The Stormont Talks

Agenda: Negotiating a Power-Sharing Framework and Deliberating on the Decommissioning of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland.

Freeze Date: 17th July, 1997

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Chairperson's Address

"Power is not given. It's taken."

– Harvey Reginald Specter,
Suits

This quote, though simple, has a key underlying layer to it which makes it extremely relevant to the Stormont Talks. The enmity and sheer animosity between the various parties involved in the multi-party talks at the Stormont Castle fueled something much greater than themselves; power. Power, to control and command a nation. A power that many throughout the course of history have wielded but a power many long to taste.

An issue which the British and the Irish have faced for decades, is now at its peak. The immense tensions between parties and individuals seems to be growing with every passing minute. The idea of the inclusion of several individuals has brought the talks to an impasse. Being stern with what you stand for has become something really hard to find.

This issue coupled with its destructive abilities has plagued the people of Northern Ireland for decades. Riots and parades have become commonplace in the everyday life of the people

A long lasting and permanent solution needs to be presented before the people with utmost speed. Collaboration and compromise are not only expectations but requirements to reach a consensus on the issue at hand.

Many have tried and failed at establishing peace and thus for possibly the last time, the fate and future of a centuries old union and of Northern Ireland lies in your hands, the delegates of this committee.

On a personal note, the executive board seeks, from the delegates - excellent paperwork, top-notch diplomacy and negotiations along with a thorough understanding of legal principles and personal policy, coupled with a readiness to logically and strategically change such policy. All this should ideally be accompanied with groundbreaking rhetoric and convincing oratory. This committee is meant to test your patience, resilience and willpower throughout the three days of the conference.

On behalf of my Executive Board, we wish to see the committee achieve a permanent solution to the crisis at hand.

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Co-Chairpersons,
The Stormont Talks, 1997,
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(Note: Please note that the following study guide is not exhaustive, the delegates are expected and encouraged to do their own research into the topic to gain a better understanding. This study guide only serves as a preliminary base of research.)

Introduction

The Stormont Talks were rooted in a long-standing constitutional conflict that began with the partition of Ireland in 1921. While the southern 26 counties became the Irish Free State (and later the Republic of Ireland), the six counties of Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. From the start, the Irish Free State, committed to full Irish unity, sought the eventual inclusion of Northern Ireland within its jurisdiction. Successive Irish governments viewed partition as temporary and unjust, and consistently pursued diplomatic and constitutional efforts to end British sovereignty in the North. However, unionists in Northern Ireland, predominantly Protestant, staunchly opposed any such move, insisting on their British identity and political allegiance to the UK. The resulting decades of division and conflict, driven by rivalling national aspirations, led to prolonged violence known as the Troubles. By the 1990s, amid a political stalemate, both the British and Irish governments recognized that a negotiated settlement was essential. The Irish government, while supporting unity, shifted its approach to one based on consent and cooperation, paving the way for inclusive, multi party negotiations—the Stormont Talks—that aimed to reconcile the deep-rooted constitutional divide through democratic means.

The Troubles

I. 1960-1970

For a long period of time, the Catholics in Northern Ireland,being the minority, have faced continued discrimination in various aspects of life, especially in Northern Ireland's workspaces. Most large employers in Northern Ireland were either Protestant Unionists who either refused to hire catholics or give them a preference over other protestants. Catholics also faced problems in the allocation of housing as housing was allocated by local authorities which were usually dominated by Unionists. The Unionists also strengthened their grip over national and local governments by manipulating their composition. They drew electoral boundaries to deliberately divide and reduce catholic voting power through gerrymandering and also rigged the vote to exclude them. Taking inspiration from the various social movements during the 1960s in America, the Catholics began campaigning against this oppression.The Roman Catholic Church protested publicly against the gerrymandering of securing seats for the Unionists in Northern Ireland. The associated radical actions by militant groups further exacerbated it into the violent struggles known as “The Troubles”

On the 5th of October 1968 The Apprentice Boys of Derry(loyalists), announced their intention to hold an 'annual' march along the same proposed route of the Civil Rights demonstration organised by Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, on the same day and the

same time. This tactic had been used on several occasions before and many times after the Derry March. It provided them the excuse needed to ban the march. William Craig, the then Home Minister banned the proposed march.The Derry Housing Action Committee planned a march with support of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in protest of gerrymandering and discrimination. The marchers had proposed to walk from Duke Street in the Waterside area of Derry to the Diamond in the centre of the City. Hundreds of people lined up on the streets, however, the Royal Ulster Constabulary broke-up the march by baton-charging the crowd and leaving many people injured including a number of MPs. This led to the start of “the Troubles”.

Four days after the Derry March, 2000 students from the Queen’s University of Belfast tried to march to the City Hall of Belfast in protest against the brutality exercised by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. However, they were stopped by blockades established by a Counter demonstration by Ian Baisley. In response the students did a 3 hour sit down demonstration, following which The People’s Democracy organisation was formed on the same day.
The People's Democracy (PD) organised a series of protests from the 16th of October to the city hall and to the Stormont parliament on 24th october.

In response Terence O’ Neil, the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland declared a package of reforms. It included the replacement of the Londonderry Commission by a developmental body. It would provide for the allocation of houses on the basis of what was needed. On 1st, January 1969, 40 members of the PD set off on a revolutionary march from Belfast to Antrim to Maghera as an acid

test to determine the government's true intentions. On the way to Derry, they were ambushed by a group of loyalist radicals. The marchers believed that the Royal Ulster Constabulary who accompanied them, did little to protect them from the Loyalist crowd.

II. 1970 - 1980

The NICRA march was to begin at 2.00p.m. from Creggan and make its way to Guildhall where a protest rally would take place. At about 3.25pm the march marched past the 'Bogside Inn' and up Westland Street before making its way down William Street. All approaches from William Street into the city of Derry had been blocked by the British Army. The marchers had decided to hold a 'Free Derry' rally on Rossville Street on new orders. But the Belfast children's crowd that marched onto barricades, started a riot with British Army ranks. The machine-gun squad opened fire on Damien Donaghy and John Johnston. Around 4:10, the soldiers began firing near the Rossville Street Area flats, an area around Glenfada park. The soldiers claimed they had been bombarded by the rioters. But no guns or bombs were taken from the site and none of the British Army personnel were injured. This British Army killing of Irish protesters on 30th January, 1972 came to be known as the 'Bloody Sunday'.

