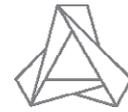




PRINCIPLES
for PEACE

A new path to lasting peace



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Northern Ireland Case Study

2021

TRIAS Consult

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Acronyms

AIA	Anglo-Irish Agreement
CFNI	Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
CNR	Catholic/Nationalist/Republican
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EU	European Union
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GFA	Good Friday Agreement (Belfast Agreement)
IFI	International Fund for Ireland
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IICD	Independent International Commission on Decommissioning
IICP	Independent International Commission on Policing (Patton Commission)
IRA	Irish Republican Army
NI	Northern Ireland
PUL	Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
ROI	Republic of Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SEUPB	Special EU Programmes Body
SF	Sinn Féin
UDA	Ulster Defense Association
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party

Key Messages

Building an Inclusive and Legitimate Process

The British and Irish Governments were keen to avoid previous mistakes made in the Sunningdale talks in 1974 and set out to build a more inclusive process. A number of strategies were devised to maintain a reasonable level of inclusivity. First, to give recognition and political legitimacy to all the parties, the British Government held elections to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue in 1996, that subsequently became the chamber for the negotiations. Secondly, to promote an inclusive process, the British Government revised the electoral system to allow smaller parties such as the Women's Coalition and the two parties linked to Loyalist paramilitaries - the Progressive Unionist Part (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic party (UDP) - to win seats and join the negotiations. Thirdly, all parties, were required to sign up to the 'Mitchell Principles' of exclusively peaceful means before they were admitted to the Stormont talks. This ensured that parties linked to paramilitary groups like Sinn Féin and the loyalist parties could enter the political talks without any decommissioning of their weapons. However, that

meant once their military wings came off ceasefire, they were immediately excluded from the talks. This happened twice. The combination of these approaches allowed the political representatives of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Loyalist paramilitary group and the cross-community Women's coalition to join the talks.

Inclusivity needs to be more than an aspiration. Specific measures are needed to ensure that representatives of minority and excluded groups have a democratic mandate and a legitimate voice at the table. At the same time, care must be taken not to undermine the centre ground and democratic values by focusing too much on getting armed groups to the table. Building consensus and getting agreement of the parties on the core principles underpinning the process, having clear commitments on what is required by the parties and putting in place effective monitoring mechanisms can help in navigating this difficult phase.

Agreed Principles and an Institutional Architecture

The British and Irish Governments together with the Independent Chair Sen. George Mitchell worked to develop the architecture for the NI parties to address the substantive issues without forcing the agenda and working to nail everything down. The negotiations focused on reforming political structures within a three stranded process between Ireland and Britain. Rather than trying to come up with a complete package which tried to resolve everything in advance, the substantive issues were worked on in each of the three strands. They sought to build 'sufficient consensus' on what had to be addressed, got these issues on the table and then produced an agreement on the principles and mechanisms to deal with them.

the Independent International Commission on policing (the Patten Commission) helped to depoliticise these particularly sensitive issues and created space for the parties to focus on the central three strands of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) alongside a number of other measures such as the early release of political prisoners. There was no provision for transitional justice elements of healing the past for victims, truth recovery and an inter-communal reconciliation process. The use of constructive ambiguity (*'fudging'*) in the wording of some sections of GFA has been criticised by some analysts but others see this as a necessary mechanism to manoeuvre around different road blocks and get the agreement over the line.

Through this approach, two of the most contentious issues - policing and decommissioning of weapons - were outsourced to independent bodies. The establishment of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) and

Parties involved in negotiations (including third parties) should focus on developing an overall architecture whereby they can address the key issues and grievances at the heart of the conflict. They should avoid trying

to tie everything down in advance as this can cause frustration and risk derailing the entire process.

It can be more effective to agree the principles that will underpin future decisions

and set up mechanisms to deal with a number of specific issues that can be taken off the negotiation table and outsourced to other bodies. This creates space and builds momentum for an agreement.

Plan for and Invest in the Implementation Phase

This approach puts increased emphasis on the political implementation phase of an agreement and the importance of long-term sustained oversight. The **GFA did not build trust between the parties** – this had to be done slowly through implementation. It was fortunate that the two prime ministers had renewed electoral mandates that allowed them to continue their partnership and devote considerable political capital to working through implementation issues. In hindsight, more consideration should have been given to this part of the process. The working out of the GFA became a confidence building measure which eventually allowed the parties to establish a developed administration once the decommissioning of weapons had been resolved. Undoubtedly, the delays around decommissioning of IRA weapons undermined this confidence and damaged the overall process particularly in the eyes of the unionist community. The importance of long term oversight is reflected in the fact that the British, Irish and US governments continued to monitor the process and intervened on several occasions to deal with crises leading to four follow up agreements: (1) *the St Andrews Agreement (2006)*; (2) *the Hillsborough Agreement (2010)*; (3) *the Stormont House (2014)*; and, (4) *the Fresh Start (2015)*. Without this level

of mentoring and oversight and without the level of financial assistance coming in through the EU Peace Programme it is likely that the process would have collapsed. The GFA political process focused on central government level but had limited detail on local government level and a complementary social peace process at community level.

The implementation phase should be given more prominence and attention and parties to agreements need to put more focus on embedding the agreement, setting out a clear implementation process with agreed, manageable and sequenced steps.

Parties need to be more realistic about implementation, recognising that all sides will face internal constraints and tensions with inevitable slippage.

The International community should stay engaged and be willing to invest time and resources to embed the agreement, build it out to involve wider government and society and ensure that as far as possible these implementation steps build confidence in the process.

Being Realistic

The GFA has been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to several key post conflict issues - *transitional justice and dealing with the past, support for victims and the failure to set up a civic forum*. There has also been criticism that there was too much emphasis on getting and keeping SF in the process and not enough on the decommissioning of IRA weapons. These issues were heavily contested at the time of the negotiations and there were risks that efforts to get agreement could have been jeopardised if additional issues were also on the table. Had more rigid timelines been imposed, it would have led to unravelling on other issues. The NI parties faced internal constraints which seriously reduced their

capacity to move on critical issues. The priority for SF was to keep the IRA on board and avoid a potentially violent split. The Official Unionist Party (OUP) were concerned about being outflanked by the more hard-line Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and faced internal opposition. The hope was that the new power-sharing government in NI would deal with these issues. Civil society has worked to develop community led processes to deal with the past, and to support women, victims and ex-combatants but the NI Assembly has still failed to make any real progress on these fronts and this has continued to negatively impact on politics and on efforts to reduce sectarianism and build reconciliation.

Parties to the negotiation process need to strike a balance between a comprehensive agreement and a more realistic approach which focuses on the core issues which can end the conflict and establish a political settlement. But there are risks that these

issues and the people most affected by them will be ignored when politicians and parties fail to live up to their commitment and more powerful interest groups set the agenda in the post conflict environment.

Strengthening Local Ownership

The process of negotiating the GFA was relatively inclusive, and the fact that there was a high level of public awareness and debate on the agreement did ensure a good degree of ownership and contributed to wider support for the GFA. This was reflected in the results of the referenda to ratify the agreement with strong support on both sides of the border (71% in NI and 94% in the Republic of Ireland). However, this did not necessarily build the deeper ownership needed to sustain the agreement and to allow the political parties to make the difficult compromises needed. The agreement dealt with constitutional and central Government issues and processes and was weak on the role of local government. The implementation process and the building out of the different elements of the agreement played an important role in building ownership and sustaining the process. The release of prisoners and their social re-integration, the removal of military infrastructure and the establishment of the North/South bodies were all important in this regard. Silently, in the background, the removal of borders and trade barriers within the EU meant that the old divisive border disappeared and became seamless.

The availability of independent funding (*the EU Peace Programme and the International Fund for Ireland*) and the establishment of the Special EU Programme body (SEUPB) was critical as it provided space for the engagement of other sectors of society (*local authorities, education bodies, the private sector, trade unions, farmers organisations and civil society*) and created a peace dividend for communities. This funding filled some of the gaps in the agreement particularly around support for ex-combatants, allowed risk taking and targeted resources on key target groups like victims, women, youth and political ex-prisoners. The establishment of the cross-border bodies under strand two of the GFA was also significant as it extended and integrated the workings of the agreement into important areas, such as: *tourism, trade, waterways and the delivery of EU Programmes*. In addition, getting buy-in from the major cultural

and sporting organisations was critical particularly the Orange Order which draws its members from the Unionist community and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) which had extensive reach into the Nationalist community.

Building and strengthening ownership of a peace process requires more than media and information campaigns and needs real engagement and the building out of the process at subnational and local government levels.

There is a need for structured approaches to bolster and amplify peace agreements, build the involvement of wider society and embed it into the real world.

Independent funding can be critical in this regard and by targeting resources at key groups, supporting a bottom-up process to complement the high level negotiations, taking risks and generating a visible peace dividend.

The NI peace process was led by the British and Irish Governments and the parties in NI always had a high level of local ownership and control. However, there has been substantial international involvement in the process over the years in the following ways: the lobbying efforts of the Irish-America community, the interventions of the US President, the EU being the forum where Irish and British ministers met on an equal and frequent basis, the EU peace funds to support peacebuilding on the ground as well as the establishment of international bodies to deal with some of the more contentious elements of the GFA. The role of the US was critical in the negotiations phase, particularly the efforts of President Clinton and Sen. George Mitchell² gently nudged the parties and both governments to make the necessary shifts and compromises. Critically the international community stayed invested in the process in three main ways:

2 Independent Chair of the talks process.

1. the international commissions on policing and on decommissioning took these issues off the table and helped to depoliticise them;
2. the EU continued to support a comprehensive programme of peacebuilding in the years after the GFA; and,
3. US envoys continued to play a role in the follow up agreements which have kept the NI process going.

The GFA did not remove the levels of mistrust between the parties, and without this ongoing mentoring and oversight it is likely that the process would have collapsed. The power-sharing arrangements in NI have been problematic, with regular crises (*the Assembly has collapsed on several occasions*). The mandatory coalition has been criticised for reinforcing existing community divides, embedding sectarianism and providing limited room for the emergence of middle ground parties.

Sustained and constructive international support is vital both in the formal negotiations and in the back channel negotiations which are critical to these processes and this role is needed at all stages - *before, during and after* the negotiation of a peace agreement.

