

The British Army and the Peace Process in Ireland

by *Colin McInnes and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe*

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the dynamics of peace processes in intra-state conflicts such as Northern Ireland is one of the major challenges facing contemporary security studies.¹ This is perhaps understandable given the widespread view that violent conflicts are now more likely to occur than in previous decades, and that they are likely to be fought within states rather than between them.² This article looks at a particular problem within the study of peace processes - that of the role of the military - by focusing on the British Army's role in the Northern Ireland peace process. The article argues that the Army was central to the beginning of the peace process through denying the Irish Republican Army (IRA) a military victory, despite a paramilitary campaign which had lasted well over two decades.³ The IRA in 1999 seemed on the verge of accepting both the Good Friday Agreement and the turn by Sinn Féin to constitutional politics. However, despite what appears to be the endgame of violence in the province, the British Army remains a significant factor in the politics of Northern Ireland for a variety of reasons.

The first is that until the issue of the decommissioning of paramilitary arms has been satisfactorily resolved, the Army will continue to play an important security role. The continued presence of the Army acts as a reassurance to Unionists against large-scale violence by Republican paramilitaries, such as the IRA or breakaway groups. For some, if not all, Nationalists an Army presence also provides confidence against a resurgence of Loyalist paramilitary violence.⁴ The question is, however, what form that military presence should take during this peace process. Demands for the demilitarization of Northern Ireland and the actual dismantling of some of the security apparatus which has come to characterize the province, such as the watch towers within cities and the checkpoints and closure orders on border roads, formed part of the Nationalist dialogue long before the ceasefires of 1994. The peace process has therefore been in military terms a balancing act between the competing demands of a continued Army presence with the need to reduce the more militaristic evidence of a troop presence and return the region to "normality." Under the Conservative governments of John Major, the balance was struck in favor of maintaining a substantial military presence (until the IRA had disarmed), but even so a number of changes were introduced in the Army role to encourage cross-community support for the peace process. The "New" Labour government of Tony Blair, which was elected in 1997, has continued to link reductions in the Army's presence to the decommissioning of IRA arms. Implicit in Labour's policy is that, once decommissioning progresses, military activity will be considerably scaled down. It is also the case that successive British governments have taken proactive steps to modify the Army's presence to encourage Republicans to engage in dialogue. In a break with previous British policy, Blair has demonstrated that he understands that any movement toward a lasting peace settlement must also address the issue of the recent British military past in Ireland and he has, among other measures, established a new inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972.

This understanding of the central importance that troops have played in the collective memory of the province underlines the symbolic nature of the British Army in the peace process. For Sinn Féin the slogan "troops out" traditionally reflected a defining belief that peace could only be achieved when the British Army left the "island of Ireland." However, for Unionists the Army affirms the continuation of the political union with Britain. What is interesting, however, is that during the last few years, the "troops out" agenda, long advocated by Republicans and supported by some left wing members of the Labour Party, has been partially, but not totally, subsumed under the broader Nationalist agenda of constitutional change and a process of gradual demilitarization. Even before the Good Friday Agreement, Nationalists, while still deploring the military presence and the behavior of some regiments, increasingly modified their argument from one of immediately ejecting the British Army from Ireland to a consideration of how, in the short to medium term, a reduced Army presence would fit alongside new devolved institutions. This is not to argue that Republicans and Nationalists do not want a British military withdrawal - they do - but to point out that the peace process has robbed Republicans of some of their most potent arguments. In particular, British governments have argued for nearly a decade that they have no desire to prolong a military or strategic presence in Ireland and that they wish to oversee military withdrawal when the IRA has laid down its arms.

The continuing debate over the future of policing structures in the province and the deeply held suspicions within the Catholic community over the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) also mean that the role of the British military in the peace process is linked to the controversial issue of policing. Since the ceasefires of 1994, the central issue is whether the RUC (or the successor body recommended by the Patten Commission) will be able to "police" Northern Ireland in a manner which is acceptable to both communities without substantial military support. Although the British government, under pressure from Sinn Féin and the Irish government in the South, has continued to pursue the aim of a military "downsizing" from Ireland (somewhat ironically until the issue of new police structures in Ireland has been resolved to the satisfaction of both communities, especially during the marching seasons) British troops will remain in place, albeit in a peacekeeping not a counter-insurgency role.

The beginning of the peace process is usually traced to an initiative by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, during 1989-90. Rather than provide a detailed chronology of the peace process, we have focused on four key moments to examine the manner in which the Army was an issue in this process: the 1989-90 Brooke initiative; the IRA's 1994 ceasefire; the 1996 Mitchell Report; and the 1998 Stormont Agreement (the "Good Friday Agreement"). Throughout the process the Army remained a source of controversy for Republicans and the Southern Irish government. These concerns were not, however, fully addressed by John Major's Conservative governments, which focussed instead on the issues of decommissioning and political structures. There are indications of an awareness by London of the Army as an issue, and indeed some initiatives were undertaken, such as the attempt to reduce the number of troops deployed in Northern Ireland. But the parliamentary weakness of the government after the 1992 General Election led to increased Unionist influence over the government and this in turn

made it difficult to address the issue of the Army directly.⁵ It was only with Tony Blair's New Labour government that the issues surrounding the Army's presence in Northern Ireland began to be addressed more fully by the British government.

The Army and the Troubles: 1969-90

Although the British Army's presence in Northern Ireland pre-dated the "troubles," it was only in 1969, when the indigenous police forces proved unable to contain the explosion of inter-communal violence, that troops were deployed in an internal security role.⁶ The initial military role was to support the police. In effect, however, the Army replaced the police. Within a year of deployment the conflict changed from one of ethnic conflict policed by the British troops, to one of confrontation between Republicans and the British Army. This was due in part to the failure by the British government to implement political reforms to the Stormont regime, but also to the emergence of the Provisional IRA.⁷ The Army's response drew heavily on its colonial experiences. Tactics included the imposition of curfews, intrusive searches of Catholic areas and, during 1971, the use of internment (imprisonment without trial), which was used initially only in Catholic areas. These tactics, as is now well documented, proved counter-productive and led to a rallying of support for the IRA. The "Irish troubles" became for the British a question of subduing this threat. Troop numbers were increased, peaking in 1972 at just over 22,000. By the mid-1970s the British Army had managed to contain the situation militarily and to push the IRA out of the cities and into rural areas. Yet the short-term military success hid the failure at a political level to address the question of what the British long-term political aim in Ireland was. In particular, the failure in 1974 of the Sunningdale Agreement, which had attempted to introduce a power-sharing assembly into the province, meant that there was no immediate political solution in sight.⁸

The British Labour government in the mid-late 1970s decided to redraw the security arrangements in Northern Ireland. The central element was an attempt to "normalize" the situation by focusing on the RUC (and the locally recruited Ulster Defence Regiment) and policing rather than the Army. A process of "Ulsterization," "criminalization" and "police primacy" allowed the RUC to take the leading role in security issues. This in turn permitted a reduction in the British military profile in Ireland and the withdrawal of some troops. The most controversial aspect of the Army's activities at this time, however, was the deployment of the Special Air Service (SAS) in 1976.⁹ Concerns were raised over the SAS's commitment to minimum force, over who directed their operations and over the very legality of some of their actions. By the mid-1980s, however, it was clear that special forces were a central element in the fight against the IRA by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Despite the continuing ability of the IRA to carry out operations both in Northern Ireland and in England, by the late 1980s a number of commentators began to argue that the police and Army had successfully reduced fatalities to acceptable levels and that the security forces now held the initiative.¹⁰ Indeed, by the end of the 1980s 20 years of Republican violence had produced few gains and it was widely held that the Republican strategy of the "ballot box and armalite" had failed to achieve substantial political victories.¹¹

By 1990-91, the years when the peace process began, the Army's role was largely one of supporting the RUC in internal security - the main exceptions to this being intelligence gathering and use of special forces. For the majority of troops, Northern Ireland was now a dull, routine posting. Nor was it particularly dangerous. Although care still had to be exercised, fatalities for British troops had fallen such that they were little or no higher than other operational postings. In 1991, for example, only five fatalities were suffered by the Army in Northern Ireland, half of the number killed in the previous year.¹² Operations for infantry battalions, even before the peace process, were curtailed by political considerations and police primacy. Although in some areas the police still rarely ventured out without military protection, more generally troops had begun to stay in their barracks, deploying only when the RUC requested support. The role of leg infantry had also been reduced by the Army's growing use of Special Forces.¹³ For the most part, the British Army did little more than man check points and observation posts, and conduct routine patrols in areas of particular difficulty. It was also the Army who usually dealt with vehicle and house searches. Nevertheless, over the years the British Army had built up a visible presence through the construction of military installations. A network of purpose-built barracks, bases and forts covered Northern Ireland, surveillance cameras operated in the main cities long before they became commonplace in England and Belfast City airport was heavily protected from attack. IRA operations had led to the fortification of military bases with concrete bunkers and wire, creating "urban citadels,"¹⁴ while the border area had been heavily militarized and many roads remained closed. Security considerations pervaded every aspect of Northern Irish life. The new motorway system around Belfast, for example, was constructed in the 1980s as much to ensure rapid Army access to trouble spots in the city as to facilitate civilian travel.¹⁵

The Army's relationship with Northern Ireland prior to the peace process was complex. For some years in the 1970s and the 1980s it had offered the benefits of "real soldiering" and played to the Army's traditional strengths of individual and collective skills. It was also, in many respects, a more traditional role for the military than that which it held within NATO. As a small professional Army its history had been dominated by imperial policing rather than major conventional war. Indeed, when engaged in such wars in the twentieth century the Army's character had changed dramatically, involving large numbers of volunteers and conscripts as well as a small professional core.¹⁶ Yet throughout these years, the Soviet Union remained the single greatest threat to British security and, therefore, the defence of West Germany remained the single most important commitment for the Army. This was where the bulk of the Army's resources were focused, and although in the early 1970s Northern Ireland briefly assumed greater immediate significance, by the 1980s West Germany had regained its status as the priority commitment. Indeed, the pressure from commitments overseas as well as the process of "normalisation" had impacted upon policy in Northern Ireland. In the mid-1980s Irish regiments of the British Army, which traditionally had not served in Northern Ireland, were deployed for service in the Province.¹⁷ This decision allowed a degree of relief for other infantry regiments. The deployment also came about as a result of the closer security links forged between London and Dublin after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. The Agreement for the first time gave the Southern Irish government a more formal role in regard to the security affairs of the North and led to

developments such as the establishment of a Police Complaints Commission and the publication of a document summarizing complaints procedures against the Army.¹⁸

A number of points therefore can be made concerning the Army's presence in Northern Ireland at the time when the peace process began. Most obviously, the presence of the Army was controversial. Catholics had welcomed the Army in 1969 as a force to protect them from Protestant violence. This honeymoon period had quickly soured. Nationalists continued to perceive in certain activities of the military a campaign against the Catholic community in general and support for Unionist ambitions in particular. The Army's presence therefore was politicized at an early stage of the troubles. The military presence was also a highly visible one, particularly in certain areas of Belfast and Londonderry/Derry and on the border. In urban areas foot patrols, low flying helicopters, watch towers and military checkpoints became commonplace. The British Army, therefore, could not be ignored and it impacted upon the social and economic fabric of life in the province. Further, patrols were armed, soldiers wore body armor and helmets, and their bases were heavily fortified. For Republicans therefore, the ideology of the British Army as an army of occupation found ready confirmation in what they saw with their own eyes. Activities of Army special forces proved consistently controversial and arguably illegal, compounding the distrust felt by the Nationalist community. In particular, Army special forces (as well as the UDR and parts of the the RUC) remained dogged by allegations that it had operated a "shoot to kill" policy.¹⁹

The process of "Ulsterisation" had meant that security was considered a matter for the police. But the RUC could only "police" Northern Ireland because of the support of the Army. Indeed, despite Ulsterisation troop levels never fell appreciably below 10,000, while after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement numbers were increased to deal with an upsurge of Loyalist paramilitary violence. By the beginning of the peace process in the early 1990s there were approximately 12,500 troops on tour of duty in Northern Ireland, many of them from infantry battalions. When linked to post-Cold War reductions and deployments in both the Gulf and Bosnia, this commitment had created a degree of overstretch within the British Army. There is, however, no concrete evidence to suggest that the peace process was motivated by concerns to reduce military overstretch, although some scholars have argued that overall the huge cost of maintaining the economic and military presence in the province was a source of considerable political concern for the British government by 1990.²⁰ By this time it was clear that the Army would stay in Northern Ireland for the foreseeable future and certainly beyond the establishment of political structures as detailed in the Good Friday Agreement. The agenda, however, had moved on from questions over the Army's presence in Northern Ireland. With Republicans adopting a more constitutional approach and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the old battle cry of "troops out" was progressively replaced (though never wholly removed) by questions of how the Army might fit into the new political structures and how the legacy of the Army's role in the troubles might be addressed.

The Origins of the Peace Process

The early 1990s saw a series of profound changes in the political landscape of Northern Ireland. Among the most important of these was that Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, attempted to become central to constitutional politics in Northern Ireland. Twenty years of activity by Republican paramilitaries had not achieved the removal of the British presence, nor was there any sign of an imminent military breakthrough by the IRA. Indeed, there is evidence that by the turn of the decade certain elements in the Republican movement had concluded that they could not win the armed struggle and had ordered a reappraisal. Crucially, this turn to constitutionalism reinforced the earlier rejection of the historic policy of abstentionism (through which Sinn Féin had refused to contest elections in Southern Ireland) and a movement toward constitutional Nationalism.²¹ Gerry Adams had long accepted that his party on its own could not engineer substantial inroads into the political process. This recognition meant that Sinn Féin was now prepared to work with John Hume's more moderate but Nationalist Socialist Democratic Labour Party (SDLP).

These local developments must also be set against the background of the renewed optimism in Europe on the resolution of ethnic conflict in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, as well as progress in resolving two other longstanding conflicts, in the Middle East and in South Africa. The end of the Cold War and collapse of anti-imperialist movements elsewhere had made revolutionary ideologies appear obsolete. As Mick Cox has argued:

Logistically [the IRA] could fight on But having the capacity to bomb and shoot was one thing. This was hardly the same as being part of a broader international movement whose goal was the liberation of humanity from the oppressive grip of imperialism As the tide of anti-imperialism continued to ebb, the republican movement in Ireland increasingly began to resemble some beached political whale without a wider purpose - other than to go on killing people in Britain and Ireland in a campaign that seemed to be going nowhere, and about which old friends and comrades elsewhere were saying had been rendered meaningless by changes in the wider international environment.²²

The British government, in response to these changes, attempted to find ways to marginalize what it perceived to be a groundswell of support within the Nationalist community for Sinn Féin and attempted to cultivate new political structures which could attract moderate Nationalist opinion. Part of this involved an acceptance by the British government that Dublin should be engaged in the process of change in Northern Ireland and decisive moves were now made to include Dublin in wider political negotiations. More controversially it also involved the recognition by the British security services that a secret channel similar to that used during previous ceasefires should be opened to the IRA. The belief here was that Sinn Féin might be persuaded or coerced into exerting pressure upon the IRA to relinquish its campaign.

The Brooke Initiative

Under the influence of Peter Brooke, the British government in 1989-90 sought to build upon the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement to achieve a greater devolution for Northern Irish affairs. In November 1989, Brooke intimated that he might be willing to be "creative" in

response to an approach from the IRA. Brooke drew an analogy between the British presence in Cyprus in the 1950s and the current situation in Northern Ireland. He pointed out that despite spirited proclamations of a permanent military presence, the British had eventually withdrawn from Cyprus. He also mused over whether the strategy of containment in Ireland had actually worked.²³ The publication of Brooke's views caused a furore, particularly among sections of the Unionist community. In addition, Michael Oatley, a British Secret Service (MI6) agent, was given permission to use the secret "back channel" to open a dialogue with Sinn Féin. Oatley's initiative was to prove decisive. For the next crucial months contacts remained active, persuading Brooke that it might be possible to influence a divided Republican movement.²⁴ The British government also authorized the release to Sinn Féin of an advance copy of a speech which Brooke was going to make in London.²⁵ Throughout the speech the British presence in Ireland was presented as a "neutral" force and the legitimacy of both Unionist and Nationalist views was acknowledged. Of the former, it was accepted that Northern Ireland would not be ceded from the UK without the consent of the majority; but Brooke also said that it was understood that the minority had concerns and aims which, if pursued through democratic, non-violent means, were equally legitimate. Critically, Brooke argued that Westminster had no "selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland." Brooke went on to state that the British presence had three different parts: the Army, the Northern Ireland Office, including financing by the British Exchequer, and the Unionist population which regarded itself as British. On the military presence, the Secretary of State argued that the United Kingdom did not want to sustain high troop levels in Northern Ireland but that soldiers were there as long as they were needed to protect the police from paramilitary attacks. Once the threat to the police had been removed, troops could be, and would be, withdrawn.²⁶

Brooke appeared to be "bargaining" with the IRA over the presence of troops. This represented a major departure from the line generally taken by the Thatcher administration. Mrs Thatcher had previously argued that Northern Ireland was "as British as Finchley" (her Parliamentary constituency in London); Brooke was now arguing that the Army was deployed only in support of the police and was not a natural presence in Northern Ireland. Brooke's efforts to bring together the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland led to the notion of "talks about talks" to be conducted along lines originally advocated in the 1980s by SDLP leader John Hume. Discussions would take place between the political parties in the North; between Dublin and Belfast and between Dublin and London.²⁷ These three distinct but related aspects became known as the "strands" and continued to provide the structure of negotiations until the Good Friday Agreement. Establishing the talks process proved complicated, with arguments revolving around largely secondary issues such as where the talks should be held and who should chair the sessions.²⁸ When the talks did eventually get under way, continuing violence by the IRA meant that Sinn Féin was excluded, limiting what could be achieved.²⁹

Under Peter Brooke, therefore, the British appeared to move decisively on the Army's role. Through his statement that the British government had no "strategic interest" in the island, Brooke had suggested an unexpected flexibility. However, just as some government advisers recognized the importance of including Sinn Féin in the process

(leading Peter Brooke to authorize the establishment of the secret "back channel" to the Sinn Féin leadership), so others argued vehemently against their inclusion in any form of political dialogue and advocated rather a concerted security initiative in the face of continuing violence from both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. Indeed, a number of senior military and police officers in late 1991 went as far as to argue that internment should be brought back including Sir Hugh Annersley, the then Chief Constable of the RUC.³⁰

Part of what Brooke had done in this period was to undermine many of the arguments that Sinn Féin had traditionally put forward as to why the British maintained a military presence in the province. Sinn Féin had argued that a wholly neutral Ireland was contrary to the wishes of Britain and NATO as it would increase the vulnerability of the Atlantic sea lanes in any conflict with the USSR. The collapse of communism in 1989 and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact had undermined this argument, as did Brooke's assertion that Britain no longer sought such a presence.³¹ What is particularly significant for our purposes is that the Brooke initiative explicitly identified the Army as an issue in any peace process. He attempted to balance a number of factors, demonstrating flexibility over its future, but also reassuring Unionists over a continuing military presence as long as the paramilitary threat remained. As Brooke's successor Sir Patrick Mayhew later put it, "the British presence in Ireland is not the Army or state, but a million Unionists."³²

The 1994 IRA Ceasefire

The Brooke initiative bore fruit only slowly. In particular, the IRA was determined to maintain the military pressure. Toward the end of 1990 it began to use hostage drivers to deliver bombs. This involved tying alleged informers into lorries loaded with bombs and forcing them to drive straight into British Army posts. Also in 1990 the Conservative MP Ian Gow, a vociferous supporter of the Unionists and close friend of Mrs Thatcher, was blown up by a car bomb in front of his home in England. One of the IRA's most spectacular "successes" during this period was in 1991, when they launched a mortar attack on Downing Street which came close to killing the British Gulf War Cabinet. In April 1992, the IRA continued its campaign in England, detonating two huge bombs in London's financial sector, causing over £700M in damage - contrasting starkly with the £600M which had been paid in compensation in Northern Ireland. The IRA had demonstrated that it retained the capability to strike at the heart of the British political and financial establishment. Ironically, it was perhaps the new threat to financial institutions which was seen in London as the greater. In particular, the British authorities feared that further attacks might lead major financial institutions to relocate outside the UK.³³

Despite these operational successes, and despite certain evidence that the IRA might be planning another "spectacular," the political leadership of the Republican movement was engaged in the process of rethinking its strategy. In February of that year, following internal debates over its future course of action, Sinn Féin published a peace initiative entitled, *Towards a lasting peace in Ireland*. According to some analysts this had the tacit approval of the IRA. The document was a watershed in the history of the movement in

that several hitherto unquestioned "truths" were now revised. In particular, it emphasized the importance of the Southern Irish parliament (the *Dail*) - previously held to be an illegal institution - as a positive agent for change in the North. The document had, of course, the usual requirement for an eventual "peaceful and orderly British political and military withdrawal from Ireland," but perhaps most interesting was the view that the British might now be useful in obtaining Unionist consent to a united Ireland.³⁴

Adams at this point seized the political initiative through a dialogue with the SDLP and particularly its leader, John Hume. Confidential discussions began in April 1993. In October, these talks were made public when the Hume/Adams document was delivered to the Irish government.³⁵ In contrast, Prime Minister John Major was circumscribed in his Irish policy because of his weak domestic position. The April 1992 General Election had returned Major to power but with only a slim majority of 21. Unionist support in the House of Commons was crucial as Major struggled to push forward a controversial strategy over Europe. In 1993, in a vote on the Maastricht Treaty, the Prime Minister faced a severe test of leadership over his European policies. The Unionists and colleagues sympathetic to their cause threatened to undo Major's European strategy if he pushed too hard on the issue of contacts with Sinn Féin.³⁶ As it was, on 22 July 1993, it was Unionist support that saved the Maastricht Treaty. The relationship of the government with the Unionists, was further complicated when it became public knowledge that, despite repeated protestations to the contrary, it had been conducting a covert dialogue with Sinn Féin. By mid May 1993, the British and Sinn Féin had exchanged 16 letters and four oral messages,³⁷ and Major had decided he would talk to the spokesmen of Sinn Féin. But after a renewed bombing campaign in England, most notably the bomb in Warrington which killed two young children, Major said that talking to Gerry Adams would "turn his stomach."³⁸ In October 1993, the Southern Irish *Taoiseach*, Albert Reynolds, and John Major rejected the Hume/Adams proposals.³⁹

This impasse was followed by a burst of Anglo-Irish activity between the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, and Sir Patrick Mayhew, in a bid to put together a joint initiative. In December, the response came in the form of an Anglo-Irish announcement known as the Downing Street Declaration. Many of the terms actually had been foreshadowed in the Hume/Adams talks. Of these the most important was the notion that a united Ireland could be achieved through negotiation and constitutional methods and that Sinn Féin would be included in the peace process on the basis of a permanent end to the use of violence. The British government also undertook to engage in direct talks with Sinn Féin as to how the violence could end.⁴⁰ The IRA did not reject the Declaration out of hand, but rather mixed short-term ceasefires with attacks in England as it pondered its reaction. Although Sinn Féin eventually rejected the Downing Street Declaration at its Letterkenny meeting in July 1994, pressure for a ceasefire was building (not least from Dublin and Washington). On 31 August 1994, the IRA announced a ceasefire. It did not promise that it was permanent, but rather stated that it was a complete cessation of violence.⁴¹ In October, the Combined Loyalist Command also declared a ceasefire. This was crucial, as during the course of 1993 Loyalist paramilitaries had actually killed more people than had Republican groups.⁴²

By the end of 1994 then, after the deaths of 3,171 people over 25 years, there was peace of a sort in Ireland. The political discussions and continued use of violence by the IRA obscured the very significant role played by the military and security forces in achieving this. In particular, the Army's ability to deny the IRA a military victory was a central element in the Republican reappraisal of strategy. The IRA was finding it increasingly difficult to operate in Belfast because of the increasingly effective intelligence operations by both the RUC and MI5. Indeed, Special Branch estimated that by 1994, 80 percent of all IRA operations in the city were intercepted.⁴³ Nor was this type of efficiency limited to the city of Belfast. In rural areas a series of successes by security forces had disrupted IRA activities and imposed an unpalatable level of attrition on the organization. The IRA's failure to drive out the British after 25 years of violence led to a degree of war weariness and a questioning of the utility of the campaign of violence. This weariness was not universally shared (as seen by the emergence of splinter groups responsible for the 1997 bomb in Omagh), but by 1994 had developed sufficient momentum to lead to a ceasefire. In other words, the Army had over a number of years helped to create a situation whereby IRA violence was not reaping either military or political rewards. The Army had kept casualties to Reginald Maudling's infamous "acceptable" level and had imposed a degree of attrition on the IRA's active service units. As a result, a satisfactory military solution for the IRA was unlikely, at least in the foreseeable future. In denying the IRA any hope of a military victory, the Army had created a situation whereby negotiations offered a better way forward.

The role of the British security forces was not publicly recognized in order to avoid exacerbating Republican sensitivities at a crucial moment in the peace process. In particular, it was clear that the IRA would balk at the idea that negotiations equated to surrender. But it also had much to do with the British government's perspective on the "troubles." For successive British governments, the conflict in Northern Ireland had been deliberately portrayed not as a war but an "internal security" matter. As Charles Townshend has argued, from the mid-1970s onwards the movement away from the tacit recognition of the IRA through the removal of the "political" status of prisoners and the emphasis upon the RUC as the lead agent in security matters all meant the British government never conceded that Northern Ireland was a war - "indeed in British legal terms it was peace."⁴⁴ This perspective is critical to understanding why the Army's role in the peace process has not been emphasized by those engaged in the politics of Northern Ireland.⁴⁵

Yet, if military attrition had been responsible (at least in part) for bringing the IRA to acknowledge that a military victory was not possible, actions by the Army impinged upon and in many ways undermined any progress toward a lasting political settlement. Tensions between the Army and the wider Catholic community were amply demonstrated when, in 1992, soldiers from the 3rd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (the Regiment which had been involved in the shootings on Bloody Sunday in 1972) were accused of harrasing locals in a pub in Coalisland, County Tyrone. This led to calls for the Regiment to be withdrawn from Northern Ireland, calls which extended across community lines. Nationalist critics of the Army argued that the role of the British military had not been about policing or containment but about raising the costs of

operations for the IRA. In February 1992, for example, four members of the IRA were shot dead in Coalisland by the SAS during a paramilitary attack on a police station. This led to sustained criticism over the behavior of the SAS.⁴⁶ The publication of Mark Urban's *Big Boy's Rules: The Secret War Against the IRA* in 1993 brought these concerns to a wider audience. Urban, a former soldier turned journalist, alleged that the British Army at times had been authorized to "trap" and "kill" members of the IRA, albeit through operations within certain guidelines. Urban claimed that between 1976 and 1987 the SAS and 14th Intelligence Company were responsible for the deaths of over 30 Republican paramilitaries. To put this in context, members of the security forces on duty have been responsible for just over 300 fatalities since the beginning of the conflict.⁴⁷ It is also the case that the SAS have only killed Republican, not Loyalist paramilitaries. While none of these allegations were completely new, alongside the complex peace negotiations, they raised sensitive questions about the British military role in Ireland. In recognition of this problem, and particularly after the attack at Coalisland, the British changed the policy by which the SAS were used in Northern Ireland. Urban states that during 1990-92 Army special forces had killed 11 Republican terrorists; after Coalisland, members of the SAS operating in Northern Ireland did not kill anybody. A senior SAS officer argued that the change in policy resulted from orders for a non-lethal policy from Stormont: ministers and senior police officers believed that further killings would inflame Republican opinion and jeopardize the secret contacts with Sinn Féin which had been established under Peter Brooke.⁴⁸

While these controversies did not go away, during 1993 the conflict nevertheless changed character. This was the first year of the troubles in which no IRA member was killed by the security forces, though Catholics continued to die as a result of an upsurge in violence by Loyalist paramilitaries. Nevertheless, despite attempts by the security forces, including the Army, to reduce tension with the Nationalist community, long-standing grievances continued to simmer. The controversy over the record of military forces was highlighted and exacerbated by the case of Private Lee Clegg. In 1993, Clegg was sentenced to life imprisonment for the alleged murder of Karen Reilly, a passenger in a car which had driven through an Army checkpoint in 1990. Supporters of Clegg campaigned for his early release arguing that he had acted within the rules of engagement governing the behavior of soldiers in Northern Ireland. The case aroused enormous controversy, not least because Nationalists had long raised the issue of how soldiers were treated in the courts, including the "secrecy rule," under which the identity of soldiers was not revealed for fear of assassination. In July 1995, Clegg was released on license at a difficult time both in Northern Ireland (because of the marching season) and in the peace process. His release led to rioting in Belfast, underlining the sensitivity of the Nationalist community to the behavior of the British Army and the treatment of serving soldiers within the judicial process.⁴⁹

After the ceasefires of August and October 1994, there was some scaling down of activities by the British security forces. Most noticeably, British Army patrols were withdrawn from the streets of Belfast and Londonderry. Soldiers replaced their protective helmets with berets and rifles were no longer carried in the ready-to-fire position. Army support for police patrols was reduced by three quarters and in Belfast withdrawn

altogether. In October, a number of bases were closed and 104 closure orders on border roads in Northern Ireland were rescinded. Pressure was also successfully brought to bear in Londonderry to remove the large observation tower at RUC Rosemont police station (although in November 1996 the Army constructed a new "security tower" nearby, despite Nationalist complaints).⁵⁰ These moves had been foreshadowed in a secret 54-page document drawn up by the Army in 1992 with the knowledge of the police and passed to the IRA as part of the process to encourage a ceasefire. Several Army units were returned to barracks in Germany and the Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, formally stated in December 1994 that the role of the Army on the streets of Northern Ireland was fast diminishing.⁵¹ There were, however, clear limits to this scaling-down. The British government refused to listen to the case advanced both by Gerry Adams and Mitchel McLoughlin, the Sinn Féin National Chairperson, that demilitarization and the decommissioning process should include the weaponry of the British security forces. Although John Major was prepared to withdraw some troops, he was not prepared to concede the principle that the British Army could be equated within the peace process with a paramilitary organization.⁵²

Despite the peace process and the reduced Army presence, violence both within and between Catholic and Protestant communities remained a problem. In the year following the first IRA ceasefire, 218 "punishment beatings" took place, 85 by Loyalist gangs and 133 by Republican gangs. (Indeed, by the summer of 1999 the level of violence within the Catholic community led Unionist politicians to urge the Northern Ireland Secretary to declare the IRA ceasefire to be over.)⁵³ At this stage there was little indication on the British side that it was ready to address many of the controversial issues which the peace process had raised. Not the least of these was the issue of covert British activity in the province over the past decades and the outstanding issue of the behavior of the Parachute Regiment in 1972. However, it was not just the British Army which came under scrutiny over its past: Sinn Féin faced increasing pressure to persuade the IRA to reveal the location of the hidden bodies of some of its victims - the so-called "disappeared." In 1994, there was little indication of movement on these issues, but as the peace process wore on it became increasingly obvious that a number of issues from the past, including the Army's past, had to be addressed to secure trust in a new and more peaceful order.⁵⁴

The Mitchell Report

With the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in place, two sets of talks emerged. The first - the "strands" - examined future political structures in Northern Ireland and its relationship to the South and to the UK; the second focused on decommissioning. From the start the relationship between the two sets of talks was problematic. What, if anything, was the linkage? How should they be sequenced? Particularly, should talks on decommissioning precede talks on future political structures? The British government attempted to clarify its position on these issues when Sir Patrick Mayhew visited Washington in March 1995. Its position (expressed in what became known as the "Washington Three") was that for Sinn Féin to join the talks the IRA had not only to indicate its willingness to disarm but to begin decommissioning *before* gaining entry to the talks, thereby demonstrating its commitment to peaceful means and engaging in confidence-building. Although the

British government's insistence upon prior decommissioning broadly satisfied Unionist concerns it was unacceptable to the Republicans. In particular, the idea of the IRA handing over its weapons to British security forces smacked of surrender. The Irish government was also beginning to suspect that the decommissioning issue was being used by London to slow down progress. To break the impasse on decommissioning, the two governments launched in November 1995 the Twin Track Initiative. The first track involved preparatory multi-party talks to establish a framework for substantive negotiations; the second created an independent commission, chaired by former US Senator George Mitchell, to examine the decommissioning of paramilitary arms.⁵⁵ The Mitchell Commission reported in January 1996 and proposed its own solution to the key problem of when to decommission - that decommissioning should move in parallel with all-party negotiations rather than precede or follow them. The report also introduced six principles "of democracy and non-violence" to which all parties involved in negotiation should "affirm their total and absolute commitment."⁵⁶ "Signing up" to the Mitchell Principles quickly became a formal requirement for entry into the talks.

The Mitchell Report was seen by Dublin as providing the way forward and indeed the Mitchell compromise quickly became the policy of both governments on how to sequence talks and decommissioning. The Mitchell compromise, however, proved unpopular with the Unionists who maintained their support for prior decommissioning. Nor was it embraced wholeheartedly by the Major government. In particular, Major's decision to call elections to an assembly which would in turn provide the basis for representation at the multi-party talks was seen by Dublin as an attempt by London to downplay the significance of Mitchell.⁵⁷ More importantly, the decision to call elections was the last straw for the IRA. From the Republican perspective, the Major government had backtracked on its commitment in the Downing Street Declaration to allow Sinn Féin into negotiations on the sole proviso of an IRA ceasefire. With the ceasefire in place, Major had then insisted on decommissioning before talks; with the Mitchell compromise, Major had now asked for elections. This created deep distrust within the Republican community over the British government's real intentions. On 9 February 1996, the IRA exploded a bomb in London's Docklands, breaking its ceasefire and beginning a campaign on the mainland that later escalated to Northern Ireland itself. Despite severe provocation, Loyalist paramilitaries formally kept to their ceasefire, though the Orange Order and Apprentice Boy marches in 1996 and 1997 created a series of crises which threatened to destroy the entire peace process.

Although the Army played a key role in monitoring the IRA ceasefire, during this period its role appears largely to have been sidelined while attention focused on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.⁵⁸ Attempts by Sinn Féin to argue that the military arsenal of the security forces, including the British Army, should form part of that process, continued to fail. Sinn Féin argued that the endpoint of the peace process should be the full demilitarization of Northern Ireland, and that since the Army could not be expected to disarm it should leave. But Major insisted that the Mitchell Commission could only go ahead if Army weaponry was excluded and that the focus was on "illegal" weaponry. Although Sinn Féin argued in its representations to the Mitchell Commission

that the weapons of the security forces should be included in decommissioning,⁵⁹ this was not accepted. In its Report, the Commission stated:

Different views were expressed as to the weapons to be decommissioned. In the Communiqué, the Governments made clear their view that our remit is limited to those weapons held by paramilitary organisations. *We accept and share that view.* There is no equivalence between such weapons and those held by the security forces. However, in the context of building mutual confidence, we welcome the commitment of the Governments, as stated in paragraph nine of the Communiqué, 'to continue to take responsive measures, advised by their respective security authorities, as the threat reduces.'⁶⁰

In other words, changing the Army's role would be a useful confidence-building measure, but would not be central to the decommissioning process.

At this time, therefore, the British government still insisted that the Army was a neutral force in Northern Ireland and that its continued presence was required due to the potential for a return to violence. Unionists shared this perception. What both underestimated were continued Nationalist sensitivities over the behavior if not the actual presence of the Army. These were amply illustrated when in December 1996 relatives and friends of the 14 men killed by the Parachute Regiment during Bloody Sunday 24 years previously objected to the proposed deployment of three battalions of the Regiment into Northern Ireland.⁶¹ A less controversial but related issue was that of what might be termed the "nuisance" factor associated with the Army. Foot patrols were accused of spreading TB among cattle by crossing between quarantined and unaffected farms. In addition, the noise of helicopter patrols in some areas was a long running bone of contention between residents and the military.⁶² Sinn Féin spokespeople continued to argue that the British Army should be withdrawn, claiming that, rather than the Army reducing its presence, the reverse was actually occurring in Catholic West Belfast, including an enlargement of its base on the 18th floor of the Divis flats.⁶³

In the midst of these controversies, a crucial role for the Army remained that of urban peacekeeping. This proved particularly important during the "marching season" of July and August each year, when both communities commemorate historic occasions through a series of parades. (Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 there has been a one-third increase in parades in Northern Ireland. In 1995 alone there were 3,500 marches of which 2,581 were Loyalist.) Many of the marching routes run through communities which bitterly resent such displays. This problem was particularly acute in 1995 when the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Hugh Annersley, decided to allow the Orange Order parade at Drumcree to march down the Garvaghy Road, despite the objections of the Catholic residents. In part this decision was taken because the Chief Constable feared that the RUC on its own would not be able to contain the situation if the Unionists were not allowed to march. Critically, additional troops were not available because of over-stretch in the Army caused by the British deployment in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Although there was much criticism of the decision to allow the marchers through, it is difficult to see what other decision the Chief Constable could have

taken. RUC officers policing the march had been subjected to fierce intimidation. Although a battalion of the Parachute Regiment was available as backup, Annersley still did not believe that the situation could be controlled without additional troops being available, indicating the continued significance of the Army in Northern Ireland. The situation at Drumcree was repeated in 1996, when again the march was allowed to pass down the Garvaghy Road, despite complaints from the residents. This decision came after significant Unionist pressure, notably from David Trimble and the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Ian Paisley, who warned of bloodshed if the marchers were not allowed down the Garvaghy Road.⁶⁴ Sir Patrick Mayhew argued that he could not guarantee the ability of the RUC to hold the line in such a situation and that there was little alternative to the use of British military forces in a policing role.⁶⁵

The Stormont ("Good Friday") Agreement

By the end of 1996 the peace process was moribund. The IRA had broken its ceasefire, arguing that the British government had not made good on its commitment to involve Sinn Féin in the talks process, while the Major government itself was beset with internal difficulties over Europe. Uncertainty over the loyalty of its backbenchers was compounded by a reliance on Unionist support in the House of Commons. As a result, the process stalled and little progress was made. In summer 1997, however, new governments in London and Dublin provided the necessary impetus to reinvigorate the process. The new Irish *Taoiseach*, Bertie Ahern, was viewed by Nationalists as being more committed to the peace process than his predecessor John Bruton had been, while Tony Blair systematically addressed the concerns expressed by Sinn Féin over the peace process. This included an attempt to meet some of the Nationalist concerns over the Army by reducing its visibility in Northern Ireland. Not least during the summer of 1997, the Army reduced the number of its helicopter flights. In other words, from the very beginning Blair's Labour government appeared to accept that the Army was a major issue in the peace process and that a number of measures could be taken which would assist progress in negotiations.

On 3 June 1997, the multi-party talks which had been suspended for the British General election campaign recommenced and on 19 July the IRA announced a second ceasefire. This removed the single largest stumbling block to Sinn Féin's participation in talks. On 6 August, the new Labour Secretary of State Mo Mowlam met a Sinn Féin delegation at Stormont to discuss a wide range of issues, but emphasized that the IRA's statement on restoring the ceasefire had to "be reflected in words and deeds" before Sinn Féin could join the talks process.⁶⁶ Unlike Major's government, which took six months before making the "working assumption" that the ceasefire was genuine, it took Labour six weeks. During this period the Army was heavily involved in preparing reports on the IRA ceasefire. On 29 August, Mo Mowlam announced her decision to allow Sinn Féin entry to the talks. This was based on her assessment, following a report from General Sir Rupert Smith, the Army's commanding officer in Northern Ireland, that the ceasefire was indeed genuine.⁶⁷ The sole proviso was that Sinn Féin formally sign the Mitchell Principles on democracy and non-violence. This they did on 9 September at a plenary session of the multi-party talks, with the major Unionist parties notable by their

absence.⁶⁸ The way had nevertheless been opened for direct and substantive talks which culminated in the signing of the Good Friday Agreement at Stormont on 10 April 1998.

The Good Friday Agreement committed the British government to "make progress towards the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, *consistent with the level of threat*." This was an important qualification aimed at reassuring Unionists. When the agreement was signed, no terrorist weapons had been handed in and doubts remained in Unionist communities over whether the IRA ceasefire was genuine or merely "tactical." The agreement clearly stated that the government would aim to reduce troop numbers "to levels compatible with a normal peaceful society;" that security installations would be demolished; and that emergency powers to assist the police and Army would be removed.⁶⁹ What had been hinted at in the Brooke initiative was now made real, subject to continuing improvements in the security situation.

For the Unionist community in particular, whose support for the Good Friday Agreement was critical but uncertain, a substantial Army presence was a necessary reassurance for as long as the potential for paramilitary threats remained. From the Unionist perspective, premature reductions could threaten security rather than contribute to it, particularly given the lack of decommissioning by the IRA. A linkage was therefore identified between Army reductions and IRA decommissioning. Nevertheless, from July on troops (including 250 soldiers from the Parachute Regiment) began to leave Northern Ireland following a scaling down of security and from the autumn of 1998 all Army patrols in Belfast ceased.⁷⁰ There was, however, no commitment to removing the Army wholly and permanently. A force would remain; the resident Royal Irish Regiment would not be disbanded; and the ability to recall troops if the situation deteriorated was implicit.

During July 1997, fears that sectarian violence would flare at Drumcree led many thousands of people within the province to leave their homes. Four hundred extra troops from the Staffordshire Regiment, Britain's emergency standby battalion, were deployed to Northern Ireland at the request of the RUC. This brought the number of service personnel on duty in Northern Ireland to 17,500. Thereby, ironically, the peace process had seen a short-term increase in the number of troops deployed into Northern Ireland. The atmosphere of crisis was further fuelled by threats from a "breakaway" Unionist paramilitary group, the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) to kill civilians in the Irish Republic if the rights of the Unionist marchers at Drumcree were curtailed.⁷¹

Learning the lessons from the previous year, troops from the Parachute Regiment trained with police officers to prevent massed ranks of Orangemen congregating at Drumcree Church.⁷² Other troops which were newly deployed to Northern Ireland were trained to deal with public order disturbances before beginning their tour of duty; so-called "refresher courses" were also provided in the run up to Drumcree. In addition, RUC officers were trained in the use of military Saxon armoured cars, as all the RUC land rovers were expected to be used at Drumcree itself.⁷³ In 1998, the Parades Commission decided not to allow the Orange Order to march down the Catholic Garvaghy Road at Drumcree. This again produced a stand-off between the Orange Order and the security

forces, which erupted into public disorder. Because of the violence, the Army was once more deployed in strength at Drumcree.

In this situation of inter-communal violence, the presence of the British Army in terms of both numbers and discipline was considered indispensable. The use of military personnel had an additional and rather unexpected advantage in that, unlike members of the RUC who tended to live locally, the homes and families of serving soldiers could not be so easily threatened. During the heightened tension of the marching seasons of 1997 and 1998 much time was spent by RUC officers guarding the homes of fellow officers threatened by paramilitaries. The British Army was, nearly 30 years after its initial deployment, once again primarily engaged in holding the line between the two estranged communities.

CONCLUSION

The British Army was influential - directly and indirectly - in the establishment of the Northern Ireland peace process. Its most direct impact was in containing paramilitary violence, especially from the IRA. Partly as a result of this the Republican movement revised its strategy of the "ballot box and armalite" and moved toward a strategy of seeking constitutional change. Persuaded that a military victory was unlikely, the IRA eventually agreed to a ceasefire in 1994 and again in 1997, the latter allowing Sinn Féin to participate directly in multi-party talks on new devolved political structures designed to engender bi-communal support. Indeed, in the year 2000, the IRA itself initiated a process whereby in return for an extension in the date set for paramilitary decommissioning, it agreed to a process whereby some of its arms would be put beyond use in sealed bunkers.⁷⁴

The military factor was also indirectly influential in that the Brooke initiative addressed a number of Nationalist concerns over the troop presence, including the crucial declaration that the British government had no obvious strategic interest in Ireland. John Major's government opted to primarily focus efforts on issues other than the military, including decommissioning and new political structures. Although the Major government were well aware of the concerns of Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Dublin over issues relating to an Army presence, room for manoeuvre on this issue was limited both by domestic weaknesses, in particular the narrow Conservative victory in 1992 which gave Unionist MPs influence, and by concerns over the ability of the RUC to police the province without the military.

The counterfactual question of what Major would have done if he had had a stronger domestic position is, like all such questions, problematic to answer. Major was deeply suspicious of Sinn Féin and the IRA and inclined, personally and politically, toward a cautious approach.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the Army's role did change at this time. Its profile was reduced, operating procedures were changed to build local confidence and SAS activities were restrained. Troop numbers did not, however, fall significantly, nor were Nationalist grievances over army behavior addressed. In particular, during the critical period of the Mitchell Report, the British government refused to engage with Sinn Féin's arguments

concerning the decommissioning of security force weapons or indeed the legacy of the military presence within the Nationalist community.

Under the Labour government of Tony Blair there were a number of significant changes of emphasis and attitude toward the military situation in Ireland. In particular, Blair, despite his avowed commitment to Unionism, and first Mo Mowlam, then her successor Peter Mandelson, have demonstrated a greater sensitivity to issues relating to the historic legacy of the conflict in Ireland. In October 1997, for example, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield was tasked with establishing a commission to look at the pain and suffering caused by the 30 years of troubles. In May 1998, a Minister for Victims was appointed with a budget of some £5 million and a concerted attempt was made to persuade the IRA to reveal the secret location of graves of IRA victims.⁷⁶ There were other signs of a change of style: in deference to local feeling, helicopter patrols were reduced and neither Blair nor Mowlam visited Army bases in the province. The litmus test, certainly for the Nationalist community, however, concerned both the early release of paramilitary prisoners and the controversial events of Bloody Sunday. The Major government had refused to reopen the latter issue, despite new evidence over the shooting of the 14 Catholic protesters, thus endorsing the findings of the original Widgery Report which had exonerated members of the Parachute Regiment. On the 26th anniversary of the shootings, Blair announced a new independent judicial review under Lord Saville, having already apologized for the events of that day.⁷⁷

The Blair government has demonstrated that it understands that an examination of past military behavior within the province is a necessary prerequisite for Nationalist confidence in any peace settlement. Blair has also shown that he understands the symbolism of the British military presence. Indeed, there is now agreement between senior British politicians and security service chiefs that additional watchtowers in the province will be demolished in a bid to further entrench the IRA in the peace process.⁷⁸ There are, however, other pressing issues which need to be addressed if the Good Friday Agreement is to hold. Not the least of these is whether the IRA will at some point disarm, despite the fact that its demands for total demilitarization and the removal of the Army from the province have failed.⁷⁹ If the IRA does indeed disarm, the crucial question is what security apparatus does the province need and whether the RUC or its successor body can successfully police a society divided by years of sectarian hatred. Until both these issues are resolved, the military will remain in Ireland.⁸⁰

Endnotes

1. See, for example, Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler problems in peace processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1997), pp. 5-53; Michael E. Brown, ed., *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

2. See, for example, Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991); Barry Buzan and Eric Herring, *The Arms Dynamic in World Politics* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. 143-50. Although we do not necessarily subscribe to this view - there were many intra-state conflicts prior to the

end of the Cold War, and it may be premature to write the obituaries for major conventional wars - we do however welcome the increased attention given to the problem of intra-state conflicts and in particular the dynamics of peace processes in such conflicts.

3. Jack Holland makes the convincing case that by 1991 the IRA's military campaign had failed. Jack Holland, *Hope Against History: The Course of History in Northern Ireland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1999), pp. 225-34.

4. There was a significant upturn in Loyalist paramilitary violence after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. This trend has, somewhat ironically, been reinforced by some aspects of the current peace process, such as the early release of Republican paramilitaries from jail. Steve Bruce, "The Problems of 'Pro-State' Terrorism: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland," in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4, no.1 (Spring 1992), pp. 67-88.

5. John Major, *The Autobiography* (London: Harper Collins, 1999).

6. Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 8-33.

7. Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

8. Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1993) pp. 198-99.

9. The SAS was deployed to Northern Ireland in 1969 and 1974, but only in 1976 was this on a permanent basis. Initially, the SAS's activities were limited to the "bandit country" of South Armagh, but in 1978 it was extended to the whole of Northern Ireland. Mark Urban, *Big Boys' Rules: the SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp. 3-4.

10. The security forces had been able to cut the number of deaths in Northern Ireland from over 500 in 1972, to 94 in 1991 and 84 in 1992. The number of deaths due to terrorism in Northern Ireland every year since 1977 has on average been less than the toll of an average week on the United Kingdom's roads. Royal United Services Institute, *Newsbrief* 13, no. 12 (December 1993).

11. At Sinn Féin's *Ard Fheis* in November 1981, Danny Morrison explained Republican policy as: "Who here really believes that we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?" An *Phoblacht/Republican News*, 5 November 1981. The policy of 'the ballot box and the Armalite,' together with the hunger strikes at the Maze prison in Long Kesh, stole the initiative from the British government in the early 1980s, but also succeeded in its aim of introducing a more explicit political dimension to the IRA's struggle.

12. This statistic excludes fatalities suffered by the UDR/RIR. See Marie-Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Costs* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 159.
13. The best account of special forces in Northern Ireland remains Mark Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*.
14. Simon Jenkins, *The Spectator*, 1 January 1994. See also David Barzilay, *The British Army in Ulster* (Belfast: Century Press, 1975). For a Republican view on this issue, see *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 5 September 1994.
15. On the militarization of the province, see, Mark Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland: Britain and the IRA in the New World Order* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), pp. 120-23.
16. Operating "close to home," however, placed unaccustomed restrictions and pressures on the Army. As Mike Dewar, himself a former Army officer who served in Northern Ireland, commented, "In a colonial situation it was acceptable to impose curfews, to issue identity cards, to control food supplies and even to move the entire population of a village. Well-trying riot control methods involved platoons . . . advancing towards a crowd . . . [which] were then warned by loud hailer that the assembly was illegal . . . If the riot persisted, fire was opened at a selected individual this usually had the desired effect." Michael Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London: Arms and Armour, 1985), p. 219. Such techniques were politically unacceptable in Northern Ireland and the transition from colonial counter-insurgency to urban peacekeeping and counter-terror operations did not always prove easy.
17. See Keith Jeffrey, "The British Army and Ireland," in Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffrey eds., *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 456.
18. See Garrett Fitzgerald, *All in a Life: An Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 574.
19. See John Ware, "Time to come clean over the Army's role in the 'Dirty War,'" *New Statesman* 127, no. 4382 (April 1998).
20. See Mike Tomlinson, "Can Britain leave Ireland? The political economy of war," *Race and Class* 37, no. 1 (1995), pp. 1-23. Colin McInnes and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, "'The dog that did not bark': the British Army in Northern Ireland 1990-4," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 8 (1997), pp. 137-53.
21. Interview sources and *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 19 March 1990 and 5 April 1990. In his autobiography Gerry Adams argues that the armed struggle alone could not succeed in ousting the British presence. Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (London: Mandarin, 1997), pp. 264-65; Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Dingle: Brendon Books, 1986).

22. Michael Cox, "Bringing in the "international": the IRA Cease-fire and the end of the Cold War," *International Affairs* 73, no. 4 (1997), p. 682. See also John McGarry, "Political settlements in Northern Ireland and South Africa," *Political Studies* 46, no. 5 (1998), pp. 871-85.
23. Paul Arthur, "The Brooke Initiative," *Irish Political Studies* 7 (1992), pp. 111-15. See also Eamonn Mallie and David McKitterick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process* (London: Heineman, 1996), pp. 98-100.
24. Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 320-24.
25. Martin Dillon, *The Enemy Within: The IRA's War Against the British* (London: Doubleday, 1994), p. 230.
26. Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Speech, 9 November, 1990.
27. See Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1995 and The Search For Peace* (London: Hutchinson, 1995).
28. The British government proposed that Lord Carrington should act as chair, but this was blocked by Unionist parties because of the belief that Carrington was closely associated with the Foreign Office, a body alleged to have been instrumental in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This particular issue was eventually resolved with the appointment of an Australian, Sir Ninian Stephens, to chair the discussions. W. Harvey Cox, "From Hillsborough to Downing Street - and After," in Peter Catterall and Sean McDougall eds., *The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics* (London; Macmillan, 1996), p. 189.
29. By 1990, many on the British side had actually conceded the centrality of Sinn Féin to the dialogue and a secret channel of communication between government ministers and Sinn Féin was set up. See Paul Arthur, "Dialogue Between Sinn Fein and The British Government," *Irish Political Studies* 10 (1995), pp. 185-91; Nicholas Watt, "Thatcher gave approval to talks with the IRA," *Guardian*, 16 October 1999. There was an established track record of secret meetings between British officials and Irish paramilitaries. Back channels had been operative in the period 1974-75 and again in 1980-81 during the period of the hunger strike. See Mallie and McKitterick, *The Fight for Peace*, p. 104. Violence by Loyalist paramilitaries also meant that a number of Loyalist political groupings were excluded.
30. Dillon, *The Enemy Within*, p. 243; Chris Ryder, *The RUC 1922-1997* (London: Mandarin, 1997), p. 401. See also *Independent on Sunday*, 17 November, 1991.
31. Michael Cox, "Bringing in the international," pp. 682-89.
32. Speech in Manchester, November 1996.

33. Ryan, *War and Peace in Ireland*, pp. 72-73. See also An Phoblacht/Republican News, 12 March, 1992; Dillon, *The Enemy Within*, p. 228; Interview sources.

34. *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, published by Sinn Féin, 1992. See Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1993), pp. 226-31; Taylor, *Provos*, p. 323; Mallie and McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace*, p. 148.

35. Although the contacts between Hume and Adams gained much attention, doubts were cast over this process less than two weeks after the delivery of the Hume/Adams document. A bomb planted by the IRA in a fish shop on the Shankill Road in the heart of a Protestant community exploded, killing the bomber and nine other people. In retaliation, Loyalist paramilitaries launched a campaign of random assassinations on Catholics. Adams expressed regret for the Shankill bombing, but just a few days later took his place as a pallbearer at the funeral of the bomber. *The Economist*, 30 October 1993; *The Independent*, 23 October 1993.

36. These threats continued throughout Major's second government. In 1996, for example, Jeffrey Donaldson, an MP with David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party, warned that the party would withdraw its support for the government if it backed down on the decommissioning issue. See *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 November 1996. The threats were not always successful, however. When David Trimble attempted to buy influence in return for his support of the government over the damaging Scott Report, the Major government refused to play along. Interview sources.

37. *The Economist*, 4 December 1993; W. Harvey Cox, "From Hillsborough to Downing Street - and After," in Peter Catterall and Sean McDougall, eds., *The Northern Ireland Question*, p. 201.

38. See Anthony Seldon, *Major: A Political Life* (London: Phoenix, 1997), p. 428.

39. *The Economist*, 6 November 1993.

40. *The Weekly Telegraph*, 22-28 December 1993.

41. Interview sources. See IRA statement reprinted in "At last?," *The Economist*, 3 September 1994.

42. Holland, *Hope Against History*, p. 229. See also *USA Today*, 3 September, 1994.

43. Holland, *Hope Against History*, pp. 253-61.

44. Charles Townshend, "The Supreme Law: Public safety and state security in Northern Ireland," in Dermot Keogh and Michael H. Haltzel, eds, *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge and Washington: Woodrow Wilson Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 84-102.

45. An indication of the government's attitude to the Army's role is the lack of campaign medals as opposed to service or gallantry medals awarded for service in Northern Ireland. See R.W. Gould, *British Campaign Medals: Waterloo to the Gulf* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1994).

46. Mark Urban, *UK Eyes Alpha, The Inside Story of British Intelligence* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 269-87. See also *The Belfast Telegraph*, 22 January 1997 and 23 January, 1999.

47. Urban, *Big Boy's Rules*, pp. 238-47. Some of Urban's accusations were also made in Dillon, *The Enemy Within*. See *The Independent*, 7 January 1991.

48. Mark Urban, *UK Eyes Alpha*, pp. 269-87. See also Holland, *Hope Against History*, p. 233.

49. See, for example, *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 July 1997. Major, *The Autobiography*, p. 477.

50. Proceedings of the House of Commons, 263, Part 2, 3-19 July 1995, p. 634; *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 November 1996.

51. Chris Ryder, *The RUC 1922-1997: A Force Under Fire* (London: Mandarin, 1997). *The Times*, 21 December 1994.

52. *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 31 August, 1995. Major, *The Autobiography*, p. 472.

53. John Wheeler, Proceedings of the House of Commons, 264, 26 October 1995, p. 36905; John Mullin, "Unionists threaten boycott over IRA violence," *The Guardian*, 17 August 1999.

54. Proceedings of the House of Commons, 264, 26 October 1995, p. 1132.

55. Originally the name of the Australian Sir Ninian Stephens had been mentioned, but he was deemed unacceptable by the Unionists because of his perceived links with the 1985 Anglo-Irish Accord. Mitchell's relationship with the Clinton White House was critical in giving him the status and support he required in the Commission's work.

56. *Report of the International Body* (hereafter Mitchell Report), 22 January 1996 paragraph 34. Available at: <http://www/nio.gov.uk>. Mitchell Report, paragraph 20.

57. Interview sources.

58. See the report carried in *The Belfast Telegraph*, 9 August 1997.

59. *Building a permanent peace in Ireland: Sinn Fein's submission to the International Body*, 10 January 1996.

60. Mitchell Report, paragraph 54. Emphasis added.
61. *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 December 1996.
62. *Ireland Today*, 1 October 1998; *The Sunday Times*, 10 August 1997.
63. *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 5 September 1996.
64. Seldon, Major: *A Political Life*, p. 661.
65. *The Independent*, 13 July 1996.
66. Mo Mowlam, quoted in Meeting with Sinn Féin, 6 August 1997, Northern Ireland Information Service, 6 August 1997.
67. *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 August 1997.
68. The DUP and UK Unionist Party both boycotted the talks, believing the ceasefire to be a "sham." The larger UUP was absent until a meeting of its executive, postponed from 6 September due to the funeral of the Princess of Wales, had decided upon whether or not to attend the talks if Sinn Féin were present. On the position of the UUP, and particularly its leader David Trimble, see "Talks dilemma for Trimble as unionists face defining moment," *The Independent*, 21 July 1997. The IRA, however, appeared to distance itself from Sinn Féin's acceptance of the Mitchell Principles. An IRA spokesman in an interview the week Sinn Féin signed up to the Mitchell Principles commented "Sinn Fein is a political party with a very substantial democratic mandate. What they do is up to them . . . the IRA would have problems with sections of the Mitchell principles. But then the IRA is not a participant in these talks." "'Rise to the challenge' IRA tells parties," *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 11 September 1997.
69. *Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations*. p. 22. Available at <http://www.nio.gov.uk>. Emphasis added.
70. *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 July and 21 November 1998.
71. *The Times*, 3 July 1997.
72. *The Belfast Telegraph*, 26 May 1997.
73. *The Times*, 3 July 1997
74. Kirsten E. Schulze and M.L.R. Smith, "Decommissioning and Paramilitary Strategy in Northern Ireland: a Problem Compared," in *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 23, no. 4 (December 2000).
75. Major, *The Autobiography*, pp. 431-95.

76. *The Belfast Telegraph*, 27 May 1999.

77. *The Belfast Telegraph*, 30 January 1998.

78. *The Sunday Times*, January 2001.

79. Schulze and Smith, "*Decommissioning and Paramilitary Strategy*," pp. 77-106.

80. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1999). Indeed, it can be argued that the military presence has taken on an increasingly "normal" air. For the first time in July 1996 it was announced that women could be posted to the "front line" in Ireland. See *The Belfast Telegraph*, 8 July 1996.