On 30th March, 1972, the Westminster Parliament dissolved the Stormont Parliament by imposing Direct Rule. The Provisional and Official IRA both denied any of their units were involved. Troops said they were the target of a fierce attack by gunners and by nailbomb throwers, but local residents disputed their account, saying that the troops had fired unnecessarily. No troops were killed or wounded by bullets or nailbombs, and no weapons were taken by the army.

In the afternoon of 21st July, 1972 at Belfast, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) exploded 22 bombs which, during a 75-minute interval, killed 9 people and badly injured 130 others. This came to be known as “Blood Friday”. Other than the bombs, there were hoax warnings for other bombs which helped to create the mix-up in the streets on that day.

On 20 March 1973 the British government proposed through a document called the ‘White Paper’ - a devolved power-sharing assembly in Northern Ireland and a Council of Ireland. In June, elections were conducted on a Proportional Representation basis along with a majoritarian ideology rooted in the sense of compromise. The pro-White Paper parties achieved a majority of 72% in the general elections, although some of the elected members were against the proposals. The Sunningdale Agreement in December 1973 sought to institutionalize power-sharing and cross-border collaboration. Unionist opposition, notably to the Council of Ireland, resulted in massive resistance. It was in May 1974 that the Ulster Workers' Council strike caused the collapse of the Executive. Resignations by Brian Faulkner and his colleagues brought about an end to the brief power-sharing government. The climax was reached with demonstrations and street celebrations in Protestant neighborhoods.

The IRA announced on 9 February 1975 that they would be observing, with effect from 6pm on 10 February 1975, an open-ended ceasefire. The drive was part of a series of Republican initiatives and was the consequence of negotiations between the Republican movement and Westminster powers and other political developments.

Throughout July 1972, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Whitelaw, and other ministers of the British government had received an IRA delegation to negotiate the conditions under which an end to the logjam in Northern Ireland might be reached.This was the state of affairs until December 1974 when, at Feakle, County Clare, there were talks between a party of Protestant churchmen and IRA spokesmen. From them emerged a list of proposals which appeared to hold out not only the hope of renewed formal contact between the British government and Republicans but even of a more durable ceasefire. To further facilitate this the IRA indicated that it would attempt to extend its customary but brief Christmas recess by declaring that it would run from 22 December 1974 to 2 January 1975. Consequently, a decision was taken to allow British government officials to open informal discussions with Sinn Féin (SF) on 22 December 1974 and these were continued in the face of the return of the IRA campaign on 17 January 1975. The two eventually came to an agreement on a structure of general terms that was to form the basis of the statement to be made on 9 February calling an indefinite truce.

There had been years of strikes, violent confrontations and waves of sectarian riots between the Republicans and Unionists until the end of 1970s and afterwards in the 1980s. Lord Mountbatten, the famous politician who had played a key role in the partition of India and Pakistan, was killed while on board his yacht by an explosion set up using gelignite by the Provisional IRA.

III. 1980-1990

Northern Ireland's political landscape underwent seismic shifts as entrenched sectarian tensions began to be addressed through a blend of civil resistance, electoral transformation, and fragile diplomatic engagement. This decade was defined by a crescendo of political violence, public protest, and institutional experiments, which ultimately catalyzed a slow pivot from armed struggle to structured negotiation.

The decade opened with the intensification of the prison protests, most notably the Irish Republican hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. These were led by republican prisoners in the Maze Prison who opposed the British government's decision to strip them of Special Category Status which was essentially the recognition as political prisoners rather than criminals. The first hunger strike, lasting 53 days, was suspended in December 1980 after appeals from Irish clergy. However, the core demands remained unmet, and a second, more publicized strike erupted in 1981, led by Bobby Sands. During the strike, Sands was elected to the British House of Commons from Fermanagh and South Tyrone, and two other hunger strikers were elected to the Irish Dáil. Though the strike ultimately ended with the deaths of ten prisoners, it succeeded in galvanizing nationalist sympathy, elevating Sinn Féin's profile, and drawing international attention to the republican cause. In the aftermath, Secretary of State James Prior introduced reforms that largely addressed the prisoners' five demands, albeit without restoring full political status.

This period also saw significant institutional developments. In 1982, the British government enacted the Northern Ireland Act, establishing

a new 78-member Assembly at Stormont under a framework dubbed "rolling devolution." The idea was to gradually devolve powers from Westminster based on consensus among Assembly members. However, the experiment faltered due to nationalist boycotts, most notably by the SDLP, and deep unionist-nationalist divides. The Assembly was formally dissolved in 1986, underscoring the failure of unilateral British attempts to engineer power-sharing.

In response, John Hume of the SDLP pushed for broader nationalist engagement, resulting in the formation of the New Ireland Forum in 1984. Though dismissed by unionists and Sinn Féin alike, the Forum's final report laid out three proposals for Irish unity: a unitary state, a federal/confederal Ireland, and joint British-Irish sovereignty. While the British government rejected these frameworks, they helped clarify the nationalist agenda and framed the dialogue that followed.

These developments directly influenced the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on 15 November 1985. This treaty, co-signed by UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Irish Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, marked a historic shift by formally recognizing the Republic of Ireland's consultative role in Northern Ireland's governance. It established the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference to address political, legal, and security concerns. Although it provoked mass unionist protests and was viewed by republicans as insufficient, it marked the first significant diplomatic acknowledgment of Irish involvement and laid crucial groundwork for future peace efforts.

Finally, Sinn Féin itself experienced internal rupture in 1986 when it dropped its policy of abstentionism from the Dáil. This move,

spearheaded by Gerry Adams, prompted a walkout by hardliners led by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, who went on to form Republican Sinn Féin. This split symbolized the broader ideological transition from militancy to mainstream political engagement.

IV. 1990-1997

Since 1990, militant activities have picked up speed and so have efforts towards a negotiated peace. The developments, both political and otherwise, were extremely crucial in bridging all interested parties to the negotiation table at Stormont in 1996.

On 9 January 1990, Peter Brooke, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, delivered a speech in Bangor, County Down, in which he sought to break the political stalemate by seeking to encourage a fresh round of inter-party talks aimed at restoring devolved power to Northern Ireland. In particular he stressed that sufficient "common ground" existed for progress to be made and urged Unionist politicians to resume contact with the British government. Whilst reluctant to make any commitment to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement to allow for Unionists to engage in discussions, Brooke did hold out the promise that he would seek to work the Anglo-Irish Agreement in a sensitive manner.