As far as possible international actors need to co-ordinate their efforts so that they can facilitate communications and dialogue to get parties to the table, use both the carrot and stick to move the process during deadlock and provide the medium to long term pressure and support to ensure that there is a genuine effort to implement.

While the follow up agreements in NI have addressed specific issues and roadblocks, there is a view that the power sharing arrangements should be reviewed and a more appropriate structure put in place which would change the political dynamics and be more conducive to reconciliation.

1. Introduction

The Principles for Peace Initiative (P4P) is an initiative to re-think and re-frame peace processes and to address fundamental flaws in the international community's approach to peace. Recent trends and developments in conflict and violence call for new ways of working and a re-think of the way peace processes are conceived and structured. Interpeace has identified seven interrelated and fundamental challenges in the way peace processes are structured, including: *(i) an overfocus on conflict resolution than sustainable peace; (ii) fixation on 'at-the-table' negotiations; (iii) a lack of real inclusivity and local ownership; (iv) a lack of implementation and long-term oversight; (v) a strategic deficit in international peace and security interventions; (vi) the failure to address historical root causes and past grievances, and; (vii) the failure to understand and address the political economy of conflict.*

The Northern Ireland (NI) study examines the extent to which these factors were present in Northern Ireland, how this has impacted on the peace process and what, if any, strategies were used to address these challenges before, during and after the GFA. It aims to test the P4P hypotheses by mapping out the key factors at play, the strengths and weaknesses of the process and why specific elements of the NI peace process were successful or unsuccessful in creating the foundations for sustainable peace.

2. Background: The Conflict in Northern Ireland

The conflict in Northern Ireland or “*the Troubles*” was the result of combination of factors including:

1. The **political exclusion and marginalisation of the Nationalist community** following the **partition of Ireland and the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921**;
2. **Decades of neglect and discrimination and the failure of British Governments** to intervene and tackle the **serious levels of inequality and the sectarian nature of the security forces**.

Over the period 1968-1998 there were more than 3,800 conflict-related deaths, up to 50,000 serious injuries and an estimated 25,000-30,000 politically motivated prisoners. This, together with the extensive damage to property and local infrastructure, had a major impact on a small population of 1.5 million.

“Within Northern Ireland, a majoritarian system of devolved government with relatively autonomous policymaking, lightly regulated and generously funded by the British government, sustained a deeply unequal and divided society.”³

The initial demands by the Nationalist community for civil rights in 1968-69 was met with excessive force by the Unionist State and security forces resulting in widespread communal violence, increasing deaths and destruction, displacement and the further alienation of the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) community. The crises led to the deployment of British troops on the streets in 1970, the collapse of the Stormont Government in 1972 and the establishment of direct rule from London.

The early 1970s saw increased violence across NI, growing support for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the CNR community, the establishment of the Provisional IRA with a traditional nationalist agenda of reunification of Ireland as well as increased activity by Loyalist paramilitary groups; *the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)*. These groups saw their role as protecting Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) communities, countering the IRA and supporting the security forces in defence of the state. The situation in CNR communities was further inflamed by the actions of the British army in these years with increased security activity including large scale searches and curfews, the introduction of internment without trial and particularly the shooting of 14 civilians on Bloody Sunday during a civil rights march in Derry in 1972⁴.

The delay by the British Government to shift out of a military response into a political process increased the sectarian nature of the conflict. When direct rule from London came in 1972, it was a brave attempt to recognise the Irish dimension by a cooperative approach with the Irish government to introduce a power-sharing NI Executive under the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973 (*many elements of which eventually found their way into the GFA 25 years later*). However, the agreement was brought down by the Ulster Workers Strike in 1974. Consequently, it led to an increased securitisation of the conflict for the rest of the 1970-80s in an effort to defeat the IRA with over 20,000 British troops deployed at the height of the conflict and the increased militarisation of the police force - *the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)*. On the ground this led to regular low-intensity attacks on the security forces by the IRA with tit for tat killings with the knock-on effect of increased polarisation and tension. The Protestant community saw it as an attack on them, creating fear, that reinforced their siege mentality. The Hunger Strikes of 1981 resulted in the deaths of 10 republican prisoners

3 The People’s Peace Process in Northern Ireland, Jennifer Todd, 2004.

4 Annex 2 provides a chronology of the main events of the conflict.

and led to a dramatic increase in violence⁵. It seriously damaged relationships between the CNR community and the British Government and generated further tension between the Dublin and London Governments. The failure of politics in this period led to a sense of disillusionment and also coincided with economic recession and high levels of unemployment particularly in deprived CNR communities.

By the late 1980s the conflict in NI had been ongoing for 20 years with little obvious signs of a breakthrough on the political front and a certain level of stalemate on the security front. The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985 changed the dynamic between London and Dublin, creating a new dimension in NI and opened the door to increased engagement by Dublin in efforts to bring about a settlement. A significant development, however, were ongoing processes in the Republican movement - with an increasing emphasis on politics following the political success during the 1981 hunger strikes. However, efforts to bring about

a political settlement failed and added to the sense of hopelessness which pervaded Northern Ireland in the 1980s. The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985 marked a new departure in efforts to bring about a settlement even though it did not immediately bear fruit. This agreement, facilitated British-Irish co-management of the conflict, provided a coherent approach which "*prevented internal Northern Irish conflicts from being magnified into British-Irish ones*". For the first time it created space for the Irish government to engage in efforts to bring about a settlement and meant that each state was able to put pressure on its 'own' client groups in Northern Ireland. Another significant development was the political rethinking process within the Republican movement following their electoral success in 1983 (after the hunger strikes). Following the departure of Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, in 1991, the new conservative government of John Major enabled the opening up of the high level formal peace process that allowed the success of a comprehensive peace settlement.

5 A total of 117 people were killed in 1981

3. Key Elements of the Peace Process

The NI peace process is a complex and long-term series of processes and activities which has involved sustained work at all levels over the last 30 years. It brought an end to large scale political violence and led to significant change to the lives of people in NI. The process has been subject to considerable analysis and debate with different perspectives on when it started, the critical success factors, its effectiveness and the extent to which it has created the foundation for sustainable peace.

The formal or public aspect of the peace process began with the declarations of ceasefire by the IRA and the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) in August and October 1994. This opened the door to an intensive three-year period of negotiations from early 1995 to the signing of the GFA in April 1998. However, there had been sustained work on a number of fronts from the mid 1980s onwards involving the British and Irish Governments, the political parties in NI as well as back channel talks with the paramilitary groups. This laid the groundwork for the ceasefires by the IRA and the CLMC in 1994 and the development of a roadmap for the negotiation process. Central to this was the Downing Street Declaration at the end of 1993 and the Framework Documents in 1995 because they set out the broad parameters within which the British and Irish governments believed negotiations should take place. They held out the promise of negotiations between ‘*democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process*’.

*“The **Good Friday Agreement** was therefore the product of several strands of change that converged in 1997–8. The **Downing Street Declaration** and its principles for negotiation, and the **Framework Documents** with their institutional plan, **provided the structure and impetus for a new round of inter-party talks that began in 1996**, that would come in 1997 to include Sinn Féin, and that would result ultimately in the **Good Friday Agreement**”⁶.*

There are a number of identifiable stages or phases to the NI process stretching over the last 30 years. Martin Manseragh⁷ identifies three broad phases;

1. The first, from **1987 to 1994**, was the **slow establishment of principles and understandings that would lead to definitive ceasefires**.
2. The second, from **1994 to 1998**, was to **negotiate a political peace settlement** that would underpin the ceasefires of 1994.
3. The third stage from **1998-present** has focused on **the implementation of the GFA**.

3.1. The Good Friday Agreement

The GFA is divided into three strands:

1. **Strand One:** dealt with **internal power sharing arrangement** in NI and aimed to avoid the traditional politics of **majority rule through the establishment of a power-sharing Assembly**. In order to make a decision the Assembly had to have the support of a majority of both Nationalist and Unionist members.
2. **Strand Two:** dealt with **North-South structures** and provided **recognition of the Irish identity of Northern Ireland Nationalists through a North-South Ministerial Council**,

⁶ Negotiating a Settlement in Northern Ireland, 1969–2019. John Coakley and Jennifer Todd, (2020)

⁷ Special Advisor to the Irish Government on the NI Peace Process.

which comprised members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann⁸. This, together with further North-South institutions, was set up to deal with issues of common concern like tourism and water ways.

3. **Strand Three:** provided **recognition of the British identity of Unionists through a British-Irish Council**. The Council was set up with representatives from the British and Irish Governments and devolved institutions in NI, Scotland and Wales plus the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

Other elements of the Agreement included:

- ▶ **Articles Two and Three of the Irish Constitution** would be amended to define the nation of Ireland as its people rather than the territory in which they live. Irish and British constitutional law would reflect the principle of consent; there would be **no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional status without the consent of the majority of its people**.
- ▶ **NI law** would **incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights establishment of a Human Rights Commission and a joint North-South Commission to review rights in each jurisdiction**. The British Government would support minority culture and language.
- ▶ All parties committed themselves to bring about the **total disarmament of paramilitary organisations within two years of the Belfast Agreement's approval**. The number and role of the Armed Forces would be reduced, Emergency Powers legislation would be repealed and prisoners of paramilitary organisations on ceasefire would be released early.
- ▶ Independent commissions would **review policing and the Criminal Justice System**.

In addition to the institutional arrangements the Agreement dealt with a range of issues which were central to the conflict and critical to building peace and reconciliation. It affirmed the '*principle of consent*'⁹. At the same time, it provided a route to Irish unity, with provision for future parallel referenda in both NI and the RoI if there was evidence that a majority of people in NI were in favour of this. It provided recognition of the validity of both Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican identities and aspirations, with equality in cultural, social and economic spheres. It promoted equality and human rights through equality legislation, an overhaul of the criminal justice system, and police

reform.

*"A major outcome of these negotiations was **the creation of a set of principles, ground rules, and institutions designed to resolve conflicts over sovereignty, democracy, and inequality** that could win multi-party acceptance in Northern Ireland. These came to **inform British and Irish policymaking and institution building in Northern Ireland**"¹⁰.*

It would, however, be incorrect to view this as a straight line process working towards an inevitable outcome. There were numerous challenges and on several occasions it looked like the process would collapse. There was ongoing violence in the early stages of the process right up to the ceasefires of 1994 with a number of particularly brutal sectarian massacres carried out by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups:

Irish Republican Army (IRA):

1. Teebane Massacre, May 1991, which killed eight;
2. Shankill Road bombing which killed 9;

Bomber Loyalist Paramilitaries:

The *bomber Loyalist paramilitaries* carried out sectarian attacks on:

1. Grahams Bookmakers Belfast, March 1992, killing five;
2. The Greysteel Massacre, Oct 1993, which killed eight;
3. The Loughlinisland massacre, June 1994, which killed six.

The IRA continued to wage a bombing campaign both in NI and in Britain which included:

1. an attack on the Glenanne Barracks, May 1991;
2. a mortar bomb attack on Downing St., Feb 1991;
3. the Bishopsgate bombing, April 1993, in London which caused an estimated £350 mIn damage.

Although the levels of violence declined considerably after the ceasefires there were still ongoing incidents during the negotiations and after the signing of the GFA which threatened to derail the process. In 1996 the ceasefires collapsed when the IRA bombed Canary Wharf (London, UK) and Manchester and in July 1998 the Drumcree protest led to widespread violence across NI.

8 The Irish Parliament

9 the constitutional status of NI as part of the United Kingdom would depend on the will of a majority of the population there

10 Bertie Ahern quoted in Todd & Coakely

4. Analysis of the Northern Irish Peace Process

This section provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the NI Peace process looking at what factors have contributed to the resilience of the GFA and relative peace and stability in NI. It will also assess the factors which have limited the transition and the progress towards reconciliation in NI and link these to wider problems in peace processes as identified in the P4P.

4.1. A Sustained Multi Track Process

One of the key strengths of the NI process has been the fact that it has been a long term process, or indeed series of processes, which has extended over 30 years and operated at multiple levels with sustained work going on at track one, two and three over this period. Despite this the final negotiations required intense discussions going on right up to the signing of the GFA on Good Friday (10th April 1998). The deadline was imposed by Sen. George Mitchell who felt that additional time and further extensions of the negotiations would result in slippage and backtracking by parties.

As outlined above there were several phases in the process which allowed all the parties to engage with the issues over a lengthy period. The **extended nature of the process and the fact that several of the key elements of the agreement were pushed into the implementation phase** are now seen as critical factors in the effectiveness and resilience of the NI process. The initial phase of the process from the late 1980s up to the ceasefires of 1994 and the start of multi-party talks provided a solid foundation for the remainder of the process and proved to be critical when difficulties arose later in the talks. This period allowed the different parties to frame their positions and start to build trust and engage with each other around the key issues. Central to this was the development of a partnership approach between the British and Irish Governments. The **commitment of both Governments and the strong working relationship at political and civil service levels created a framework and space for the parties to deal with the difficult and sensitive issues driving the conflict.**

Two significant and inter-connected processes were going on in these early years; **first, the engagement with Republicans to bring them into the process** and **second, the efforts of the two governments to set out a road map for a settlement.** The process of engaging with the Republican movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s through back channels and the Hume-Adams talks process is recognised as a key step in the process. These talks between John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and Gerry Adams, leader of SF, signalled a change in the Republican thinking and facilitated the ongoing shift in the Republican movement. The talks set out an agreed nationalist approach, opened the door to dialogue between SF and the Irish Government and later on with the British Government.

“Irish negotiators thus increasingly argued for a formula for including republicans in negotiations and in power-sharing government. Their aim became one of ending republican violence by creating an inclusive polity in NI, one where unionists would no longer have a veto either on internal change or on the engagement of the Irish government in Northern Ireland, and where a peaceful path to Irish unity became a realistic option”.

In their paper on this period Corry and Hynes have outlined how these efforts created the political conditions to bring about the end of political violence in NI¹². They define this as the *Conflict Engagement phase* where: “**the task is to engage the protagonists and win their confidence to break out of cycles of tit-for-tat violence on the ground. New political thinking in the secret back channels can explore the principles on which talks can commence, nudge the parties towards a ceasefire and build the new relationships of trust**”¹³. One of the lessons identified by Corry and Hynes is that “*in almost all national liberation organisations dedicated to political objectives, there are those who bomb and those who think. The challenge for governments and peacemakers is to identify those who think beyond the violence and help them to develop political strategies*”¹⁴. The Hume-Adams talks were a key piece of this process, leading to new thinking on the way forward and shaping the proposals which then fed into the Downing Street Declaration.

The second key element was the **inter-governmental work**. The Downing St Declaration (15 December 1993) was a joint declaration by the UK Prime Minister, John Major, and the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Albert Reynolds. This was a significant milestone in the process where both Governments set out their joint approach to a negotiated settlement in NI. It set out the principles and conditions for the conduct of negotiations to achieve peace and held out the promise of a place in the negotiations for “*democratically mandated parties which establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and which have shown that they abide by the democratic process*”. It also confirmed the existing positions of both governments, that **they**

would seek the agreement of the people of both NI and the ROI to any change to the status of NI and would uphold all existing guarantees to NI. The Downing St Declaration was developed further in the Framework Documents (22 February 1995) which formally define the broad parameters within which the British and Irish Governments believed negotiations should take place. It provided “*a shared understanding between the British and Irish Governments to assist discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland parties*”¹⁵ and committed the Governments to work along with the constitutional parties. **These years also provided space for the parties to start to address the key issues which were going to be part of any agreement and to develop a common language which allowed the parties to engage more constructively around difficult issues.**

*“I think that the very good thing about the 1991–2 talks was that all the parties started drawing up position papers. They started saying what it was they wanted, rather than just saying we’re against this or that.”*¹⁶

The GFA set up the institutional architecture for the parties to work together and the structure of the agreement meant that many of the key elements had to be worked out in the years after 1998. There is debate as to when the implementation phase ended, with some commentators viewing the devolution of security and policing in 2010 as the final piece of the jigsaw while others see the process as being ongoing with several outstanding issues still to be resolved. The working out of the GFA and the parallel process of community level peacebuilding has sustained the peace process well beyond the signing of the GFA.

4.2. Track Two and Track Three Work

The high level political process (track 1) has received most attention and analysis but it is important to highlight the extensive work at track two and track three over these years. While the political track one process was going on a parallel process of civil society peacebuilding was taking place with financial support from the EU, the British and Irish Government, the US, the International Fund for

Ireland, the Ireland Fund, Atlantic Philanthropies, and others. The work of **Track two and three was critical to the overall peace process as it provided a firm foundation for the political process, providing space for diverse voices and ensuring broad based buy in for the difficult concessions which were part of the agreement**. This created a foundation for the political process

12 Creating Political Oxygen to Break the Cycle of Violence 1981 – 1994: Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process Geoffrey Corry and Pat Hynes

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

15 A framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland (22 Feb 1995)

16 Bertie Ahern quoted in Todd & Coakley

and sustained the momentum particularly during the periods when the political process stalled and the agreement seemed at risk. Some would argue that this work **paved the way and created the atmosphere for the politicians to engage in the negotiations and make the concessions that were needed to firstly sign the GFA and then implement some of the more contentious measures.**

“the elite level political negotiations that led to the various agreements were but one part of a much wider process that involved (and continues to involve) a diverse range of civil society organisations, including community groups, voluntary organisations, trade unions, business community, arts and sports bodies, faith-based groups and others who sought to ensure that peace and justice was built from the ground up and horizontally between groups and communities as well as vertically”¹⁷

Work at track two and track three had been going on from the mid-1980s, with a range of civil society actors working to promote cross-community and cross-border dialogue and relationship building, and also working behind the scenes to facilitate track two dialogue to kick-start and support the political process.

In the early days of the peace process when the potential for peace was still limited there were a number of initiatives set up to open up space for dialogue and generate new thinking on the issues which had blocked progress for decades. Examples of this is the Opsal Commission, Democratic Dialogue and the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

- ▶ **The Opsal Commission** (1992 -1993) was a citizen’s enquiry designed to address the vacuum in constructive thinking and to engage with the many people in NI who felt excluded by the political stalemate and ongoing violence. The commission was chaired by the Norwegian Human Rights Lawyer, Torkel Opsal, and took both written and oral submissions from hundred on interested citizens across Northern Ireland which fed into the report: A citizens Inquiry: The Opsal Report on Northern Ireland (1993).
- ▶ **Democratic Dialogue** was a think tank which was set up 1995, with the aim of stimulating fresh approaches to the political problems of NI. It facilitated round table discussions and produced a number of policy report on relevant issues related to the peace process.
- ▶ **The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation** was established by the Irish Government in October 1994 following the paramilitary ceasefire. It was designed to promote dialogue between parties and to examine ways in which lasting peace, stability and reconciliation could be established. It held 41 plenary session with presentations by political parties, church leaders, business groups as well as representatives of civil society and the peace sector.

Funding from the EU Peace Programme and other donors such as the IFI, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Rountree foundation allowed civil society to undertake a comprehensive programme of peacebuilding from the mid-1990s onwards. Some examples of dialogue initiatives which supported the political peace process include:

- ▶ The **Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation** outside Dublin organised over fifty residential political dialogue workshops between 1994-2007. These interactive track two dialogues involved representatives of all the political parties in Ireland and Britain and provided space for the parties to build relationships and to develop new understandings and thinking on the way forward. The Glencree Centre also delivered a victims/ex-combatants dialogue programme which brought together victims from both communities, representatives of paramilitary groups and members of the security forces from both sides of the border.
- ▶ Following the release of political prisoners under the GFA a number of projects were established to **promote and facilitate dialogue and collaboration between ex-combatants /political ex-prisoners.** The “ex-POW Consortium” project and the “Prison to Peace Project” were funded under the EU Peace Programme and involved representatives of the five main paramilitary groups, three Republican (*the Provisional IRA, the Official IRA and the Irish National Liberation Army - INLA*) and two Loyalist groups (*the Ulster Volunteer Force - UVF and the Ulster Defence Association - UDA*) These projects provided space for ex-combatants to build relationships, explore issues related to the peace process, deal with emerging tensions and conflicts as well as providing practical support to ex-prisoners and supporting re-integration.
- ▶ **Transitional Justice and dealing with the past** has been one of the most contentious issues in the NI process and controversies about the past continues to damage the political process and block reconciliation. A number of community

level initiatives have worked to address this gap and to provide space and mechanism for the two communities to address these issues. An example of this type of work is Healing Through Remembering - a diverse member-led organisation working on the legacy of the past and providing opportunities and learning to inform broader debate about dealing with the legacy of the conflict. Its membership includes victims and survivors, political ex-prisoners, ex-security services, churches, academia and civil society. It has worked on five main themes; (1) *storytelling*, (2) *truth recovery and acknowledgement*, (3) *Living memorial museum*, (4) *days of reflection and*, (5) *Commemoration*.

- ▶ The Women's sector played a critical role in the peace process with a wide range of **Women's groups** working at different levels to promote the participation of women in peacebuilding and political processes and to shape the policy agenda. The **Women's Coalition** undertook an inclusive process of cross community dialogues in the lead up to the GFA and held regular meetings with the public to learn more about the needs and concerns of both the Catholic and Protestant communities. They also broadened the agenda of the talks and ensured there was more focus on victim's issues, reintegration of political prisoner, education, housing and social cohesion. The fact that the coalition was drawn from across the traditional divided broadened public support for the agreement and their support and campaigning is considered critical to the approval of the GFA in the follow up referenda on both sides of the border. Another example is the work carried by the Women and Peacebuilding Project a partnership of the Women's Resource and Development

Agency (WRDA), the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWIC). This project used the framework of UN 1325¹⁸ and aimed to reflect on, distil and disseminate learning from the Northern Ireland peace process with a particular emphasis on post-conflict issues.

- ▶ Despite the paramilitary ceasefires and the decommissioning of arms, there were ongoing street disturbances in the years after the GFA particularly around contested parades and other controversial incidents (*Drumcree, Holycross School, Harryville Church, Twadell etc.*) which became symbolic of the increasing "culture war" being fought out and the breakdown in community relations. These tensions were also reflected in the increased number of peacewalls¹⁹ erected after the GFA. These conflicts presented a serious threat to the peace process, damaged relationships at political level and had the potential to escalate, with the risk of paramilitary involvement. A range of civil society groups have been active in local mediation and dialogue process to prevent and resolve these disputes and to build the capacity of the local communities to intervene and defuse tensions. Organisations such as Mediation Northern Ireland, TIDES Training, the Belfast Interface project and the ex-combatant/ex-prisoners groups have been active in this type of work with the support of EU Peace programme and the IFI. The fact that these violent incidents have reduced considerably and that there were no street disturbances around Brexit's controversy would indicate that this work has been effective in reducing inter-communal tensions and preventing conflict.

4.3. Dealing with Root Causes and Grievances

There is general agreement that some of the original causes of conflict in NI had been addressed by the British Government over the 1980s and to a large extent the CNR community had achieved basic civil rights by the time the peace process got underway. The key issues in the negotiations were; the **constitutional position of NI; security, justice and policing; decommissioning of weapons and prisoners; victims and dealing with the past, and; equality and human rights.**

The status and legitimacy of NI has been contested from the partition of Ireland in 1921, and the constitutional position of NI was a core issue throughout the negotiation process. The GFA managed to address this issue through a number of interlinked elements (the three Strands outlined above) including a **structured power-sharing arrangement in NI**, a **recognition by all parties of the position of NI in the UK**, and recognition that this could not change without the **consent of the majority** of people in NI, a **strong Irish dimension**

18 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

19 Peacewalls are barriers erected to separate the Catholic/nationalist/Republican (CNR) and the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities at interface areas with a history of violent conflict. Despite the peace process there are still over 80 of these walls in place mainly in Belfast

and role for the Irish government, including the establishment of **North-South bodies**. It also included the removal of articles in the Irish constitution which laid claim to Northern Ireland (Articles 2 & 3) while also setting a clear process for the possible reunification of Ireland. What has been described as “*constructive ambiguity*” allowed the different parties to reach agreement - but with different interpretations. While the agreement confirmed NI’s position in the UK, SF saw it as a means to a united Ireland. The effectiveness and the complexity of this arrangement has been noted by various commentators while others have highlighted the fact that it **allowed all sides to claim some level of victory *while* sowing the seeds of future tension.**

*“The **peace process marks a sea change in the debate about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, rather than drawing a line under it. It provides for an institutional and political framework that will enable peaceful debate and dialogue***

to continue”²⁰.

*“The Irish state, and all the main nationalist parties, recognized that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as this was the will of a majority in Northern Ireland, and most Catholics were prepared to accept this. The British committed to facilitate constitutional change to a united Ireland should this become the will of a majority in Northern Ireland. Meanwhile, **the full legitimacy of nationalist aspirations for a united Ireland (to be achieved democratically) was accepted**”²¹*

The process also developed the concept of “*parity of esteem*” with recognition of the validity of both Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican identities and aspirations. A very practical application of this was that people in NI would have the right to be British or Irish or both and to carry either passport.

4.4. Inclusivity and Local Ownership

The fact that the process has extended over a 30-year period means that **there have been fluctuations and times when sections of society felt excluded**. This is particularly true in recent years with regular political crises, the NI Assembly not operating for three years (2017 – 2019), and increasing alienation among some sections of society and in particular disadvantaged loyalist communities. While there were challenges around inclusivity and local ownership in the NI peace process, there are a number of factors which have ensured a reasonable level of inclusivity.

As outlined above there was a strong focus on inclusion and on bringing in the paramilitary groups, and both the Downing St Declaration and the Framework documents provided a path for the paramilitary groups to get on board the political process. In this regard the process leading up to the GFA was different from previous peace efforts in Northern Ireland such as the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 where the focus was on the moderate parties and the exclusion of the extremes.

*“The dominant inter-governmental effort for more than 20 years was to **try and create a centre ground, rigorously excluding and***

condemning paramilitary movements, with a view to achieving an agreement that would isolate extremists and legitimize a tough and conclusive security end-game”²².

Both Governments recognised the need to include the extremes from both communities but were clear that there were some pre-conditions. Jonathan Powell notes that “*you cannot stop the violence without talking to the men with guns. We were criticised in Northern Ireland for undermining the political centre by focussing on the IRA. But that was exactly the point. **Unless we could get the IRA to stop we would not bring peace to Northern Ireland***”²³.

The extent to which there were pre-conditions has been heavily debated. On the one hand parties linked to paramilitary groups (Sinn Féin SF, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Ulster Democratic Party (UDP)) took part in the talks and were signatories to the agreement without the disbandment of paramilitary groups or decommissioning of weapons. Initially there were demands that decommissioning be a pre-condition but it was recognised by the two Governments that this would lead to failure. In his

20 Galvanising the Peace

21 ibid

22 Manseragh

23 Jonathan Powell Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process; LSE

assessment of this issue Jonathan Powell notes that *“it is far better to address these issues in the negotiations themselves rather than making them a prior condition to be met before the talks can commence”*. On the other hand, these parties did have to commit to purely political means. There are a number of additional factors which promoted inclusion in the process.

In order to have a basis for the proposed all-party talks and to give parties legitimacy and a mandate for the negotiations the British Government called an election to create the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue (30 May 1996). The election used both the conventional closed system list and a party list system in order to secure the representation of smaller parties with loyalist paramilitary links who would otherwise have been excluded. As a result, four smaller parties won seats and were included in the negotiations:

1. the Progressive Unionist Party - linked to the Ulster Volunteer Force;
2. the Ulster Democratic Party – linked to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA);
3. the Women’s Coalition, and;
4. the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

The Women’s Coalition was founded in 1996 to address the lack of female representation in NI’s politics and drew its membership from across the political divide. It played a key role in the talks process leading up to the GFA, by bringing the voice of women and excluded groups to the table and pushing the inclusion, equality and human rights agenda.

The negotiation process - from the start of the all party talks to the signing of the agreement was difficult and close to collapse on several occasions with the **involvement of SF a particularly contentious issues for the Unionist parties**. Despite strong opposition and a number of walkouts and boycotts by Unionists the two Governments stuck with the principle of inclusion and managed to keep the process moving forward. This was particularly problematic in the lead up to the talks in early 1996 when the IRA ceasefire had collapsed and Unionists were demanding that the IRA decommission its weapons before they could enter the talks. In an effort to prevent the collapse of the process the new chair of the talk Senator George Mitchell drew up the so called *‘Mitchell Principles’*. These Principles acknowledged that the pre-condition of arms decommissioning in advance of the talks was not realistic and instead set out six principles that all parties including SF

had to fully commit to in order to enter the talks process. This formed the basis on the talks process and underpinned the GFA. Parties committed to the following:

1. To **democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political** issues;
2. To the **total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations**;
3. To agree that such **disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission**;
4. To renounce for themselves, and to **oppose any effort by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all party negotiations**;
5. 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;
6. To urge **that “punishment” killings and beatings stop** and to take effective steps to prevent such actions.

This did present problems for SF and caused dissatisfaction in sections of the IRA. Critically this approach got around the problem of the decommissioning and allowed the talks to proceed with SF at the table. A number of key people in the process argue that stopping the violence was the priority and getting SF around the table was a critical step in achieving this.

*“Insurgent groups need a narrative to explain to their supporters what they have achieved and why all the sacrifice was worthwhile. If an agreement looks like abject surrender they will reject it. For that reason, **it is a mistake to insist on preconditions before beginning talks**. As I said above, democratic governments find it very hard to be seen to talk to insurgent groups until there is a ceasefire. But **to demand additional preconditions before talks can start is usually a mistake**”²⁴*

However, Paul Bew takes the view that the process did find a balance:

“When discussing the lessons of the Northern Ireland peace process, it is simplistic and misleading to say that the key to success was the bringing in of extremes. Despite the obvious temptation to bring them in, during

*the crucial phase from 1993-1998, the needs of the moderates were prioritised at crucial junctures, thus creating the conditions for a sustainable deal*²⁵

The support of both Loyalist and Republican prisoners was seen as crucial to the process and both SF and the two Loyalist parties, the PUP and UDP, maintained an ongoing dialogue with their prisoners. However, in early 1998 UDA prisoners voted for their representatives in the UDP to withdraw from the talks. In an effort to keep this group on side and involved in the process then British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, visited loyalist prisoners in Long Kesh (The Maze) prison in January 1998 to persuade them to support the ongoing peace talks. This approach worked and the Loyalist parties were able to stay involved and sign the GFA.

The outcome of these approaches was an inclusive process which involved a total of 13 parties; ten political parties in NI, the two Governments and the independent chair George Mitchell. This contrasts with the earlier peace process and the Sunningdale Agreement, 1973, which involved only three pro-agreement parties and the two Governments.

The final phase of the negotiations leading up to the GFA was very much focused on the parties directly involved in the process. A key issue was selling the agreement to the different constituencies. There was opposition to the agreement within the Unionist community with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and sections of the Official

Unionist Party (OUP) having reservations about power sharing with the Nationalist community and major problems with going into Government with SF without IRA decommissioning. The strategy of running simultaneous referenda in NI and the RoI provided an opportunity for the citizens of the island to endorse the GFA. **The two referenda were held on 22 May 1998 and provided an overwhelming endorsement for the agreement with a 94% yes vote in the South and 71% in NI. This level of support has been helpful for politicians in the difficult implementation phase.**

Another important element was the work of SF to sell the agreement to its constituency, and particularly the more militant IRA elements who were committed to the military campaign for a British withdrawal and a United Ireland. This process of consultation with the Republican constituency was effective and did enable SF to sign up to an agreement which fell short of this and which allowed them to enter Government and work on the implementation. Critically it prevented a split in the IRA with the majority of the membership accepting the agreement and allowed SF to continue to engage and become a key party in the power sharing executive.

“the Sinn Féin leadership in the North have, in the absence of any sort of a military victory, achieved what few other insurgent groups around the world have succeeded in doing, making a convincing transition into exclusively democratic politics”²⁶.

4.5. Policing and Decommissioning

A second group of highly contentious issues was related to security, justice, demilitarisation, disarmament, policing and prisoners. The negotiations around these issues were central to the process from the early days right up to the devolution of justice and policing to the NI assembly in February 2010 – what some regard as the final element of the implementation process. **Decommissioning of weapons was to prove to be the most contentious issue and caused numerous breakdowns over the course of both the negotiations and implementation process.** The position of the British government and the Unionists was that Sinn Féin’s participation in negotiations depended on the actual decommissioning of IRA weapons while the

SF’s stance was that the question of arms could only be resolved through implementation of the agreement and the power-sharing government so that IRA could be persuaded that politics was working. When SF accepted the *Mitchell Principles* in September 1997 they were allowed to enter the talks. However, this resulted in the permanent withdrawal of the two Unionist parties; the DUP and the smaller UK Unionist party.

“One of the main obstacles to maintaining rapid momentum was the difficulty of obtaining clarity about renunciation of both the threat and the means of renewed violence. The section on weapons decommissioning in the Good Friday

25 Paul Bew, “Myths of Consociationalism: From Good Friday to Political Impasse,” in *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, ed. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen 2006),

26 Manseragh

*Agreement was weak and aspirational, albeit the best that could be obtained at the time*²⁷.

This process was slow and acrimonious and the first IRA arms were only decommissioned in 2001. with the process completed in 2005. The **language used in the agreement around decommissioning was ambiguous and allowed scope for different interpretations which created ongoing tension and mistrust and led to the collapse of the Assembly in February 2000.** Seamus Mallon, the SDLPs chief negotiator and former Deputy First Minister, has been very critical of this element of the process and felt that it poisoned the atmosphere. He argued that the two governments paid too much attention to the demands of SF and the IRA and took the more moderate parties for granted.

*“There was something unnervingly wrong about the two sovereign governments instead of dealing with the **issue of paramilitary groups illegal weapons, themselves making those arms part of the bargaining element within an ultra sensitive political process** [...] So the IRA keeping their arms for so long enabled Sinn Féin to move to a central and decisive position in the politics of Northern Ireland*²⁸

Realising the difficulties around this issue the two Governments decided to take this out of the main negotiations and to set up the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) in August 1997. This was a key step as it allowed the main negotiations to proceed without the process being derailed on the arms issue, and

managed to depoliticise one of the hottest issue in the process. The IICD was tasked with “*facilitating the process by observing, monitoring and verifying decommissioning*” of paramilitary weapons and explosives, and was headed by a Canadian Gen John de Chastelain. The process facilitated what Corry describes as a unique Irish model of DDR which “*started first with the re-integration of political prisoners, then demilitarisation of British security presence and then the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons*”.

However, ongoing illegal activities by the paramilitaries continued to cause political tension and slow the implementation process. In 2004 the two Governments established another body; the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) to monitor and report on the state of the paramilitary ceasefires and any continuing activity by paramilitary groups, and the process of demilitarisation by the British Government. Again, this mechanism depoliticised these contentious issues although the IMC faced ongoing criticism.

Another highly contentious issue was police reform – a key demand of the nationalist side but one which was strongly resisted by Unionist parties who felt an ownership of the police which had borne the brunt of IRA attacks over the course of the conflict. This issue was also dealt with through an independent international body - The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland chaired by the Conservative politician Chris Patten. This again depoliticised the reform of policing and led to the disbanding of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the formation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

4.6. The Political Economy of the Conflict

The context in the NI conflict was quite different from other conflicts in term of the political economy. Both the UK and the RoI were members of the EU and there was not a large scale war economy with vested interests benefiting from instability. There was a recognition among all parties including the majority of the paramilitary groups that a successful peace process would result in a peace dividend which would benefit their constituencies. There was no formal DDR process although there was some level of support for ex-prisoners/ex-combatants through the EU Peace Programme. The paramilitary groups were represented in the

talks and a number of Republican ex-prisoners went on to represent SF in the Assembly and the Dail. However, there had been a problem of funding for the paramilitary groups through bank robberies, protection and smuggling rackets. This was supposed to come to an end with the ceasefires and decommissioning but elements of the paramilitary groups have shifted to criminal activity with increased links with organised crime and drug dealing, and this remains a significant problem in some urban areas and in the border region.

27 Lessons of the Northern Ireland Peace Process: Martin Manseragh: LSE 2011

28 A Shared Home Place; Seamus Mallon with Andy Pollock

4.7. Implementation of the GFA

The implementation process can be divided into two phases:

1. signing of the GFA up to the Hillsborough Castle Agreement in February 2010 which enabled the justice and policing power to be devolved to the NI Assembly, and;
2. from 2010 to date²⁹.

The Implementation process required sustained work by the two Governments with the negotiation of several follow up agreements needed to clarify and tie down issues. What is critical is that there was a commitment by the custodians to support the process and ensure that it kept on track. The two Governments continued to work on the details of the agreement for the next decade and invested considerable time and energy in working through complex issues such as policing, decommissioning, supporting victims and getting and keeping the Assembly up and running.

- ▶ The **St. Andrew's Agreement** (2006) set out a path to full devolution of policing and justice and a stable power-sharing arrangement.
- ▶ The **Hillsborough Agreement** (2010) allowed for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the NI Assembly and an agreement on controversial parades which had caused ongoing conflict between communities.
- ▶ **The Stormont House Agreement** (2014) covered a broad range of political, social and economic issues and also provided for the establishment of a new institutional framework for dealing with the past.
- ▶ **A Fresh Start – The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan (2015)** addressed implementation of many aspects of the

Stormont House Agreement along tackling the continuing impact and legacy of paramilitarism.

- ▶ **The New Decade, New Approach agreement (Jan 2020)** aimed to make politics and government more transparent, accountable and effective and led to the restoration of the NI Assembly after a three year break.

A key factor in **NI's peace process was the quality of leadership among the different parties, the patience and determination of the two Governments and strong working relationships firstly between the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and British PM, John Major, and then between UK PM, Blair, and the Taoiseach, Ahern.** Another key factor was the level of interest and commitment by President Clinton as key stages. In the earlier stage the Reynolds and Major worked closely to get the process going. The fact that there were stable governments in both Dublin and London with both Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern in power for that crucial ten year period from 1997 to 2007 was critical. Leaders of the NI political parties also demonstrated leadership and took significant risks. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness navigated a difficult path - engaging in a political process while working to bring the IRA with them and avoid a dangerous split. John Hume and David Trimble demonstrated leadership of their respective parties the SDLP and the OUP in driving the process over many years. Both parties paid a price for this and have lost out to the more hard-line parties, SF and the DUP. **The lack of leadership in NI in recent years and the drop of in the level of engagement by the two governments are seen as contributory factors to the problems affecting NI in recent years. The Brexit vote has added to the insecurity and there are concerns that it will further destabilised politics.**

4.8. Weaknesses and Challenges

The GFA has received considerable attention and is recognised as an historic agreement which ended political violence in NI and provided a framework for building peace and reconciliation. Despite this it has a number of weaknesses and failures.

As outlined above the issue of decommissioning weapons continued to disrupt the process until 2005 and the activity of both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups has been a major

problem particularly in disadvantaged PUL and CNR communities. **The legacy of paramilitarism is one of the key issues still facing NI over 20 years after the signing of the GFA.**

The nature of the agreement also presented difficulties. It is acknowledged that the GFA did not tie down several key issues and was described by Jonathan Powell as “*an agreement to disagree*”. The use of “*constructive ambiguity*” to get around

29 A summary of key events in this period is proved in Annex 2.

some difficult issues and a number of side agreements also presented problems. While the parties have worked together in the power sharing executive, they come to this with very different agendas. SF views the agreement as a route to a united Ireland while the DUP opposed the agreement and only agreed to join the assembly when they had displaced the OUP and become the largest Unionist party. Support for the process was never very strong in the Unionist community. Overall, 71% voted in favour in of the GFA in NI, but attitudes towards the agreement were very different in the two communities. It is estimated that the yes vote in the CNR community was 93% while in the PUL community it was around 57%.

Transitional Justice, dealing with the past, and victims issues, have presented huge challenges since the signing of the GFA. The agreement did not set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as it was felt that it was too early and could exacerbate divisions. In the absence of an official TRC there have been a number of approaches to dealing with the past, some of which have been very contentious. On the other hand, a wide range of community level process have been implemented which have proved to be effective in healing the wounds and helping communities deal with the legacy of the conflict.

The GFA and resulting power sharing arrangements have been criticised for reinforcing existing community divides providing limited room for the middle ground - although there are recent signs of increasing support for the Alliance party

and the Greens. **The power-sharing structures have proved problematic and with regular crises and the mechanisms that were put in place to protect minority rights have been misused on a number of occasions.**

The GFA included a proposal to establish a Civic Forum in Northern Ireland involving representatives of civil society, business, Trade Unions, Arts and sport which would act as a consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues. The Forum was in place for 2 years (2000-2002) but was suspended when the NI Assembly collapsed and devolution was suspended. The Forum was not re-established when developed power was restored in NI.

Culture and identity were significant factors in the NI conflict and continue to negatively impact community relations and politics with ongoing tensions and a “culture war” exacerbated by Brexit. The GFA did address these issues and recognised their importance. It placed a strong emphasis on equality and consent and managed to blur the identity issue. The wider peacebuilding work which followed on from the GFA provided space to deal with these issues and supported work on shared history, identity and symbolism. Despite this there are significant problems and a need for stronger leadership from politicians and increased focus on reconciliation. **The levels of segregation in social housing and education present major challenges and the presence of over 80 peace walls³⁰** highlights the ongoing levels of fear and mistrust which remains on the ground.

30 Physical barriers erected at interface areas between PUL and CNR communities.

5. The International Dimension

The NI peace process has been led by the British and Irish Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland and has always had a high level of local ownership and control. NI was not part of wider geopolitical tensions which have, in other contexts, created tensions. However there has been substantial international involvement in the process over the years in several key areas; the efforts of the US Government and Irish diaspora to support and facilitate the process, the work of the EU to promote and facilitate peace and its financial contribution to peacebuilding as well as the establishment of international bodies to deal with some of the more contentious elements of the GFA.

5.1. Role of the USA

The role of the US was particularly important at different stages of the process and President Clinton devoted time and energy to keep the process alive and to push the parties to make compromises at critical junctures. He had a good working relationship with the two Prime Ministers, Blair and Ahern, and was in the unique position to be able to put pressure on both the British and Irish Governments and the NI parties when there were delays and roadblocks.

The appointment of Sen. George Mitchell as special envoy in 1995 was a key step in the process and marked a turning point in US involvement in NI. Mitchell had been initially appointed as head of the International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) with General John de Chastelain, former head of the Canadian armed forces, and Harri Holkeri, former Finnish Prime Minister. In June 1996, Mitchell was appointed Chair of the talks process despite some concerns among British officials and opposition from Unionists. Mitchell played a central role in the talks process and used his influence and political skill to overcome a number of obstacles.

- ▶ While chairing the IICD he recognised that making decommissioning a pre-condition for entry to the talks process would exclude SF and derail the process. He developed the so called “Mitchell Principles” which set out the conditions for entry to the talks. All parties had to commit to purely peaceful means and this allowed SF join the talks.
- ▶ Mitchell was also central in the decision to take the arms issue out of the main negotiations process and to have it dealt with by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD). This allowed the main negotiations to proceed.
- ▶ In the final stages of the negotiation Mitchell made two key interventions. He set a deadline of Good Friday for the conclusion of the negotiations and put pressure on the parties to make concessions and sign up even though there was a lack of clarity on several key issues. The final draft of the GFA was presented as Mitchell's work and provided a level of impartiality which allowed the different parties to sign up, despite their reservations.
- ▶ Decommissioning emerged as a major issue after the signing of the GFA and blocked progress towards devolution. In September 1999, the two Governments asked Mitchell to return to chair a review process in an attempt to kick-start devolution and get the process moving again.

The US government continued to support the process following President George Bush's inauguration in 2001. Bush appointed two special envoys Richard Haas (2001 -2003) and Mitchell Reiss (2004 -2007) to support the implementation of the GFA. Both played active roles in the follow up negotiations and agreements.

While US involvement is recognised as being constructive and critical to the success of the process there were tensions between the US administration and British officials.

Clinton was perceived as being supportive of the Irish Government and Irish nationalism - when there were disagreements on issues this created suspicion among British officials and Unionists. An example of this was the decision by Clinton to grant a US visa to the Gerry Adams, Leader of SF, despite strong opposition from Tony Blair. The British and Unionist were opposed to this visit without a permanent IRA ceasefire and were concerned that the visit would raise the profile Adams on the international stage and lead to further demands by SF/IRA. Both Clinton and the Irish Government recognised the symbolic importance of this visit and the fact that it would legitimise politics, strengthen to moderates wing of the movement and facilitate the move towards a ceasefire and decommissioning. There were a number of significant disagreements between the British and Irish Government in the years after

the signing of the GFA and the US administration tended to support the Irish Government on these issues.

On the other hand, lobbying by the US and Irish governments applied pressure on SF to make concessions. The delays around decommissioning and failure by SF to endorse the reformed police service were major blocks in the years after the signing of the GFA and the US administration put pressure on SF to move on these issues. When IRA members were captured in Colombia allegedly training FARC guerrillas in August 2001 the atmosphere changed in Washington. The 9/11 attacks also dramatically changed the context and it was not longer tenable for SF to be linked to an armed terrorist group. Following intense pressure from all sides the IRA announced its first act of decommissioning six weeks later.

5.2. The Establishment of International Bodies

The negotiations faced a number of major inter-connected issues particularly policing and decommissioning of arms which had the potential to collapse the entire process. In order to avoid this the two governments and George Mitchell established a number of independent bodies to deal with these issues. The most significant were: the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) and the Independent Commission in Policing. In 2004, the two Governments established the Independent Monitoring Commission to monitor paramilitary activity.

A range of other bodies were established to implements different elements of the GFA such as the North-South implementation bodies (including the Special EU Programmes Body), the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and, the Parades Commission which was set up to deal with contentious parades.

5.2.1. Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD)

The IICD was established by the British and Irish Government³¹ in August 1997 to oversee the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and comprised:

1. General John de Chastelain, Chairman – Canada;
2. Brigadier Tauno Nieminen - Finland;

3. Ambassador Donald C. Johnson - US, (1997–99);

4. Andrew D. Sens - US, (1999–2011).

Its objective was to facilitate the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives, by:

- ▶ Consulting with both governments, the participants in the ongoing negotiations in NI, paramilitary and other relevant groups;
- ▶ Devising and presenting to the governments a set of proposals on how to achieve decommissioning;
- ▶ Facilitating the process by observing, monitoring and verifying decommissioning, and receiving and auditing arms, and;
- ▶ Reporting periodically on progress.

The IICD was assisted by a team of weapons Inspectors (Former Finnish President, Martti Ahtisaari and Mr Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa)) whose mandate was to regularly inspect the contents of a number of IRA arms dumps to ensure that the weapons have remained secure. The IICD published its fourth and final report on IRA decommissioning on 26 September 2005 in which they reported that they were “*satisfied that that the arms decommissioned represent the totality of the IRA’s arsenal*”. The IICD also oversaw the decommissioning in Loyalist paramilitary weapons which was completed in early 2010.

31 The Decommissioning Act, 1997 in the Republic of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Act 1997 in the United Kingdom enabled the establishment of the IICD on 26 August 1997.

5.2.2. Independent Commission on Policing

The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland was established in 1998. It was chaired by UK politician Chris Patten, and was known as the Patten Commission. The aim was to create a police service that would be effective, operate in partnership with the community, and be accountable both to the law and the community which it was to serve. The mandate was to inquire into policing in Northern Ireland, consult widely, and make proposals for future policing structures and arrangements including the police force composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols. The Commission included international experts in policing and law including Kathleen O'Toole (US Law enforcement Officer), Gerald W. Lynch, John Jay College of Criminal Justice USA, and Clifford Shearing University of Cape Town South Africa. In September 1999, the Commission produced its report entitled "A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland" with a number of key recommendations including :

- ▶ renaming the Royal Ulster Constabulary the Police Service of Northern Ireland;
- ▶ a new Policing Board and District Policing Partnership Boards to ensure accountability;
- ▶ creation of a Police Ombudsman and a Complaints Tribunal;
- ▶ removal of most visible symbols of Britishness from the police service;
- ▶ a 50-50 recruitment policy for Catholics and Protestants;
- ▶ a new code of ethics and oath of office,

including a strong emphasis on human rights;

- ▶ an emphasis on community policing and normalisation.

The recommendations contained in the report have been partly implemented by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 and the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003. The Patten report changed the face of policing in NI. Catholic membership of the services increased from 8% in 1998 to over 30% in 2014 and Catholic confidence in the service increased steadily.

5.2.3. The Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC)

The IMC's was set up in 2004 to monitor paramilitary activity and the normalisation of security measures in Northern Ireland. Its mandate was to monitor any continuing activity by paramilitary groups, monitor the commitment by the British Government to a package of security normalisation measures and to handle claims by parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly that another party is not committed to non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means. The IMC produced 26 reports over the period 2004 -2011 when its mandate. The members of the IMC were;

- ▶ Lord Alderdice, former Alliance Party leader and member of the House of Lords (UK).
- ▶ Joe Brosnan, former Secretary General of the Department of Justice, Republic of Ireland.
- ▶ John Grieve, former Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police
- ▶ Dick Kerr, former Deputy Director, Central Intelligence Agency.

5.3. Role of the EU and International Donors

The NI peace process has been supported and sustained through a broad range of peacebuilding and economic regeneration programmes across NI and the border region of the South. The international community has made a significant contribution to this through two main funding structures; the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the Special EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. The British and Irish Governments and a range of charitable organisations such as the Rowntree Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies have also supported this work.

The International Fund for Ireland was established as an independent organisation by the British and Irish Governments in 1986 with financial

contributions from the US, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The total resources committed to the Fund to date amount to £728m/€914m, supporting over 6,000 projects across Ireland. The Fund aims to promote economic and social advance as well as encourage contact and dialogue between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland. The IFI aims to assist the two governments to consolidate the Peace Process by continuing to tackle persistent challenges to lasting peace, "with a particular focus on young people". It has targeted resources at areas and communities not engaging in or benefiting from the peace process, where there is high levels of alienation and economic disadvantage

The EU has been a central to the Irish peace process providing both practical and political support and acting as a critical facilitator providing space for politicians from the different parties in NI and from Ireland and the UK to engage on common issues. The EU was keen to resolve a major conflict within its own borders but was also cautious as the conflict involved the core interests of two member states. Nationalist politicians particularly John Hume recognised the potential of the neutral political framework of the EU as a mechanism to secure additional resources and to soften issues related to sovereignty and territory which were central to the NI conflict. Efforts to build peace and promote economic recovery received a major boost when the EU committed funding in 1995 through the Special EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation to support the peace process. Over the last 25 years the Peace Programme has allocated around €3 billion through four tranches of funding (Peace I, II, III & IV) to “address the economic and social legacy of 30 years of conflict in the region and to take advantage of new opportunities arising from the restoration of peace”. The majority of the funding

(75%) is provided by the EU with matching funding of 25% from the British and Irish Governments.

This scale of funding has been critical in providing a peace dividend, and a range of mechanisms were used to administer the funding with a strong focus on decentralisation. This helped to ensure that it reached into areas and communities most affected by the conflict. The Special EU Programme Body (SEUPB) was one of the six cross border bodies established under the GFA and was tasked with the administration of EU funding – including the Peace Programme. **The establishment of the SEUPB to administer this funding was critical as it took control out of the hands of politicians and de-politicised the allocation of funding.** The establishment of locally based partnerships comprising local authorities and civil society was also particularly effective as it strengthened **local governance, developed models of cross-community democracy and engagement and supported the delivery of services and the engagement of grass roots community groups in peacebuilding.**

Overview of the EU Peace Programme

EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation	Period	Total budget (EUR)
Peace I	1995-1999	€667m
Peace II	2000-2006	€995m
Peace III	2007-2013	€333m
Peace IV	2014-2020	€270m

The EU has recently committed to provide another round of peace funding for the period 2021-2027. The Peace plus programme will provide a further €600m towards peacebuilding work.

The Peace Programmes covered a broad range of activities. The Peace II programme which invested almost €1 bn aimed to “assist Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland to address the legacy of the conflict and to take advantage of opportunities arising from the peace process”. It has five priorities:

- 1. Economic renewal** - realising the economic opportunities generated by the peace process;
- 2. Social integration, inclusion and reconciliation** - with priority given to vulnerable groups in the areas worst affected by the conflict, interface areas and areas where community infrastructure is weak;

- 3. Locally-based regeneration and development strategies;**
- 4. Promoting an outward and forward-looking region** - by encouraging a dialogue with other EU regions on economic, social and environmental issues;
- 5. Cross-border co-operation** (economic, social and cultural).

Definition of Reconciliation (Hamber and Kelly):

1. Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society;
2. Acknowledging and dealing with the past;
3. Building positive relationships;
4. Significant cultural and attitudinal change, and;

5. Substantial social, economic and political change.

The **Peace Programme paid particular attention to specific target groups including women, youth and displaced people** and provided substantial support for both **Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners/ex-combatants**. The Peace Programme focused on **reconciliation and building positive relations and contributed to a new language of reconciliation** which has enabled parties to deal more constructively with contested issues. Central to this was work of Hambor and Kelly to provide a workable definition of reconciliation. This helped provided guidance and a shared understanding of the term despite disagreement on many other aspects of the peace process.

The focus of the programme has remained on peace and reconciliation with increased emphasis on young people and local level peacebuilding. The Peace IV programme (2014 -2020) had four priorities;

1. shared education;
2. helping children and young people;
3. creating shared spaces and services, and;
4. building positive relations at a local level.

In their analysis of the contribution of the Peace Programme to peacebuilding, Bush and Heuston noted that:

“The existence of this type of model within a conflict-to-peace transition, where existing governance structures needed to be changed, demonstrated an alternative model that worked effectively. The partnership approach constituted a new culture of governance [...] because peace building initiatives were not wholly captured or controlled by the antagonists battling in the formal political arena, civil society continued moving forward [...] In the absence of such peace building support, the risk is high that that political failure may re-ignite societal violence”³².

Despite some criticism the EU programme for Peace and Reconciliation has been recognised as making a valuable contribution to peacebuilding and has helped sustain the peace process particularly in the periods where the political process was in trouble and the NI Assembly was suspended. The main criticism have related to the bureaucratic nature of the programme, the administrative and reporting burden placed on projects and the fact that the programme has become more risk averse and not flexible enough to respond to some of the long term challenges facing communities in NI.

However, the scale of the programme and its duration has meant that funding has been widely dispersed across NI and the Southern border region. For example, the Peace II programme supported 7,500 projects with a strong focus on bottom up peacebuilding. The range of delivery mechanism used particularly the use of local Authority led task forces ensured that local communities could access the funding and decide how they wanted to build peace at local level.

Bush and Heuston identified **two main factors which helped prevent NI from slipping back in violence** and the importance of peace funding in building relationships and promoting collaboration across the divide.

“...by cultivating and connecting capacities within stakeholder groups that had previously not worked together – or had only worked in opposition to each other. This would include civil society actors (from divided communities), civil servants, and elected politicians under a variety of decision making structures that required contact, communication, sharing of information, and collaboration”, and;

by **“providing tangible examples to civil society actors of the benefits of their support for, and engagement in, incremental steps towards a normalised, post-conflict, society. The civil society incentives for continued progress on the peace building front are maintained, despite the obstacles at the formal political level”³³**

32 The Story of Peace; Learning from EU PEACE Funding in Northern Ireland and the Border Region INCORE Bush & Hueston

33 Ibid

6. Conclusions

There is ongoing debate about the NI peace process, the capacity of the institutions to survive regular crises and the extent to which there is a sustainable peace in NI. There is agreement that the process is fragile and facing several significant and interlinked problems including the political and economic fall out from Brexit, a possible referendum on the border, ongoing paramilitary activity, segregation and sectarianism, the failure effectively promote reconciliation to address victim's issues and deal with the past. **Despite this there is some degree of confidence that NI will not revert back to serious violence on the scale seen in the years before the GFA.** The peace process has embedded peace in society and there is significant capacity to deal with conflict. Local peacebuilding work (including work by ex-combatants) has helped to address a wide range of conflicts and to prevent recruitment and resolve feuding among paramilitary groups. Local authorities, the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) and other agencies have developed new and more inclusive way of working with a strong emphasis on cross community partnerships.

The NI peace process is unique in several respects and some of the problems identified in other peace processes were not as significant. **The problems related to the international community's role in peace processes;** interventions based on a superficial understanding of the conflict, deficits in the international security intervention, a disconnect between the intervention and the context and a lack of implementation or oversight, **were by and large not present in the NI context.** The process was **locally owned** by the parties in NI and the two Governments with sustained and constructive support from the US and the EU. **The problems related to the political economy of conflict were not significant in NI although there were problems around the funding of paramilitary groups, smuggling and protection rackets.**

In addition, there was scope and political will to put in place strategies to deal with the problems such as the strategy to get smaller parties elected to the NI Forum for Political Dialogue in 1996 and the establishment of the IIDC to deal with the decommissioning problem and keep the political process on track.

There was also **a recognition of the importance of symbolism and timing and events during the negotiations,** and implementation were sometimes carefully choreographed and sequenced to avoid putting one or other of the parties on the defensive and under further pressure for their own more hard-line elements. The complex decommissioning with international observers was designed to get around the IRA's refusal to hand over any weapons which might indicate surrender or defeat. **The two governments demonstrated a good degree of conflict sensitivity and knowing when to push issues and where the red lines were.** An example of this is the North-South bodies which were set up under Strand Two. Initially there were plans for a comprehensive set of structures but as a result of strong Unionist opposition this was whittled down to six which dealt with non-contentious issues such as: Tourism, Waterways, Food safety and the Special EU Programmes Body. At the same time the North-South Ministerial Council and these bodies was enough to satisfy nationalists that the Irish Government had a role, and that a reasonable level of cross-border cooperation was built in.

The **GFA was the culmination of several processes and years of work by the key actors and this lead in phase was helpful in getting an agreement.** Timing has also been a key factor at different phases of the process. By the 1990s the two communities were weary after 25 years of conflict and both the British Government and SF/IRA recognised that a military solution was not possible and that a negotiated settlement was the only way forward. Timing was also critical during the process with the election of three leaders who were willing to commit to working together on a settlement: Tony Blair (UK), Bertie Ahern (Ireland) and, Bill Clinton (US).

The key issues and the roadmap was set out from early on, **the parties had time to reflect on these issues and articulate their interests.** The two governments also had time to

work on various options, to float proposals and to draft and redraft documents. The result was a carefully drafted agreement which managed to incorporate the critical issues but did not resolve them. Rather it created an institutional framework and the key principles which would allow the parties and the two governments to work together to build stability and peace. At the same time, it was comprehensive and dealt in sufficient detail with the core issues. Setting out the three strands (Internal NI, North-South and East-West) ensured that it could address “*the totality of relationships*” provide a mechanism to deal with the longstanding constitutional position of NI and meet the interests of the parties in this regard.

In the early stages of the process there was a strong focus on **conflict resolution, stopping the violence and getting the IRA to hand over its weapons** and join the peace process. However, **there was a recognition that this was going to derail the process and there was a shift towards a more nuanced approach**; building agreed political institutions first and dealing with some of the more contentious issues of conflict resolutions issues down the road. As a result, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and police reform were taken out of the political negotiations and dealt with through independent commissions. This allowed the parties to get on with the political talks and also depoliticised these issues. However, there was considerable resistance in the Unionist community to the strategy designed for decommissioning and the fact that the SF was able to join the talks without handing in or destroying any weapons. This issue was a key factor in the decision of the DUP to withdraw from the talks process and campaign against the GFA in the follow on referendum and also led to delays in the setting up of the NI Assembly and its collapse in 2000. The DUP did change its position and took its seat in the Assembly, and went into power-sharing with Sinn Féin when it became the largest Unionist party. There is broad consensus in the literature and among those interviewed for this study that there was a **strategic approach to build a good degree of inclusion and ensure that all relevant constituencies were represented in the talks process**. While it was not perfect the process did include the Women’s Coalition and smaller Loyalist parties. There is also agreement that there was substantial local ownership and the process was led by the NI parties with sustained support from the British and Irish Governments, the US and the EU. Investing energy in selling the agreement to the public and holding parallel referenda in NI and the RoI to ratify the agreement also strengthened ownership.

The **GFA was comprehensive but did not frontload everything and instead pushed a number of critical issues such as policing and decommissioning of weapons into the implementation phase**. There is agreement that attempts to tie these down in the negotiations would have brought down the process. Instead the process created a set of principles, ground rules, and institutions designed to resolve these issues and as a result there was an awareness among stakeholders especially the two government that they would need to provide ongoing support and oversight. The agreement did not remove the levels of mistrust between the parties - particularly between the Unionist and SF - and without this ongoing mentoring and oversight it is likely that the process would have collapsed. The decade that followed saw regular engagement by the two governments and the US which facilitated four follow up agreements; (i) the St Andrews Agreement (2006); (ii) The Hillsborough Agreement (2010); (iii) Stormont House (2014), and; (iv) the Fresh Start (2015).

The **role of the international community has been important and constructive both in the negotiation stages and in supporting and providing oversight throughout the implementation phase**. NI was not part of a wider geopolitical tensions which have created problems in other contexts, and the international community provide constructive leadership throughout. **The US played a substantial role both during Clintons presidency**, particularly with the appointment of **Sen. George Mitchell as chair of the talks process, and after Bush was elected with the appointment of Special Envoys Richard Haas and Mitchell Reiss**. Clinton remained closely involved and was in the unique position to be able to put pressure on both the British and Irish Governments when there were delays and roadblocks. The role of the Irish diaspora in the US has been significant and ensured that the peace process remained on the agenda of both the Clinton and Bush administrations. Key Irish-Americans, such as Ted Kennedy, played a vital role behind the scenes and opened door for all the NI parties giving them access to key players in the US Government. The large diaspora also played an important role in contributing to social and economic recovery and creating a peace dividend.

A number of the key sticking points have been resolved through the use of independent international bodies (*the IICD, the Independent Commission on policing/Patton Commission and the Independent Monitoring Commission*). **As outlined above the role of international donors particularly the EU Peace Programme was and continues to be critical to sustaining the peace**. While there was ongoing international engagement and indeed intensive work by the British and Irish Governments the process was locally owned with the NI parties dictating the shape of the agreement.

The **fact that the process was inclusive, had a good level of local ownership and was based on learning from previous failures meant that the root causes and grievances were identified from early on.** The parties had deep insight into the causes and the extended timeframe of the process, and the work at track one and track two allowed space for parties to gain an understanding of the issues and constraints of the other side. **However, there was no attempt to agree on the causes of the conflict as this would have bogged down the process.** Despite the controversy and delays there were a number of **significant achievements and to a large extent policing, decommissioning of weapons and the prisoner's issues were addressed.** The constitutional issue and the position of NI was addressed through the three stands outlined above and this did provide a resolution to the issues even though there are different interpretations of what it means and the question has come back into the political arena as a result of the Brexit vote. The fact that the causes and grievances were known does not mean they were resolved and there are a number of significant failures particularly around the needs of victims and dealing with the past.

The NI process was made up of several different process, **the official political track one process, a number of dialogue and back channel processes, plus a range of track two and three initiatives.** The British and Irish Governments and George Mitchell the independent chair of the talks were primarily interested in the negotiations at the table and reaching an agreement particularly as the deadline of Good Friday approached. The parties particularly SF and the Women's coalition were well connected into their constituencies with regular engagement on key issues. **Overall, there was a good level of awareness among the negotiators regarding the issues on the ground and what Interpeace calls the "other tables in the process".** That it not to say that the process was *entirely* open and inclusive as some civil society actors feel that the politicians did their best to exclude other voices after the agreement was signed. The failure to set up the Citizens Forum is seen as reflecting the view of the main parties that they were the elected representatives and that civil society should not have a central role in governance.

A key factor in NI's peace process was the quality of leadership among the different parties, the patience and determination of the two Governments, and strong working relationships firstly between the Taoiseach Albert Reynolds and the British Prime Minister John Major and then, later, between Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair . The role of the international community has been important, both in the negotiation stages and in supporting and providing oversight throughout the implementation phase. However, the process was locally owned with the NI parties dictating the shape of the agreement.

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of People Consulted

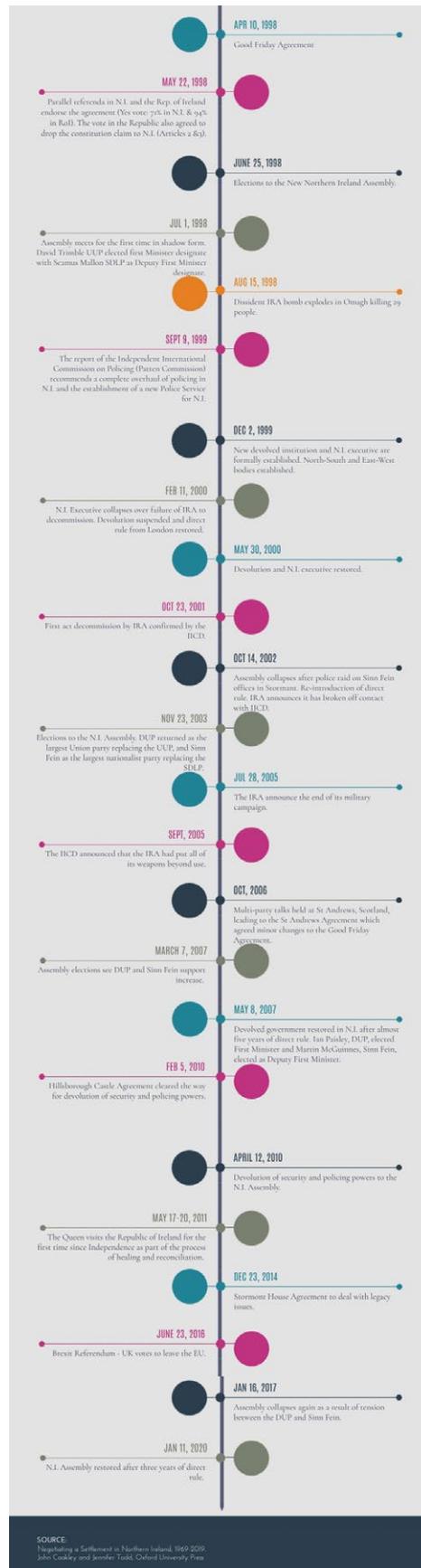
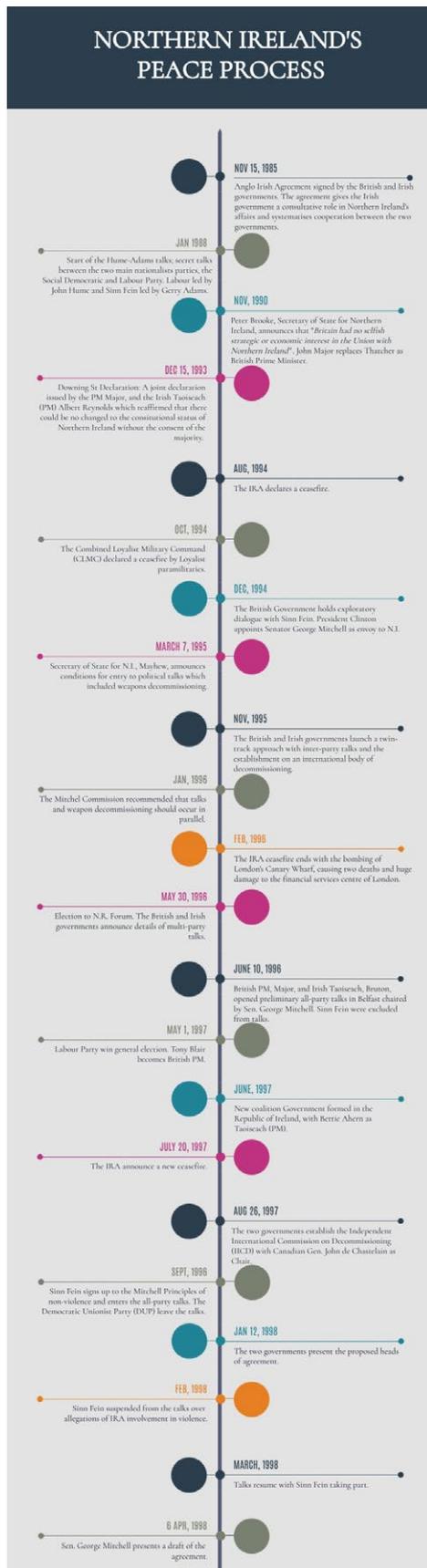
List of people interviewed:

Name	Position
Martin Manseragh	Special Advisor to the Irish Government on Northern Ireland
Sean Farren	Member of Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) negotiation team and represented the SDLP in the Northern Ireland Assembly 1998 -2007
Jonathan Powell	Chief of Staff for Tony Blair 1997-2007 and chief negotiator in the Northern Ireland peace talks
Andy Pollock	Founding Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies Armagh, Journalist and author.
Prof. Paul Arthur	Queens University Belfast
Avila Kilmurry	Founding member of the Women's Coalition and former Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
Pat Colgan	CEO of the Special EU Programme's Body (SEUPB) 2004 -2015 and Advisor to the Irish Government on the Colombian Peace Process
Michael Culbert	Director at Coiste na nIarchimí: The Republican ex-prisoners organisation
Mary Madden CBE	Former Political Advisor to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Rev. Dr. Gary Mason	Director of Rethinking Conflict
Tim O Connor	Senior Diplomat in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Joint Secretary of the North/South Ministerial Council and member of the International Reporting Commission

Written responses received from:

Name	Position
Geoffrey Corry	Edward Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention, Mediator and Author
Gen John de Chastelain	Chairman of the Independent International Commission of Decommissioning (IICD)
AaroSumo	Chef de cabinet Independent International Commission of Decommissioning (IICD) and Political Advisor at the EU Delegation to Somalia

Annex 2: Timeline of the Northern Irish Peace Process



SOURCE:
Negotiating a Settlement in Northern Ireland, 1969-2009
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