
The United States and post-Agreement Northern Ireland, 2001–6

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ABSTRACT

On his inauguration in 2001, it was widely assumed that George W. Bush's presidency would signal the end of the United States' activist diplomacy in the Northern Ireland peace process. As such, it is unsurprising that the few existing accounts of the Bush administration's role in Northern Ireland have characterised its contribution as being negligible. This article will demonstrate, however, that the Bush administration has had a significant impact upon the politics of post-Agreement Northern Ireland, and that this is due to the autonomy that the White House grants to its special envoys to Northern Ireland. The Bush administration's role in post-Agreement Northern Ireland will also be compared to President Clinton's contribution to the peace process. Having completed the comparison, this article will conclude by arguing that in contrast to its self-described role as an 'honest broker', on balance, the United States has tended to side with the Irish government when disputes have arisen between Dublin and London.

INTRODUCTION¹

Given the pomp and circumstance that attended President Bill Clinton's involvement in the Belfast Agreement,² it would seem safe to assume that the Bush

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¹Interviews for this article were conducted in Washington DC, New York, Belfast, Dublin, London and Oxford, between December 2005 and June 2007. All information was given on the condition of anonymity, and interviewees also chose how they would be identified (e.g., 'US official', 'former NIO political director', etc.).

²*The agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations*, 10 April 1998. This agreement, also known as the Good Friday Agreement, the Stormont Agreement and the British–Irish Agreement, will be referred to throughout this paper as the Belfast Agreement.

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administration's role in the Northern Ireland peace process would be far more muted. Although inconspicuousness does not necessarily indicate inactivity, it is far from surprising that US discretion in the post-Agreement period has led one commentator to consider the Bush administration's contribution to the seemingly interminable peace process to be negligible,³ and led another to describe one US special envoy to Northern Ireland as 'a third wheel on a rear axle'.⁴ Whilst such comments are ostensibly reasonable, careful analysis of the Bush administration's involvement in the post-Agreement period renders such assumptions erroneous.

This article's purpose is twofold. It will demonstrate that whilst George W. Bush has not been personally involved in the peace process in any significant way, the autonomy granted to US special envoys to Northern Ireland by the White House has meant that Bush's first two special envoys—Richard Haass and Mitchell Reiss, respectively⁵—adopted stances that had a significant impact upon post-Agreement politics in Northern Ireland. Moreover, it will be shown that these stances were at times inimical to the British and Irish governments' policy preferences. The actions of President Bush's two special envoys will also be compared to the Clinton administration's role in Northern Ireland. In the light of that comparison, it will be demonstrated that both administrations' self-described roles as 'honest brokers' in the peace process are contestable, as both administrations have displayed a marked preference for supporting Dublin when disputes have arisen between the Irish and British governments.

BILL CLINTON AND THE NORTHERN IRISH PEACE PROCESS

As many accounts have noted, any US desire to intervene in Northern Irish affairs was trumped by the US–UK 'special relationship', a relationship that became of paramount importance with the onset of the Cold War.⁶ Although President Ronald Reagan did put some pressure on Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to sign the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985,⁷ the first real break with the traditional policy of non-interference came with Bill Clinton's presidency. Clinton first raised the possibility of a US visa for Gerry Adams in an effort to outbid Jerry Brown ethnically in the New York US presidential primary, but Clinton staffers showed scant enthusiasm for the idea during the early days of his first administration.⁸ Moreover, apparently feeling that foreign policy was not his *métier*, Clinton initially delegated much foreign policy responsibility to officials at the State Department,

³Lee Marsden, 'Promoting democracy in Northern Ireland: George Bush and the peace process', *Political Quarterly*, 77 (1) (2006), 61–70.

⁴Brian Feeney, 'Trust and confidence isn't quite there yet', *Irish News*, 2 February 2006.

⁵Paula J. Dobriansky, Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs at the State Department, assumed the position of United States Special Envoy to Northern Ireland on 15 February 2007.

⁶Seán Cronin, *Washington's Irish policy 1916–1986: independence, partition and neutrality* (Dublin, 1987); Andrew J. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict 1968–1995* (Belfast, 1995); Jack Holland, *The American connection: US guns, money, and influence in Northern Ireland* (Boulder, 1999); Paul Arthur, *Special relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem* (Belfast, 2000); William Hazleton, 'Encouragement from the sidelines: Clinton's role in the Good Friday Agreement', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 11 (2000), 103–19; 106; Joseph E. Thompson, *Policy and Northern Ireland: a saga of peacebuilding* (Westport, CT and London, 2001); John Dumbrell, *A special relationship: Anglo-American relations in the Cold War and after* (Basingstoke, 2001); Timothy J. Lynch, *Turf war: the Clinton administration and Northern Ireland* (Aldershot, 2004); F.M. Carroll *The American presence in Ulster: a diplomatic history, 1796–1996* (Washington, DC, 2005).

⁷For a good account of this, see John A. Farrell, *Tip O'Neill and the Democratic century* (Boston, 2001), 623–4.

⁸Conor O'Clery, *The greening of the White House: the inside story of how America tried to bring peace to Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), 28.

Pentagon and National Security Council (NSC).⁹ A series of foreign policy *débâcles*, however, forced Clinton to reconsider his bit part on the world stage.

Several foreign policy disasters occurred during Clinton's first term in office, the most notable being Haiti, Somalia and Bosnia. In response to a growing perception that his foreign policy was 'ostentatiously feckless',¹⁰ Clinton soon set about looking for a foreign policy initiative that he could put his imprimatur upon. It soon became apparent that Northern Ireland was a 'win-win' situation, but not in the way that Clinton's staff director of the NSC, Nancy Soderberg, often described it:¹¹ it was a low-risk initiative with domestic benefits, as it was likely to appease both Irish-American congressional Democrats in general and Ted Kennedy in particular, and the latter was chairman of the vitally important Senate Labor Committee.¹²

It was in this environment then, that Gerry Adams's first visa to the US was issued. The issuance of the various visas to Sinn Féin members between 1994 and 1995 caused much consternation for then British prime minister John Major and amongst Foreign Office officials, but Dixon has argued that British anger over these decisions was a contrivance designed to make the leadership of Sinn Féin feel that the 'pan-nationalist front' of the Irish government, constitutional nationalism and Irish-America had scored victories over Perfidious Albion. With their fictitious victories in the bag, the Republican movement would be inclined to continue supporting the peace process, and the longer the Republicans supported it, the harder it would be to go back to war.¹³ Dixon's thesis is reasonable—authoritative accounts have shown that the British government was a far from reluctant partner in the peace process, and Guelke has argued that American and British aims in the peace process were congruent¹⁴—but he overestimates the level of choreography between the three governments. Speaking on condition of anonymity, a senior Irish official argued that British officials were genuinely taken aback by the Clinton administration's decision to grant Gerry Adams a visa in 1994:

I think the British would have come to realise that that it [granting the visa] was the right thing to do, but it cost them an awful lot of pain at the time... I remember the British ambassador in Washington at the time was a man called [Sir Robin] Renwick. I remember after that Sunday when those decisions were made...he

⁹John F. Harris, *The survivor: Bill Clinton in the White House* (New York, 2005), 121. This also fits with Guelke's contention that US involvement in Northern Ireland that resulted in a peace agreement would enhance the Clinton administration's credibility when attempting to settle other conflicts. See Adrian Guelke, 'The United States, Irish-Americans and the Northern Ireland peace process', *International Affairs* 72 (3) (1996), 521–36: 536.

¹⁰Harris, *The survivor*, 192.

¹¹Soderberg felt that granting the visa was a 'win-win' situation because if it was successful, it would facilitate the Republican movement's transition from violence to fully constitutional politics. If this transition did not occur after Adams had been given the visa, however, Soderberg felt that it would be easy for the US administration to drive a wedge between the Republican movement and its US supporters. Whilst this reasoning might have applied to the Republican movement's new friends in corporate America, it did not apply to its more traditional supporters, such as members of NORAI, who at the time were largely opposed to the direction in which Adams was taking the movement.

¹²Lynch, *Turf wars*, 55; Andrew J. Wilson, 'From the Beltway to Belfast: the Clinton administration, Sinn Féin and the Northern Ireland peace process', *New Hibernia Review* 1 (3) (1997), 23–39: 30.

¹³Paul Dixon, 'Rethinking the international and Northern Ireland: a critique', in Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds), *A farewell to arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement* (Manchester, 2006, 2nd edn), 409–26: 418–19; Dixon, 'Political skills or lying manipulation? The choreography of the Northern Ireland peace process', *Political Studies* 50 (2002), 725–41; and Dixon, *Northern Ireland: the politics of war and peace* (Basingstoke, 2001), 254–5.

¹⁴Ed Moloney, *A secret history of the IRA* (New York, 2002); Peter Neumann, *Britain's long war: British strategy and the Northern Ireland conflict 1969–98* (Hampshire, 2003); Guelke, 'The United States', 536.

came back into his embassy that following morning and he said, 'I no longer want the expression used in this embassy again that the United States and Britain have a unique relationship, because it's not true'. They were upset, they were embarrassed. They lost. And we won. And subsequently we all won.¹⁵

The three governments' aims might have ultimately been congruent, but the pan-nationalist front was far from a ruse: it did not secure Sinn Féin's ultimate aims—nor did the Irish government intend it to—but it did give the Irish government leverage over the British. A State Department official, active from the Clinton administration to the present day, described the United States' role in the peace process in the following terms:

On one level, it is a question of trying to accommodate both Catholic and Protestant communities. On another level...it's [as] much the relationship between Dublin and London. You could say, looking at it over the long haul, that our role is to help strengthen the weight of Dublin over the predominant weight of London. We never say this of course, but that is implicit in everything.¹⁶

British officials active during the Clinton administration also pour cold water on the notion that all three governments were always singing from the same hymn sheet.¹⁷ As one former official colourfully put it, Clinton 'is a s—t, but ultimately he is a thinking man's s—t', and the same official asserted that Clinton evinced a greater even-handedness when British officials explained that he would secure himself no legacy if his intervention in Northern Ireland was perceived to be tendentious.¹⁸ Another official explained that after the first visa was issued to Adams in 1994, the British attempted to co-opt the Americans, with the aim of getting them to support the British strategy. According to this official:

[T]he moment for me when it was clear that we finally, as it were, got the Americans where we wanted was after Tony Blair's election. I was authorised to meet Sinn Féin officials to try and find a way of getting them back into talks... We did an *aide-mémoire*, which answered the points, you know, what do we mean, what's the timescale for the talks, what's our position on the decommissioning of arms. We cleared this *aide-mémoire* with our Irish colleagues, and we showed it to our American colleagues... So I then had this meeting and gave it to [Martin] McGuinness, who said that he was very disappointed, and I said that I was very disappointed... Then immediately after the meeting, I spoke to my Irish colleagues, and I talked to my American colleagues in the embassy here [London] and said, 'These guys said they are very disappointed. We've answered all their questions, you know we have'... And at that point, the Americans, and the Irish, obviously went up to Sinn Féin and said, 'Look, the Brits have done the business, what's your problem?' And within a very short time from that we had the second ceasefire.¹⁹

¹⁵Interview with senior Irish official, November 2006.

¹⁶Interview with State Department official, December 2005.

¹⁷According to one Blair aide, 'It is fair to say that we managed to do a deal in spite of Clinton's interventions', see Con Coughlin, *American ally: Tony Blair and the War on Terror* (London, 2006), 38.

¹⁸Interview with former British official, February 2007. Note that in the wake of the visa issuance, Tony Lake—Clinton's National Security Advisor—sought to combat the perception that the administration was pro-nationalist by reaching out to unionist leaders. Andrew J. Wilson, 'The Billy Boys meet Slick Willy: the Ulster Unionist Party and the American dimension to the Northern Ireland peace process, 1994–9', *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 11 (2000), 121–36.

¹⁹Interview with former Northern Ireland Office (NIO) political director, February 2007.

With the ceasefire reinstated, Sinn Féin was admitted to the talks that would eventually lead to the Belfast Agreement. The talks would be chaired by former US senator George Mitchell. British officials are quick to praise Mitchell as a ‘model of impartiality’,²⁰ but they are equally quick to state that Mitchell’s role was not a creative one:

He [Mitchell] was a chairman, and a very good chairman...But as I say, he wasn’t a creative force...And apart from being a good chairman, I think his main benefit was that Washington felt, ‘Well, our man’s there, what else can we do?’ Number 10 [Downing Street] was sort of quite resistant to bringing in outsiders...I think others, others of us felt, ‘Well, this is good, we’ll co-opt these guys.’ From our perspective, a lot of this was about co-option.²¹

As previously stated, the political talks that Mitchell chaired did result in the Belfast Agreement, and UUP leader David Trimble has stated that President Clinton’s interventions during the talks helped to persuade him to sign the Agreement.²² Nevertheless, attempts to set up an Executive and Assembly were bedevilled by the unresolved issue of decommissioning, an issue that the British and Irish governments had fudged in order to get both the UUP and Sinn Féin to sign up to the Agreement. George Mitchell was recalled to Belfast in the summer of 1999 to break the impasse. The result of Mitchell’s review was Trimble’s decision to ‘jump first’ and go into government with Sinn Féin absent prior IRA decommissioning, his parachute being a post-dated letter of resignation as First Minister of the Executive should the IRA have not started disarming by February 2000.

Trimble’s decision to ‘jump first’ was partly motivated by the realisation that unionism needed to shed the perception that it was intransigent by occupying the moral high ground. If the IRA failed to begin decommissioning after Trimble had gone into government with Sinn Féin, Trimble hoped 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 agree to go into government with Sinn Féin prior to the Mitchell review.²³ When push came to shove, however, this scenario did not occur. When the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Mandelson, suspended the Assembly and Executive in order to obviate Trimble’s resignation, Clinton effectively sided with the Irish government against the decision. Trimble understood why the Irish government was angry with the suspension—the Assembly had allowed Sinn Féin to labour under the illusion that British sovereignty in Northern Ireland had been weakened, and the shattering of this illusion was unwelcome at a time when Sinn Féin had demonstrated an ability both to convince Fianna Fáil’s grassroots that its leadership was acting in an insufficiently nationalist manner and to make electoral inroads in the Republic.²⁴ Nevertheless, Trimble was angry with Clinton’s decision to support Dublin on this issue. He felt it was a hypocritical decision given Clinton’s comments to him before the Mitchell review, and in light of Mitchell’s own understanding, according to

²⁰Interview with former British official, February 2007.

²¹Interview with former NIO political director, February 2007. Note that this account conflicts with Dumbrell’s assertion that Tony Blair welcomed Clinton’s involvement. See John Dumbrell, ‘The new American connection: President George W. Bush and Northern Ireland’, in Cox, Guelke and Stephen, *A farewell to arms?*, 357–66: 358.

²²Wilson, ‘The Billy Boys’, 131.

²³Joe Carroll, ‘Tragedy if talks break down over sequencing, says Clinton’, *Irish Times*, 2 July 1999.

²⁴See Denis Coghlan, ‘Angry voters wait in long grass for FF’, *Irish Times*, 24 May 1999; Geraldine Kennedy, ‘Aherh vulnerable for first time since ’97 election’, *Irish Times*, 13 May 1999.

Seamus Mallon of the SDLP, that decommissioning should commence at the end of January.²⁵

Actions like these caused commentators such as Godson to question the Clinton administration's impartiality.²⁶ Granted, being an 'honest broker' does not mean slavish adherence to London's point of view, but Clinton's failure to support the British on the issue of suspension of the Assembly seemed odd in light of his earlier promises to Trimble and given Prime Minister Tony Blair's willingness to support the US president during both the Lewinsky affair and the war in Kosovo.²⁷ No. 10 was undoubtedly disappointed with Clinton's decision; but more disturbing was the revelation that British officials became reluctant to share intelligence with the Clinton administration, as they feared it might be passed along to Republicans.²⁸ Therefore, although Blair was unhappy to see his ideological ally leave the White House, there is some sense that the prime minister might have welcomed the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001, as the latter's presidency appeared to presage a return to the US policy of non-intervention in Northern Ireland.

RICHARD HAASS: RELUCTANT SHERRIFF?

At the beginning of George W. Bush's presidency, it appeared safe to assume that the US would adopt a more *laissez-faire* approach to Northern Ireland. Speaking to the British ambassador in Washington, future National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice expressed her desire to see Northern Ireland 'fixed' prior to the inauguration, and it has been stated that the Bush administration privately informed Downing Street that it had scant interest in an issue that it considered to be the sole responsibility of Britain.²⁹ Moreover, Bush's first special envoy, Richard Haass, had a track record with Northern Ireland, and it did not suggest that there would be extensive, high-level US involvement in the peace process.³⁰ Although Haass gave the Clinton administration 'one cheer' for its efforts in Northern Ireland, he felt that the bulk of the credit should go to local leaders.³¹ On balance, Haass was largely critical of Clinton's role in Northern Ireland, which he characterised as misguided and tendentious.³²

Upon becoming special envoy in 2001, Haass made it clear that any solution to Northern Ireland did not lie in Washington, and that it was up to the local leaders to strike a deal.³³ Events, however, would cause Haass to assume a more active role. Adams's decision to travel to Cuba against US advice in 2001 and the discovery of three IRA members in Colombia allegedly training FARC guerrillas³⁴ exactly one

²⁵Joe Carroll, 'Blow to peace process regretted by Clinton', *Irish Times*, 12 February 2000; Frank Millar, *David Trimble: the price of peace* (Dublin, 2004), 109–10; Frank Millar, 'Mallon still in search of key to the decommissioning deadlock', *Irish Times*, 13 April 2000.

²⁶Dean Godson, *Himself alone: David Trimble and the ordeal of unionism* (London, 2004), 611.

²⁷In fairness to Clinton, though, it was Blair who pushed him on the issue of Kosovo.

²⁸Raymond Seitz, *Over here* (London, 1998), 291; Godson, *Himself alone*, 686.

²⁹Christopher Meyer, *DC confidential* (London, 2005), 166; Coughlin, *American ally*, 118.

³⁰For his earlier views on Northern Ireland, see Richard N. Haass, *Conflicts unending: the United States and regional disputes* (London and New Haven, 1990).

³¹Richard N. Haass, 'The squandered presidency', *Foreign Affairs* 79(3) (2000), 136–41.

³²John Aloysius Farrell, 'Presidential, Adams Meet at Capitol', *Boston Globe*, 17 March 1995; 'Clinton's Foreign Policy', *Journal of Commerce* 4 November 1996.

³³Kevin Cullen, 'More trouble looms in Northern Ireland', *Boston Globe*, 22 June 2001; T.R. Reid, 'US changes tack towards N. Ireland; Bush limits role as trouble festers', *Washington Post*, 22 June 2001.

³⁴FARC, known in English as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, is a Communist revolutionary group that is also deemed to be a narco-terrorist organisation by the Colombian government, the US government and the European Union.

month before the 11 September terrorist attacks caused the Sinn Féin leader problems in the US, and one official has admitted that the administration's view of Adams 'dimmed' shortly thereafter.³⁵ Moreover, Haass's unwillingness to give Sinn Féin the benefit of the doubt in perpetuity was exposed on 11 September, when Haass—to borrow from the graffiti of south Belfast—told Adams to 'FARC off' as it were.³⁶ An Irish official who met with Haass on 11 September described the scene:

He [Haass] was coming into this office to meet the Taoiseach on the 11th of September 2001 at fifteen minutes past two...And the person who had been in the door at quarter to two, or half past one, was Gerry Adams. So as one was coming out the door and the other was coming in the door, the planes crashed into the World Trade Center...And September 11th had a significant effect on the whole thing because all of sudden terrorism...if there was perceived to be a certain tolerance or understanding with the Irish that went back generations, all of a sudden this became an absolute no-no. And Sinn Féin were quick to recognise that. And Haass was quick to make sure that they recognised that.³⁷

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—one of Adams's key allies in corporate America—and other Irish-American corporate executives. Realising that the Republican movement was on the back foot, the IRA announced its first act of decommissioning six weeks later.³⁸

Beyond his no-nonsense attitude to Sinn Féin, Haass appeared to possess a better understanding of unionism than most of his predecessors. In a speech in January 2002, Haass located growing unionist insecurity not in the oft-cited 'siege mentality' said to characterise Northern Ireland's unionists, but rather in more temporal concerns over housing, demography and economic uncertainty.³⁹ Moreover, Haass grasped the changing nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland. He argued that the conflict was no longer about the denial of civil rights to the nationalist community, but now turned upon differing conceptions of identity.⁴⁰

Prior to delivering the speech, Haass consulted with UUP leader David Trimble over its contents, a move that appeared to augur well for their relationship. Each, however, would soon find himself at odds with the other. According to US officials, Trimble's unpredictable and often unpleasant moods rendered him 'an enigma' to Haass.⁴¹ Worse still for Trimble, Haass's growing impatience with him occurred at a time when the special envoy was experiencing a *rapprochement* with Adams. Despite having initially adopted a tough line towards the Sinn Féin leader, according to US officials, over the course of his tenure Haass became 'enamoured' of Gerry Adams.⁴² When asked why Haass appeared to become so solicitous of Adams, a US official stated the following:

³⁵Jack Holland, 'Adams's Cuba visit, FARC episode anger Sinn Fein backers', *Irish Echo*, December 26, 2001–January 8, 2002; Conor O'Clery, 'The end of the affair', *Irish Times*, 12 March 2005.

³⁶Henry McDonald, Kamal Ahmed and Ed Vulliamy, 'Disarming Ulster: special report: how the IRA gave in to US arms pressure: America's threats crucial to historic move', *Observer*, 28 October 2001.

³⁷Interview with senior Irish official, November 2006.

³⁸Moloney, *Secret history*, 489–91.

³⁹Richard N. Haass, 'The Northern Ireland peace process', Address to the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, 7 January 2002, available at <http://www.state.gov/s/p/rem/7300.htm> (7 November 2005).

⁴⁰Haass, 'Northern Ireland peace process'.

⁴¹Interview with State Department official, December 2005.

⁴²Interview with US official, January 2006.

You know, London just got so solicitous of Adams...And when you'd go there and you talk to Blair and [Blair's chief of staff] Jonathan Powell at Number 10 and they were so in...and Gerry Adams is mesmerising, you know? And he'll spin a story and a narrative, and in it you just can't see how you could do anything other than give Gerry the sweeties he's asked for...They [No. 10] saw Northern Ireland only through Gerry Adams and David Trimble. Those were their interlocutors, and then through intelligence apparatus...He [Haass] did soften, and *he did back off the core US demand that they join policing and that they stop intimidating Catholic recruits, et cetera*...And he did get more solicitous of Adams. And part of it was, you know, he was getting short in the job. And just like Tony Blair when he started to get short in the job, you've got this legacy issue and you want to wrap up the deal, and the quickest way to wrap up the deal is to give Gerry Adams a pile of goodies. And he makes you believe this, he plays every leader this way is [that] if you just give him this little packet of things that he wants then you will go out as the one who gets the credit for bringing peace to Northern Ireland...He very much seduces his *very* sophisticated interlocutors into believing this.⁴³

The interviewee argues that Downing Street was equally entranced by Gerry Adams, but this individual also contends that Adams was not Blair and Powell's sole interlocutor in Northern Ireland—David Trimble was as well. This is where US policy begins to depart from British policy, as Haass became increasingly annoyed with Blair and Powell because he apparently felt that they were overly indulgent of the UUP leader.

Haass was not the only individual who felt this way. Although Trimble was their preferred leader of unionism, some Irish officials began to feel that he was becoming too costly to keep. With the British and Irish governments unable or unwilling to push the IRA on decommissioning, Trimble could only be kept alive as the leader of the UUP through measures such as the 2000 suspension of the Assembly, nugatory concessions on policing and by allowing the UUP leader to ban members of Sinn Féin from meetings of the North–South Ministerial Council. These measures were deeply unpopular with nationalist Ireland, as they left Fianna Fáil vulnerable to the accusation of not having defended northern nationalism adequately, and often led the SDLP into ill-advised battles with Sinn Féin for the hearts of northern nationalists. Moreover, although they kept David Trimble alive, these measures only allowed Trimble to barely sneak by in Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) meetings, as the only thing likely to silence his anti-Agreement critics within the UUP was the full decommissioning of IRA weaponry. This conundrum led one commentator to speculate in 2001 that the Irish government had developed a wandering eye.⁴⁴ As the following section of this paper will show, the Irish government and the United States did indeed make a cuckold out of David Trimble.

THE DUPING OF DAVID TRIMBLE

As the preceding section has shown, Haass became annoyed with David Trimble over the course of his tenure as special envoy. When asked why this apparently led Haass to prefer a deal between Sinn Féin and Ian Paisley's DUP, a State Department official stated that the cause of Haass's change of heart could be located in his

⁴³Interview with US official, December 2006. (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁴Frank Millar, 'Trimble facing isolation in fateful week', *Irish Times*, 24 January 2000; Frank Millar, 'Hard to see how bottom line Trimble has set might be breached this time', *Irish Times*, 28 June 2001; Frank Millar cited in Godson, *Himself alone*, 675.

changing relationship with Dublin.⁴⁵ This individual then stated that, ‘I think it is true that, over time, Richard Haass came to listen more to Dublin than he had to begin with’, and added that Haass came to prefer a DUP–Sinn Féin deal ‘about two seconds after Dublin did’.⁴⁶ When asked about this characterisation of events, an Irish official responded with the following:

Yeah it’s true. And I think to some extent the Ulster Unionists feel slightly betrayed by Dublin and Washington. The journey from sort of revolutionary army—the IRA—to a mainstream political party was something which clearly we wanted to encourage very heavily and probably adopted a sympathetic line in that area. The United States could see that as well, and the United States wanted to encourage people away from terrorism. And I think it was an exciting prospect because it would help to create a precedent for a whole series of other areas...And I think the United States was very interested in that. I think they also made a calculation reasonably early on...that maybe the Ulster Unionists didn’t have the solidity of a [Sinn Féin] deal with the DUP...So I think there was probably a cold-hearted, calculated decision made at some stage.⁴⁷

Although the above quotation suggests that the US and Dublin became interested in a Sinn Féin–DUP deal because they wanted to further the *peace process* (i.e., the Republican movement’s journey from violence to fully constitutional politics), it does not reveal how officials from both governments came to believe that the DUP would agree to be a willing partner in the *political process* (i.e., power sharing between nationalist and unionist parties). When asked why they came to believe that the DUP would cut a deal, US officials stated that they felt that it was inevitable, and that any deal cut by the DUP would stick. Finally, several US officials doubted the contention that there was a decline in unionist support for the Belfast Agreement, but instead chose to blame unionist dissatisfaction on Trimble’s poor salesmanship.⁴⁸

All of these assumptions, however, require interrogation. First, was a DUP–Sinn Féin deal inevitable, and was growing unionist disenchantment with the Agreement Trimble’s fault? One need only look at the proposal for an Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) in 2002 to argue that neither assumption is necessarily correct. As noted, unionist support for the Belfast Agreement had been declining during the post-Agreement period. Although a slim majority of unionist voters endorsed the Agreement in the 1998 referendum,⁴⁹ many unionists became increasingly disillusioned with the Agreement over the course of its *implementation* (see Tables 1 and 2).

When asked in 2000 why they would not vote for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, 78% of Protestant respondents cited lack of decommissioning.⁵⁰ Therefore, one could argue that Trimble’s proposal for an IMC was his attempt to better ‘sell’ the Belfast Agreement to his constituency, as it tried to remedy what was perceived to be, from a unionist perspective, the weakest part of the Agreement:

⁴⁵Interview with State Department official, December 2005.

⁴⁶Interview with State Department official, December 2005.

⁴⁷Interview with Irish official, October 2006.

⁴⁸Interview with State Department official December 2005; Interview with State Department official, December 2005; Interview with US official, February 2006; Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁴⁹Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O’Leary, Northern Irish voters and the British–Irish Agreement: foundations of a stable consociational settlement?, *Political Quarterly* 71(1) (2000), 78–101: 78.

⁵⁰‘Political Attitudes’, *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*, 2000, available at http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2000/Political_Attitudes/WHYNOT.html (1 April 2006).

Table 1. Protestant respondents' views of who benefited from the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement* (Figures given are percentages.)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
<i>Unionists benefited a lot more than Nationalists</i>	0	0	1	1	0
<i>Unionists benefited a little more than Nationalists</i>	1	1	1	1	0
<i>Nationalists benefited a lot more than Unionists</i>	46	42	52	55	53
<i>Nationalists benefited a little more than unionists</i>	13	14	11	12	17
<i>Nationalists and Unionists benefited equally</i>	32	29	19	19	18
<i>Other</i>	n/a	1	0	0	0
<i>Neither</i>	n/a	1	9	5	4
<i>Don't know</i>	8	13	8	8	8

*Question: Thinking back to the Good Friday Agreement now, would you say that it has benefited unionists more than nationalists, nationalists more than unionists, or that unionists and nationalists have benefited equally?

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003.

Table 2. Protestant respondents' answers as to how they would vote if the referendum on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was held again* (Figures given are percentages.)

<i>Year</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
<i>Yes</i>	35	34	35	28
<i>No</i>	41	36	38	42
<i>Wouldn't Vote</i>	12	13	12	17
<i>Not Registered to Vote</i>	1	1	1	2
<i>Don't Know</i>	10	11	12	10
<i>Refused</i>	n/a	5	2	1

*Question: If the vote on the Good Friday Agreement was held again today, how would you vote?

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003.

namely, the tenuous link between the abrogation of paramilitarism and the holding of office.⁵¹

All three governments, however, were initially reluctant to embrace the IMC. Part of this reluctance stemmed from John Reid's—the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—unwillingness to endorse anything that might potentially usurp his authority. It should also be mentioned here that Haass and Reid were good friends.⁵² However, an Irish official provided another explanation:

We all knew there were things going on we didn't particularly like, but we felt that it was a journey. If you start accusing people halfway through the journey...in other words if you pushed them up against the wall, and define things without

⁵¹David Trimble, cited in Michael Kerr, *Transforming Unionism: David Trimble and the 2005 general election* (Dublin, 2006), 139.

⁵²See *Commons Hansard*, vol. 389, 15–24 July 2002, cols 984–1002. David Trimble believes that Reid was one of member of the British government who felt that only a deal with the 'extremes' would provide a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland. See Neil Tweedie, 'Bittersweet legacy of my long Good Friday', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 April 2007.

ambiguity, then it's going to fail...It was basically David Trimble's proposal to have a monitoring commission. I suppose when it came from that side...when we were bringing Sinn Féin...towards a non-violent future...They [Sinn Féin] were very, very strongly opposed to it. And I suppose we reflected that. We were helping them on the journey, and they didn't want referees noting fouls all the time.⁵³

Like the Irish government, Haass appeared to believe that the IMC could cause problems for the leadership of the Republican movement. When Trimble stated in 2002 that only a clear 'winding down' of the IRA would obviate the political process's collapse, Haass asked him how this could be done whilst preventing 'a mass exodus to the Real IRA': fear of a Republican split arose frequently in Haass's statements.⁵⁴ Although officials from all three governments occasionally articulated this fear, it is worth questioning how real the dissident threat was after 1998. Although the split that created the Real IRA in 1997 resulted in some key people leaving the Provisional IRA (i.e., the Engineering Department), the bulk of the northern based IRA stayed loyal to Adams. Therefore, the threat was limited in size, and as one Irish official argued, the dissidents suffered from other problems as well:

The Real IRA is a very border thing...The Continuity [IRA] is just sort of old geezers down in Limerick which aren't going to hit the thing [peace process] too much...The other thing is, and the Provos would always say to me, they [the dissidents] were incompetent. They were lucky that a lot of incompetent people got involved at the start with the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA, and often people who had been sort of sidelined by the Provos got in and made a mess of things.⁵⁵

As such, it appears that Haass's concerns about dissidents most likely stemmed from his growing relationship with Adams, as officials have admitted that raising the spectre of dissidents was one of Adams's key negotiating strategies.⁵⁶ Therefore, it seems unfair to blame unionist disillusionment with the Agreement on Trimble by characterising him as some sort of latter-day Willy Loman: this ignores that his attempts to keep the unionist community on board for the Belfast Agreement often took a back seat to the three governments' concern not to cause 'difficulties' for the Republican leadership.⁵⁷ Moreover, it also ignores that Trimble successfully negotiated the Agreement and managed to sell it to a very sceptical UUP.

What of US officials' contention that the DUP would eventually cut a deal? Although the DUP had been making electoral gains throughout the post-Agreement period at the UUP's expense,⁵⁸ it does not necessarily follow that the DUP's increased vote share translated into a mandate for power sharing. Rather, it could also be interpreted as a protest vote that expressed the unionist electorate's alienation from the political process *in toto*. Although Table 2 shows just over a third of Protestant/unionist voters stating in 2002 that they would vote 'yes' if the referendum on the Agreement was held again, US officials have stated that they found the polling

⁵³Interview with Irish official, October 2006.

⁵⁴Godson, *Himself alone*, 720; Dan Keenan, 'Haass warns of republican split', *Irish Times*, 25 April 2003.

⁵⁵Interview with Irish official, October 2006.

⁵⁶Interview with US official, February 2006; interview with US official, May 2006; interview with US official, August 2006; interview with Irish official, October 2006; interview with US official, December 2006; interview with former NIO political director, February 2007.

⁵⁷Loman is the central character in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. The IMC was eventually created by the two governments on 7 January 2004. For Trimble, however, it was a case of 'too little, too late'.

⁵⁸See Jonathan Tonge, *The new Northern Irish politics?* (Basingstoke, 2005), 66.

data on unionist disillusionment to be 'ambiguous'.⁵⁹ The US Consulate in Belfast commissioned a poll of its own, which showed 49% Protestant/unionist support for the Agreement, a result that allowed officials to combat the notion that there had been a steady decline in unionist/Protestant support for the Agreement.⁶⁰ Although the survey also found that a majority of Protestants/unionists had little or no confidence in the Assembly and felt that Northern Ireland was 'headed in the wrong direction', the Consulate played up the poll's more positive findings.

Given these discrepancies, one has to wonder whether US officials commissioned the poll to find an answer that would support their own overtures to the DUP. US officials active at the time stated that their social and professional contacts with the DUP's second generation led them to believe that the party would sign up to power sharing when the time came. According to a US official:

I think we developed a far more nuanced view of the DUP way in advance of London... We had told London this was going to happen [that the DUP was going to overtake the UUP], and they were just in disbelief about the whole thing. And then when it did happen they knew almost nobody in the DUP, whereas we were actually comfortable—knew each other, knew their kids, and also knew that these [people] weren't monsters.⁶¹

US officials' comfortableness with DUP members led to speculation that the United States was facilitating meetings between the party and Sinn Féin. Jack Holland reported in 2002 that the US Consulate in Belfast confirmed that middle-ranking representatives of the DUP and Sinn Féin were in the US for a congressionally sponsored leadership programme and could have easily met under those conditions, although the consular spokesman denied that any alleged meetings were part of US policy.⁶² When asked about these allegations, one US official stated that Richard Bullick, an adviser to Peter Robinson, and Timothy Johnston, the DUP's Director of Communications, had taken part in a programme at Harvard that was designed to sharpen the party's negotiating skills, but this individual could not remember having Sinn Féin members meet with the DUP during these sessions.⁶³

Whether or not US officials facilitated any *tête-à-têtes* between representatives of the two parties remains unclear, but what is clear is that many US officials put much stock in the 'modernising' wing of the DUP. The question remains, however, were they right to do so? 'Modernisers' such as Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds may have portrayed themselves as amenable to a power-sharing deal, but it was also in their interest to do so: presenting themselves as moderates could reap dividends electorally, as officials who were frustrated with Trimble would be more likely to push for an election if they felt that there was a viable alternative in the wake of the UUP's demise. Moreover, whether the 'modernisers' really wanted power sharing or not, they still would have to convince Ian Paisley of its merits. As an Irish official explained, this was no small matter:

I think we [the Irish government] probably overestimated [Peter] Robinson at certain stages... I think there were a lot of people in Dublin, London and Washington who felt Robinson could deliver. David Trimble once said that Peter Robinson couldn't deliver a bottle of milk[*sic*],⁶⁴ and there's some element of truth

⁵⁹Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁶⁰Tony Bailie, 'US poll finds support for Agreement constant', *Irish News*, 23 November 2002.

⁶¹Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁶²Jack Holland, 'DUP, Sinn Féin: détente in North's cold war?', *Irish Echo*, October 3–29, 2002.

⁶³Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁶⁴This comment was made by Peter Bell, former British secretary of the British–Irish Secretariat. See Godson, *Himself alone*, 288.

in that. He's intellectually able, but in the end it's an unusual party. It's the nearest thing to the papacy that they have, and Paisley is the most Latin politician in these islands. You know, exaggerated gestures and I mean he wouldn't like to hear that but he looks like he's straight from the Naples Opera House... In the end, just like in the old Fianna Fáil here when de Valera was still around, in the end no one can depose Paisley.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the prospect of a DUP–Sinn Féin deal would have to be entertained by the end of 2003. The failed sequencing of October 2003 was rather stiff,⁶⁶ and the ambiguous act of IRA decommissioning that occurred under its aegis left Trimble bereft of the transparency he would need for the impending elections. The lack of transparency was far from surprising: Sinn Féin had been told that elections would be held in the following month, a decision that Downing Street allegedly took due to pressure from Dublin and Washington.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, one must wonder whether Haass and Dublin were playing convenient roles for Downing Street, as the latter could not make overtures to the DUP lest it be accused of dropping Trimble; a US official argued that Trimble was still Downing Street's man even on the eve of 2003 Assembly elections:

I think he [Haass] gave up on Trimble way before Number 10 did. I think it took No. 10 *absolutely forever* to understand that Trimble had lost his traction as a Northern Ireland politician. I mean right into that *disastrous* election defeat where the DUP took 31 [*sic*]⁶⁸ seats in the Assembly. But they believed in... I mean, I had dinner at Buckingham Palace with the Queen and this is what she wanted to talk about was Trimble's election prospects. And you go 'Wow'. You know, and then you have to say, 'Well, Trimble's the one'.⁶⁹

Knowing that they would get their desired elections, and that any ambiguity regarding IRA decommissioning would harm the UUP electorally, there appeared to be every incentive for Sinn Féin and the IRA to be less than forthcoming during the sequencing. In the Assembly election that followed, the DUP eclipsed the UUP and became the primary party within the unionist bloc, but, *pace* US officials, it was hardly an electoral routing of the latter party.⁷⁰

⁶⁵Interview with Irish official, October 2006.

⁶⁶The sequence involved the following: the British government announced that the Assembly elections would be held on 26 November. Gerry Adams then issued a statement reiterating his party's 'total and absolute commitment' to exclusively democratic and peaceful methods. The IRA then confirmed that it had authorised a third act of disarmament, which was to be outlined in a press conference by the chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, John de Chastelain. De Chastelain's confidentiality agreement with the IRA, however, meant that his press conference did not give the UUP the transparency it needed to go into government with Sinn Féin. Therefore, David Trimble put the sequence on hold by refusing to signal his party's willingness to go into government until it had received greater clarity regarding the IRA's actions and intentions. See 'How the day unfolded', *Irish Times*, 22 October 2003.

⁶⁷The British government postponed the Assembly elections scheduled for May 2003 after the IRA failed to produce a statement that would satisfy the demands of the Joint Declaration, which required the IRA to signal its intention to abandon paramilitarism. The British government's desire to postpone the elections again in November 2003 stemmed from the belief that a victory for Paisley would spell the end of the Belfast Agreement. With all parties, save for the UUP, in favour of calling an election, a British official has admitted that the British government ultimately found it too hard to resist the pressure to call an election. Interview with senior British official, February 2007.

⁶⁸The DUP took 30 seats in the 2003 Assembly election.

⁶⁹Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁷⁰See Christopher Farrington, 'The Northern Ireland assembly election 2003', *Irish Political Studies* 19 (1) (2004), 74–86: 83; and Henry Patterson, 'The limits of "New Unionism": David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party', *Eire-Ireland* 39 (1 and 2) (Spring/Summer 2004), 163–88: 164.

Although US officials were not the only ones putting pressure on Downing Street for the election, one has to wonder, given the paramount importance of the United Kingdom to the 'war on terror', why didn't the White House muzzle Haass? Part of the answer appears to be structural. The US special envoy for Northern Ireland is a presidential envoy, and thus the position is not subject to the degree of oversight that other positions in the State Department are.⁷¹ So structure was partly to blame; but this still fails to answer why Downing Street didn't call the White House. Although a definitive explanation will probably have to await the publication of either Tony Blair or Jonathan Powell's memoirs, Godson has argued that it was most likely Number 10's unwillingness to ask the Bush administration's neo-conservatives for a favour, coupled with Blair's reluctance to spend his 'credit' with the administration on an issue like Northern Ireland when it could be spent on something like the Middle East.⁷² If this is so, then it is unfortunate, as it confirms the thesis proposed by Kendall Myers—a recently retired State Department analyst with an expertise in Northern Ireland—that the UK has been the uxorious partner in the 'special relationship' under the Bush administration.⁷³ Whatever the reason, the 2003 Assembly election left both the DUP and Sinn Féin as the head of their electoral blocs. Haass would soon exit, stage left, for the presidency of the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, and it would be up to his successor, Mitchell Reiss, to pick up where he left off.

THE QUIET MAN: MITCHELL REISS

Although one could assume that the only change precipitated by Mitchell Reiss's assumption of the position of special envoy in 2004 would be a change in style—Reiss is, according to US officials, a much more genial character than the somewhat abrasive Haass—Reiss's tenure saw changes in substance as well. As previously shown, US officials have stated that Haass backed off his demand that Sinn Féin join the policing board. For Reiss, however, policing would become his central preoccupation as special envoy. According to a US official:

[Policing] was not only a key issue, but perhaps the key issue for moving the peace process forward. The reason for that was because of what would be required in change of philosophy and just in terms of how Sinn Féin and the IRA operated. If they had to sign up to policing it was the last great hurdle.⁷⁴

Moreover, US officials under Reiss appeared to hold less of a candle for the DUP's 'modernisers'. When asked about the ability of the second generation leadership to deliver a power-sharing deal, an official responded with the following:

The generation after Ian Senior—they're a little more worldly than Ian is, but not a whole lot. These guys don't get out a lot. They know what they know...but whether there's a new generation or not that's going to think differently than Reverend Paisley—in some of the conversations I've had Reverend Paisley is the most moderate person in the room, okay? And I think this is what gives Blair and

⁷¹Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁷²Godson, *Himself alone*, 774. Neo-conservatives would have been most likely to muzzle Haass because he was not in favour of the invasion of Iraq, and he left the State Department in 2003. For Haass's views on the invasion of Iraq, see George Packer, *The assassins' gate: America in Iraq* (New York, 2005).

⁷³Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'So much for the "special relationship"', *Boston Globe*, 6 December 2006; see also Myers's remarks in Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *Yo, Blair!* (London, 2007), 152.

⁷⁴Interview with US official, January 2006.

Ahern...some confidence that if they can move this thing forward, is that the great man himself will seal the deal.⁷⁵

THE PERFECT STORM: THE NORTHERN BANK AND THE MCCARTNEY MURDER

Paisley the Elder's alleged moderation would be put to the test in the Leeds Castle negotiations in the autumn of 2004. According to the benign interpretation, Leeds Castle almost led to the 'deal of all deals' being inked, were it not for some pesky photographs. After the publication of the abortive 'Proposals for Comprehensive Agreement' in December 2004, however, Irish sources admitted that a larger issue bedevilled the process: the IRA's unwillingness to sign a statement recognising 'the need to uphold and not to endanger anyone's personal rights and safety'.⁷⁶ In contrast to elements of the Irish government, the British government appeared rather *blasé* about IRA criminality, as did the DUP's Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds. Although much attention would be lavished on Paisley's 'sackcloth and ashes' speech at the time, criminality would become *the* problem in light of the IRA's alleged robbery of £26.5 million from the Northern Bank at the end of December 2004. When asked if London's relaxed attitude towards criminality was partly to blame for it becoming the manifest issue by the end of 2004, a US official responded with the following:

[T]his was the biggest irritant between us and the Northern Ireland Office. I don't believe that they had ever issued a policy statement to the police to tell them to ignore IRA criminality as long as it did not turn into bombs on the mainland, but I believe that many, many police thought they operated under those rules...And when the IRA held up Makros, that big store, on the eve of those elections,⁷⁷ and no one could figure out *who in the world might possibly have pulled this off this very well orchestrated heist?* And the explanation we get quietly when we asked about it was, 'If we were to say it was the IRA, we'll be accused of interfering in the election outcome'. What did you just train the IRA to do? You told them that they can carry out egregious, blatant, criminal behaviour in the run up to an election, and we will turn a blind eye to it. So then, you know what? They came back and did the Northern Bank...*Finally*, Dublin saw it too.⁷⁸

The Northern Bank heist was just too big to ignore, and it embarrassed all three governments. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern's assertion that the Sinn Féin leadership would have been aware of plans to rob the bank shocked many people, not least of whom was Gerry Adams.⁷⁹ Recognition that such allegations could have a deleterious effect upon his party's electoral expansion—evidenced by the precipitous drop in his personal popularity in the Republic⁸⁰—appeared to set Adams down a path towards reclaiming the momentum of the peace process. His journey would be expedited by allegations of IRA members' involvement in the murder of Robert McCartney at the end of January 2005. The combination of the two events was, according to one US official 'the perfect storm',⁸¹ and Adams would feel its full effects when he travelled to the US in March 2005.

⁷⁵Interview with US official, January 2006.

⁷⁶Tom Brady, 'Smokescreen over photos obscures real North issues', *Irish Independent*, 10 December 2004.

⁷⁷Makros was robbed on 23 May 2004. Elections to the European Parliament occurred on 10 June 2004.

⁷⁸Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁷⁹Chris Thornton, 'Sinn Féin rift with Ahern over bank raid', *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 January 2005.

⁸⁰Gene McKenna, 'Big boost for Ahern as Adams slips in poll', *Irish Independent*, 21 January 2005.

⁸¹Interview with US official, February 2006.

If Dublin was proving a 'cold house' for Adams, Washington would prove even frostier on St Patrick's Day. Adams was not invited for the annual St Patrick's Day celebration at the White House—Robert McCartney's sisters and partner were the guests of honour instead—and he was the recipient of bipartisan opprobrium on Capitol Hill.⁸² The only rostrum provided to Adams during the St Patrick's Day festivities was Richard Haass's Council of Foreign Relations. Haass did raise the spectre of Adams becoming akin to Yasser Arafat should the Republican movement fail to become fully democratic,⁸³ but he also stated that Adams clearly wanted the IRA 'rolled up', as did Haass himself. Haass, however, stated that he wanted it done in a way that did not lead to a mass exodus of dissidents.⁸⁴

Adams's cold US reception—and perhaps the realisation that the loss of his international statesman image could negatively effect his party's electoral expansion in the Republic—brought home the need to act quickly. On 6 April Adams called upon the IRA to consider engaging in purely political and democratic activity. Although many considered the announcement to be a cynical election ploy, the aftermath of the local elections in the following month would signal the need for a positive response. Sinn Féin's council seat total was about twenty fewer than expected, a result some Republicans privately attributed to the fallout over alleged IRA members' involvement in the McCartney murder.⁸⁵ The IRA's positive reply to Adams came on 28 July, and British reciprocity came in the decision to release the recently arrested Republican Seán Kelly and in the reduction of the British military presence in Northern Ireland. The reduction of the military presence had been discussed during the 2001 Weston Park negotiations and was outlined in the 2003 Joint Declaration. The IRA then decommissioned a significant amount of its weaponry in September of 2005.

POLICING AND THE ST ANDREWS 'AGREEMENT'

Although decommissioning was welcomed by the United States, officials still wanted Republicans to sign up to policing and Reiss continued to deny fundraising visas to Sinn Féin as a means of expediting the party's endorsement of the PSNI. Although some British and Irish officials were unhappy with Reiss's decision on the fundraising visas, Reiss's reasoning appeared to be a textbook example of *realpolitik*: Sinn Féin's approval of the PSNI was essential if Paisley was to agree to power sharing, and the relative rapidity with which the IRA decommissioned in September 2005 suggested both that Adams responds well to pressure from the three governments and that he has more latitude within the Republican movement than

⁸²It should be noted here, however, that the Irish government successfully argued against excluding only Sinn Féin from the St Patrick's Day celebrations, as Irish officials feared that this would bestow a victim status upon the party. As such, all political parties were excluded. Ed Moloney and Torcuil Chrichton, 'Bush cancels St Patrick's Day party and tells Adams: you're not wanted here', *Sunday Herald*, 27 February 2005. Note that a similar logic governed Irish officials' opposition to any potential US sanctions against Sinn Féin. See Catherine O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil, Irish republicanism and the Northern Ireland troubles 1968–2005* (Dublin, 2007), 181–2.

⁸³William Graham, "'Olive branch or the gun": diplomat tells republicans', *Irish News*, 15 March 2005.

⁸⁴Richard Haass interview, 'The future of the IRA', *Talk of the Nation*, National Public Radio, 15 March 2005; Michael A. Fletcher, 'Sinn Féin leader snubbed by Bush, Kennedy', *Washington Post*, 17 March 2005.

⁸⁵Brian Rowan, *Paisley and the Provos: the bugs—the bank job—the broken deal* (Belfast, 2005), 23. It should be noted here, though, that Rowan is writing about Sinn Féin members' expectations: the party made gains in the 2005 local elections, capturing 23% of the vote, a 2% increase from 2001. Results from 'The 2005 local government elections in Northern Ireland' are available at <http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/flg05.htm> (7 May 2007).

he's often given credit for. Unlike the position taken by Haass, US officials under Reiss didn't appear to be as convinced about the dissident threat to Adams. As one official stated, even if the threat is real:

Gerry's got no choice but to move forward. These people [the dissidents] have got nowhere to go. And what should happen is that the Brits and the Irish should lock them up and throw away the key. That's how you deal with them. You're never going to bring everybody with you on any political campaign. Every time Gerry has done something moderate, done something to advance the peace process, Sinn Féin has gained in popularity, not lost it...It could be that some of these guys are dangerous [but] there are other ways to deal with them than Gerry saying, 'I need to go slowly'.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the United States' reasoning on the visa issue was not welcomed by all British and Irish officials. In May 2006 Dermot Ahern, the Irish foreign minister, stated that policing would not be a precondition for a deal in November, a statement that occasioned a call from the United States asking Dublin for clarification.⁸⁷ Moreover, there was speculation that a rift had developed between Reiss and the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain.⁸⁸ Although Reiss stated that such speculation was 'wildly overblown',⁸⁹ a US official described things differently:

I think they [the British government] went after Mitchell harder than they went after Richard. Because when Mitchell started to actually continue to insist that policing mattered and we restricted Gerry Adams's visa for fundraising, it was much tougher with British officials, and open and nasty...They were *much* more angry at Mitchell last year. I mean that was really icky.⁹⁰

The question remains, however, why would individuals from the two governments be upset with Reiss's position on the fundraising visa? One individual stated that the British government was unhappy because officials felt that the ban reinforced the hard-line DUP position that Sinn Féin was unfit for government.⁹¹ Echoing this, another official stated that the British government 'didn't want to make more sticks for the unionists to beat the process with'.⁹² Irish officials, on the other hand, expressed their disappointment in slightly different terms. When presented with the author's *realpolitik* analysis of the fundraising ban, an Irish official argued the following:

You're right in some respects because at one stage we were saying that policing wasn't a precondition for going back into government. And Mitchell had a very serious reservation about that...he was saying that can't be, there's no way in which unionism will sign up for government with Sinn Féin without the policing issue being resolved. But it was a question again as to how much the system could digest...Just bear in mind that throughout 2005, Sinn Féin jumped through a number of hoops that many people—including plenty in government and Blair in particular—thought we'd never get to the point where we'd get a sign-off on their campaign and the act of decommissioning...And to throw another issue up on the

⁸⁶Interview with US official, August 2006.

⁸⁷Frank Millar, 'Policing issue will not be a pre-condition for a deal in November', *Irish Times*, 9 May 2006; interview with US official, August 2006.

⁸⁸Tom Baldwin, 'US at odds with allies over bar on Sinn Féin fundraising', *The Times*, 6 June 2006.

⁸⁹Frank Millar, 'Bush's envoy sees policing as the key issue for Sinn Féin', *Irish Times*, 10 June 2006.

⁹⁰Interview with US official, December 2006.

⁹¹Unattributable remarks by British official, November 2006.

⁹²Interview with British official, March 2007.

table...in other words, that all the pressure was on his [Adams's] side right, and that Paisley was just sitting there waiting for everything to fall into his lap as it were.⁹³

All of these criticisms are fine, but they ignore the basic point that policing was a *sine qua non* of any power-sharing deal that Paisley was going to agree to, as Hain's calls for 'greater co-operation' from Republicans on policing were unlikely to satisfy Paisley.⁹⁴ Moreover, leaving the issue of policing as something for the DUP members to negotiate themselves would leave the issue open to endless fudges, thus adding even greater instability to any Sinn Féin–DUP deal.

Differences aside, however, the fundraising ban was lifted in November 2006, shortly after the St Andrews Agreement. Although this might suggest that St Andrews represented a breakthrough between Sinn Féin and the DUP, officials have admitted that 'agreement' is a bit of a strong word for what occurred at St Andrews. According to a British official, Ian Paisley Snr told NIO officials in the summer of 2006 that he was ready to agree to a power-sharing deal, provided that it was the *right* deal (i.e., that it dealt with the issue of policing). Paisley repeated this to Peter Hain the week before St Andrews, adding that he wanted the deal to be done quickly, and he then reiterated this to Tony Blair on the eve of the talks.⁹⁵ Paisley's eagerness, however, frightened some DUP members, and these individuals attempted to restrain Paisley by adopting an intransigent negotiating stance that made the prospect of a deal highly unlikely. According to an Irish official:

Things were so bad...that at one stage [Tánaiste, and Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform] Michael McDowell, our Michael McDowell, went to the DUP and said, 'Look, I'm a moderate nationalist but what you're talking about, even I couldn't accept'. I mean [he was] very genuine. So on Thursday night he did go to them, and he did speak to them. By Friday morning we were getting an indication from them that they were prepared to entertain something on the 24th of November—to be defined. And really it went from there...ultimately the decision was taken by the two governments that we'd call our work an agreement. But really it was an 'intended' agreement I suppose.⁹⁶

The *ard fheis* that saw Sinn Féin give its conditional support to the PSNI came the week before Reiss stepped down as special envoy; but what of Haass's primary goal? The DUP–Sinn Féin decision to share power came three years after Haass's resignation, but whether he deserves any credit for it is debatable. Paisley's decision to share power did not come about because of the ability of his 'modernisers' to deliver him, but rather it owes much to his growing relationship with Tony Blair.⁹⁷ Moreover, Sinn Féin seemed amenable to the deal because of the apparent feeling that it could bolster the party's election prospects in the Republic; and the fact that these changing prospects have often influenced its fickle attitude towards devolved government in Northern Ireland seems to have been worryingly absent from Haass's calculations.⁹⁸ It should also be remembered that two major issues were resolved

⁹³Interview with senior Irish official, November 2006.

⁹⁴See 'Speech by Peter Hain to the Macgill Summer School, Glenties, Co. Donegal', 16 July 2006, available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/ph160706.htm> (30 March 2007).

⁹⁵Interview with senior British official, June 2007.

⁹⁶Interview with senior Irish official, November 2006.

⁹⁷Frank Millar, 'How the deal was won', *Irish Times*, 31 March 2007; Nicholas Watt, Owen Bowcott and Patrick Wintour, 'Blair's secret weapon in Paisley talks: religion', *Guardian*, 14 March 2007.

⁹⁸Paul Bew, 'Northern Ireland is no model for peace processes', *Sunday Independent*, 1 April 2007.

after Haass's departure: decommissioning, which came about in response to fallout from the Northern Bank robbery and the McCartney murder; and policing, which was resolved in part because of his successor's more robust stand on the issue.

CONCLUSION

As this article has argued, George W. Bush's administration, *pace* Marsden and Feeney, has had a profound impact upon the politics of post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Haass's initial tough line towards Sinn Féin helped to bring about the IRA's first act of decommissioning, and his resiling from that line—coupled with his and Dublin's cultivation of the DUP—helped *in part* to bring about the demise of the UUP and the SDLP. Mitchell Reiss's contribution was also profound: Reiss's tough line towards Sinn Féin in the wake of alleged IRA involvement in the Northern Bank robbery and the McCartney murder helped to expedite decommissioning, and his support for the demand that Sinn Féin endorse the PSNI helped *in part* to bring about a Sinn Féin–DUP agreement to share power.

As this article has also demonstrated, Haass's and Reiss's positions at times did conflict with the policy preferences of the British government and—albeit only occasionally—those of the Irish government. Haass's position largely fitted into a wider pattern, established under the Clinton administration, of siding with the Irish government to counterbalance the weight of London. Given this tendency, one can question the extent to which the United States has lived up to its role as an 'honest broker' in Northern Ireland. Although Reiss undoubtedly deserves the title of 'honest broker' as he both demonstrated an understanding of the unionist community's concerns and genuinely tried to play an even hand with the two governments, it has been demonstrated here that, on balance, the US has tended to support the Irish government over the British. As such, it is argued that Dixon's thesis overestimates the level of choreography between the US, Irish and British governments on the issue of Northern Ireland. Although the three governments' aims are ultimately congruent, in that they want a Northern Ireland that is characterised both by non-violence and power-sharing, this paper has demonstrated that the paths that they have taken to achieve these goals have diverged at times.