On 16 January, John Taylor, the Ulster Unionist Party MP, called for an end to the Unionist boycott of talks with Northern Ireland Office ministers. On 20 February, John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and Peter Brooke, met to discuss the possibility of political talks.

On 24 February, The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) announced that its councilors would resume meeting with Northern Ireland Office (NIO) Ministers on issues of 'specific importance to any council area or relevant board'.

On 26 February, the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Inter Parliamentary Body (BIIB) took place in London and was boycotted by the unionists. On 1st March, an appeal to the Irish Supreme Court by Chris McGimpsey and Michael McGimpsey on the issue of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution was rejected. The Court ruled that Articles 2 and 3, are a 'claim of legal right' over the 'national territory'. The Court stated that the articles represented a 'constitutional imperative' rather than merely an aspiration. On 23rd March, James Molyneaux, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), said that there would be no agreement on talks while Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution remained.

Article 2 stated that; "*The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas.*" and Article 3 stated that "*Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the parliament and government established by this constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole territory, the laws enacted by the parliament shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws of Saorstát Éireann and the like extra-territorial effect.*" These articles became a matter of contention as the Republic of Ireland claimed sovereignty over the whole island of Ireland, including Northern Ireland.

In a statement to the House of Commons on 5th July Peter Brooke, said that he was unable to report agreement on the schedule for

proposed talks. The main difficulties centred on disagreements over when the Irish government should become formally involved in the negotiations. In addition no compromise had been reached on Unionist demands that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution would have to be repealed if the talks were to succeed. On 9th November Peter Brooke made a major speech on the British position on Northern Ireland to an audience in London. Brooke stated that Britain had no 'selfish economic or strategic interest' in Northern Ireland and would accept the unification of Ireland by consent. This came to be known as the famous Brooke speech.

On 17 January 1991, Peter Brooke met with representatives of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) at Westminster. The SDLP objected to aspects of the arrangements for proposed talks on the future of Northern Ireland. On 14 March, Peter Brooke, announced to the House of Commons that an agreement had been reached with the Irish government whereby he would decide when they would enter the political negotiations. In addition he also set Easter as the deadline for all the parties deciding on the arrangements for new political talks. The talks were to involve the four major political parties at the time and were the first in a series that lasted from April 1991 to November 1992 and later became known as the Brooke / Mayhew talks. Patrick Mayhew took over from Brooke as Secretary of State before the talks were concluded.The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), all agreed to the arrangements for political talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

Peter Brooke, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, announced that the political talks would involve a three-strand process. This process was to include relationships within Northern Ireland and achieving a devolved government ('*Strand One*'), between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland ('*Strand Two*'), and between the British and Irish Governments ('*Strand Three*'). In addition the three strands were to form a complete agreement - 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'. The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC), acting on behalf of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), and the Red Hand Commandos (RHC), announced that there would be a ceasefire beginning on 30 April 1991. The ceasefire announced on 17 April 1991 by the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) began at midnight of 29 April, 1991.

The preliminary round of political talks, involving the four political parties, on the political future of Northern Ireland began. A series of bilateral political talks were held at Stormont but there was no agreement among the parties about the venue of the main talks.The leaders of the Unionist parties refused to accept the deadline imposed in the political talks and instead travelled to London for a meeting with John Major, British Prime Minister. Unionist representatives spoke to Major about the issue of the venue and nominations for the role of independent chairman of the talks. In particular they voiced their objection to the nominee of the British government, Lord Carrington, as the independent chair for the Strand Two negotiations, because of comments he had made concerning Northern Ireland politicians in his memoirs. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) announced that it was leaving the political talks until such time as the procedures for the main talks were agreed by the other parties.

The four political parties in Northern Ireland agreed to the start of the main political talks known as the Brooke / Mayhew talks on 17 June 1991. Sir Ninian Stephen, then an Australian High Court judge and a former Governor-General of Australia, was named as the independent chairman for the strand of the forthcoming talks involving relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The four main political parties met at Stormont, Belfast, to begin talks on the future of Northern Ireland. Prospects of a breakthrough however were considered as slim given that a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference was scheduled for July. This was important because Unionists had stated that they would withdraw from the talks once the two governments began their preparations for the AIIC meeting. On July 4, 1991, The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) announced the end of its ceasefire, which had been in place since April 29, 1991. On July 12, a public opinion survey revealed strong support for the continuation of the talks. However, with renewed speculation about the date of the next Westminster general election no progress was made towards setting a date for a resumption of the discussions. Peter Brooke, again met the leaders of the political parties in Northern Ireland to try to begin all-party talks. John Major travelled to Dublin, to meet with Charles Haughey, the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister). This was the first visit by a British Prime Minister since 1980. The two leaders agreed to hold biannual meetings. Peter Brooke, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, outlined a fresh set of proposals to the Northern Ireland parties in the hope that these would lead to the resumption of the political negotiations that have been suspended since July 1991.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) exploded a bomb killing eight Protestant civilians on 17 January 1992 who had been travelling in a minibus past Teebane crossroads between Cookstown and Omagh, County Tyrone. Charles Haughey, theTaoiseach, announced his resignation as both Taoiseach and leader of Fianna Fáil (FF). Albert Reynolds was elected as leader of Fianna Fáil (FF) and also became Taoiseach. Representatives of the four main political parties in Northern Ireland held a 'plenary session' of political talks in Stormont. The parties agreed to meet again following the forthcoming general election. A general election was held in the United Kingdom (UK) on 9 April 1992 and the Conservative Party won the election with a reduced majority of 21 seats in the House of Commons. In Northern Ireland the main news in the election was that Gerry Adams, then President of Sinn Féin (SF), lost his seat in West Belfast to Dr. Joe Hendron of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). Patrick Mayhew was chosen to replace Peter Brooke as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. There was an announcement at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference that there would be a three-month suspension of its meetings to allow the political talks to re-commence. Differences however emerged between the British and Irish governments with Sir Patrick Mayhew, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and David Andrews, Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs, publicly disagreeing as to whether, amongst other things, the Government of Ireland Act was open for discussion.

The political talks recommenced at Stormont 29 April, however, little progress was made amidst frequent leaks to the media and disagreements among the parties.

The two leaders set the 16 November 1992 as the date for the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. Representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) presented a series of proposals at the political talks in a last minute attempt to prevent the process from collapsing which included proposals for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and provisions for Nationalists to have a 'meaningful role' in the government of Northern Ireland. In return the Irish government would repeal Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution. Unionists withdrew from the political talks and brought the process to an end. Their action was provoked by the restart of work by the Maryfield secretariat for the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference . Patrick Mayhew, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, said that informal party contacts would continue.

In 1993, the Downing Street Declaration* was signed by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. This outlined a path towards peace and a potential resolution to the Northern Ireland conflict. It established the **principle of consent**, meaning that Northern Ireland's constitutional status could only be changed with the agreement of a majority of its people.

In 1994, both the Provisional IRA and loyalist paramilitaries declared ceasefires, marking a significant shift in the Northern Ireland conflict. The IRA declared a cessation of military operations on August 31, 1994. Six weeks later, on October 13, 1994, the Combined Loyalist Military Command announced a ceasefire. Following this there were differing opinions, even between parties belonging to the same side, as to whether parties linked to paramilitaries should be included in talks.

On Friday 15 December 1994: Albert Reynolds resigned as Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland following the collapse of his Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition. He was succeeded by John Bruton, heading a "Rainbow Coalition" of Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left.

In 1995, the British and Irish governments released two "Framework Documents" outlining proposals for Northern Ireland's political future. The documents were a significant step towards addressing the political and territorial complexities of the Northern Ireland conflict. On the 30th of November 1995, President Clinton visited Northern Ireland. The aim of this trip was to encourage the peace process. He brought along his National Security Adviser, Anthony Lake, who had played a key role in the process, and also his wife Hillary Clinton. During a speech at Mackie's factory in Belfast, Clinton made a heartfelt plea for peace and paid tribute to those working towards a settlement including John Major and John Bruton. This visit marked the start of an increased and indirect American influence in the political process.

In 1996, the London Docklands bombing occurred on 9 February 1996, when the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) detonated a powerful truck bomb in South Quay which is outside Canary Wharf. The blast killed two people and devastated a wide area and injured over hundred people. The attack marked an end to the IRA's seventeen-month ceasefire, and came just over an hour after its declaration to Irish broadcaster RTÉ. The IRA agreed to the ceasefire in August 1994 on the understanding that Sinn Féin would be allowed to take part in peace negotiations, but resumed its campaign with the Docklands bombing when the British government demanded a full IRA disarmament as a precondition for talks. After the bombing, the

British government dropped its demand. A few months later, the IRA detonated another, more powerful truck bomb in Manchester. The attack was condemned by the British, Irish and American governments, and by the main political parties. Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams said he was saddened, but blamed the British government for the breakdown of the ceasefire, claiming that an unprecedented opportunity for peace has foundered on the refusal of the British government and Unionist leaders to enter into dialogue and substantive negotiations.

On 30th May, 1996, elections were held to the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue, which was set up as a consultative body as a part of the peace negotiations. On 10th June, 1996, the Stormont Talks formally began at the Stormont Castle. Nine parties of Northern Ireland along with the British and Irish governments were a part of the negotiations. The Sinn Fienn were barred entry to the talks, which continues till date, because of the renewed campaign of terror that was being carried out by the Irish Republican Army. The year also saw the Labour Party coming to power with Tony Blair becoming the Prime Minister.

***The Downing Street Declaration is covered on Pg.27**

The Peace Process in Northern Ireland

I. Sunningdale Agreement, 1973

The Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 was an attempt by the British and Irish governments, along with Northern Ireland's constitutional parties, to establish a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland during the height of The Troubles. It emerged from growing pressure to find a political solution after years of violence and unrest.

The agreement proposed a new Northern Ireland Executive, in which power would be shared between unionists and nationalists, and created a Council of Ireland to foster cooperation between the North and the Republic. Unionist parties were deeply divided over this proposal, particularly over the perceived threat of Irish interference.

Although the agreement was signed in December 1973 and the executive began operating in early 1974, it collapsed within months due to strong unionist opposition and the Ulster Workers' Council Strike, which brought Northern Ireland to a standstill. Sunningdale ultimately failed, but it laid the groundwork for later peace efforts.

The agreement had multiple provisions however it mainly proposed a new Northern Ireland Executive, in which power would be shared between unionists and nationalists, and created a Council of Ireland to foster cooperation between the North and the Republic.

The results of the treaty were viewed differently by different groups. From the republican perspective, the Sunningdale Agreement was

seen as a deeply flawed compromise that fell far short of their goal of Irish unity. Many republicans, particularly those aligned with Sinn Féin and the IRA, rejected the agreement outright, viewing the power-sharing executive and Council of Ireland as cosmetic reforms that legitimized continued British rule in the North. They criticized the lack of a clear pathway to unification and remained committed to armed struggle rather than political compromise.

Unionists were sharply divided in their response. Moderate unionists, particularly those within the Ulster Unionist Party who supported power-sharing, saw the agreement as a necessary step to stabilize Northern Ireland. However, hardline unionists, led by figures like Ian Paisley, perceived the Council of Ireland as a backdoor to Irish unification and a threat to Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. Their fierce opposition culminated in the Ulster Workers' Council Strike, which crippled the region and brought down the power-sharing executive.

II. Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985

By the early 1980s, Northern Ireland remained deeply divided, with recurring political violence, rising paramilitary activity, and little progress toward a lasting resolution. The British Government's withdrawal of Special Category Status for republican prisoners in 1976 ignited years of prison protests, culminating in the 1981 hunger strikes. The death of Bobby Sands and nine others not only drew global attention but also dramatically increased support for the republican cause, pushing Sinn Féin into the political mainstream. Simultaneously, the failure of the 1982 Northern Ireland Assembly,

due to nationalist boycotts and unionist rigidity, highlighted the collapse of unilateral British-led political solutions.

In 1984, the Irish Government convened the *New Ireland Forum*, which proposed three potential frameworks for Irish unity. Although the UK rejected these proposals, the forum reinforced Dublin's diplomatic position. Meanwhile, the U.S., under President Reagan, discreetly urged both parties to seek a political resolution. British intelligence also concluded that a purely military response to the Troubles was unsustainable, encouraging dialogue with Dublin.

The resulting *Anglo-Irish Agreement*, signed on 15 November 1985 at Hillsborough Castle by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, represented a turning point. It granted the Irish Government a formal, consultative role in Northern Irish affairs for the first time, while affirming the constitutional principle that Northern Ireland's status could only change with majority consent. Though it triggered fierce unionist opposition and was met with skepticism by republicans, the Agreement laid the foundation for future peace efforts and cross-border cooperation.

A few important details of the agreement are as follows;

- The Agreement reaffirmed that Northern Ireland would remain a part of the United Kingdom unless a majority of its citizens explicitly expressed the desire to change that status through democratic means. This marked a formal recognition by both governments—the UK and the Republic of Ireland—that the **principle of consent** would be the bedrock of any future constitutional changes in Northern Ireland. While it reassured the unionist population that their place in the UK was secure, it also acknowledged the nationalist aspiration for a united Ireland.

- A central outcome of the Agreement was the creation of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (AIIC), a bilateral body designed to institutionalize cooperation between the UK and Irish governments on Northern Ireland matters. Co-chaired by the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Conference was tasked with consulting on political, legal, security, and cross-border issues. While it had no power to legislate or enforce decisions, it symbolized a new era of diplomatic engagement and gave the Republic of Ireland a formal platform to express concerns and offer recommendations about Northern Ireland's governance.

- The Agreement emphasized the need for enhanced collaboration between the British and Irish governments in addressing practical, transboundary issues. It proposed joint action in areas such as policing, criminal justice, economic development, environmental protection, and cultural affairs. By improving cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on shared concerns, the Agreement aimed to reduce operational inefficiencies, combat cross-border crime, and foster interdependence. It also aimed to build trust between communities on both sides of the border, using shared interests to encourage political reconciliation.

- Both governments committed themselves to combating terrorism and upholding law and order, but also to ensuring that

security operations respected fundamental rights. The UK agreed to consider Irish concerns about policing practices, legal procedures, and detention policies. At the same time, the Irish Government pledged to support counter-terrorism efforts, particularly against paramilitary violence, including from the IRA. This provision sought to strike a balance between maintaining public security and preventing the abuse of state power. It acknowledged that peace could not be achieved through force alone, but required fairness, transparency, and legitimacy in the rule of law.

- To operationalize the Agreement, a permanent secretariat was set up at Maryfield in Belfast. This body was responsible for supporting the day-to-day work of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, preparing documentation, recording discussions, and following up on recommendations. The Conference was expected to meet regularly and produce actionable outcomes, even though its role remained advisory. The presence of this institutional infrastructure gave continuity and weight to the Agreement, ensuring that it would not remain a symbolic document but would evolve into a functioning framework for long-term cooperation.

The reactions to the agreement were varied, for the republicans the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a disappointment if not a betrayal. Although it acknowledged the Irish Government's role in Northern Ireland, it fell short of their central demand: British withdrawal and a clear path to Irish unity. Sinn Féin, which had gained political momentum following the 1981 hunger strikes, viewed the Agreement

as a cosmetic gesture that left British sovereignty intact and did not recognize the legitimacy of the republican struggle. It did not dismantle partition or offer self-determination to the nationalist population. As a result, many within the republican community saw it as an empty promise that failed to challenge the status quo, further entrenching British rule through diplomatic window dressing.

For the unionists the Agreement was seen as a unilateral decision imposed by London without their input, effectively giving the Republic of Ireland a say in Northern Ireland's internal affairs. This was deeply offensive to unionist identity and sovereignty. To them, it symbolized a dangerous erosion of their Britishness and a slippery slope toward Irish unification. Mass protests, political resignations, and the rallying cry "Ulster Says No" reflected widespread unionist anger. It deepened the political divide and fostered a siege mentality that would last for years, with trust in the British Government severely damaged.

III. Downing Street Declaration

The Downing street declaration , issued on 15th December, was a landmark joint statement by UK prime minister John Major and Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds , aiming to revive stalled efforts for peace in Northern Ireland. The declaration came after years of political deadlock, deep sectarian violence, and the limitations of earlier initiatives like the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. The context was shaped by an evolving republican strategy: Sinn Féin, backed by a more politically engaged Irish Republican Army (IRA), was signaling conditional openness to peace. International actors, especially the

United States and the Catholic Church, were quietly encouraging dialogue. The British Government, facing fatigue over “The Troubles,” sought a political breakthrough that could bring republicans and loyalists into a negotiated process. The Declaration was significant because it clarified the British and Irish positions on self-determination, legitimacy, and future constitutional arrangements, laying the moral and political groundwork for all-party talks.

There were multiple provisions of this and the most important ones were; first, it affirmed the right of the people of Northern Ireland to self determination, stating that the UK had “no selfish strategic or economic interest” in Northern Ireland and would accept unification only with the consent of the majority in the North. Second, it recognized that national aspirations were legitimate , just as unionist Identity and allegiance to the United Kingdom were equally valid. Third, it laid out the requirement for democratic consent for any constitutional change and declared that all parties must renounce violence to join inclusive political talks. Fourth, it invited Sinn Fein and other paramilitary-linked groups to participate in peace negotiations provided they committed to peaceful methods. Fifth, it reaffirmed the Irish government's constitutional claim to the whole island, while simultaneously acknowledging the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

In essence, the Downing Street Declaration created a diplomatic bridge between republican and unionist narratives, inviting both to pursue their goals through democracy rather than armed struggle. It became the political basis upon which the IRA called a ceasefire in 1994.

The reactions to this agreement varied from party to party, for the republican movement, the Downing Street Declaration was a pivotal moment of cautious opportunity. While it did not immediately fulfill the goal of a united Ireland, it marked a public shift in the British government's tone stating clearly that it had "no selfish strategic or economic interest" in Northern Ireland. This was seen by many within the republican ranks as an opening for political engagement. For Sinn Féin, the declaration gave just enough political cover to begin seriously considering a peaceful path forward. Though the IRA was initially skeptical, the clarity around self-determination and legitimacy of nationalist identity gradually helped build trust. Within months, the declaration laid the moral groundwork for the IRA's 1994 ceasefire, showing that diplomacy might succeed where armed struggle had stalled.

For unionists, the reaction was far more mixed and, in many quarters, deeply suspicious. While the declaration reaffirmed that any change in Northern Ireland's status must come with the consent of the majority, many unionists feared that inviting Sinn Féin into peace talks—even conditionally—legitimized groups still tied to paramilitary violence. There was a strong belief among hardliners that the declaration blurred the line between constitutional politics and terrorism. Some saw it as the British Government softening its stance to accommodate republican demands, which triggered anxiety over potential constitutional concessions. Still, moderate unionists recognized that the declaration also protected their position through the explicit consent principle and offered a potential off-ramp from violence.

