The 'Art of the Fudge':
Merits of Constructive Ambiguity in the Good Friday Agreement

by Noel Anderson

With fighting spanning over four centuries, the region of Northern Ireland has been deadlocked in conflict. The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 marked what appeared to be a real breakthrough in the conflict in the eyes of political elites in Dublin and London: a commitment from all parties involved to resolve political differences through "exclusively democratic and peaceful means."[1]

Yet key issues remained unresolved: the implementation of paramilitary decommissioning was repeatedly delayed, uncertainty remained with regard to the procedures to be followed to remove from office parties found to be engaged in violence or undemocratic activity, and devolution of policing remained a contentious issue between Northern Ireland's divided political parties. Indeed, the optimism of political elites following the signing of the Agreement seems to have been premature. Evidence reveals paramilitary violence actually increased in the post-Agreement period through to 2003 and remains a problem in Northern Ireland to this day. Critics of the Good Friday Agreement have argued that signatories were in fact never in agreement, but rather used the "constructive ambiguity" which lies at the heart of the Agreement to interpret it differently and construe its language to

1 Northern Ireland Office, The Good Friday Agreement (1998), Declaration of Support, Section 1.4.

their suiting.

While it is tempting to conclude that clarity would have yielded a more orderly implementation of the Agreement, it is equally likely that absolute clarity would have produced a political stalemate and no peace agreement at all. This paper thus asks the following questions: How was ambiguity strategically applied to the Good Friday Agreement and what were the merits of such a strategy for the Northern Ireland peace process from 1998 through to the present day? This paper will first provide an overview of the theoretical debate of the utility of ambiguity in the crafting of political agreements. Next, it will present a brief historical introduction to the conflict in Northern Ireland, followed by an analysis of the levels of violence in Northern Ireland during the post-Good Friday Agreement period. The paper then identifies the ambiguous sections of the peace document and provides a synopsis of the arguments presented by critics of the Agreement. Finally, an assessment of the merits of constructive ambiguity in the Good Friday Agreement is presented. Investigation reveals that while ambiguity has caused delays in the implementation of numerous Agreement obligations, over time it has successfully created a non-violent political environment that has enabled both sides of the conflict to believe, credibly, that they can fulfill their political agenda without recourse to violence. It thereby entrenched norms of non-violence over time, dramatically improving the overall security situation in the region and advancing the peace process.

'Constructive Ambiguity'

Geoff Berridge and Alan James define constructive ambiguity as "the deliberate use of ambiguous language on a sensitive issue in order to advance some political purpose."[2] In political negotiations, constructive ambiguity can be a tool used to obscure an issue which remains contentious, while simultaneously framing the discourse so as to enable each side to claim that some concession has been won. Berridge and James go on to explain: "It may also be hoped that, having

2 Geoff Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, Second Edition (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), __ .

thereby shelved this particular point in a way that causes neither side excessive discomfort, they will be able to make real progress on other matters."[3] In other words, by avoiding the most controversial issues – those upon which negotiating parties are in diametric opposition to each other – space is created to solve more peripheral problems. It is hoped that, once such peripheral issues are addressed, the ground might then be prepared to return to the unresolved issues and find compromise.

Such a strategy, however, can also generate controversy. James Dingley has noted that while constructive ambiguity may encourage all parties of a dispute to sign on to an agreement, it implies that they will sign on to different interpretations and as such were never in agreement in the first place.[4] Moreover, a political agreement is likely to be undermined when rival interpretations come into conflict in the implementation phase of the agreement. Dingley also argues that ambiguity can in fact exacerbate conflict by allowing political leaders to avoid the real substantive issues while simultaneously permitting them to window-dress an agreement as a breakthrough to a political impasse.[5] Similarly, Itay Fischhendler has noted that mechanisms built into agreements designed to address future instability can often get bogged down in disagreements around ambiguity.[6] Abbott and Snidal also point out that while ambiguity may reduce the costs of bargaining during the negotiation process, it may also increase the post-agreement costs of managing and enforcing commitments if parties interpret the agreement differently.[7]

The Good Friday Agreement,[8] the peace agreement that brought Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' to an end in 1998, has become infamous

3 Ibid.

4 James Dingley, "Constructive Ambiguity and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland," *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 13, no. 1 (2005): 1.

5 Ibid.

6 Itay Fischhendler, "Ambiguity in Transboundary Environmental Dispute Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 106.

7 Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance," *International Organization* 54, no. 3 (2000): 434.

8 The Good Friday Agreement, named after the day in which it was signed, is also known interchangeably as the Belfast Agreement, after the city in which it was signed.

for its application of constructive ambiguity. Proponents argue that such ambiguity was necessary to bring all parties to the negotiation table, and point to the improving security situation as proof that the Agreement has brought benefits to the region. On the other hand, critics argue that the ambiguity of the Agreement has rendered it ineffective and that the paramilitaries of Northern Ireland will resume their war once political negotiations begin to falter.

The Troubles: A Brief Historical Introduction[9]

Any analysis of the conflict in Northern Ireland necessitates a brief historical introduction.[10] While the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict can be traced back to the Ulster Plantation of the 1600s, contemporary conflict stems from 1916, the year in which the Easter Rising was staged by elements of the republican group the Irish Volunteers, who challenged the British refusal to grant the Irish Home Rule. While the rising was defeated by the British, it nonetheless radicalized the nationalist agenda.[11] In the general election of 1918, the nationalist party, Sinn Féin, won a majority of seats and proclaimed itself the first Irish Parliament, issuing a declaration of independence.[12] The Irish Volunteers morphed into a self-declared national army of

9 When discussing the conflict in Northern Ireland, it is important to clarify the commonly referenced terms. A nationalist is most likely Catholic and is in favour of a unified Ireland, independent from British rule. A unionist, on the other hand, is most likely Protestant, and is in favour of Northern Ireland remaining a part of the United Kingdom, under British rule. The terms republican and loyalist denote the more radical factions of nationalists and unionists, respectively. It is also important to qualify the term 'paramilitary' in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, as there is an important distinction to be made. As Peter Neumann (Spring 2002) points out, while outside Northern Ireland the term generally refers to "militias that are organized, or controlled, by the security forces," inside Northern Ireland it refers to "sub-state groups that use violence for political ends."

10 For a succinct history of the conflict in Ireland, see Richard Killeen, *A Short History of Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 2003). For a detailed analysis of the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland, see Michael Hughes, *Ireland Divided: The Roots of the Modern Irish Problem* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

11 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-13.

12 Ibid., 13-15.

the Republic, renamed themselves the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and began a military campaign against the British. In 1920, the bitter guerrilla war between the IRA and British forces led the British to partition Ireland into 'North' and 'South' Ireland; 'South Ireland' would become a Republic in 1949.

From 1920 to 1967, Northern Ireland's Protestant unionist majority dominated the devolved parliamentary assembly at Stormont, marginalizing Catholics politically, culturally, and economically.[13] By the late 1960s, however, a grassroots civil rights movement inspired by the teachings of Martin Luther King in the United States began to develop, seeking equal rights for all citizens of Northern Ireland. Unionists, however, saw the movement as a threat to their state and security – as yet another attempt by radical republicans to destroy the Northern Irish state. In response, loyalist groups began to form, seeking to provoke a sectarian clarification to the civil rights movement.[14] Conflict between the nationalist and unionist communities soon erupted. By 14 August 1969, intensifying violence had led the unionist regime to request the British army be deployed to regain order. While initially welcomed by the nationalist community[15], the relationship quickly soured due to heavy-handedness by the Army.[16]

In the face of increasing repression by the unionist government and widespread nationalist mistrust of British police and military forces, a new paramilitary organization emerged to fill the protection void of the nationalist community. An offshoot of the historic Irish Republican Army of the early 1920s, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), quickly developed a radical *raison d'être* that went beyond communal defence, launching a systematic offensive against British forces in 1971.[17] In turn, British forces initiated a counter-insurgency

13 For a full discussion, see: Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press Limited, 1990).

14 Marc Mulholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67-68. See also: Patrick Bishop and Eamon Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi Books, 1989), 100; Purdie, 214-217.

15 Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1972), 172.

16 Peter Taylor, *Provos: the IRA and Sinn Fein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 78-80.

17 Richard Killeen, *A Short History of Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Mc-

campaign to root out paramilitarism in Northern Ireland. The period 1968-1998, commonly dubbed 'The Troubles,' would see some of the worst paramilitary violence in Irish history, claiming the lives of at least 3,700 people and injuring over 30,000 more.[18] This period of violence came to an end on 10 April 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Contemporary State of Affairs

Mac Ginty et al. remind us that "[r]eaching a peace deal is not the same as reaching peace."[19] The peace process in Northern Ireland exemplifies this statement. The Good Friday Agreement was signed by the British and Irish governments and was supported by the majority of political parties in Northern Ireland. It was approved in a referendum by 71 percent of the voters in Northern Ireland and 94 percent of voters in the Irish Republic.[20] It established a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland, detailed police reform, formed a new bill of rights, and addressed a demilitarization agenda aimed at putting all paramilitary arms beyond use. Most importantly, the Agreement obliged all participating parties to resolve political differences through peaceful and democratic means.

To be sure, the Good Friday Agreement has contributed to an overall decrease in paramilitary-related deaths (see appendix, Figure 1.1). However, empirical data reveals that 'security-related incidents,' a term used by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to denote paramilitary-related incidents, either increased or remained constant in the post-Good Friday Agreement period through to 2003. For example, bombing incidents spiked in the years 2000-2003, reaching an all-time high in the 2001-2002 period. Incidents decreased after 2002 and in recent years have decreased even further (Figure 1.2). Shooting incidents have decreased since spiking in 2000-2003, but

Millan, 2003), 115.

18 Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, Second Edition (London: Penguin Books, 2007), xvii-xviii.

19 Roger Mac Ginty, Orla Muldoon, and Neil Ferguson, "No War, No Peace: Northern Ireland after the Agreement," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2007): 1.

20 English, *Armed Struggle*, 301.

remained fairly consistent until the 2006-2007 statistic period, with only an approximate 36 percent reduction from pre-Good Friday Agreement levels (Figure 1.3). Explosives, ammunition, and firearms finds remained constant, with the exception of 2005/2006, which saw a significant rise in finds (Figure 1.4). The 2006/2007 period saw a substantial reduction in firearms and ammunition finds, though explosives finds spiked upwards that same year. These statistics embody Mac Ginty's statement, revealing that reaching agreement does not guarantee the implementation of that agreement.[21]

The Good Friday Agreement, Ambiguity, and its Critics

As noted above, the Good Friday Agreement has become infamous for its use of constructive ambiguity in the crafting of political settlement in Northern Ireland. Varying levels of ambiguity can be seen in some of the most important aspects of the Agreement, not least of which include the implementation of paramilitary decommissioning, the procedures to be followed to remove those parties from office which are found to be engaged in violence or undemocratic activity, and the devolution of policing. However, this built-in ambiguity has become contentious: while proponents praise the Agreement for its breadth of participation, critics have argued that the Agreement's deliberately vague language has rendered its depth of commitment inadequate.

One of the biggest areas of ambiguity left open by the Agreement was the decommissioning of paramilitary arsenals. James Dingley notes that while the Agreement, and its founders, seemed to imply decommissioning was an essential part of the Agreement, "in practice it did not actually say that."[22] The operative clause of the Agreement reads:

> All participants … reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent

21 Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Statistics Relating to the Security Situation: Statistical Report No. 6*, National Statistics Publication (Belfast, 2006), 1-7.

22 James Dingley, "The Road to Peace? Northern Ireland after the Belfast Agreement: Causes of Failure," *Democracy and Security* 2, no. 2 (2006): 270.

> Commission, and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.[23]

Nowhere in the above passage, nor in any other section of the Agreement, is decommissioning presented as a necessary condition. The ambiguity of this passage allowed the republican party Sinn Féin, most often seen as the political wing of the PIRA, to argue that the Good Friday Agreement does not *require* decommissioning, but rather only that the parties use their influence to attain it.[24] When unionists later refused to enter into power sharing in the absence of decommissioning, Sinn Féin argued that delays in establishing devolution and its attendant institutions meant that republicans did not have enough time to establish trust in such institutions, and as such they ought not be coerced into giving up their sole means of community self-protection (i.e. their physical force capabilities).[25] Instead, Sinn Féin contended that because they were a democratically elected party which was separate from the PIRA, they had the right to participate in government.

Sinn Féin's argument was further bolstered by yet more ambiguity within the Agreement, this time with regards to the procedures to be followed to remove those parties from office which are found to be engaged in violence or undemocratic activity. The Agreement clearly imposes conditions on the ability of political parties to hold office: "Those who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office under these provisions."[26] David Trimble, former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), points out that the "cross-reference between office and decommissioning is also included in the

23 The Good Friday Agreement, Decommissioning, paragraph 3.

24 Jonathan Stevenson, "Irreversible Peace in Northern Ireland?," *Survival* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 11.

25 Ibid.

26 The Good Friday Agreement, Strand 1, paragraph 25.

Agreement."[27]

However, ambiguity lies in the Agreement's outlining of the *procedures* for exclusion or removal of those parties found to be engaged in non-democratic or violent activity; it merely states that removal requires a vote in the Assembly on a cross-community basis. This means that no matter what a political party does, it can only be removed if both the opposition community, as well as its own community, vote to remove it. For example, if the PIRA failed to decommission its weapons and Sinn Féin could not effectively distance itself from the group, they could only be removed if their nationalist brethren in the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) agreed – an unlikely scenario. This ambiguity was likely built into the Agreement by the Irish and British governments to ensure Sinn Féin would become a signatory (as they surely acknowledged it would be impossible for Sinn Féin to adequately demonstrate complete autonomy from the PIRA). This lack of substantive procedure enabled the PIRA to remain armed while Sinn Féin shared power in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

As Jonathan Stevenson notes, the "blend of vague off-stage representations and obscure precatory formal terms … permitted unionists and republicans alike to construe the Agreement's language however they wished."[28] The consequent result was political deadlock, with Sinn Féin refusing to pressure the PIRA into decommissioning without power sharing, while unionists refused to enter into power sharing without decommissioning. The Executive was suspended on numerous occasions, leading to serious delays in the full implementation of the Agreement.[29] Writing in 2002, James Dingley, a vocal critic of the Agreement, argued that the equivocation over PIRA decommissioning "suggests that the process itself might actually be considered a triumph

27 David Trimble, "The Belfast Agreement," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 1137 (April 1999): 1167.

28 Stevenson, "Irreversible Peace": 11-12.

29 The Assembly has been suspended on four occasions: 11 February 2000 – 30 May 2000; 10 August 2001 (24 hour suspension); 22 September 2001 (24 hour suspension); and, 14 October 2002 – 7 May 2007. Thus, the Assembly has only operated intermittently, and has been suspended more often than it has been running.

for PIRA violence over politics."[30]

The deadlock only deepened as more issues were added to the political mix. The issue of devolution of policing from Britain to Northern Ireland became intertwined with the issue of decommissioning when unionists began to refuse police reform without progress on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. The Agreement states that policing "arrangements should be based on principles of protection of human rights and professional integrity and should be unambiguously accepted and actively supported by the entire community."[31] Sinn Féin had long argued that, without substantive police reforms, they would continue to refuse to recognize the largely unionist Northern Ireland police service, which they saw as instruments of the unionist state and alien to the nationalist population. Unionists, however, argued that police reform could not go forward if paramilitary groups held onto their weapons. Once again, both parties became trapped in political deadlock, with Sinn Féin refusing to recognize an unreformed police force and unionists refusing to implement reform without decommissioning. Dingley argues that these political deadlocks are the result of "clever word games and spin by politicians and senior civil servants [which] have created an, in some ways, worse situation, largely because real, substantive issues were ducked."[32]

To be sure, devolution of policing remains a contentious issue to this day. While republicans have now recognized the police service, unionists paradoxically now refuse to support devolution – once again, a consequence of ambiguity within the Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement states that "the British Government remains ready in principle, *with the broad support of the political parties* … to devolve responsibility for policing and justice issues."[33] However, the Good Friday Agreement has no mechanism to guarantee that political parties will grant the British Government the ability to devolve policing. Unionists have manipulated this to their advantage, using the issue of

30 James Dingley, "Peace in Our Time? The Stresses and Strains on the Northern Ireland Peace Process," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, no. 6 (2002): 357.

31 The Good Friday Agreement, Policing and Justice, paragraph 2.

32 Dingley, "Constructive Ambiguity": 1.

33 The Good Friday Agreement, Policing and Justice, paragraph 7 (emphasis added).

devolution of policing as leverage over their nationalist rivals in other political negotiations.

Thus, critics of the Good Friday Agreement have much ammunition to demonstrate that the constructive ambiguity which was fashioned into the Agreement has been the primary source of its implementation delays. It is the ambiguity, they claim, which alienated republican and loyalist politicians from one another and led to political deadlock on the key issues of the Agreement, from decommissioning to police reform. They point to statistics provided by the PSNI (as detailed above) as demonstrable proof that paramilitary violence has been unaffected despite the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. What we are seeing, the critics claim, is merely a new PIRA strategy of periods of constitutional politics interspersed with periods of violence.[34]

Analysis of Criticisms and the Merits of Ambiguity

Although critics are quick to point to the statistics on paramilitary-related violence to strengthen their arguments against the Good Friday Agreement, these statistics must be carefully scrutinized. It is true that levels of violence increased in the post-Good Friday Agreement period, but the kinds of violence executed across the region were distinctly different. While violence continued (and continues) to exist across the region, *inter-communal* conflict has decreased over time. The strategic use of "punishment attacks" by paramilitary groups sheds light on this contradictory situation. This vigilante style of justice enforcement, while not new to the region, has been the enforcement method of choice of paramilitary groups on both sides of the conflict to 'police' their territories since 1998 and has become known, and to some degree accepted, as an "alternative justice system" in the region.[35] This alternative system possesses a hierarchical sanctions structure: attacks escalate from low-level sanctions, such as threats or curfews, to medium-level sanctions, such as exiles and beatings, and culminate in rather exceptionally violent attacks, such as kneecappings. Crucially,

34 Dingley, "Peace in Our Time?": 370.

35 Colin Knox, "See No Evil, Hear No Evil: Insidious Paramilitary Violence in Northern Ireland," *The British Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 1 (2002): 173.

punishment attacks are generally *not inflicted upon rival paramilitary groups*, and as such have "implicitly been regarded by state actors as a 'tolerable,' if distasteful, form of violence and a necessary price to pay during the period of reform and transition."[36] Colin Knox argues this form of violence has been able to thrive in Northern Ireland because of a government policy of "see no evil, hear no evil," which has been taken up given the political stakes at hand in the long term.[37] The government and police services have elected to turn a blind eye so as not to derail the current political peace process and ceasefire, waiting patiently for political institutions to stabilize. Once these institutions have become entrenched, the logic continues, the police service will be free to take a more aggressive approach in combating criminal activity of all kinds without the risk of spoiler groups undermining their legitimacy.[38]

While the ethics of such an approach are certainly debatable, the strategy appears to be working: violence has become less and less severe (i.e. has deescalated from murder to punishment attacks and beatings) and is increasingly non-sectarian in nature.[39] What is more, the number of paramilitary-related deaths has decreased significantly (Figure 1.1). In other words, the conflict has been transforming itself from a military enterprise into what can more appropriately be called a criminal enterprise. Furthermore, as state institutions develop and trust is built between both communities of Northern Ireland, trends indicate that absolute levels of violence are on the decline (Figures 1.2 and 1.3). These facts are testament to the improving security situation in Northern Ireland following the Agreement.

Nevertheless, James Dingley argues that, at root, the Good Friday Agreement is a failure because "[t]he fundamental philosophical problems…behind the Troubles have yet to be resolved."[40] This statement, however, implicitly assumes that the fundamental conflict between the nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland

36 Neil Jarman, "From War to Peace? Changing Patterns of Violence in Northern Ireland 1990-2003," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (2004): 424.

37 Knox, "See No Evil": 164.

38 Jarman, "From War to Peace?": 424.

39 Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twelfth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*, Section 5.

40 Dingley, "The Road to Peace?": 269.

are actually resolvable. In fact, they *cannot* be resolved – Northern Ireland cannot be both united with the Republic of Ireland and remain a part of Britain at the same time. The conflict in Northern Ireland is so entrenched precisely because it hinges on mutually exclusive national identities: the unionists identify with and wish to remain a part of the United Kingdom; the nationalists identify with and wish to reunite with the Republic of Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement acknowledges the legitimacy of both aspirations and seeks to address the substantive issues upon which mutual agreement *can* be reached, such as power-sharing, the creation of a charter of human rights, and the need for an end to violence. Arguing that the Agreement is a failure because it does not solve a fundamentally unsolvable problem is not only unreasonable, it is counterproductive.

Indeed, the Good Friday Agreement must be seen as a means, albeit sometimes of limited effectiveness, to achieve greater security: while the full implementation of the Agreement was confounded on a number of fronts and remains uncertain in some ways, the *process* of arriving at the Agreement has made gains in security less and less reversible.[41] In the words of George Mitchell, one of the primary architects of the Agreement, "It is important to recognize that the Agreement does not, by itself, provide or guarantee a durable peace, political stability, or reconciliation. It makes them possible."[42] Thus, the Agreement must be analyzed not as a stand alone document, but in tandem with the significance of arriving at that agreement itself. Its ability to bring radical nationalists and radical unionists together in a political contract is of unprecedented value for the overall peace process in Northern Ireland.

The most obvious accomplishment of the Good Friday Agreement process is the facilitative role it has played in reducing inter-communal violence and enabling a prolonged period of relative peace between the two communities of Northern Ireland. It has transformed the confrontational discourse which perpetuated the conflict-laden attitudes seen throughout the Troubles and replaced it with a common

41 Stevenson, "Irreversible Peace": 5-6.

42 George Mitchell, "Toward Peace in Northern Ireland," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 1137 (1999): 1139.

discourse, however watered-down, of consensus government.[43] This is a crucial contribution: as republicans and loyalists alike become incorporated into the Northern Irish state and as their agendas begin to be addressed in the constitutional realm, recourse to violence is not only delegitimized, but also made unnecessary. The PIRA's historic decommissioning of September 2005, along with the election of Martin McGuiness, a former PIRA commander, as Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland in May 2007, exemplifies that once the republican movement could believe, credibly, that it could fulfill its objectives through democratic politics, it would make a move to disarm its militants. By giving a voice to all parties involved in the conflict and transforming the political discourse from confrontation to consensus, space was created for all parties to achieve their political goals in the absence of violence.

This consensus and political space has in turn created and entrenched norms of non-violence over time. A norm is a "standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity."[44] The stability of political and social institutions rests on the existence and maintenance of these commonly perceived norms; they help regulate the conduct of actors and act as informal controls on an actor's behaviour, guiding an actor's perception of what constitutes appropriate behaviour. As norms are created and observed, they become more deeply entrenched in the political arena and throughout society at large. In turn, the costs of disobeying norms increase over time. By breaking the discourse of confrontation and creating an environment which values constitutional change, new norms of non-violence were created to guide behavior amongst Northern Ireland's various actors. Once political institutions were established, and political parties could work for change constitutionally, norms of non-violence took on increasing permanence.

The pinnacle of this process came on 28 January 2007, when republicans officially recognized and supported the police service in Northern Ireland; such recognition was unprecedented in the republican

43 Dingley, "Peace in Our Time?," 362.

44 Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 891.

movement's history. Similarly, loyalist paramilitaries have increasingly been applying their efforts to community development and restorative justice initiatives, as evidenced by recent projects undertaken by the Ulster Political Research Group, the political wing of the Ulster Defense Association.[45] Both loyalist and republican groups have also engaged the community by acting as stewards during protests and parades.[46] These actions indicate that, by acknowledging the legitimacy of the political aspirations of both of Northern Ireland's communities, the Good Friday Agreement has enabled norms of non-violence to grow and develop in the region. As these norms have become learned and observed, they have gained increased permanence in Northern Irish society. As domestic and international expectations of continued improvements in cooperation between the two communities remain high, a return to violence by Northern Ireland's main paramilitary groups seems highly unlikely.

Drawing Conclusions

Paramilitary-related violence and crime remains a protracted problem across Northern Ireland, despite the signing of the Good Friday Agreement some eleven years ago. At the same time, however, the security situation is rapidly stabilizing. Bombings, shootings, and other paramilitary-related offences are on the decline. What is more, a relatively stable power-sharing executive has been running at Stormont for nearly two years, with the republican party Sinn Féin successfully sharing power with the loyalist Democratic Unionist Party. While critics argue the Good Friday Agreement's ambiguity rendered it ineffective, this paper has argued that such ambiguity was essential for the advancement of the Northern Ireland peace process. And while ambiguity may have provided – and still provides – delays in the implementation of numerous Agreement obligations, overtime it has enabled a non-violent political environment which has encouraged

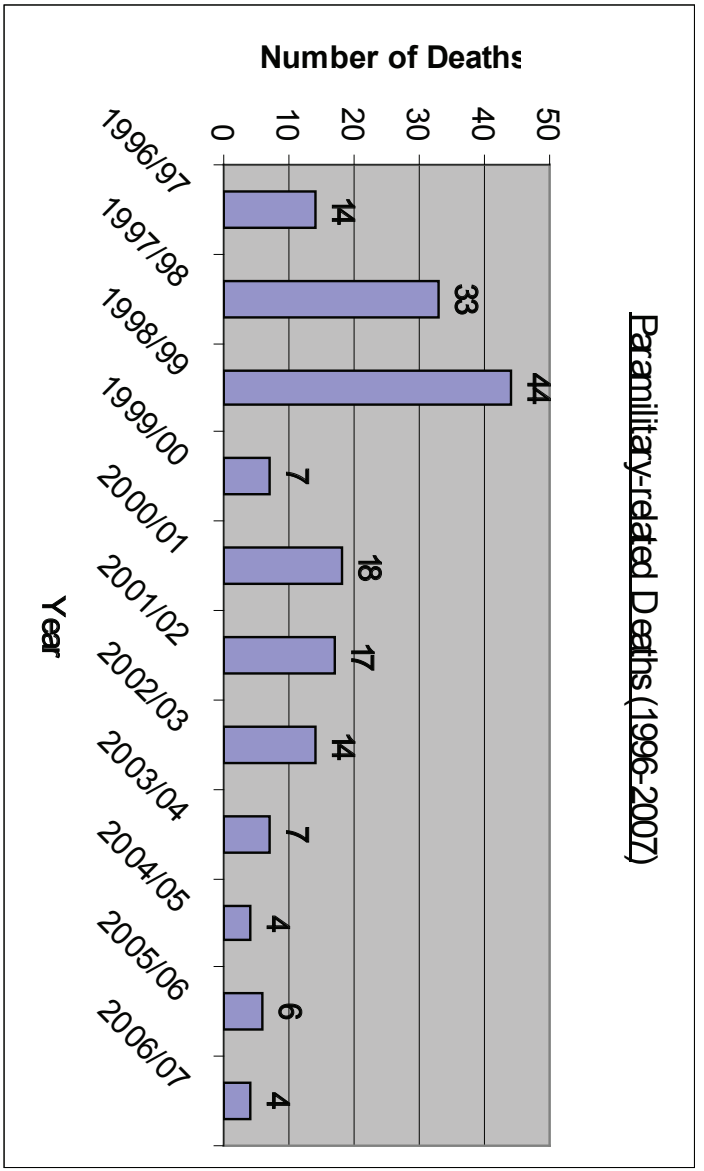
45 Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twelfth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*, paragraph 4.7.

46 Independent Monitoring Commission, *Thirteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*, paragraphs 2.13, 2.25, 2.29, 4.7, and 4.10.

both sides of the conflict to believe, credibly, that they can fulfill their political agenda without recourse to violence. It has thereby entrenched norms of non-violence over time, dramatically improving the overall security situation in the region and advancing the peace process. The political poets of Northern Ireland successfully implemented the "art of the fudge" to bring greater security to the region's divided communities – that much is clear to see.

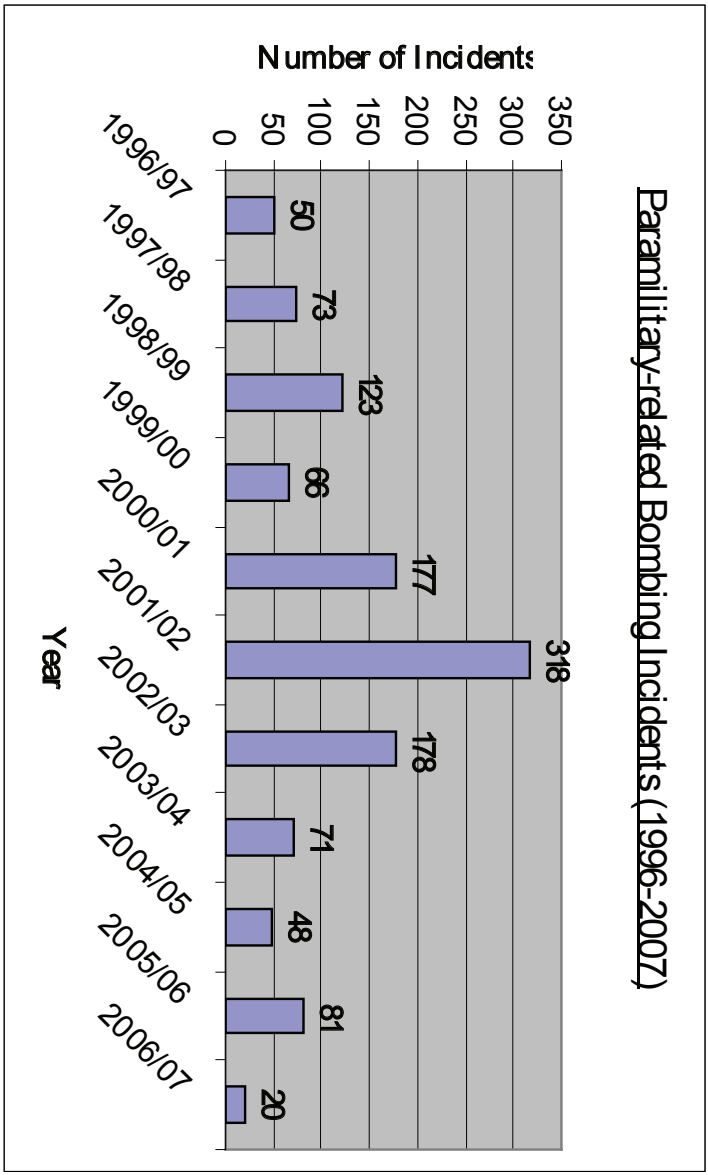
Appendix

Figure 1.1



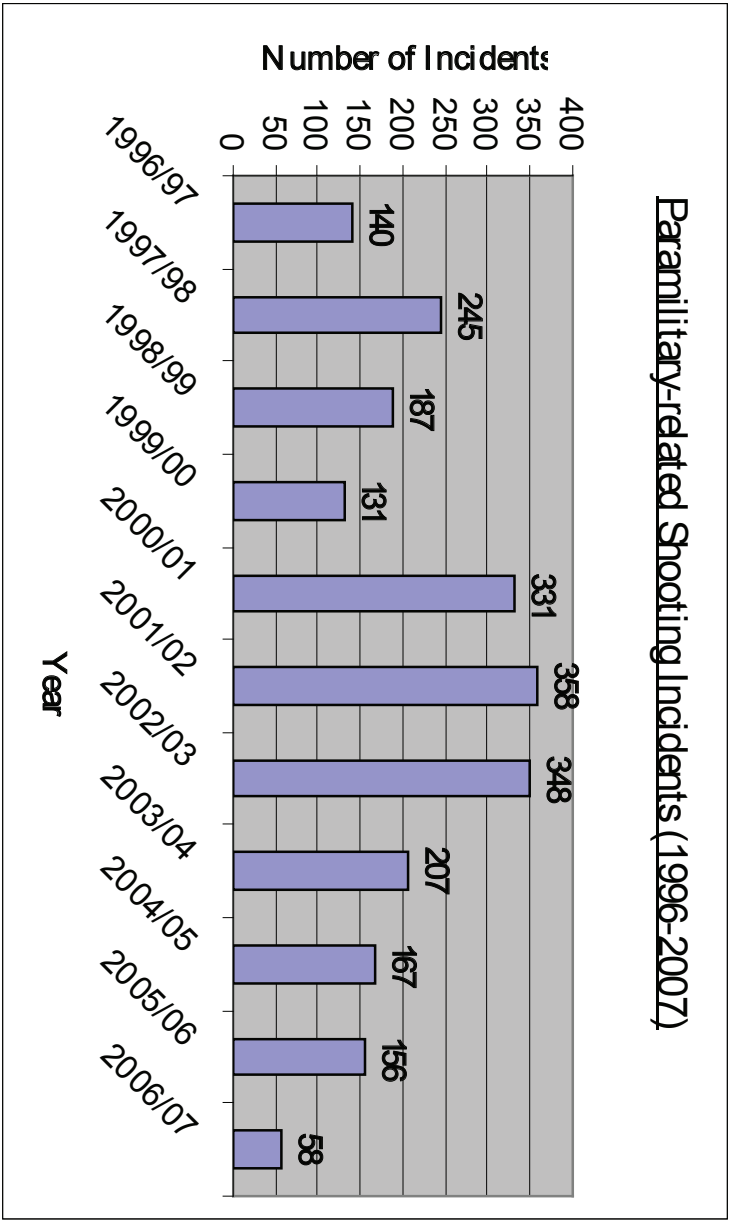
DATA SOURCE: Police Service of Northern Ireland

Figure 1.2



DATA SOURCE: Police Service of Northern Ireland

Figure 1.3



DATA SOURCE: Police Service of Northern Ireland

Figure 1.4

Paramilitary-related Firearms, Ammunition, and Explosive Finds (1996-2006)

Year	Firearms	Ammunition (rounds)	Explosives (kgs)
1996/97	102	12,043	2462.6
1997/98	97	9984	661.7
1998/99	104	13,416	778.4
1999/00	110	12,414	240.4
2000/01	134	12,970	98.9
2001/02	96	9241	96.2
2002/03	129	18,549	19.9
2003/04	148	19,017	92.1
2004/05	81	23,822	26.5
2005/06	365	112,748	35
2006/07	55	5,086	132.2

Bibliography

Abbott, Kenneth, and Duncan Snidal. "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance." *International Organization* 54, no. 3 (2000): 421-456.

Berridge, Geoff, and Alan James. *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, Second Edition. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003.

Bishop, Patrick, and Eamon Mallie. *The Provisional IRA*. London: Corgi Books, 1989.

Dingley, James. "Peace in Our Time? The Stresses and Strains on the Northern Ireland Peace Process." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, no. 6 (2002): 357-382.

Dingley, James. "Constructive Ambiguity and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland." *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 13, no. 1 (2005): 1-23.

Dingley, James. "The Road to Peace? Northern Ireland after the Belfast Agreement: Causes of Failure." *Democracy and Security* 2, no. 2 (2006): 263-286.

English, Richard. *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

Fischhendler, Itay. "Ambiguity in Transboundary Environmental Dispute Resolution." *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 79-97.

Hughes, Michael. *Ireland Divided: The Roots of the Modern Irish*

Problem. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twelfth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*, Ordered by the House of Commons, The Stationary Office, 2006.

Independent Monitoring Commission, *Thirteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission,* Ordered by the House of Commons, The Stationary Office, 2007.

Jarman, Neil. "From War to Peace? Changing Patterns of Violence in Northern Ireland 1990-2003." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (2004): 420-438.

Killeen, Richard. *A Short History of Modern Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and McMillan, 2003.

Knox, Colin. "See No Evil, Hear No Evil: Insidious Paramilitary Violence in Northern Ireland." *The British Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 1 (2002): 164-185.

Mac Ginty, Roger, Orla Muldoon, and Neil Ferguson. "No War, No Peace: Northern Ireland after the Agreement." *Political Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2007): 1-11.

Mitchell, George. "Toward Peace in Northern Ireland." *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 1137 (1999): 1136-1144.

Moloney, Ed. *A Secret History of the IRA*, Second Edition. London: Penguin Books, 2007.

Mulholland, Marc. *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History*. London: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Neumann, Peter R. "The Imperfect Peace: Explaining Paramilitary Violence in Northern Ireland." *Low Intensity Conflict and Law*

Enforcement 11, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 116-138.

Northern Ireland Office, The Good Friday Agreement, 1998. Document can be accessed at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm.

O'Brien, Conor Cruise. *States of Ireland*. London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1972.

Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Statistics Relating to the Security Situation: Statistical Report No. 6*, National Statistics Publication, 2007.

Purdie, Bob. *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press Limited, 1990.

Stevenson, Jonathan. "Irreversible Peace in Northern Ireland?" *Survival* 42, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 5-26.

Taylor, Peter. *Provos: the IRA and Sinn Fein*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

Trimble, David. "The Belfast Agreement." *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 1137 (April 1999): 1145-1170.