flourish only where both security operations and political progress took place.

Eventually, the U.K. Government and other players realized that economic incentives were powerful motivators and used them to good effect. By building commercial ties between sides in the conflict, they were able to stabilize the security situation and achieve political progress. Over time, this encouraged a fractured society to put aside political differences in favor of pursuing prosperity.

The U.K. Government's recognition of the Republic of Ireland's interests in Northern Ireland also reaped economic dividends. The Republic achieved unprecedented economic growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Its GDP rose by 53 percent between 1988 and 1994—the fastest growth in the

EU over the period.<sup>24</sup> Northern Ireland was able to piggyback on this success, and from 1987 to 1997, the nominal value of Northern Ireland's exports to the Republic of Ireland increased by 93.3 percent while imports from the Republic of Ireland increased by 68.3 percent.<sup>25</sup> This growth contributed to a sharp upturn in the Northern Irish economy with "2.4 percent growth per annum for the six years ending 31 December 1996 compared to 0.9 percent for Great Britain as a whole for the same period."<sup>26</sup>

From a peak of 17.2 percent in October 1986, unemployment plummeted to 7.6 percent in November 1997, its lowest level in around 17 years. This progress had two major consequences. First, it removed one cause of the disaffection and disenfranchisement that made the criminal activities of paramilitary organizations appealing. Second, employed persons became stakeholders in society and sought a peaceful, politically progressive environment in which to work and prosper. As Kim Cragin and Peter Chalk tell us, "Some terrorist groups [had offered] recruits financial incentives and additional family support . . . . Social and economic development policies . . . [helped] to reduce the pool of potential recruits by reducing their perceived grievances and providing the members of these communities with viable alternatives to terrorism."<sup>27</sup>

Highlighting the wider impact of economic development on social reconciliation, Cragin and Chalk point to the emergence of a new middle class in Northern Ireland: "Members of this particular demographic sector have formed important mediation networks to reduce violence between supporters of militant Protestant groups and those sympathetic to the cause of the Real Irish Republican Army."<sup>28</sup>

## The Security Dimension

From the start, security forces in Northern Ireland were meant to serve as a visible threat to keep the parties involved in the political process. Military de-escalation was intended to be a bargaining tool to encourage political progress. However, failure to be impartial, or the perception of partiality, prolonged the process. The military resort to a security solution was therefore detrimental to political progress in AR2. The security operation evolved into an end in itself with little consideration given to political (and economic) developments so long as the environment was dangerous. The U. K. used its army

in these early years to counter accusations of Royal Ulster Constabulary partiality, but the army's presence politicized the security effort and undermined police authority.<sup>29</sup> When the GFA and subsequent Patton Commission created the Police Service of Northern Ireland in November 2001, police forces finally began to play an effective role in AR2.<sup>30</sup>

The security situation also had an impact on the economic dimension, as noted above. Border controls and increased internal security measures (e.g., segregation) undermined paramilitary efforts by cutting off smuggling and black marketeering as sources of funding, but also stifled trade. Ironically, absent substantial economic and social development addressing unemployment, the illegal trade the paramilitary organizations engaged in became the source of livelihood for many in Northern Ireland. Cutting off this earning opportunity without providing alternative livelihoods was unpopular and increased discontent.

S.E. Sneddon writes of the early years, "Mistakes were made; the heavy-handed colonial approach of the 1970s that utilized internment, hard interrogation, curfews, and area searches was massively counter-productive and generated deep sympathy for the IRA."<sup>31</sup> The U.K. Government found it difficult to appear impartial when everyone viewed its military as being partial to the unionist side. The government began to counter these allegations by developing new police forces, although the military had a role in this too. As Sneddon observed, "One of the greatest achievements of the armed forces was the ability to evolve and fall more closely into step with political progress, becoming a vital, but always subordinate part in the overall campaign."<sup>32</sup> When the military subordinated itself to the political process, security operations started to have a much more positive effect on the cycle of economic and political progress.

In summary, security forces in Northern Ireland initially enforced peace and protected the citizens by persuading the opposing sides that the economic, political, and social benefits of AR2 outweighed the benefits of continuing the struggle. This security presence eventually created a relatively secure environment for AR2, but real economic and political progress became possible only when the police had primacy over the military and the people believed security forces were impartial. The following sec-

tions discuss AR2 in light of how these dimensions shaped resolution of the conflict.

## Amnesty

In discussing AR2, one should remember that certain conditions have to have been met in order to proceed with an effective process. Specifically there has to be initial political agreement, although, as described below, amnesty can often form part of this initial agreement. As Brian Gormally writes: "Politics have to come first. Only . . . on the basis of a real political solution, will demobilization and reintegration support be fundamental . . . components of post-war rehabilitation and development."<sup>33</sup> In the case of Northern Ireland, this political development was embodied in the GFA, to which amnesty was central. Below follows separate examinations of Northern Ireland's political amnesty and weapons decommissioning.

**Political amnesty.** Amnesty is always an important part of conflict resolution. As Gormally and McEvoy discovered in their 1995 survey of the release and reintegration of politically motivated prisoners across the world, "the issue of the early release of politically motivated prisoners was critical to any peace process which follows a political conflict. Whatever the particular positions taken up by negotiating parties at any given time, we would argue that, until the question of prisoners is agreed then nothing, that will create a final solution, is agreed."<sup>34</sup> Prisoner amnesty in Northern Ireland was important for two reasons: it was an important trust-building measure on the part of the U.K. Government, and many of the key players needed to lead the reconciliation and reintegration processes were behind bars and would have been excluded from the process. Amnesty was, necessarily, a precursor to reconciliation and reintegration in Northern Ireland.

A further point to note is that amnesty often appears as a concession, one side to another, in this case the U.K. Government to insurgents and terrorists. To many, this concession was and remains

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unpalatable. However, the U.K. Government had neither won the COIN fight nor defeated the IRA, as the authors of *An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland* conclude: "It should be recognized that the Army did not 'win' in any recognizable way; rather it achieved its desired end-state, which allowed a political process to be established without unacceptable levels of intimidation."<sup>35</sup> It had, as mentioned above, brought the various belligerents to the point where a negotiated solution was more attractive than continued resistance. By the same token, clearly the U.K. Government had also reached the point where a negotiated solution was in its own best interests, and to that end, in entering the process, it had to be prepared to concede ground in the same way as the other parties.

One can also argue that, in ending violent armed struggle, the U.K. Government had a moral obligation to provide for the future of those they had "put out of work." There had to be at least partial recognition of an obligation to incorporate into the new society those who had fought for two generations to unite Ireland and get the British out by whatever means. Jonathon Moore espouses this view: "A random sweep through the thousands of individual cases that have led to conviction [of insurgents] reveals a complex picture in which the individual offender is caught in a cycle of violence. It is one of the most common remarks to be heard in both unionist and republican [nationalist] circles, that most of the young people who ended up in prison would not have been there but for 'the troubles.' Statistically at least, this is a tenable view."<sup>36</sup>

Amnesty was not a novel concept to the British in Northern Ireland. As Moore writes, "Britain has often found it expedient to release Irish political offenders before they have served their full or even a significant proportion of their sentences. Political realism suggested to British politicians that continued incarceration of 'patriots' was an impediment to and not an aid to achieving political stability."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, there were several amnesties during the "troubles" in response to ceasefires. For example, 36 prisoners received amnesty following the first ceasefire in 1994, and a further 25 between July 1997 and April 1998.<sup>38</sup> However, the already politically sensitive issue of amnesty was raised to another level when, at the 1994 Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, nationalist prisoners tabled a motion asserting that

"the release of all political prisoners is a republican demand based on the merits of justice—there would be no prisoners but for the conflict caused by Britain's usurpation of Irish sovereignty."<sup>39</sup> In effect, this statement put the U.K. Government in a difficult position. By suggesting that any future general amnesty would be tantamount to Britain admitting it had usurped Irish sovereignty, it created pressure that might have hindered further progress. Fortunately, the U.K. Government was able to rise above the rhetoric, and it agreed to a rapid general amnesty in the GFA. Granting general amnesty in the face of such provocative talk probably served to enhance the trust the nationalist parties had in the U.K. Government.

In the GFA, the U.K. and Irish Governments committed to establishing "mechanisms to provide for an accelerated program for the release of prisoners."<sup>40</sup> They noted that those included in the provisions of the agreement should, subject to individual review, be released within two years of signing the agreement.<sup>41</sup> However, while a general amnesty is necessary to begin the processes of reconciliation and reintegration, it also proved divisive, as expected, in Northern Irish society. Given that a considerable majority of those to be freed were nationalist, one can understand the concern felt by the unionist community over the release of such a large number of prisoners (approximately 150). As Prime Minister Blair said: "The early release of paramilitary prisoners . . . reached deep into people's emotions."<sup>42</sup> Ian Paisley has been particularly vehement in his opposition.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, the amnesty also had two key effects on the political process. First, the influence of paramilitary prisoners, which hitherto had been considerable, was significantly reduced, and former militants were led to work through legal political parties in order to achieve their desired ends.<sup>44</sup> Fitzduff points to the emergence of several new political parties in the late 1990s that recruited significant numbers of former paramilitaries (for example, the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party).<sup>45</sup> Second, many of the paramilitaries have been directly involved in furthering the peace process.<sup>46</sup> They have done so either by being politically active or by taking leading roles in the processes of reconciliation and reintegration. Probably the best example is Martin



McGuinness, a convicted senior IRA terrorist who became the chief Sinn Fein negotiator of the GFA. McGuinness currently holds office as the deputy first minister of Northern Ireland.

**Weapons decommissioning.** Recognizing that the surrender of huge quantities of weapons would be a vital part of the general peace process, the U.K. Government forced “decommissioning” as a major condition for negotiation, particularly with the IRA and Sinn Fein. There was, however, a disparity between the conditions leveled on the nationalist paramilitaries and those demanded of the unionist groups. The IRA steadfastly refused to surrender its weapons without evidence of reciprocal action on the part of the unionists. As we have seen, in the end, the condition was dropped under the “Mitchell Principles.”<sup>47</sup> Decommissioning instead became a part of the GFA amnesty. Nevertheless, it has remained a contentious issue. While the IRA claims to have decommissioned much of its arsenal, its refusal to provide photographic evidence of the destruction remains a unionist concern.

Two positive lessons emerged from decommissioning in Northern Ireland: flexibility among concerned parties ultimately allowed for a drop in the initial demand; and, as with the political process in general, involvement of international players aided the decommissioning process. As The Honorable Mitchell B. Reiss, Special Envoy of the President

and Secretary of State for the Northern Ireland Peace Process, has written, “The GFA established a process for paramilitary weapons decommissioning that is verified by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD). This process allowed the paramilitary groups to avoid the perception that they were surrendering weapons to the British government by interposing an international body to handle the weapons issue.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, while the decommissioning process did gain credibility from the presence of an external broker, it remains a contentious issue with the potential for future problems.

## Reconciliation

As defined above, “reconciliation” entails the coming together of opposing political agendas to the point where progressive and meaningful dialogue can become possible. This form of reconciliation, resulting in a peace agreement, appears necessary for the success of the AR2 process in general and reintegration in particular.

Social reconciliation is probably the most difficult of the AR2 processes to transact. As Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma Bennink write: “We suggest that it is the process of reconciliation itself that builds stable and lasting peace.”<sup>49</sup> Reconciliation calls for genuine societal change, which explains the intransigence toward it. Bar-Tal and Bennink continue: “Rec-

onciliation goes beyond the agenda of formal conflict resolution to changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, reconciliation is particularly difficult to achieve in societies in which separate identities have evolved.

In Northern Ireland these identities have coalesced around ritual and symbology. Throughout the “troubles,” murals and landmarks gained added significance and came to mark the territory of rival groups. Parades, in particular the unionist ones in Portadown and South Belfast, became iconic symbols serving to divide the society.<sup>51</sup> But subordinating group concerns to the interests of the wider community is what undergirds the reconciliation process.



AFP, Paul Faith

**A British Army helicopter hovers over the Romeo 101 observation post near Camlough, in South Armagh, 25 October 2001. Army engineers begin dismantling it after the IRA announced it had begun decommissioning its weapons.**

While the main parties in Northern Ireland were not prepared to forgo what they saw as rights, the security forces played a valuable role by attempting to mitigate, through negotiation or the use of barricades and crowd control obstacles, the friction caused by the marches. Besides keeping public order, these interventions aided the process of reconciliation by limiting confrontation between the opposing sides. Attention was diverted from the marches' confrontational messages to antipathy for the security forces who attempted to deny them their "rights."

If the ultimate aim of reconciliation is to build the basis of a common narrative and develop a shared identity, then the marches indicate that the process is far from complete in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the main sides see the GFA and its resulting dialogue as an opportunity to continue to seek their own agendas under the framework of their separate narratives. There appears to be little interest in developing a common identity, and so one can conclude that, as long as this remains the case, the prospects for peace in the long term are slim.

Interestingly, in their article "Reconciliation as a Dirty Word: Conflict, Community Relations and Education in Northern Ireland," Lesley McEvoy, Kieran McEvoy, and Kirsten McConnachie argue that the term "reconciliation" inappropriately describes the process in Northern Ireland. For many of those involved, "reconciliation" is too closely associated with community relations and the implication that their own identities are impediments to progress. Furthermore, particularly for nationalists, the term is suggestive of the programs instituted by the U.K. Government. In their view, the U.K. should have been involved in the process, not dictating it.<sup>52</sup>

The same article also highlights the vital role played by ex-combatants in the reconciliation process: "Some of these men and women have been at the forefront of taking forward the most difficult issues of the peace process including working on interface violence at flashpoint areas; negotiations concerning contentious parades; the decommissioning of paramilitaries' weapons; engagement with the victims of political violence and other ex-combatants; and promoting and encouraging the emerging debate on truth recovery in the jurisdiction."<sup>53</sup> From these comments, one discerns a clear link among the

amnesty granted the ex-prisoners, their reintegration into society, and their subsequent work in the field of reconciliation.

Finally, as mentioned above, security forces can contribute to reconciliation by providing an environment in which it can take place. In this case, that is exactly what has happened. In generally keeping the peace, and specifically by preventing the marches from spawning greater conflict, the military set the conditions for the early stages of reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

## Reintegration

Reintegration has also taken place on several different levels in Northern Ireland: reintegration of the region itself, reintegration of the Catholic and Protestant communities, and reintegration of ex-prisoners in society at large. In examining reintegration as a concept, one should understand that it is a two-way process requiring decisiveness and effort by the party being reintegrated and the accepting society. This distinction is important since the ground has to be prepared on both sides.

**Regional reintegration.** Northern Ireland's regional reintegration, both politically and economically, not only drew it into closer ties with the rest of the U. K. and Ireland, but also more widely with the rest of the European Union and even the world. This type of reintegration was stimulated by economic ties and bound together by political negotiations and agreements. As such, it was arguably instrumental in extending horizons for many of the groups in Northern Ireland beyond what one may see as parochial issues (without trivializing them). While it is difficult to substantiate, one could conclude that rather than feeling locked in a mortal battle with either the U.K. or each other, many of the political parties and paramilitaries realized that the eyes of the world were on them. They could therefore use this high visibility to their advantage to pursue their goals through peaceful means, in particular by leveraging the support of other nations to influence the U.K. and Irish Governments to recognize their positions.

**Community reintegration.** One of the most effective methods security forces can use to de-escalate violence is to construct physical barriers to keep warring factions apart. In Northern Ireland, the division these "peace walls" created was enhanced by

the marking of territory, usually by painting murals, erecting curbstones, or hoisting party flags. As the conflict progressed, however, communities became increasingly isolated and entrenched, not only physically but also psychologically. To reintegrate, the communities therefore needed to overcome both physical and mental barriers.

In Northern Ireland, it is possible to see that, over time, effective policing offset the need for the physical barriers. The mental obstacles to reintegration were more significant; in fact, most of the community relations work in Northern Ireland was predicated on the assumption that “while such physical and mental separation exists between communities, fears and misunderstandings about each other’s ultimate intentions will continue, and will thus make the achievement of any agreed political solutions between the communities even more difficult, and more difficult to sustain.”<sup>54</sup>

Over the course of the conflict, the U.K. Government launched community-relations initiatives at national, regional, and local levels. Perhaps chief among them was the Community Relations Council (CRC), established in 1990 and intended as “an independent agency dedicated to improving relationships between communities and fostering conflict resolution in Northern Ireland.”<sup>55</sup> Fitzduff,

who was the first director of the CRC, points to two significant elements that enabled such programs to begin to achieve a level of social reintegration. The first was an emphasis on education, that is, giving participants the necessary knowledge and skills with which to begin or continue dialogue. The second was the use of “partials” as facilitators. Having concluded by experiment that it was virtually impossible for both sides to consider a facilitator completely neutral, work began to develop a cadre of “partials” or “insider-partials,” people whose loyalties were known to both sides but who were trusted to lay their interests aside for the duration of community dialogue. These individuals were able to “model openness about their own upbringings, their fears and their political convictions, while at the same time ensuring a productive process for discussion.”<sup>56</sup> This mechanism has proved to be very successful, and it has often involved ex-prisoners, thereby aiding their reintegration into the community.

**Reintegration of political prisoners.** This aspect of reintegration follows directly from amnesty and is another vital step in the AR2 process. According to Gormally, “Prisoner release and reintegration are an indispensable prerequisite for the building of an inclusive society.”<sup>57</sup> Of course, the ground

for such reintegration has to have been prepared. Preparation happens on both sides of the process; on the one hand, the ex-combatants need to be prepared to play their part as responsible citizens in a democracy; on the other hand, the society receiving them must be prepared to recognize that change has occurred and accept them on those terms.

The significant role that political prisoners played, not only as partials but also throughout the peace process in Northern Ireland, helped with their reintegration. Again, Gormally addresses this significance: “The active role of prisoners



AFP/hemis.fr, Patrick Fillet

Loyalist murals in the protestant Docks area, Belfast, 14 July 2006.

and ex-prisoners in the peace process opened their way to political reintegration . . . Virtually all of the negotiators representing paramilitary-aligned parties during the peace talks were ex-prisoners.”<sup>58</sup> In essence, having conceded that further violence would not bring them closer to their goals, many of the insurgents sought to pursue their cause in political forums.

The ex-combatants were given the opportunity to work through forums sponsored by the U.K. Government, whose attitude in this regard helped. Having adopted an intentionally permissive attitude, the government created conditions that allowed those most closely associated with the paramilitary organizations to reintegrate into democratic society. This situation helped to further the political process by enabling ex-prisoners and supporters alike to play an active, nonviolent political role and by ensuring that paramilitaries influenced their supporters in actively supporting the process.

At the same time, the reintegration of political prisoners into Northern Ireland society has not been without its problems. Most of them stem from the economic conditions ex-prisoners face as they begin the reintegration process. Because of a lack of job skills (due to prison time), employer aversion to anyone with a “bad reputation,” and various legal reasons, many have found employment elusive.<sup>59</sup> This point also highlights the importance of society being prepared to receive ex-prisoners. Returning to Gormally: “Long-term peace is hardly to be consolidated by excluding former combatants from mainstream employment.”<sup>60</sup> Again the international community has intervened positively: the EU has initiated a “Special Programme for Support and Reconciliation” that, by providing funding to communities to sponsor “prisoner projects,” has assisted the reconciliation and reintegration process.

## Conclusion

The U.K. Government’s actions in resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland reveal some of the difficulties inherent in attempting to appropriately balance the political, economic, and security dimensions in a society to set the conditions for AR2. The following observations illustrate lessons from that AR2 process.

- The U.K. Government’s internalizing of the problem and the characterization of the situation as a

zero-sum game in the early years of the conflict prevented meaningful political dialogue for decades.

- In lieu of substantive dialogue, it is possible to argue that security operations became an end in themselves (and so were detrimental to overall efforts at AR2).

- One can also argue that progress was not realistic until Sinn Fein was brought into the political process, with significant economic incentives, along with international brokers. These measures should have been taken in the intervening 25 years of military struggle.

- While the U.K. Government can assert that it took 25 years to set the conditions for what followed, one can also conclude that the military struggle continued for such a long time precisely because the above steps had not been taken earlier. In the meantime, the conflict served only to increasingly divide and impoverish society in Northern Ireland.

- The effectiveness of outside mediation (for political and economic reasons) should have been deduced earlier in the process. Notwithstanding issues of sovereignty, the impartiality of an outside broker clearly offers benefits, particularly when the government has such a close association with, and perceived interest in, one side.

In conclusion, any approach to setting the conditions for AR2 needs to be inclusive, balanced, and responsive. It should seek to advance political, economic, and security processes in a way that avoids one area having an adverse effect on the others. Only by achieving results in all dimensions simultaneously will the ground for successful AR2 be prepared.

As part of the security forces, the military has a key role to play in laying the foundations for AR2. Chiefly, it can persuade the opposing sides that the benefits to be gained (economic, political, and social) via AR2 outweigh the potential benefits of continuing the struggle. Military forces have to act as a threat to

***As part of the security forces,  
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the paramilitary organizations to keep their political representatives in negotiations. Military forces—indeed all security forces—should be mindful of the negative effects their operations can have. Military

operations should not be seen as an end in themselves, or even purely as a way to support a legitimate government, but rather, in terms of their contribution to the vital processes of AR2.<sup>61</sup> **MR**

## NOTES

1. *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. Sara Tulloch (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. "amnesty."

2. *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines "reconcile" variously as 1. make friendly after an estrangement, 2. make acquiescent or contentedly submissive to, 3. settle (a quarrel etc.), 4. a. harmonise; make compatible, b. show the compatibility of by an argument or in practice. *The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*, ed. by Sara Tulloch (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. "reconcile."

3. This connotation accords with the understanding of Lesley McEvoy, Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie who write, "The successful negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 has seen the Irish peace process widely lauded as an example of successful reconciliation between sworn enemies." "Reconciliation as a Dirty Word: Conflict, Community Relations and Education in Northern Ireland," *Journal of International Affairs* 60, no.1 (Fall 2006): 81.

4. David Bloomfield, *Peacemaking Strategies in Northern Ireland: Building Complementarity in Conflict Management Theory* (New York: St Martin's Press Inc., 1997), 22.

5. *Ibid.*, 3.

6. Michael Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969-2000* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001), 161.

7. There are many different political parties and paramilitaries with diverse agendas who are loosely bound together by a common desire to preserve the union with Great Britain. Most of them are labeled as either "unionist" or "loyalist." In the interest of clarity in this article, I will use the term "unionist" to refer to all of these groups.

8. Again, there are many different political parties and paramilitaries with diverse agendas who are loosely bound together by a common desire to unite Ireland under one government and so for Northern Ireland to cede from its current union with Great Britain. Most of them are labeled as either "nationalist" or "republican." In the interest of clarity in this article, I will use the term "nationalist" to refer to all of these groups.

9. Bertie Ahern, "In Search of Peace: The Fate and Legacy of the Good Friday Agreement," *Harvard International Review* 24 (Winter 2003): 26.

10. Bloomfield, 185.

11. Mari Fitzduff, *Beyond Violence: Conflict Resolution Process in Northern Ireland* (New York: United Nations Press: Incore, 2002), 79.

12. *Ibid.*, 28.

13. Editorial, "Peace in Northern Ireland," *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, April 30, 2007.

14. Fitzduff, 9.

15. The other key event that in many ways enabled and arguably forced Prime Minister Blair towards this measure was President Clinton's move to legitimize Gerry Adams and by association to give the IRA an official platform, by inviting him to the White House in 1994.

16. *An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland* actually argues that the Irish Government was actively hostile to the UK: "The Government of Ireland, which had cooperated with Stormont [the seat of government of Northern Ireland] during the IRA campaign of 1957-1962, was deeply anti-British in the late 1960s and 1970s. Initially, therefore, there was virtually no cross-border cooperation." *Operation BANNER: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland*, Army Code 71842, July 2006, 3-6.

17. Bloomfield, 38.

18. Seamus Dunn, "Northern Ireland: A Promising or Partisan Peace?" *Journal of International Affairs* 52, no.2 (Spring 1999): 729.

19. Dominic Casciani, "Clinton: His Role in Northern Ireland," British Broadcasting Corporation online, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/1065913.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1065913.stm)>.

20. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

21. The Portland Trust, *Economics in Peacemaking: Lessons from Northern Ireland*, May 2007, 7 <<http://www.portlandtrust.org/Economics%20in%20Peacemaking%20-%20Lessons%20from%20Northern%20Ireland.pdf>>.

22. European Commission, "EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (2000-2004) - PEACE II," <[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/country/prordn/details.cfm?gv\\_PAY=UK&gv\\_reg=ALL&gv\\_PGM=2000RG161PO001&LAN=5](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/prordn/details.cfm?gv_PAY=UK&gv_reg=ALL&gv_PGM=2000RG161PO001&LAN=5)>.

23. Fitzduff, 99.

24. Newry and Mourne District Council, "Economic Development: Statistics: Northern Ireland's Economic Statistics," <[www.newryandmourne.gov.uk/economic\\_development/stats/economic.asp](http://www.newryandmourne.gov.uk/economic_development/stats/economic.asp)> (12 September 2007).

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Kim Cragin and Peter Chalk, *Terrorism and Development: Using Social and Economic Development to Inhibit a Resurgence of Terrorism* (Santa Monica, California: Rand, 2003), x.

28. *Ibid.*

29. The Royal Ulster Constabulary was the police force in Northern Ireland between 1922 and 2001 and was considered by many in the Catholic community to be dominated by and loyal to the Protestants, and protective of unionist paramilitaries.

30. The Patton Commission conducted an independent review of policing in Northern Ireland and made 175 recommendations on subjects ranging from the composition, size and structure of the police service to the creation of new account-

ability structures, and it stressed that human rights and community policing should underline all of the work carried out by the police service. Police Service of Northern Ireland website, <[www.psn.police.uk/index/about\\_psn.htm](http://www.psn.police.uk/index/about_psn.htm)>.

31. S.E. Sneddon, "Northern Ireland: A British Military Success or a Purely Political Outcome?" (Defence Research Paper, Joint Services Command and General Staff College, Watchfield, UK, 2007), 3.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Brian Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland* (Bonn International Centre for Conversion, Bonn: 2001), 2.

34. Brian Gormally, Kieran McEvoy, *Release and Reintegration of Politically Motivated Prisoners in Northern Ireland: A Comparative Study of South Africa, Israel/Palestine, Italy, Spain, The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland* (Belfast: The Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)1995), 43.

35. *Operation BANNER: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland*, paragraph 855, 8-15.

36. Jonathon Moore, "Paramilitary Prisoners and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland," in *Political Violence in Northern Ireland: Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, ed. Alan O'Day (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), chapter 6, <<http://psi.praeger.com/doc.aspx?d=/books/questia/b702619/b702619-sect31.xml>>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Mary Baber quoting John O'Donoghue, in a speech in the Dail (Irish Parliament), *Northern Ireland: The Release of Prisoners under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Bill*, Research Paper 98/65 (London: House of Commons Library, 15 June 1998), 24.

39. Moore, Chapter 6.

40. The Agreement, 30, online, <<http://www.nio.gov.uk/agreement.pdf>>.

41. *Ibid.*

42. "Blair Jets in to woo Unionists," BBC News, 14 May 1998, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/northern\\_ireland/latest\\_news/93397.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/events/northern_ireland/latest_news/93397.stm)>.

43. James F. Clarity, *As First Step in Peace Accord, Ireland Frees 9 IRA Prisoners*, *New York Times*, 15 April 1998, <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CE4D9163CF936A25757C0A96E958260>>.

44. George J. Mitchell, *Making Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1999), 131. Mitchell notes that "prisoners play an important part in the peace politics of Northern Ireland. They are seen by some in their communities as heroes who fought to defend a way of life and an oppressed people. Their views are of special significance to the political parties associated with paramilitary organizations."

45. Fitzduff, 10.

46. *Ibid.*, 102. The role of the Political Education Group was critical in preparing many former political prisoners for roles in public life.

47. The 'Mitchell Principles' were six ground rules agreed on by the British and Irish governments in February 1996 as a basis for participation in peace talks. Parties entering the negotiations had to affirm their total and absolute commitment: to democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues; to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations; to agree that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission; to renounce for themselves, and to oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or outcome of all-party negotiations; 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, to urge that "punishment killings and beatings stop and take effective steps to prevent such actions. Mitchell," 35-36.

48. Northern Ireland: Prospects for the Peace Process. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives. One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session, 25 May 2005.

49. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Chapter One: "The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process," 13.

50. *Ibid.*

51. A full description of these phenomena is described by Marc Howard Ross in his article "Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation," in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*.

52. Lesley McEvoy, Kieran McEvoy and Kirsten McConnachie, 109.

53. *Ibid.*

54. Fitzduff 32-33.

55. *Ibid.*, xiv.

56. *Ibid.*, 142.

57. Gormally, *Conversion from War to Peace: Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners in Northern Ireland*, 35.

58. *Ibid.*, 13.

59. *Ibid.*, 19-20.

60. *Ibid.*, 22.

61. FM 3-24 states that "the primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster the development of effective governance by a legitimate government." *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*, (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 15 December 2006), 1-21.