It showed, for the first time in years, that both governments were willing to make bold, public commitments toward peace and that the path forward would be inclusive, even for former combatants, if they

renounced violence. It offered a narrative shift: from zero-sum confrontation to a shared framework where diverse identities could coexist under democratic rules.

IV. Joint Communique, 1995

The Joint Communique of 1995, issued by the British and Irish Governments on 28 February, was a follow-up to the Downing Street Declaration and a key milestone in the evolving peace process in Northern Ireland. It aimed to solidify momentum toward inclusive, all-party talks by laying out concrete steps and timelines for political engagement. The communique confirmed that both governments would establish a twin-track process: one focusing on preparing for all-party negotiations, and the other dedicated to addressing the critical issue of decommissioning paramilitary weapons. It also reaffirmed both governments' commitment to constitutional consent, peaceful resolution, and democratic inclusion. Crucially, it set the stage for the eventual multi-party talks of 1996, moving the peace process from rhetoric to structured implementation.

The document's central feature was the launch of a twin-track approach to address the dual challenges of initiating inclusive political dialogue and resolving the contentious issue of paramilitary decommissioning. One track focused on preparing for all-party talks by engaging with all constitutional parties, including those associated with paramilitary movements, provided they committed to democratic and non-violent principles. The second track involved the creation of an international body tasked with evaluating the modalities of arms decommissioning and building mutual confidence among parties. Both governments reiterated their commitment to the principle of consent, affirming that any change to Northern Ireland's constitutional

status would only occur with majority support. The communique also called for mutual respect, political reconciliation, and a peaceful path forward.

The response to the agreement varied from party to party from the republican perspective, the Joint Communique of 1995 was viewed as a cautious but meaningful step forward. While republicans remained wary of British intentions, the recognition of Sinn Féin as a potential participant in future talks—provided they committed to peaceful methods—was seen as a political breakthrough. The promise of addressing arms decommissioning through an international body rather than as a precondition to talks gave republicans some room to maneuver without appearing to surrender.

Unionists had a more divided response. Hardline unionists feared that the communique was another concession to republicans, especially with the prospect of Sinn Féin entering negotiations without prior disarmament. However, moderate unionists cautiously welcomed the twin-track approach, particularly the emphasis on consent and the appointment of an international commission to oversee decommissioning. For them, the communique offered a structured way to test republican intentions without compromising core unionist principles.

V. The Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning, 1996

It was the 28th of November, 1995 that the British and Irish Governments called for a twin track process for an efficient decommissioning process in Northern Ireland. As outlined in the Communiqué, the two governments agreed to establish an

International Body tasked with providing an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue. Recognizing the general desire for the elimination of weapons from Irish political existence, the governments asked the International Body to study the circumstances under which weapons could be taken out of the political arena—most notably those connected with organisations which had, the past summer and autumn, announced a cessation of armed activity on political grounds. The Body was requested in particular to identify and recommend an acceptable and appropriate means of completing and verifiable decommissioning, and to inform whether persons in control of such weapons were manifestly committed to cooperating constructively towards that goal. The Body was to be chaired by US Senator George Mitchell and its members were former Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri, and retired Canadian General John de Chastelain.

The members of the Body pledged that they had no interest in Northern Ireland beyond a legitimate interest in bringing the violence to an end and in upholding the right of its people to live in peace. Their methodology was based on independence and a common will to make a positive contribution to the peace process. They asserted that their evaluation represented their best, concerted, and independent judgment. In order to carry out their brief, the Body held two series of meetings in Belfast, Dublin, and London: the first between 15 and 18 December 1995, and the second between 11 and 22 January 1996. There was a further organisational meeting in New York on 9 December 1995.

In order to achieve a negotiated political settlement and remove the gun from Irish politics, there has to be commitment and observance to basic principles of democracy and non-violence. Negotiators

All parties, excluding the Sinn Fein and Democratic Unionist Party, fully accepted the Mitchell Principles. The Democratic Unionist Party also initially refused the Mitchell Principles outright, only accepting it as it was required to attend the talks at Stormont.

V. Stormont Talks Begin, 1996

On 10th June, after months of preparation, the Stormont Talks commenced at the Stormont Castle at Belfast. With a Plenary Session, chaired by US Senator George J Mitchell taking place, with the parties affirming their support for the “Mitchell Principles”. Nine parties of Northern Ireland, along with delegations representing the Government of the United Kingdom and the Government of the Republic of Ireland took part. The Sinn Fein were not allowed into the negotiations because the IRA had broken its ceasefire earlier in the year. Despite this, Gerry Adams led a Sinn Fein delegation to Stormont and protested at their exclusion outside Stormont Castle. The talks signalled hope and were a result of years of hard work on all sides of the political spectrum.

However, soon enough, the issue of allowing the Sinn Fein to enter into the talks dominated the negotiations. On 5th June, 1997, the

Talks were adjourned until 3 June 1997 to allow the parties to contest the forthcoming general election.

VI. General Elections, 1997

The UK general election of 1997, held on 1 May, resulted in a landslide victory for the Labour Party under Tony Blair, winning 418 of 659 seats and ending 18 years of Conservative rule. The Conservatives, led by John Major, suffered their worst defeat since 1906, dropping to just 165 seats. Key upsets included the loss of prominent Tory Michael Portillo in Enfield Southgate. The Liberal Democrats, under Paddy Ashdown, gained 46 seats, benefiting from anti-Conservative tactical voting. In Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) remained dominant, but the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) under John Hume increased its influence, while Sinn Féin also gained traction. Labour's victory brought a new reformist agenda focused on constitutional reform, public service investment, and modernization. However, some of Labour's policies—particularly its proactive role in the Northern Ireland peace process—caused unease among unionists, who feared the government would favour nationalist aims or fast-track Sinn Féin's inclusion in peace talks without ensuring prior IRA disarmament. Despite this, the Labour government's strong mandate allowed it to push forward with the Stormont process, reshaping Northern Irish politics in the years to come.

Paramilitary Organisations

I. **Irish Republican Army**

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 created the Irish Free State but partitioned the island, granting six counties in the north to remain part of the United Kingdom. This sparked a bitter split in the republican movement between pro- and anti-treaty factions, culminating in the Irish Civil War (1922–1923).The anti-treaty side, opposing partition and British influence, evolved into what would later become the modern Irish Republicans best represented politically by Sinn Féin and militarily by the IRA.

Over the decades, the republican movement would fracture and re-form multiple times, but its ideological origin remains tied to the pursuit of a united, independent Ireland achieved through a combination of political activism and, historically, armed resistance. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), formed in 1969 after a split from the original IRA, participated in multiple activities throughout the years such as having waged an armed campaign aimed at ending British rule in Northern Ireland and unifying Ireland. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the IRA employed bombings, shootings, and guerrilla tactics across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and the British mainland. In 1972, they orchestrated “Bloody Friday,” detonating 22 bombs in Belfast in under two hours, killing nine people.The IRA’s reach extended further in 1984 when they attempted to assassinate Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher in the Brighton hotel bombing, killing five. In the early 1990s, they escalated attacks with mortar strikes on Downing Street and large-scale urban bombings in London, including the 1996 Docklands bombing.

Despite these acts of violence, the IRA intermittently engaged with peace efforts. In 1994, they declared a ceasefire, which eventually collapsed in 1996 amid frustrations with the political process. The relationship between the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin has been one of strategic and ideological alignment. After the 1969 split in the republican movement, the Provisional IRA emerged as the armed resistance to British presence in Northern Ireland while the Sinn Fein, which is widely believed to be the political wing of the IRA, has time and again asserted the fact that it is a separate entity from the IRA and is not its political wing, despite continually supporting the actions of the IRA. Despite such claims, multiple unionist parties such as the DUP view the Sinn Fein and the IRA as one and the same.

The Irish Republican Army (IRA) viewed the Troubles not as a conflict between two religious communities, but as a legitimate war of national liberation against British occupation. From the IRA's perspective, the root cause of the conflict was the partition of Ireland in 1921, which they saw as an imposed and illegitimate division that left the six counties of Northern Ireland under British rule and subjected the nationalist/Catholic population to systemic discrimination and repression. The IRA believed that the British state and its security forces—along with loyalist paramilitaries were maintaining this unjust system. As a result, they considered armed

struggle to be a necessary and justified response to colonial domination. The IRA saw itself as the defender of the nationalist community and argued that peaceful means had failed, citing decades of political marginalisation and state violence. The IRA also framed its actions in historical continuity with earlier republican efforts, linking their campaign to a broader anti-imperial tradition.

II. Ulster Volunteer Force

Leader: Robin Jackson

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a Protestant paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, was established in 1966 in reaction to what it saw as a re-emergence of Irish nationalism, especially around the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916. The organization named itself after a historical Protestant militia unit established in 1912 to counter Irish Home Rule.

While the British government formally prescribed the UVF in the year that it was formed, the organisation was soon active in sectarian loyalist violence. At the beginning of 1969 it restarted its campaign by giving support to the Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV) in a string of bombings. These were designed to destabilize the government of Northern Ireland Prime Minister Terence O'Neill, who hardline loyalists believed was too willing to be conciliatory to Catholics and the Republic of Ireland.

The UVF officially made its violent introduction to the escalating Northern Ireland crisis on December 4, 1971, when a supposedly warning bomb detonated in the corridor of McGurk's Bar in Belfast. The bombing leveled the building, took the lives of 15 civilians, and injured several more. In 1972, the UVF murdered 27 individuals, all civilians, through sectarian shootings and bombings.

In 1974, the British government removed the ban on the UVF as an attempt to persuade the group to participate in the political process. This move, however, backfired as on May 17, 1974, a series of bombs coordinated by the UVF exploded in Dublin and Monaghan, killing 33 individuals in the most deadly attack of the Troubles in the Republic of Ireland. The UVF only officially claimed responsibility for the attacks in 1993.

Throughout the 1970s, the UVF was dedicated to maintaining Northern Ireland's union with Britain. It actively targeted members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), as well as committed murders of independent Roman Catholics, Protestants, and paramilitaries of other organizations. When the Progressive Unionist Party was formed it was widely believed to be the political voice of the UVF, although no official claims have been made despite contact between leaders of the two organisations and some shared members. In 1994, the UVF called a ceasefire, along with other Protestant paramilitary organisations, after a similar statement by the IRA. But internal disagreement about the ceasefire resulted in a split and the emergence of the harder-line Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), which opposed the ceasefire and returned to violence.

III. Ulster Defence Association

Leader: John McVeigh

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) was formed in 1971 towards the peak of the Troubles as a grassroots reaction to increasing nationalist violence and the dissolution of the Ulster Special Constabulary, popularly referred to as the 'B Specials,' in 1970. The movement started with a group of Belfast Shankill Road pigeon breeders who got together to create a local 'defence association' to guard their neighborhoods. As violence and tensions increased throughout Northern Ireland, the defence groups based in neighbourhoods started to organize. By the latter part of 1971, they had come together as a larger and more organized body: the Ulster Defence Association.

The UDA tried from the start to portray itself as a respectable and community-based organization that was dedicated to law and order. Its slogan, "law before violence," reinforced this image, and it formally excluded Members of Parliament and clergymen from its membership in an attempt to preserve its working-class ethos and keep out of politics. In reality, however, the UDA had a large number of paramilitary volunteers within its ranks and was heavily implicated in the use of violence and intimidation.

The UDA also created in mid-1972 the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), a paramilitary wing supposedly separate but in fact used as a cover for UDA members who carried out terrorist acts. This double structure enabled the UDA to remain legal, while the UFF claimed attacks that were actually planned and executed by the UDA. The British government outlawed the UFF in November 1973, as a terrorist organisation, and the UDA remained legal for many years afterward.

The UDA, via the UFF, was also a participant in the loyalist ceasefire announced on 13 October 1994, which followed on from the IRA's own ceasefire earlier in the year. Politically, the UDA was was believed to have been represented by the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), which won a seat in the multi-party peace negotiations after the Forum elections of May 1996.

IV. Loyalist Volunteer Forces

Leader: Billy Wright

The UVF, which was weakened by British penetration during the 1980s, resumed attacks primarily against civilians. It re-emerged under Billy Wright, commander of the Mid-Ulster Brigade, a ruthless and divisive leader known as "King Rat." Wright's ambition for leadership was at odds with UVF leadership, and after resuming attacks in breach of a 1996 ceasefire, he was ejected. He next established the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), a hardline

Mid-Ulster-based group which rapidly became infamous for sectarian violence, particularly against Catholics. While other loyalist groups opposed the peace process and Good Friday Agreement, the LVF did so. Creation of the LVF sparked a fatal feud with the UVF. Although small, the LVF's activities undermined loyalist cohesion and heightened splits within the wider loyalist paramilitary movement.

V. Red Hand Commando

Leader: Winston Churchill Rea

The Red Hand Commando (RHC) was a UVF satellite group. It existed separately from the UVF but frequently carried out missions on its behalf. RHC founder Johnny McKeague was a notorious Catholic-hater, once aligned with Ian Paisley. The group derived its name from the heraldic symbol for Ulster. Beginning in early 1972 the RHC carried out numerous bombings and drive-by shootings in Catholic areas.

VI. Combined Loyalist Military Command

The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) was formed in the early 1990s as an umbrella organization to coordinate the efforts of the principal loyalist paramilitary groups during a very volatile period in the conflict in Northern Ireland. It brought together the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the Ulster Volunteer Force

(UVF), and the Red Hand Commando (RHC), with the aim of being in a position to present a united loyalist face and influence the peace process from a loyalist perspective. The CLMC tried to make rational decisions and enforce internal discipline amongst the various groups.

The CLMC became prominent for declaring a loyalist ceasefire on 13 October 1994, soon after a similar move by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). While this was a significant step towards peace, the CLMC was also associated with continuing acts of violence and internecine struggles within loyalist organizations. The legitimacy was often challenged by the imminent threat of breaking of ceasefire and resultant turf fighting.

Political Parties

I. Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), founded in April 1970, emerged as a non-sectarian alternative to traditional unionist and nationalist parties during the early years of the Troubles. It was formed by moderate unionists and liberals, primarily from the middle class, the party aimed to bridge community divisions through civil rights, power-sharing, and constitutional democracy. Unlike most parties, it drew support from both Protestant and Catholic communities and consistently promoted reconciliation, inclusive governance, and equality.

APNI's politics are *slightly left of centre* and focus on cross-community integration, including support for integrated education, a bill of rights, and security reform. The party has international liberal ties, including links with the Liberal Democrats in the UK and the Progressive Democrats in Ireland. Internally, the Party Council governs the organization, electing leadership and approving policies, while the party leader holds significant influence.

In response to the loyalist and republican ceasefires, the Alliance Party emphasized that decommissioning of paramilitary weapons should be viewed as a confidence-building measure rather than a precondition for talks. It argued that while disarmament could reduce

short-term threats, it would not prevent future rearmament. During the peace process, APNI held firm on adherence to the Mitchell Principles.

APNI's core stance on political settlement included four pillars: regional power-sharing, accountable North-South structures, the Principle of Consent, and strong human rights protections. They opposed any deal driven by force, insisting on democratic negotiation. While supportive of inclusive dialogue, the party maintained a cautious approach toward Sinn Féin due to its IRA links, insisting on clear commitments to non-violence and democratic values to ensure public trust in the process.

II. Democratic Unionist Party

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) was established in 1971 by a hard-line group of members of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). In 1986, the DUP worked with the UUP to condemn the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Party leader Ian Paisley took part in inter-party negotiations in 1991–92. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is *constitutionally right-wing* and *socially left* but *generally socially conservative.* It is supported by rural voters, inner-city working-class groups, and religious ones. Its leadership has traditionally shown strong Protestant fundamentalist tendencies. The DUP strongly supports Northern Ireland's retention of union with Britain. It challenged territorial claims in the Irish constitution on the grounds that they were illegal. As such, the DUP has historically shunned interaction with the Irish government. Its policy stances are

influenced by an amalgamation of constitutional unionism and social conservatism.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) made complete paramilitary decommissioning, especially by the IRA, an absolute precondition for political negotiations. It opposed the 1996 Mitchell Report recommendation of concurrent disarmament and talks. The DUP considered Sinn Féin and the IRA inseparable and insisted on disarmament as proof of a clean break with violence. It was against all-inclusive talks involving parties associated with paramilitaries unless disarmament was proven. The party criticized trust or phased methods, demanding only overt, total disarmament. It positioned disarmament as a moral and legal requirement, not as a political concession and accused the British government of appeasing terrorism. Although it rejected parity with the Republicans, it sought decommissioning of Loyalists forces as well.

The Democratic Unionist Party supported a devolution of power which would only provide power to the unionists while rejecting the recognition of status of nationalist parties. It promoted a majoritarian form of devolution whereby they also rejected any form of power sharing with parties like SDLP and Sinn Fein. It challenged North-South institutions on the grounds that they facilitated Irish unification. In the 1990s, the party advocated for "roll-back devolution" without power-sharing requirements. It opposed the 1993 Downing Street Declaration, which it saw as a threat to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. It criticized the 1995 Framework Documents as more appeasements to Dublin. The DUP was against inclusive negotiations with Sinn Féin short of complete

IRA disarmament. The party considered the Mitchell Principles and parallel decommissioning as untenable. The party's opposition to Major's policies consolidated its image as the uncompromising guardian of unionist interests. Even under Tony Blair's government, the party remained highly critical of the British Government's strategy of inclusion and engagement with Sinn Féin.

III. Labour Coalition

The Labour Coalition was established in 1996 to stand in the Northern Ireland elections. Its most significant unit was Militant (subsequently Socialist Party), accompanied by the Newtownabbey Labour Party, the British and Irish Communist Organisation (BICO), and ex-SDLP members Malachi Curran and Hugh Casey. Militant had been hoping the PUP and PUP backed UVF would become socialist and initially encouraged cooperation. The Coalition's policy was for trade unions and community organisations to be part of peace negotiations. It was quickly established in reaction to the election process, Militant being the best-organised element. The Coalition consisted of several minor left-wing parties with little common ideology. It was guided by Mark Langhammer for the purpose of securing seats but dismissed Stormont's Assembly as "institutionalised sectarianism." Its internal disputes soon arose. BICO thrust Curran and Casey into office without consultation and clashed with Militant on democratic procedures. Militant struggled to retain control and ultimately bested BICO's manoeuvring. BICO, drawing on 1960s émigré politics, advocated a contentious "two nations" thesis contending Ulster Protestants constituted a distinct

nation. They advocated partition and were unusually tolerant of Ulster Unionism, frequently brushing aside Irish nationalism.

At the discussions, