



Northern Ireland: The Peace Process

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Summary

Since 1969, over 3,500 people have died as a result of political violence in Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom. The conflict, which has its origins in the 1921 division of Ireland, has reflected a struggle between different national, cultural, and religious identities. The Protestant majority (53%) in Northern Ireland defines itself as British and largely supports continued incorporation in the UK (unionists). The Catholic minority (44%) considers itself Irish, and many Catholics desire a united Ireland (nationalists).

For years, the British and Irish governments sought to facilitate a political settlement. After many ups and downs, the two governments and the Northern Ireland political parties participating in the peace talks announced an agreement on April 10, 1998. The resulting Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) called for devolved government—the transfer of power from London to Belfast—with a Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee in which unionist and nationalist parties would share power. The agreement also contained provisions on decommissioning (disarmament), policing, human rights, UK security normalization (demilitarization), and the status of prisoners.

Despite a much improved security situation in the years since then, full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement has been difficult. For years, instability in Northern Ireland's devolved government was the rule rather than the exception; decommissioning and police reforms were key sticking points. The devolved government was suspended for the fourth time in October 2002 amid a loss of trust and confidence on both sides of the conflict. Unionists were concerned about the IRA's commitment to non-violence and the lack of full nationalist support for policing; meanwhile, nationalists worried about the pace of UK demilitarization and police reforms.

On May 8, 2007, however, Northern Ireland's devolved political institutions were restored after an almost five-year suspension following a power-sharing deal between the traditionally anti-agreement Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The DUP and Sinn Fein are the largest unionist and nationalist parties, respectively, in Northern Ireland and have long been viewed as the two most polarized forces in Northern Ireland politics. London and Dublin hoped that this deal would entrench the political settlement embodied in the Good Friday Agreement and produce a politically stable devolved government in Northern Ireland.

In 2008, the DUP and Sinn Fein clashed over the outstanding issue of transferring authority for policing and justice affairs from London to Belfast. Given the sensitive nature of this portfolio, the parties had been unable to agree on its devolution at the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. After protracted negotiations, the parties reached a deal in February 2010 paving the way for the devolution of police and justice powers in April 2010.

Successive U.S. administrations and many Members of Congress have actively supported the peace process. The United States has provided aid through the International Fund for Ireland since 1986. In recent years, congressional hearings have focused on the peace process, police reforms, and the status of public inquiries into several murders in Northern Ireland in which collusion between the security forces and paramilitary groups is suspected.

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Background

Since 1969, over 3,500 people have died as a result of political violence in Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom. The conflict, which has its origins in the 1921 division of Ireland, has reflected a struggle between different national, cultural, and religious identities.¹ The Protestant majority (53%) in Northern Ireland defines itself as British and largely supports continued incorporation in the United Kingdom (*unionists*). The Catholic minority (44%) considers itself Irish, and many Catholics desire a united Ireland (*nationalists*). *Loyalists* are more militant unionists and *republicans* are more militant nationalists, who have been willing to use force to achieve their goals.²

The latest version of “the troubles” in Northern Ireland was sparked in late 1968, when a civil rights movement was launched mostly by Catholics, who had long faced discrimination in areas such as electoral rights, housing, and employment. This civil rights movement was met with violence by extreme unionists, as well as the police, which in turn prompted armed action by nationalists and republicans. Increasing chaos and escalating violence led the UK government to deploy the British Army on the streets of Northern Ireland in 1969 and to impose direct rule from London in 1972 (between 1920 and 1972, Northern Ireland had its own regional government at Stormont outside Belfast).

For years, the British and Irish governments sought to facilitate a political settlement to the conflict in Northern Ireland. After many ups and downs, the two governments and the Northern Ireland political parties participating in the peace talks announced an agreement on April 10, 1998. The resulting Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) called for devolved government—the transfer of power from London to Belfast—with a Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee in which unionist and nationalist parties would share power.³ To ensure that neither unionists nor nationalists could dominate the 108-member Assembly, the agreement specified that “key decisions” must receive cross-community support. The Executive Committee would be composed of a first minister, deputy first minister, and up to 10 ministers with departmental responsibilities (e.g., health, education, social services).

The Good Friday Agreement also contained provisions on decommissioning (disarmament), policing, human rights, UK security normalization (demilitarization), and the status of prisoners. Crucially, the agreement recognized that a change in Northern Ireland’s status can only come about with the consent of the majority of its people. Additionally, the agreement created a North-South Ministerial Council to allow leaders in the northern and southern parts of the island of Ireland to consult and cooperate on cross-border issues, and a British-Irish Council composed of

¹ In 1921, the mostly Catholic, southern part of Ireland won independence from the UK. The resulting Republic of Ireland occupies about five-sixths of the island of Ireland; Northern Ireland occupies the remaining one-sixth.

² Many unionists and loyalists refer to the six counties that today make up Northern Ireland as “Ulster.” Technically and historically, Ulster also includes the three northern-most counties of the Republic of Ireland.

³ The text of the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement) may be found at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs//agreement.htm>. The unionist/Protestant community tends to use the term “Belfast Agreement,” viewing the name “Good Friday Agreement” as biased in favor of the nationalist/Catholic community. For the purposes of this report, the peace accord is referred to as the “Good Friday Agreement” because this is the name more widely used and recognized in the United States.

representatives of the two governments and the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Figure 1. Map of Northern Ireland



Source: CRS Graphics.

Voters in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland approved the Good Friday Agreement in separate referendums on May 22, 1998. Elections to the new Northern Ireland Assembly took place on June 25, 1998. The two biggest and mainstream unionist and nationalist parties at the time—the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)—won 28 and 24 seats respectively. The harder line Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), despite its continued opposition to many parts of the Good Friday Agreement, won 20 seats; Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) won 18; and a number of smaller parties claimed the rest of the Assembly seats.

Devolved Government and Recurrent Crises

Despite a much improved security situation since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, full implementation has been difficult. For years, instability in Northern Ireland’s devolved government was the rule rather than the exception. Decommissioning and police reforms were key sticking points. Sporadic violence from dissident republican and loyalist paramilitary groups that refused to accept the peace process and incidents of sectarian strife between Protestants and Catholics also helped feed ongoing mistrust between the unionist and nationalist communities.

1999-2002

Although Assembly elections were held in June 1998, devolution of power from London to Belfast did not follow promptly. A key unionist concern throughout the negotiations leading up to the Good Friday Agreement had been the issue of decommissioning, or surrender of paramilitary weapons. The text of the agreement states “those who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office.” Due to the election results, Sinn Fein was entitled to two ministerial posts on the Executive Committee. Unionists argued, however, that Sinn Fein could not assume its ministerial posts until the IRA had surrendered at least some of its weapons, as called for by the agreement.⁴ Sinn Fein countered that the Good Friday Agreement did not specify a start date for decommissioning. Although the IRA had been observing a ceasefire since 1997, it viewed decommissioning as tantamount to surrender, and had long resisted such calls.

In the fall of 1999, former U.S. Senator George Mitchell (who had chaired the peace talks), led a review of the Good Friday Agreement’s implementation. This review succeeded in getting unionists to drop their precondition that the IRA had to decommission first, before Sinn Fein representatives could assume their ministerial posts. After 27 years of direct rule from London, authority over local affairs was transferred to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive on December 1, 1999. London, however, retained control over “reserved” matters including policing, prisons, and the criminal justice system; given the sensitive nature of these issues, the parties had been unable to reach an accord on their devolution at the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and instead agreed to postpone the devolution of policing and justice powers until an undetermined point in the future. David Trimble, the leader of the UUP at the time, was elected first minister; Seamus Mallon of the SDLP was elected deputy first minister.⁵

⁴ The Good Friday Agreement calls upon all paramilitary groups, both republican and loyalist, to decommission.

⁵ The leader of the SDLP at the time, John Hume, who with Trimble had been instrumental in forging the Good Friday Agreement, declined to accept the Deputy First Minister position because of ill health.

On February 11, 2000, however, London suspended Northern Ireland's devolved government because First Minister Trimble was poised to resign to protest the continued absence of IRA decommissioning. British officials feared that Trimble would have been replaced by someone less supportive of, if not opposed to, the peace agreement. After intense negotiations involving Trimble and Sinn Fein, the IRA pledged to initiate a process to put its arms "beyond use." Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions were reinstated in June 2000.

For the next 12 months, unionists remained frustrated by the ongoing lack of actual IRA decommissioning. As a result, Trimble resigned as first minister on July 1, 2001, claiming that he could no longer share power with nationalists who refused to give up their weapons and send a clear signal of their commitment to democratic politics. Negotiations led by the British and Irish governments to avert the collapse of Northern Ireland's political institutions again proved difficult. Since the Assembly can operate no longer than six weeks without a first minister or new elections must be called, London suspended the devolved government on August 10 for 24 hours. London feared that fresh elections would result in gains for hardline unionists and nationalists, which would further polarize the situation. The brief suspension reset the clock, giving negotiators another six weeks to try to resolve the crisis.

Meanwhile, pressure on the IRA to decommission began to grow following the August 2001 arrests in Colombia of three suspected IRA members on charges of training FARC guerrillas to use explosives, and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. The FARC, estimated at the time to be 15,000 strong, is a force that has conducted terrorist attacks against Colombian political and economic targets, as well as U.S. interests. Given U.S. efforts to help Colombian authorities counter the FARC, the former Bush Administration was troubled by the IRA's apparent ties to this group. And after September 11, "President Bush declared war against international terrorism.... If the IRA wanted to hold on to their weapons any longer, the Americans would simply have none of it," according to the reported remarks of an Irish diplomat.⁶ The IRA faced the possibility of being put back on the U.S. State Department's list of terrorist organizations, and Sinn Fein risked political isolation as well as the evaporation of private American financial support.

The weeks after the September 11 attacks saw further protracted negotiations among Sinn Fein, London, and Dublin. On September 21, 2001, London suspended the Assembly again for 24 hours to buy more time for negotiations. Finally, on October 23, after Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams publicly called for IRA decommissioning, the IRA announced that it had put a quantity of arms, ammunition, and explosives "beyond use" to "save the peace process." In response, the UUP decided to rejoin the Executive, and the Assembly reconvened in November 2001. Trimble was re-elected first minister and Mark Durkan, the new leader of the SDLP, was elected deputy first minister.

Relative calm prevailed in early 2002. On April 8, 2002, the IRA carried out a second act of decommissioning. Still, worries among unionists about the IRA's long-term commitment to the peace process persisted following allegations that the IRA was buying new weapons, updating its "hit list," and was behind the theft of intelligence documents from a Belfast police barracks. The IRA denied all of these accusations. The summer of 2002 saw an upsurge in sectarian violence, including paramilitary shootings and rioting in Belfast and elsewhere. Trimble threatened to

⁶ Kevin Cullen, "Sinn Fein Prods IRA on Disarming," *Boston Globe*, October 23, 2001; "Decommissioning Pace Forced by IRA's Colombian Links," *Irish Times*, October 27, 2001.

resign again in a bid to pressure Sinn Fein to crack down on IRA members whom unionists claimed were behind the recent violence and in breach of the peace accord.

On October 4, 2002, police raided Sinn Fein's Assembly offices and arrested four officials as part of an investigation into a suspected IRA spy ring. Unionists were outraged, viewing the charges as further proof that the IRA was not committed to the democratic process. Both the UUP and the DUP threatened to withdraw from the government unless Sinn Fein was expelled. Sinn Fein countered that the timing of the police raid on its offices—shortly after another UUP ultimatum for IRA disarmament—was not coincidental, but rather intended to shift the blame for an impending government collapse away from the unionists. With the political process in turmoil, London once again suspended Belfast's devolved government and reinstated direct rule on October 14, 2002.

2003-2007

Following the 2002 suspension of the devolved government, London and Dublin led talks with Northern Ireland's political parties to try to find a way forward. Negotiations largely focused on finding a formula to assure unionists that the IRA was winding down as a paramilitary force and meeting nationalist demands for government stability and more progress in the police, justice, and human rights fields. In October 2003, the IRA announced a third act of decommissioning, but UUP leader Trimble criticized the lack of details about the quantity of arms disposed, and put further progress toward restoring devolution "on hold."

Despite the suspension of the power-sharing institutions, Assembly elections took place in November 2003. The elections produced a significant shift in the balance of power in Northern Ireland politics in favor of perceived hardliners on both sides of the conflict. The DUP—led by the Reverend Ian Paisley—overtook the UUP as the dominant unionist party. Sinn Fein surpassed the more moderate SDLP to become the largest nationalist party. Immediately after the elections, the DUP asserted that it would not enter into government with Sinn Fein until the IRA disarmed and disbanded; the DUP also refused to talk directly to Sinn Fein. Most analysts predicted that the election results would make restoring devolution more difficult.

Negotiations continued but remained stalemated for much of 2004. Efforts to restore devolution were further complicated by a December 2004 bank robbery in Belfast, which police believed was carried out by the IRA, and the January 2005 murder of a Belfast man, Robert McCartney, during a bar brawl involving IRA members. These incidents increased pressure on the IRA and Sinn Fein to also address the issue of IRA criminality; perhaps most significantly, much of this pressure came from within the Catholic community. On April 6, 2005, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams effectively called on the IRA to abandon violence and pursue politics as an "alternative" to "armed struggle." The IRA responded that it would consider Adams's appeal. London and Dublin welcomed Adams's statement but stressed that further progress in the peace process would depend on a decisive end to all IRA activity.

On July 28, 2005, the IRA ordered an end to its armed campaign. It instructed all members to pursue objectives through "exclusively peaceful means" and to "not engage in any other activities whatsoever." All IRA units were ordered to "dump arms." Although many analysts asserted that the IRA's statement was the least ambiguous one ever, unionists were wary, noting that it did not explicitly address the issue of IRA criminality or whether the IRA would disband. The DUP and other unionists also wanted Sinn Fein to support Northern Ireland's new police service.

On September 26, 2005, Northern Ireland's Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) announced that the IRA had put all of its arms beyond use, asserting that the IRA weaponry dismantled or made inoperable matched estimates provided by the security forces. On February 1, 2006, the International Monitoring Commission (IMC), which monitors paramilitary ceasefires and political party compliance with the peace agreement, asserted that the IRA seemed to be moving in the right direction. However, unionists remained skeptical that the IRA's decommissioning would be accompanied by an end to all IRA paramilitary and criminal activity, and the DUP continued to resist sharing power with Sinn Fein.

In an attempt to break the stalemate, London recalled the Northern Ireland Assembly on May 15, 2006; the Assembly was permitted to debate policy matters but was not given the power to make laws. UK and Irish officials had hoped that by recalling the Assembly, even in such a "shadow" form, confidence would build between the opposing parties and in the political process. When this attempt ultimately failed, London and Dublin gave the parties until November 24, 2006, to form an Executive or new British-Irish "partnership arrangements" would be implemented to effectively govern Northern Ireland. The exact form of such partnership arrangements was left unclear, but analysts viewed this prospect as a veiled threat to unionists to reach a deal or risk ceding greater authority over the affairs of Northern Ireland to Dublin.⁷

With no real progress in the negotiations by mid-September 2006, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern announced an all-party meeting in Scotland in an attempt to hammer out a deal. On October 13, Blair and Ahern put forth a road map, known as the "St. Andrews Agreement," intended to break the political stalemate. It called for negotiations between November 2006 and March 2007 on forming a new permanent government; during this time, the DUP would agree to share power with Sinn Fein, and Sinn Fein would agree to support the police service and join the Policing Board. The St. Andrews Agreement also included some changes to the operation of the power-sharing institutions and provisions on government stability and human rights; in addition, to meet nationalist demands, it called for the devolution of policing and justice powers from London to Belfast by May 2008. It set March 7, 2007, as the date for new Assembly elections, and March 26 as the date for London to rescind direct rule and restore Northern Ireland's devolved government. Blair and Ahern warned that failure to establish an Executive by March 26 would result in the dissolution of the Assembly and new British-Irish "partnership arrangements" to govern Northern Ireland.

Analysts contended that the biggest problem was the lack of trust between the DUP and Sinn Fein. The DUP wanted Sinn Fein to accept Northern Ireland's new police service, the courts, and the rule of law before agreeing to shared government. Meanwhile, Sinn Fein wanted the shared government to sit before accepting policing because it feared that, otherwise, the DUP would raise additional issues regarding the IRA before agreeing to share power. In January 2007, Sinn Fein members voted to support Northern Ireland's police and the criminal justice system in the context of the reestablishment of the political institutions. Many experts viewed Sinn Fein's resolution as historic, given the IRA's traditional view of the police as a legitimate target.⁸

On March 7, 2007, Northern Ireland voters went to the polls. Once again, the DUP and Sinn Fein emerged as the largest unionist and nationalist parties. Both the DUP and Sinn Fein interpreted these election results, in which each saw off challenges from internal dissenters opposed to the St.

⁷ Brian Lavery, "Blair and Ahern Warn Ulster: End the Standoff by Fall Deadline," *New York Times*, April 7, 2006.

⁸ "Sinn Fein Votes To Support Police," BBC News, January 28, 2007.

Andrews Agreement, as providing a mandate to work toward forming a power-sharing government. Analysts speculated that in light of Sinn Fein's commitment to policing, and perhaps to secure his own legacy, Paisley was finally ready to enter into government with Sinn Fein.

On March 26, 2007, Paisley and Adams met for the first time and announced a deal to enter into a power-sharing government on May 8, 2007. London and Dublin agreed to accept the six-week delay in restoring Northern Ireland's devolved government given that the two parties were able to reach agreement themselves. The DUP had pressed for the delay in order to "raise the level of confidence in the [unionist] community," especially in regard to Sinn Fein's commitment to support policing. Analysts contend that the image of Paisley and Adams sitting at the same table and the statements of both pledging to work toward a better future for "all" the people of Northern Ireland were unprecedented.⁹

On May 8, 2007, Paisley and Sinn Fein's chief negotiator Martin McGuinness were sworn in as first and deputy first minister respectively, and the power-sharing Assembly and Executive began work. Many experts believed that unlike past efforts, this deal would stick, given that it was reached by the DUP and Sinn Fein, viewed as the two most polarized forces in Northern Ireland politics. By many accounts, Paisley and McGuinness established a good working relationship, and the devolved government ran relatively smoothly for the remainder of 2007. Focus was largely on local issues, such as water charges, health care, housing, and education. In October 2007, the Executive issued a new legislative program, a 10-year investment strategy, and its first budget since devolution was restored. Many hailed these documents as demonstrating the Executive's ability to work together on key priorities and spending plans.¹⁰

At the same time, tensions remained within the devolved government and many continued to reflect nationalist-unionist divisions. Most significantly, the DUP and Sinn Fein remained at odds over the transfer of police and justice affairs from London to the devolved government by May 2008, as called for in the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement. The DUP had long maintained that May 2008 was merely an aspirational date to which they were not committed.

2008-Present

During the first few months of 2008, the UK government continued to encourage the devolution of policing and justice powers to Northern Ireland's Assembly and Executive by May 2008. Sinn Fein leaders warned that a failure to transfer police and justice powers by May could lead to renewed political instability. The DUP, however, continued to argue that May 2008 was only a target date and that more time was needed to build public confidence both in Sinn Fein's commitment to the police service and the devolved government's ability to undertake such a sensitive policy portfolio. Consequently, the May 2008 deadline for the devolution of police and justice affairs came and went.

The issue was further complicated when Ian Paisley stepped down as DUP leader and first minister on June 5, 2008, at the age of 81. Observers speculated that Paisley's decision likely reflected his increasing physical fragility and a loss of support among some Protestant voters still

⁹ Frank Millar, "Paisley Reaches Out and Grasps Cherished Prize," *Irish Times*, March 27, 2007; "NI Politics Moves Away from Edge," BBC News, May 8, 2007.

¹⁰ Dan McGinn, "Job Creation Key to Stormont Programme for Government," Press Association, October 25, 2007; "McAleese Praises Stormont Leaders," *Irish News*, November 30, 2007.

opposed to the power-sharing deal with Sinn Fein. Peter Robinson, the former deputy DUP leader, succeeded Paisley as party leader and first minister. Press reports indicated that the relationship between Robinson and Deputy First Minister McGuinness was much frostier than that between Paisley and McGuinness. Some suggest that Robinson's demeanor toward McGuinness reflected pressure from hardline elements both within and outside the DUP.

In July 2008, the lack of progress on devolving police and justice powers from London to Belfast prompted Sinn Fein to block the regular meetings of the Northern Ireland Executive Committee, essentially bringing the formal work of the Assembly to a standstill. Press reports indicated that Sinn Fein was also unhappy with DUP opposition to other nationalist legislative proposals, including education reform, an Irish language act, and the proposed transformation of the Maze prison site. After a five-month suspension, ministerial Executive Committee meetings finally resumed in late November 2008 following an agreement between the DUP and Sinn Fein on a roadmap for devolving authority for policing and justice affairs. Although Sinn Fein failed to achieve a precise date for such devolution, the roadmap set out a series of steps aimed at producing the eventual transfer of power.

As part of the roadmap, the DUP and Sinn Fein agreed that a Northern Ireland Justice Department would be established, as well as an independent attorney general for Northern Ireland. In addition, the parties agreed on a system for choosing a justice minister. Although Executive Committee ministerial portfolios are normally allocated based on party strength, the two sides asserted that given the sensitive nature of this position, as a temporary measure, the new justice minister would be elected by a cross-community vote in the Assembly. The selection of the justice minister by cross-community vote would be reviewed by May 2012, at which time permanent rules for choosing the justice minister would be established. The DUP was eager to ensure that the justice minister post would not go to Sinn Fein in the near future.¹¹

Nevertheless, for much of 2009, progress on transferring police and justice powers to the devolved government remained slow. The DUP continued to insist that it would only support devolution when there was sufficient confidence within the unionist community; among the confidence-building measures reportedly demanded by the DUP were changes to how contentious sectarian parades in the region were managed and certain guarantees regarding police reserve units.¹² Sinn Fein accused the DUP of stalling and playing politics. As the months went on, observers noted the uptick in dissident and paramilitary activity and asserted that such groups were attempting to exploit the perceived instability in the devolved government. In March 2009, two British soldiers and a policeman were killed by republican dissidents in separate incidents. Both the DUP and Sinn Fein, however, condemned the murders and pledged that such actions would not impede the peace process or the work of the devolved government.

¹¹ David McKittrick, "Sinn Fein Isolated At Stormont in Stand-off with DUP Over Power-sharing," *The Independent*, September 19, 2008; Gerry Moriarty, "Robinson and Adams Have To Show Leadership," *Irish Times*, October 17, 2008; Henry McDonald and Owen Bowcott, "Northern Ireland Parties Reach Devolution Agreement," *The Guardian*, November 18, 2008; Mark Devenport, "Agreement Leaves Unanswered Questions," BBC News, November 19, 2008.

¹² In 1998, an independent Parades Commission was set up to rule on disputed parades commemorating Protestant history. Although the vast majority of these annual parades by unionist cultural and religious organizations were not contentious, some were held through or close to areas populated mainly by Catholic nationalists and often provoked fierce street violence. Much of the unionist community continues to view the Parades Commission as biased against it and has repeatedly called for its abolition.

On December 1, 2009, the Northern Ireland Assembly passed a bill paving the way for the devolution of policing and justice. The bill created a justice department and formally established the rules for appointing a justice minister (as agreed in the November 2008 roadmap). However, Deputy First Minister McGuinness also warned of an “impending full blown crisis” in the devolved government if a firm date for devolution was not set soon. Negotiations between the parties continued in early 2010. On January 21, 2010, acting DUP leader Arlene Foster called on the British and Irish governments to help break the deadlock with Sinn Fein.¹³ On January 25, 2010, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Irish Prime Minister Brian Cowen convened a summit meeting of the parties to try to hammer out a deal and a date for the devolution of authority for police and justice affairs.

On February 4, 2010, after 10 days of intense negotiations, the DUP and Sinn Fein announced that they had reached a deal on the transfer of police and justice powers from London to Northern Ireland’s devolved government. The resulting “Hillsborough Agreement” set April 12, 2010, as the date for the devolution of policing and justice powers. The agreement also established a timeline for developing a new mechanism to deal with disputed parades, calling on legislation to be tabled in the Assembly by June 2010 and a new parading structure (to replace the existing Parades Commission) to be in place by December 2010. Other parts of the agreement called for the establishment of working groups to examine how the Executive might function better and to address outstanding Executive business as well as remaining issues from the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement. London, Dublin, and Washington hailed this agreement as a significant step toward completing the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and securing a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

On March 9, 2010, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted to approve the Hillsborough Agreement. The UUP was the only party that opposed the agreement, asserting that the timing was not right for the devolution of policing and justice authority as the Executive was already struggling to exercise its existing powers. Many observers, however, view the UUP vote as strictly political, serving to deprive the DUP of the unanimous unionist support it had sought. On April 12, as agreed and for the first time in 38 years, London transferred power over police and justice affairs to Belfast. That same day, David Ford, of the smaller, cross-community Alliance Party, was elected as Northern Ireland’s new justice minister.¹⁴

Implementing Police Reforms

Police reforms have long been recognized as a key element in achieving a comprehensive peace in Northern Ireland, but implementation has been challenging. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)—Northern Ireland’s former, 92% Protestant police force—was long viewed by Catholics as an enforcer of Protestant domination. Human rights organizations accused the RUC of brutality and collusion with loyalist paramilitary groups. Defenders of the RUC pointed to its tradition of loyalty and discipline and its record in fighting terrorism. The Good Friday Agreement called for an independent commission to make recommendations to help “ensure policing arrangements,

¹³ On January 11, 2010, Robinson temporarily stepped down as First Minister amid a political scandal over his wife’s personal life and financial affairs. He resumed his post in early February 2010.

¹⁴ “Justice Minister in Place by Xmas,” *Belfast News*, December 3, 2009; “Parading: A Deal Breaker?,” BBC News, January 14, 2010; “Timeline: Devolution of Policing and Justice,” BBC News, February 5, 2010; Steven McCaffery and David Young, “Assembly Passes Policing and Justice Devolution,” *The Independent*, March 9, 2010.

including composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols, are such that ... Northern Ireland has a police service that can enjoy widespread support from ... the community as a whole.” In June 1998, Prime Minister Blair appointed Chris Patten to head this commission. In September 1999, the Patten Commission released a report with 175 recommendations. It proposed a new name for the RUC, a new badge, and new symbols free of the British or Irish states. Other key measures included reducing the size of the force from 11,400 to 7,500, and increasing the proportion of Catholic officers (to 30% in 10 years). Unionists responded negatively, but nationalists were mostly positive.¹⁵

In May 2000, the Blair government introduced the Police Bill in the UK House of Commons, and maintained that the reform bill was faithful to the “broad intention” and “detailed recommendations” of the Patten report. Nationalists were critical, arguing that Patten’s proposals had been gutted. London responded that amendments would deal with human rights training, promoting 50-50 recruitment of Catholics and Protestants, and oversight responsibilities. The Police (Northern Ireland) Bill became law in November 2000, but Sinn Fein and the SDLP asserted that the reforms did not go far enough and were doubtful that the new police force would be sufficiently accountable or responsive to the entire community. In March 2001, recruiting began for the future Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), but it was unclear whether nationalists would support this new force or join the 19-member Policing Board, a new democratic oversight body. To help ensure nationalist support, London proposed further concessions in July 2001, including halving the anti-terrorist “Special Branch” and prohibiting new recruits from using plastic bullets.

In August 2001, the SDLP broke with Sinn Fein and accepted the British government’s additional concessions on policing. The SDLP agreed to nominate representatives to the Policing Board and urged young Catholics to join the new police service. The UUP and the DUP also agreed to join the Policing Board, which came into being on November 4, 2001. That same day, the RUC was renamed the PSNI, and the first class of recruits drawn 50-50 from both Catholic and Protestant communities began their training. Sinn Fein maintained that the changes in the police service were largely cosmetic and continued to charge that the new PSNI—like the RUC before it—would be unduly influenced by elements of the security services opposed to the peace process. Some say that Sinn Fein’s absence from the Policing Board discouraged more Catholics from joining the PSNI.

To assuage nationalist concerns further and encourage Sinn Fein to join the Policing Board, London outlined plans in November 2002 for new policing legislation to provide more public accountability and to eventually allow former paramilitaries to sit on Northern Ireland’s new District Policing Partnerships (DPPs). DPPs came into being in March 2003 and seek to foster greater local involvement in policing. The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003 became law in April 2003. In November 2004, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams met with then-PSNI chief Hugh Orde for the first time in what was viewed by many as a positive sign for the peace process.

Sinn Fein continued to assert, however, that its acceptance of the PSNI and the Policing Board hinged on a deal to revive the devolved government and the transfer of policing and justice powers from London to a restored Assembly and Executive. As noted above, in January 2007, Sinn Fein members voted to support the police and join the Policing Board in the context of a

¹⁵ See “A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland,” The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, September 2009. The text may be found at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/patten/patten99.pdf>.

reconstituted Assembly and Executive. Sinn Fein members assumed their places on the Policing Board in late May 2007, following the re-establishment of the devolved government. Some analysts contend that Sinn Fein's decisions to support the PSNI and join the Policing Board were made on the assumption that devolution of police and justice powers would occur soon thereafter. As such, Sinn Fein leaders reportedly worried that the stalemate in this process and the missed May 2008 deadline for devolution left them vulnerable to dissident republicans who could claim that Sinn Fein's approach had not produced tangible results.¹⁶

In July 2007, the British army ended its 38-year long military operation in Northern Ireland in the context of the peace process and the improved security situation. Although a regular garrison of 5,000 British troops remains based in Northern Ireland, they no longer have a role in policing and may be deployed anywhere in the world. Policing in Northern Ireland is now the sole responsibility of the PSNI.

U.S. Policy

Successive U.S. administrations have viewed the Good Friday Agreement as the best framework for a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. The Clinton Administration was instrumental in helping the parties forge the agreement, and the Bush Administration strongly backed its full implementation. U.S. officials welcomed the end to the IRA's armed campaign in 2005 and the restoration of the devolved government in 2007. Like its predecessors, the Obama Administration has continued to offer U.S. support for the peace process. In October 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Northern Ireland, addressed the Assembly, and urged Northern Ireland's leaders to reach an agreement on the devolution of policing and justice. Following the February 2010 deal on the devolution of these powers, President Obama stated that the resulting Hillsborough Agreement was an "important step on the pathway to greater peace and prosperity for all communities on the island."¹⁷

Many Members of Congress also actively support the peace process. Encouraged by progress on police reforms, several Members prompted the Bush Administration in December 2001 to lift a ban on contacts between the FBI and the new PSNI. Congress had initiated this prohibition in 1999 because of the former RUC's human rights record. In recent years, congressional hearings have focused on the peace process, policing reforms, and the status of public inquiries into several past murders in Northern Ireland in which collusion between the security forces and paramilitary groups is suspected; these have included the 1989 slaying of Belfast attorney Patrick Finucane and the 1997 murder of Raymond McCord, Jr.

On the economic front, the United States has provided aid to the region through the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) since its inception in 1986. The IFI supports economic and social development projects in areas most affected by the civil unrest in the North and in the border areas of the Republic of Ireland, and in doing so, has sought to foster dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists. Many Members of Congress have strongly supported the IFI as a means to encourage divided communities to work together, to promote economic development, and to further the peace process. Some have criticized U.S. funding of the IFI, however, especially in recent years in light of Ireland and Northern Ireland's improving economic

¹⁶ "Northern Ireland: Eerie Echoes of the Past," *The Guardian*, December 31, 2009.

¹⁷ "President Obama Welcomes NI Justice Deal," BBC News, February 5, 2010.

and political situation. The IFI is expected to begin winding down as an organization in 2013, although some discussions are reportedly under way about extending its mandate in some form. (See below for recent congressional appropriations to the IFI).

The United States is also an important source of investment for Northern Ireland. In September 2009, Secretary Clinton appointed Declan Kelly as the first U.S. special economic envoy to Northern Ireland. This position was created to further economic ties between the United States and Northern Ireland and to underpin the peace process by promoting economic prosperity. In March 2010, Kelly announced plans for an economic conference to be held in Washington, DC in the fall aimed at attracting investment to Northern Ireland.¹⁸

Recent Legislation

H.Res. 1252 (Rooney; introduced April 14, 2010) commending the political leadership in Northern Ireland on reaching the Hillsborough Agreement on policing and justice.

P.L. 111-117 (December 16, 2009) appropriated \$17 million for the International Fund for Ireland as part of the FY2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act.

H.R. 2915 (Chaffetz; introduced June 17, 2009) to prohibit U.S. contributions to the International Fund for Ireland.

P.L. 111-8 (March 11, 2009) appropriated \$15 million for the International Fund for Ireland as part of the FY2009 Omnibus Appropriations Act.

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¹⁸ Diana Rusk, "DUP Leader's Wearing of the Green for Obama Meeting," *Irish News*, March 18, 2010.