



Special Relationship

An Examination of the Bush Administration and the 'Internationalization' of Northern Ireland

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explain US intervention in the Northern Ireland peace process, with a particular focus on the interventions of the administration of George W. Bush. Beginning with an overview of the Clinton administration, the paper demonstrates that the 'internationalization' of the peace process has been neither as benign nor negligible as many commentators have argued. Somewhat similarly, most commentators assumed that the demands of the US–UK 'special relationship', combined with the Bush administration's relative disinterest in Northern Ireland, would lead to little, if any, interventions in contravention of British wishes. Drawing upon interviews with senior UK, Irish, and US officials, and the papers of a senior Bush administration official left to the author, this paper will demonstrate that the Bush administration pursued policy that was at times inimical to British preferences. Having done so, the paper will then seek to explain the Bush administration's interventions via foreign policy analysis (FPA). The paper will conclude by asking what, if any, wider conclusions can be drawn regarding US intervention in Northern Ireland.

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1. Introduction

Since the signing of the Belfast Agreement¹ in 1998, a veritable cottage industry has emerged seeking to export Northern Ireland's 'lessons'. While it may be too early to tell what exactly the Northern Ireland 'model' and its attendant 'lessons' are, one of its oft-cited 'lessons' is the 'internationalization' of its conflict resolution efforts, and the importance of aligning international influence (Reiss, 2005; Hain, 2007: 22–3). The lesson's import, however, is open to dispute. On the one hand, the international dimension is liable to be distorted by those seeking to secure their own legacy in Northern Ireland (for example, O'Dowd, 2001; Harnden, 2008). On the other, some have sought to downplay its importance, arguing that UK, Irish, and US officials' disputes are carefully choreographed ruses (Dixon, 2006: 418–19). This thesis, however, is undermined by a lack of primary evidence, and those authors who have engaged in field research on this question draw opposite conclusions (Neumann, 2003; Clancy, 2007).

Focusing on the United States, this paper aims to give a nuanced assessment of the 'internationalization' of Northern Ireland's peace and political processes.² It begins with a brief reassessment of the Clinton administration's role in Northern Ireland, arguing that its tendency to side with Dublin when disputes arose between the Irish and UK governments decreased the negative consequences associated with the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) continued failure to disarm. This partially expedited the enervation of Northern Ireland's political centre ground by allowing the political 'extremes' of unionism and nationalism – the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin, respectively – to capitalize upon their 'ethnic tribune' appeals (Mitchell, Evans, and O'Leary, 2009).

¹ The Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998) goes by many names (for example, the Good Friday Agreement). Here, however, it will be referred to as the Belfast Agreement.

² The *peace process* involves facilitating paramilitaries' – primarily the IRA – transition from violent to constitutional means. The *political process* describes attempts to get unionists and nationalists to share power. Although it is difficult to wholly separate these processes, it is useful to do so for explanatory purposes. It is also clear that in practice, many UK, Irish, and US officials make this distinction (see Clancy 2010).

Examining the Bush administration's role, the paper demonstrates that although US pressure was vital in securing the IRA's first act of decommissioning, the emergence of a similar pattern partially explains these two parties' triumph in the 2003 Assembly elections. The arrival of Mitchell Reiss as US Special Envoy altered this pattern, as his decision to bar Sinn Féin officials from the White House during 2005–6 and restrict the party's ability to fundraise in the US incentivized the republican movement's decision to decommission in 2005 and to endorse policing in 2007, thus paving the way for the power-sharing deal in May 2007.

While a cursory reading might suggest that UK officials welcomed Reiss's actions, a closer examination reveals that they did not support Reiss's wielding of the 'stick'. Despite the importance of the UK to the US-led 'War on Terror', relations between US and UK officials *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland were 'nasty', with Reiss admitting that British officials 'weren't reluctant to share their anger' with him (Clancy, 2007: 171; Reiss, cited in Ware, 2008). This paper seeks to explain US officials' ability to circumvent the 'special relationship' via reference to foreign policy analysis (FPA). It concludes by examining what, if any, wider implications Bush administration officials' actions have for the US–UK 'special relationship', and for lessons regarding the 'internationalization' of conflict resolution.

2. The Clinton Administration and the Peace and Political Processes

As many accounts have noted, the US–UK 'special relationship' usually trumped any US desire to intervene in Northern Ireland (Wilson, 1995; Arthur, 2000; Thompson, 2001; Dumbrell, 2001). Although Ronald Reagan did put some pressure on Margaret Thatcher to sign the Anglo–Irish Agreement in 1985 in an effort to buy US Speaker of the House Thomas 'Tip' O'Neill's acquiescence for funding for the *contras* (Farrell, 2001: 623–4), the first real break with the policy of non-interference came with Bill Clinton's presidency.

Lynch (2004: 141–3) explains the change in policy via Clinton's need to burnish his foreign policy record, his ability to circumvent various bureaucracies, and inadequate UK diplomatic power (see also Branch, 2009: 127; E.M. Kennedy, 2009: 462–4; Reynolds, 2009: 243, 323–5). Seeking to grant Sinn Féin the legitimacy that would facilitate an IRA ceasefire and secure

Sinn Féin's place at the talks table, the Irish government began to lobby the White House to grant Sinn Féin President and republican leader³ Gerry Adams a US visa. For White House officials, it soon became apparent that Northern Ireland was a 'win-win' situation: it was a low-risk foreign policy initiative with domestic benefits, as it was likely to appease Irish-American Congressional Democrats disenchanted with Clinton's centrism (Wilson, 1997: 30; Lynch, 2004: 55; Kennedy, 2009: 460). Clinton's ability to reverse the policy can be explained by his diplomatic and bureaucratic skills, as they allowed him to override both State Department and UK officials' objections.

Pace Dixon (2002, 2006), UK objections to Clinton's decision to grant a visa to Adams were, in fact, very real (see Seitz, 1998; Major, 1999; Neumann, 2003; Powell, 2008; Branch, 2009; Kennedy, 2009; Reynolds, 2009). In contrast to the Irish government, UK officials wanted no US visas issued to Sinn Féin until after its military wing, the IRA, declared a permanent ceasefire, the fear being that if US visas were issued prior to this, republicans would continue to equivocate in order to gain concessions (Reynolds, 2009: 332–3). Evidence from the IRA's decision to call a second ceasefire in 1997 suggests that this was what they were trying to do. According to a UK official, the republican leadership reinstated its ceasefire after discussions with Irish and US officials revealed that the two governments backed the British government's *aide mémoire* outlining its positions on the peace and political processes, and thus would not support any further vacillation by republicans (Clancy, 2010: 73; see also Campbell, 2007: 214–17; Ahern, 2009: 196).

The alliance of northern Irish nationalists, the Irish government, and – to a degree – the Clinton administration probably helped to legitimize the republican leadership's revision of republican shibboleths, and this in turn 'generated political confidence' within the

³ Throughout this article references are made to the 'republican movement' and the 'republican leadership'. Although in the past distinctions have been made between Sinn Féin and the IRA's leadership, this was a pragmatic distinction that facilitated republicans' entry into political dialogue in the early 1990s. However, the Sinn Féin President (Gerry Adams), an MP and then Minister for Education in Northern Ireland (Martin McGuinness) and a *Tachta Dála* (TD) (Martin Ferris) outed themselves as IRA members via their resignations from the IRA's Army Council in 2005. Adams and McGuinness's extensive hold over the Provisional republican movement – demonstrated by the fact that the Army Council was populated by Adams loyalists, the relative rapidity with which the IRA decommissioned and accepted the PSNI suggests that there was little daylight, between the IRA and Sinn Féin's positions. Therefore, the 'republican movement' encompasses both Sinn Féin and the IRA. The 'republican leadership' is synonymous with Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness's leadership of the republican movement.

movement (Neumann, 2003: 165). Indeed, it is interesting that senior US and Irish officials active during the Clinton administration viewed the United States' primary role in the peace process as one of granting legitimacy to the republican movement (Clancy, 2010: 64). Ideally, however, with legitimacy comes responsibility, and thus it was vital that the former should not have been prematurely bestowed. Conferring legitimacy prior to the declaration of a permanent ceasefire opened the way for republicans to determine the pace and content of the peace and political processes. While this strategy had obvious attractions as all three governments had a keen interest in facilitating the republican movement's transition, acquiescing in it ignored the legitimate concerns of unionists and had the potential to erode the democratic character of any future peace settlement.

The problem of conferring legitimacy absent a negotiating framework that elicited reasonable expectations of reciprocity can be seen in the important, if misunderstood, role former US Senator George Mitchell played in Northern Ireland. An official active in both the Major and Blair administrations argued that Blair found the Clinton administration's pro-Sinn Féin bias troubling, and some UK officials also became reluctant to share intelligence with the Clinton administration, as they feared it might be shared with republicans (Seitz, 1998: 291; Godson, 2004: 686; Coughlin, 2006: 32–3, 38). Although Clinton did not always support Sinn Féin, on balance, he tended to support Irish nationalists. Clinton's exchanges with the historian Taylor Branch (2009: 329, 500, 641) – wherein Clinton viewed Northern nationalists as akin to African Americans of the pre-civil rights American South⁴ and viewed unionists as at best, reluctant partners in peace; at worst, supremacist *colons* – suggest that Clinton fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict. According to a UK official, George Mitchell's arrival in Northern Ireland – first as the head of an international commission on decommissioning, later as the chairman of the talks process that would lead to the Belfast Agreement – was viewed by UK officials as an opportunity to

⁴ Applying the US civil rights analogy to Northern Ireland obscures the conflict's ethno-national roots and mitigates paramilitaries' culpability for violence. Nationalists did not experience the levels of discrimination African Americans faced: discrimination was largely confined to three local councils west of the River Bann, and it was not solely practiced by unionists (Cadogan Group, 2003). Also, as Hennessey notes (2005: 383) the nationalist minority was discriminated against, but to describe nationalists as 'oppressed' 'devalues the term and the experience of the oppressed the world over'. The analogy is further weakened by the fact that most of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association's demands had been conceded, and further reforms were being contemplated, before the IRA embarked upon its campaign in 1970 (Hennessey, 2005: 393–4).

blunt President Clinton's ability to intervene in Northern Ireland and to co-opt US officials onto their agenda (Clancy, 2010: 77). Mitchell's presence also presented another opportunity: Just as his report in 1996 allowed the two governments to bypass the 'precondition' of decommissioning prior to all-party talks, Mitchell's neutrality was a boon to the subsequent talks process, as it could be utilized to pressure the various nationalist and unionist parties into signing the Agreement. The two governments asked Mitchell to present their final draft of what became the Belfast Agreement as his own work; in doing so, Moloney (2009) argues that both the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) would feel obligated to accept the Agreement, as Mitchell's neutrality gave him the ability to 'credibly allocate blame' should either party walk away. As such, the SDLP and UUP's acceptance of the Agreement can be partially attributed to this exogenous pressure.

The two governments employed this tactic again when they asked Mitchell to chair a review in order to kick start devolution, which was stalled over decommissioning. At the review's conclusion, Mitchell recommended that decommissioning begin after establishing devolution. In response, David Trimble decided to 'jump first' and share power with Sinn Féin absent prior decommissioning, his parachute being a post-dated letter of resignation as First Minister should disarmament have not commenced by February 2000.

Trimble's decision was partly motivated by the realization that unionism needed to shed the perception that it was intransigent by occupying the moral high ground. If decommissioning did not begin after power sharing, Trimble hoped that the onus would be on the governments to guarantee decommissioning and that republicans would be on the receiving end of local, national, and international opprobrium. Indeed, President Clinton outlined this very scenario when trying to persuade Trimble to share power with Sinn Féin prior to Mitchell's review (Carroll, 1999: 9).

This scenario, however, did not occur. When the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Mandelson, suspended power sharing to pre-empt Trimble's resignation, US officials joined the Irish in their condemnation of the suspension. Prior to Trimble's resignation

taking effect, Blair's Chief-of-Staff Jonathan Powell asked Clinton to pressure Adams *vis-à-vis* decommissioning, but Adams told Clinton that this was counterproductive (Powell, 2008: 168). The former Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Bertie Ahern (2009: 263–4) argues that unlike other Secretaries of State, Mandelson had Blair's ear, making it 'difficult to go over his head', an admission which partially explains Irish officials' decision to appeal to the US for help.

Trimble understood why the Irish government did not support the suspension: Fianna Fáil's⁵ own republican provenances made it unattractive to pressure Sinn Féin, particularly when the latter party had demonstrated an ability to convince the former's grassroots that it was acting in an insufficiently nationalist manner while making electoral inroads in the Republic. Trimble was more perturbed by the United States' decision to effectively side with nationalist Ireland, which appeared hypocritical in light of Clinton's comments during the Mitchell review, and in light of Mitchell's own understanding, according to both the SDLP's Seamus Mallon and Jonathan Powell, that decommissioning should commence at the end of January (Millar, 2004: 109–110; Powell, 2008: 167).

The end result of the Irish government's support for northern nationalists and republicans – and the Clinton administration's tendency to support the Irish government when it came into conflict with the UK government – was that Trimble's attempts to appropriate the moral high ground often left him right back where he started with no real improvement to his position either within the UUP or unionism at large. This was also compounded by Blair and Powell's reluctance to apply pressure over decommissioning. While it is perfectly understandable that Blair and Powell would not want to undermine the republican leadership, evidence suggests that their fears stemmed almost entirely from Adams and McGuinness's self-presentations of their positions. Adams and McGuinness consolidated their control over the republican movement by 1999 and the dissident 'threat' was limited by the fact that the various dissident groups were disorganized and infiltrated by the security services (Moloney, 2007: 520; Clancy, 2010: 151–3, 177). Also, from 2005 onwards,

⁵ Fianna Fáil, a party formed from the rump of the Anti-Treaty IRA in the Irish Civil War's aftermath, governed the Republic of Ireland during most of the peace process.

officials from the Department of An Taoiseach, the Irish Department of Justice (DOJ), US officials and members of the British security services were aware of Adams and McGuinness's stability (Clancy, 2010: 164–5, 168, 177). However, portraying themselves as vulnerable to internal overthrow and/or dissidents offered several benefits to the republican leadership. First, the republican leadership is alleged to have had a twin-track strategy wherein devolved government was one of two acceptable outcomes, the other being the imposition of something akin to British–Irish joint authority. Few British or Irish officials were certain which track of the strategy predominated at any given time, but many also admitted that devolved government within the UK was hardly the republican movement's 'great aim', and that the republican leadership appeared to be divided over its merits (Clancy, 2010: 90–2). Therefore, the UK, Irish, and US governments would need to apply an appropriate balance of 'sticks' and 'carrots' to make the 'joint authority' track sufficiently unattractive.

Both the UK and Irish governments' approach, however, centred upon giving Adams and McGuinness 'carrots' in the hope of expediting republicans' democratic transition. The continued provision of 'carrots' in the absence of any reciprocity created a situation where it was logical for Adams and McGuinness to delay decommissioning. This situation facilitated Sinn Féin's electoral rise in Northern Ireland, as any attempt by the party's nationalist rival, the SDLP, to compromise with the UUP could be utilized by Sinn Féin as evidence of its reputation as an 'ethnic tribune', or the 'strongest defender' of the nationalist community's interests (Mitchell, Evans, and O'Leary, 2009). Alternatively, attempts to outflank Sinn Féin by the SDLP in this environment were bound to meet an ignominious end. Beyond Northern Ireland, perpetual negotiations had the ability to keep Sinn Féin in the spotlight in the Republic, and they also burnished Adams's 'international statesman image', a key plank in the party's electoral strategy.

This environment also contributed to the UUP's electoral enervation. Trimble managed to 'sell' the Belfast Agreement to the UUP, and the unionist electorate endorsed it by thin margins. It would be wrong, however, to confuse this skepticism with hostility towards the peace and political processes: as Aughey (2005: 103) argues, a majority of unionists voted

for the Agreement because they saw its potential to create a new, non-violent 'beginning' in Northern Ireland (Hayes and McAllister, 2001: 82). UK officials acknowledge that painful concessions for unionists such as the release of paramilitary prisoners and police reform early on in the process needed to be counterbalanced by reciprocal concessions if unionists were to keep faith with the Agreement (Clancy, 2010: 84–5).

Absent full decommissioning, Trimble was forced to rely on measures such as Assembly suspensions, nugatory concessions on policing and by banning members of Sinn Féin from meetings of the North–South Ministerial Council.⁶ These measures upset nationalist Ireland, and it sought US support for its disenchantment. Therefore, during this period the three governments' unwillingness to confront the republican leadership and exogenous pressure that favoured Irish nationalists created a framework that weakened Northern Ireland's political moderates. Continued enervation would depend upon whether or not this framework was challenged through a realignment of exogenous forces.

3. Richard Haass, 8/11, and 9/11

At the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency, it appeared that the US would adopt a more *laissez-faire* approach to Northern Ireland. The future National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice, told UK officials that she wished to see Northern Ireland 'fixed' prior to the inauguration, and it is alleged that the incoming administration privately informed Downing Street that it considered Northern Ireland to be the UK's sole responsibility (Meyer, 2005: 166; Coughlin, 2006: 118). Bush's first Special Envoy, Richard Haass, had previously written about Northern Ireland, and his writings did not suggest there would be extensive, high-level US involvement in Northern Ireland (Haass, 1990). Although Haass gave the Clinton administration 'one cheer' for its efforts, on balance he characterized its interventions as misguided and tendentious (Farrell, 1995: 1; *Journal of Commerce*, 1996: 6A; Haass, 2000).

The Irish government soon picked up on Haass's sentiments: According to a senior official, the Irish establishment viewed Haass as someone 'who wasn't really empathetic to Ireland

⁶ The North–South Ministerial Council is part of Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement, which deals with relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

[...] he was seen as coming from an absolute neutral position [...] they wanted the Teddy Kennedy, Democratic, sort of touchy feely approach to Ireland, and they didn't see that with Richard Haass' (Clancy, 2010: 115).

After IRA members were found in Colombia allegedly training the FARC⁷ on 11 August 2001, empathy was not high on Haass's list of priorities. The idea of IRA members training FARC rebels in methods which could be utilized to murder US citizens and military personnel also did not sit well with the republican movement's congressional supporters like Ben Gilman (R-NY) (O'Hanlon, 2001: 8). The 'Colombia Three' rattled Congress and the Bush administration, and both signaled their anger by calling for congressional hearings and firmly supporting the SDLP's decision to endorse the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) (O'Hanlon, 2001: 8).

The IRA's alleged dalliances with the FARC angered the Washington establishment, and it upset one of the republican movement's key US backers, Bill Flynn, who called on the IRA to disarm (McDonald, 2008: 161). It was this message that Haass sought to reiterate when he travelled to the UK and Ireland on 9/11. On the eve of 9/11 Haass gave Adams and McGuinness a preview of the dressing down they would receive the next day, but the attacks transformed Haass's words from a warning into an expletive-laden threat (*The News Letter*, 11 September 2001: 11; McDonald, 2008: 159). As Lynch (2009: 76) notes, '9/11 provided a rhetorical context to turn the screws on Sinn Féin but it was 8/11 that forced a revised American posture', a point that an American official concedes (Clancy, 2010: 116). According to both Irish and US officials present on the day, Adams received Haass's message loud and clear, and his message was largely echoed by Bill Flynn and other prominent Irish-Americans. Realizing that republicans were on the back foot, the IRA announced its first act of decommissioning six weeks later (Moloney, 2007: 489–91).

Herein lay the promise of the 'pan-nationalist' front created in the early years of the peace process: the realization that the republican movement's access to corporate Irish-America came with a price, and that the desire to retain its esteem could be leveraged to get

⁷ FARC, known in English as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, is a Communist revolutionary group that is also deemed to be a narcoterrorist organization by the Colombian government, the US government and the European Union.

republicans to make concessions. Adams and McGuinness appeared well aware of Haass's significant clout, and that corporate Irish–America most likely would not protest if Haass banned republicans from the US if the IRA did not disarm. The endorsement of the PSNI by two of Sinn Féin's traditional congressional supporters, Ben Gilman and William Delahunt (D–MA), also pointed to the prospect of a ban (Gilman and Delhaunt, 2001). Thus, the temporary realignment in exogenous forces in 8/11 and 9/11's aftermath made it likely that the IRA would decommission. The only question that remained was the act's scale.

A lack of alignment between US tactics on the one hand, and Irish and UK tactics on the other, meant that republicans were allowed to regain international respectability after having engaged in a minor act of decommissioning. Although one could hardly envision a more auspicious environment in which to make a demand for significant decommissioning, British and Irish officials demurred from this course of action, apparently owing to concerns over the republican leadership's stability. Powell (2008: 203) recounts meetings with Adams during this period wherein the latter told him that decommissioning had been extremely difficult and almost necessitated an Army Convention – despite the fact that the need for a convention had been abolished in 1999, the same year that the leadership consolidated its control over the republican movement (see Moloney, 2007: 518). UK officials appeared to know of these changes as Peter Mandelson states that he was receiving intelligence from 1999 onwards stating that republicans had taken the decision to decommission, but were holding out for further concessions (Watt, 2007: 13). However, Powell (2008: 163) admits that there was 'no science' to judging Adams and McGuinness's bottom line, and Blair also contends that while the intelligence services advised him that the republican leadership was well in control, he 'took a different view' (BBC, 20 April 2008). Similarly, even though intelligence fed into the process from the Irish DOJ from 2002 onwards suggested that the republican leadership faced no significant threat, Bertie Ahern (2009: 199) states that he was sceptical of most of the intelligence he received. This lack of exogenous alignment meant that only US officials brandished the 'stick' on decommissioning, while UK officials dangled 'carrots' instead. Blair notified David Trimble eight days after 9/11 that Sinn Féin would not be excluded from the Assembly even if the IRA did not decommission, and he offered Sinn Féin Westminster allowances in the hopes of facilitating disarmament (Cook,

2003: 69–71). The act of decommissioning allowed Trimble to go back into government with Sinn Féin in October 2001, but with the parameters of the peace and political processes unaltered, this was more like a stay of execution. As the following sections will show, Haass's change of heart *vis-à-vis* both Sinn Féin and the DUP further expedited the UUP and SDLP's demise.

4. Haass's Volte-Face and the Triumph of the 'Extremes'

In addition to his sober view of the IRA, Haass appeared to take unionists' concerns seriously. In January 2002, Haass delivered a speech drafted by two of Trimble's advisors, which described the conflict as ethno-national, an admission that recognized the legitimacy of unionists' identities and undercut the notion that the IRA's armed struggle was about equality for nationalists/Catholics (Haass, 2002). Haass's relationship with Trimble, however, soon soured, most likely because both men can be very difficult; what is more, Haass's dissatisfaction coincided with a growing affinity between Haass and Adams, and US officials state that Haass became 'enamored' of Adams (Clancy, 2010: 120). While he appeared to share this fascination with Blair and Powell, he did not share their appreciation of David Trimble. The Irish government shared Haass's frustration: Despair over Trimble led the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the UK Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and one Downing Street officials to look at the viability of a deal between the DUP and Sinn Féin in 2002. However, UK contemplation of such a deal had more to do with occasional annoyance with Trimble than serious policy: Blair possessed a degree of loyalty to Trimble, and he was uncomfortable with Paisley. Moreover, the NIO's contacts with the DUP suggested that a power-sharing deal was not viable in the short- to medium-term, and might not occur at all (Godson, 2004: 723, 761; Clancy, 2010: 128). While there were divisions within the Irish government – the DOJ appeared to share Downing Street and the NIO's scepticism about the viability of a deal between the 'extremes' – DFA officials admit that they contacted the DUP's 'more progressive middle-rankers' and confirm US officials' contention that Haass came to prefer a Sinn Féin–DUP deal 'about two seconds after Dublin did', around March 2002 (Godson, 2004: 722; Clancy, 2010: 121–4).

While hindsight might make it tempting to commend Haass and the DFA's perspicacity, it is worth interrogating the assumptions that led them to promote this deal. While the DFA had contact with the DUP's 'progressive middle rankers', it was in both the DUP and Sinn Féin's interest to promote themselves as amenable to a deal, as Irish and US officials were more likely to push for elections that would place both parties at the head of their respective electoral blocs if they felt a viable alternative existed. In addition to concerns regarding DUP progressive middle-rankers' sincerity, there was also the problem of this group's relationship to the former party leader, Ian Paisley Snr. An official admits that the DFA's contact with the DUP was based upon a mistaken assumed relationship between the then deputy leader, Peter Robinson, and Paisley, with the hope that the former could deliver the latter (Clancy, 2010: 122–3). However, as Moloney (2008: 415, 449, 471) notes, the relationship between Paisley Snr and Robinson was far from perfect, and it was not reasonable to expect Robinson to deliver Paisley (Clancy, 2010: 122–3).

US officials' support for a DUP–Sinn Féin deal appeared to rest upon similarly Pollyannish foundations. In addition to the DUP and Sinn Féin's good intent, US officials also believed that unionist disenchantment with the Agreement stemmed not from its implementation, but rather from Trimble's alleged poor salesmanship. However, survey evidence points to unionists' disillusionment with the Agreement's implementation; moreover, when Trimble attempted to better 'sell' the Agreement by introducing confidence-building measures such as the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC),⁸ he was often stymied by the three governments' desire not to cause 'difficulties' for republicans (Godson, 2004: 720; Clancy, 2010: 126–7). Therefore, the source of unionist disillusionment suggested that the DUP could not be any more flexible than Trimble in its demands. Given the republican leadership's alleged twin-track strategy it also remained to be seen whether the DUP's electoral hegemony within the unionist bloc would make decommissioning any more likely.

⁸ The IMC was proposed as a means of restoring public confidence in the peace and political processes by having independent commissioners report on the state of paramilitary ceasefires. Officials initially resisted the idea because, according to a UK official, they needed to make 'nuanced assessments' about ceasefires. According to an Irish official, the Irish government resisted because the republican leadership 'didn't want referees noting fouls all the time' (Clancy, 2010: 126). The UK and Irish governments established a modified IMC in 2004, but it was a case of 'too little, too late' for Trimble.

With Downing Street and most of the NIO unwilling to promote a deal between the 'extremes', the British government postponed the 2003 Assembly elections twice after republicans failed to provide clear statements signalling their intention to complete their democratic transition. The suspension did not sit well with either Irish or US officials, and both pressured UK officials for elections. Ultimately, British officials found the pressure irresistible, and the election was held in November (Clancy, 2010: 134). Once the republican leadership was granted a guarantee on elections, it became logical not to modify the IRA's confidentiality agreement with the IICD, and the opacity of the IRA's act of disarmament left Trimble in a poor position for the elections. In the Assembly elections, both Sinn Féin and the DUP became the head of their electoral blocs, although the DUP only obtained three more seats than the UUP, and the latter party managed to increase its share of first preference votes by 1.4 per cent (Rallings and Thrasher, 2004). Therefore, although Blair's post-election fidelity to Trimble was considered 'wacky' and 'kooky' by some US officials, it was not entirely preposterous. The DUP's ascent was a harbinger of things to come, however, and Blair was eventually forced to contemplate a deal between the 'extremes' (Clancy, 2010: 135).

5. Mitchell Reiss, Policing, and the St Andrews 'Agreement'

After resigning, Richard Haass was replaced by Mitchell Reiss in December 2003. Reiss differed from his predecessor: in addition to being less abrasive than Haass, Reiss made republicans' support for the PSNI the cornerstone of his tenure (Clancy, 2007: 168). Haass had backed away from policing, and he put much store in the alleged dissident threat to the republican leadership (Godson, 2004: 720, Clancy, 2010: 121). Reiss, on the other hand, was not convinced of the alleged dissident and internal threats to Adams and McGuinness; moreover, the Irish DOJ, the British Army, and the British security services supported his interpretation (Clancy, 2010: 152–3, 175–9).

Exogenous actors' prioritization of the peace process created an environment where it was logical for the republican leadership to delay concessions for as long as possible. The related tendency to ignore republicans' continued paramilitarism and criminality created a situation where they became ever more enmeshed in both activities. Therefore, Reiss and the Irish

Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell convinced the DUP's Peter Robinson that in addition to decommissioning, endorsing the PSNI and ending criminality were important metrics for judging republicans' *bona fides* (Moloney, 2008: 426). Reiss identified these as the necessary conditions for a power-sharing deal, and he felt that their identification would also get the DUP to move towards embracing objective and tangible standards of progress (Clancy, 2010: 149).

Facilitating the DUP's move from abstract to concrete demands also bolstered the party's engagement with Irish–America, as the DUP's prior vague and subjective notions of progress reinforced some Irish–Americans' assumption that the party was simply uninterested in sharing power (Clancy, 2010: 149). If the DUP could make it clear that it was willing to share power with republicans if they endorsed policing and abandoned criminality, US officials believed that Irish–America could persuade Sinn Féin to deliver. Specifically, US officials felt that the desire to retain Irish–Americans' esteem could be used as leverage to get Sinn Féin to endorse the PSNI (Clancy, 2010: 149).

Republicans' continued involvement in paramilitarism and criminality arguably reached its nadir with alleged IRA involvement in the Northern Bank robbery in December 2004 and the cover-up of the murder of Robert McCartney in January 2005.⁹ Both incidents upset the three governments, as planning for the robbery appeared to be concomitant with negotiations to restore power sharing in 2004, but Irish DOJ and US officials were the most keen to make their anger known. McDowell named Adams, McGuinness, and Martin Ferris as Army Council members in February 2005, and Reiss banned all political parties from the St Patrick's Day festivities at the White House, inviting Mr McCartney's family instead. Reiss also banned Sinn Féin members from fundraising during St Patrick's Day, and although he still came to the US, Adams was excoriated wherever he went: Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy, Congressman Peter King, and the Friends of Ireland group all condemned the IRA's alleged actions, and called for the organization to disband. Corporate Irish–

⁹ The British and Irish governments had good reasons for alleging IRA involvement – the Irish DOJ had the alleged bank robbers, an Irish businessman associated with the subsequent laundering of the £26.5 million and the republican leadership under surveillance prior to the robbery, and although the IRA did not appear to order Mr McCartney's murder, it did appear to order the subsequent cover-up (Clancy, 2010: 147–9).

America yet again let Adams know how it felt, breaking into spontaneous applause when McCain delivered a blistering attack on the IRA; senior Irish and US officials have argued that this had a 'shattering' effect on Adams, as this audience had previously 'adored' him (Reiss cited in Ware, 2008; Clancy, 2010: 150).

This atmosphere was replicated at home: Sinn Féin did not take SDLP leader Mark Durkan's seat in the Westminster elections, and local elections netted the party fewer seats than expected. The IRA answered positively to Gerry Adams's pre-election call on 6 April, 19 days after his St Patrick's Day trip to the US, to consider engaging in purely political and democratic activity. The IRA subsequently decommissioned a significant amount of weaponry in September.

For Reiss and McDowell, the lessons were clear: decommissioning suggested that the republican leadership responded to pressure, and that it could cede concessions without any great upheaval. This was also underscored by McDowell's refusal to grant Adams further concessions in order to facilitate decommissioning, as the DOJ possessed intelligence indicating that Adams was already committed to disarming, but was trying to wring out as many concessions as possible (Clancy, 2010: 151–2).

This rationale underpinned Reiss's decision to continue denying fundraising visas to Sinn Féin in order to expedite its endorsement of the PSNI. However, British and Irish officials – apart from the Irish DOJ – had been unhappy with Reiss's decision to ban the political parties from the White House on St Patrick's Day. Moreover, Downing Street and the NIO were extremely upset at the continued fundraising ban, with the former unsuccessfully attempting to go over Reiss's head – at Adams's behest – to reverse the policy. Reiss characterized the incident as probably his 'lowest point' as Special Envoy, and US officials state that relations between Reiss and British officials were 'nasty' at this point (Clancy, 2007: 171; Reiss cited in Ware, 2008). Although US officials assert that Reiss had the private support of the Department of An Taoiseach for the ban, publicly the Irish Foreign Minister stated that policing would not be a 'precondition' for a deal, an announcement, which led

US officials to call Dublin for clarification (Clancy, 2007: 171; Reiss cited in Ware, 2008; Millar, 2008: 165–9).¹⁰

While British – and most Irish – officials’ reluctance to make policing a ‘precondition’ is ostensibly reasonable, it begs the question as to how the three governments felt that they could secure a deal in its absence, particularly given the republican leadership’s alleged twin-track strategy. If the DUP was to convince sceptical unionist voters that power sharing was worthwhile, it would need to achieve more than the UUP if it was to retain its ‘ethnic tribune’ appeal. While one could argue that decommissioning had been achieved on the DUP’s watch, a US copy of minutes from Irish officials’ meeting with Paisley Snr on 18 November 2005 suggests that he was aware that decommissioning was incomplete, a fact alluded to in the IMC’s eighth report (IMC, 2006: 20; Clancy, 2010: 157). Also, if ‘peace’ and ‘democracy’ were to be considered in anyway synonymous in Northern Ireland, ongoing illegal activities had to be challenged by getting paramilitary groups to recognize the rule of law in both word and deed.

According to British officials, Paisley Snr signaled his willingness to share power *if* the conditions – primarily, if Sinn Féin endorsed the PSNI – were right (Clancy, 2010: 160). The toing and froing prior to the St Andrews summit, coupled with British officials’ lack of planning and a crisis created by a British general’s remarks about Iraq during the final day, meant that little was achieved, apart from British and Irish officials’ decision to market St Andrews as an ‘agreement’ in the hopes of pressuring the DUP and Sinn Féin to endorse it (Clancy, 2010: 163). Although the DUP leadership indicated its willingness to consider a deal on the summit’s final day, the amount of unease within the party’s grassroots – evidenced by the chicanery employed to obtain its endorsement of St Andrews – caused Paisley Snr to retreat into his party’s more uncompromising wing. It soon became clear that those keen for a deal (Paisley and Robinson) would have to compromise with members (Nigel Dodds, Gregory Campbell, and David Simpson) requiring a ‘credible testing period’ of Sinn Féin’s

¹⁰ The idea that the Irish government did not believe that policing should be treated as a ‘precondition’ also appears in US officials’ private correspondence. The Department of An Taoiseach’s private support for the ban must also be weighed against US correspondence suggesting that Irish officials put pressure on IMC commissioners throughout 2005 to give the IRA a clean bill of health in order to restore devolved government (Clancy, 2010: 156).

commitment and a considerable gap between the restoration of Stormont and the devolution of policing and justice powers (Moloney, 2008: 465, 470–1). Although acceptance of the police continued to be a *sine qua non* of a deal, the issue remained mired in negotiations. A UK official argues that Blair's 'endless phone calls to Adams and Paisley through the Christmas period were partly about the Prime Minister recognising that Adams had real management issues on policing and that he needed support' (Clancy, 2010: 164). Powell (2008: 300) states that during this period, 'we knew that the dissidents were desperately trying to kill someone.' This view, however, was not shared by US officials, the Irish DOJ or even by Bertie Ahern at this point (Clancy, 2010: 165). An IRA Convention backed policing in January, and following this a Sinn Féin *ard fheis* (annual meeting) endorsed policing with approximately 90 per cent of the vote, albeit with the caveat that the endorsement was conditional upon establishing power sharing and a date for devolving policing and justice powers (Moloney, 2007: 590; 2008: 477). This caveat provided a means for the republican leadership to pursue its alleged twin-track strategy, as it appeared to do in late 2009 and early 2010. Nevertheless, on 8 May 2007 the British government restored devolution under the DUP and Sinn Féin's auspices.

6. Explaining Richard Haass and Mitchell Reiss

Many scholars' failure to appreciate the Bush administration's significant role in Northern Ireland has stemmed from the assumption that the 'War on Terror' would lead Washington to adopt policy in Northern Ireland that was more 'reactive' than 'proactive', and would be supportive of the UK government (Marsden, 2006: 60). As NIO officials noted in 2003, US policy in Northern Ireland should not be judged solely by the exigencies of the 'special relationship', or by Blair and Bush's personal relationship (Godson, 2004: 759). Lynch (2004: 141–3; 2009: 74) has explained Clinton's ability to reverse visa policy *vis-à-vis* Sinn Féin with reference to realism, as the UK's diplomatic power was unable to thwart change. The policy change also owes something to Clinton's bureaucratic skill, as he and the NSC were able to bypass the State Department's concerns over the visa.

Somewhat similarly, Haass and Reiss's actions can be partially explained via reference to realism and Allison's (1971/1999) bureaucratic politics model. In the bureaucratic politics

model, foreign policy resultants are explained with reference to the stakeholders, issues' framing, coalitions, and action channels within the interagency group, or in the case of the Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, intraagency group model (Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 255–324). The special envoy is a presidential envoy, and thus is not subject to the normal degree of bureaucratic oversight. Given the White House's relative disinterestedness in Northern Ireland, this meant that Haass more or less¹¹ ran the issue without being second guessed (Clancy, 2010: 136).

US officials contend that Haass's position as Director of Policy Planning both drew him to the envoy position and made him effective *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland policy. The Director of Policy Planning is a fairly powerful position within the State Department, and the officeholder runs what is essentially State's think tank. The position, however, does not have any formal interagency role, and a Director's influence depends upon his/her relationship with the Secretary of State (Haass, 2009: 171). The Director's variable policy influence led Haass to accept the position on the condition that he was granted some operational responsibility as a 'roving ambassador' (Haass, 2009: 172). Haass ran the issue with the help of a few Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), none of whom had any expertise in Northern Ireland. Many FSOs were enamored of Haass, characterizing him as a 'towering intellect' and 'probably the smartest man I know' (Clancy, 2010: 137).

Additionally, many appeared to be fully aware of Haass's significant power base, as all of those interviewed declined to directly answer whether or not Haass, against UK wishes, facilitated meetings between Sinn Féin and the DUP in the US, with most citing that they were 'uncomfortable' discussing the subject and 'need[ed] to be careful' because of Haass (Clancy, 2010: 137). Thus it seems that there were few individuals willing to challenge the logic of Haass's policy preferences. An unwillingness to challenge Haass also appeared to lead to a degree of 'groupthink' (Janis, 1982). For example, many US officials adopted the Irish criticism that Trimble had failed to 'sell' the Agreement (Clancy, 2010: 137). However, when asked how Trimble could have better 'sold' the Agreement in centre-left terms few had an answer (Clancy, 2010: 137). Therefore, framing unionist disillusionment as a product

¹¹ The NSC is involved in policymaking to a degree on certain issues (for example, granting visas).

of Trimble's alleged incompetence, and UK officials' reluctance to countenance a Sinn Féin–DUP deal as a reflection of their lack of contact with the DUP and unionist grassroots opinion, allowed US officials to proceed with the promotion of a policy that reflected Haass's *rapprochement* with Adams and his own realist proclivities¹² (Haass, 2009).

Although one might have expected Blair to go over Haass's head to Bush or Condoleezza Rice to get Haass to back away from promoting a Sinn Féin–DUP deal, this did not occur. Godson (2004: 774) has argued that Blair's failure to stop Haass most likely stemmed from reluctance to ask US neoconservatives for a favour. Much has been made of Bush and Blair's solidarity, but UK officials' relationships with the Bush administration's neoconservatives were decidedly more awkward (see Meyer, 2005; Coughlin, 2006). Appealing to the latter group to stop Haass would have been Blair's best bet, as Haass would resign in December 2003 over his differences with the Bush administration, not the least of which was the Iraq War. Godson suggests that this, and Blair's unwillingness to spend his 'credit' with Bush saving Trimble when it could be spent on something else like the Middle East, are responsible for UK officials' failure to stop Haass (Godson, 2004: 774, Powell, 2008: 222–3; Haass, 2009: 184, 213–14). In this sense, Haass's actions appear to correspond to realist analyses of international relations.

Like Haass, Reiss's ability to promote policies inimical to British, and occasionally Irish, preferences can also be partially explained via bureaucratic politics. Keeping the visa ban in place – and having it lifted – stemmed from Reiss's ability to garner private support from both British and Irish officials and prominent Irish–Americans. Although Reiss had the full support of the Irish DOJ for the visa ban, a US official argues that the DOJ 'couldn't really do much' to bolster Reiss's position (Clancy, 2010: 168). Similarly, the same official argues that Reiss had the private support of the Department of An Taoiseach for the ban, along with one British official – unbeknownst to Powell and Blair – and the British security services

¹² During his tenure as Director of Policy Planning, Vice-President Dick Cheney and/or his staff believed that Haass had unauthorized contacts with Iranian officials. Although Haass (2009: 220) admits that he disagreed with US policy on Iran, he denies the accusation. Also, Haass was not given an envoy position in the Obama administration allegedly because he was regarded as too willing to talk to Hamas (Maddox, 2009: 9).

(Clancy, 2010: 168).¹³ While this private support was important, it is unlikely that it played a major role in Reiss's ability to keep the visa ban in place. Reiss also created a broad coalition of support amongst prominent Irish–Americans for the policy. Importantly, Reiss went to great lengths to reach out to Congressional Democrats, a move that reaped dividends, as the late Ted Kennedy gave Reiss his private support. This would prove vital, as correspondence between US FSOs in late 2005 argues that, even after two refusals, Adams was convinced that he would be able to obtain a fundraising visa prior to endorsing the PSNI by appealing to sympathetic members of Congress.¹⁴ Similarly, a senior US official states that Reiss had Bill Flynn's full support (Clancy, 2010: 169). This, along with the NSC's support for the policy, appears to be responsible for Downing Street's inability to go over Reiss's head to the White House when Adams wanted the visa policy reversed.

When Reiss wanted the ban lifted, he encountered resistance from the NSC. NSC members wanted to keep the ban in place because they saw Adams as a terrorist and were angered by his visit to Israel/Palestine in September 2006 (Clancy, 2010: 169). Reiss realized, however, that having the ban in place after St Andrews ran the risk of placing President Bush to the right of Ian Paisley Snr, thus giving Paisley room to back away from a deal. Although Reiss had President Bush's support on the issue, NSC objections had the potential to keep the ban in place (Clancy, 2010: 169; Reiss, 2010). Reiss asked both Blair and Bertie Ahern to call President Bush in order to get the ban lifted, and the premiers were ultimately successful in their lobbying. Therefore, Reiss's ability to pursue policy at times contrary to UK, Irish, and the NSC's preferences appear to owe much to his clout and his ability to forge coalitions with prominent Irish–Americans and Irish and UK officials.

7. The Special Relationship and Northern Ireland's 'Lessons'?

Does US policy in Northern Ireland have any wider implications for our understanding of the 'special relationship'? Yes and no. On the one hand, Northern Ireland is unique, if not *sui generis*. Structural considerations aside, it is unlikely that any other envoy would be allowed

¹³ In the minutes of a meeting between the Irish government and British military officials on 23 November 2005, a senior British military official stated that the various republican dissident groups were in disarray and that 'only 18' dissidents posed a threat (Clancy, 2010: 177).

¹⁴ Private correspondence provided to the author.

the latitude granted to Haass and Reiss. What the Northern Ireland case most likely points to is the tendency of broad concepts such as the 'special relationship' to obscure the nature of foreign policy decision-making (FPDM). As noted throughout this article, assumptions surrounding this concept had the effect of prematurely closing off scholarly inquiry; a more inductive approach reveals the very real disagreements that boiled away beneath the surface. An official active in both the Major and Blair administrations argues that, despite the effort that the UK puts into the 'special relationship', sometimes Washington simply does as it pleases (Coughlin, 2006: 11). If Northern Ireland has any wider implications for the 'special relationship' it is probably that while the concept is attractive in its parsimony, this parsimony can come at the cost of more holistic explanations of FPDM.

What, if any, 'lessons' does Northern Ireland's 'internationalization' offer other conflict-affected regions? In one sense, there is a tremendous conceit in proffering lessons from a peace process about which we still know relatively little. The counter-insurgency tactics that brought the IRA to the negotiating table are still mired in confusion and secrecy, and are likely to remain so. We do know, however, that by 1994 80 per cent of operations planned by the IRA's Belfast Brigade were being foiled by the police, and that both the former Head of the IRA's Internal Security Unit and Sinn Féin's former US Representative and Director of Elections were British agents for many decades; this does not suggest that a 'mutually hurting stalemate' prompted the republican leadership's decision to engage in negotiations (Zartman and Berman, 1982: 66–78; Holland and Phoenix, 1996: 391).

Nevertheless, current evidence does challenge accepted wisdom regarding Northern Ireland's 'internationalization'. *Pace* Hain, US involvement in both processes has not always been constructive. Clinton's interventions were not vital, but they were not entirely innocuous, either. Noting that Clinton's seeming nationalist bias could be a liability, a UK official asserts that the British government 'managed to do a deal in spite of Clinton's interventions' (Coughlin, 2006: 38–9). Clinton's tendency to side with the Irish government, along with the primacy of the peace process, created an environment that decreased the negative consequences associated with republicans' delay in delivering concessions. This

contributed to the political centre ground's enervation and made it attractive for the republican leadership to pursue both tracks of its alleged twin-track strategy.

The pressure applied by US officials and corporate Irish–America in 8/11 and 9/11's aftermath temporarily altered this pattern, but the three governments' lack of alignment meant that republicans' first act of decommissioning was relatively insignificant. Haass and Dublin's promotion of a deal between the 'extremes' meant that the governments' tactics were yet again unaligned, and this only made it all the more logical for republicans to continue delaying decommissioning. Mitchell Reiss and the DOJ's condition-led approaches altered the incentive structure for decommissioning and endorsement of the PSNI. Their tactics, however, were not appreciated by most UK and Irish officials. Therefore, Reiss's own experience contradicts his claim regarding the importance of 'unity among key stakeholders'. While the three governments were unified *vis-à-vis* outcomes, they employed different tactics. Tactical disunity was partially responsible for the DUP and Sinn Féin's electoral ascendancy. Reiss's tenure, however, also points to the benefits of tactical disunity. Reiss and the DOJ's condition-led approaches helped to facilitate a deal, and their focus on decommissioning and criminality allowed both issues to be brought to the fore without political consequences for the Department of An Taoiseach, a tendency best captured by a former DOJ official's contention that Bertie Ahern could always blame 'the lunatic across the road' (that is, Michael McDowell) when he refused to acquiesce in Downing Street's desire to grant the republicans further concessions (Interview with Irish source E, September 2009). Similarly, George Mitchell's outsider status allowed UK and Irish officials to get the mainstream unionist and nationalist parties to sign the Agreement, and partially incentivized Trimble's decision to share power with Sinn Féin. While US interventions have not always been constructive, neither have they been wholly inconsequential nor negative. Similarly, the US experience suggests that it cannot be unambiguously asserted that aligning international influence is an important 'lesson' to be extracted from Northern Ireland.

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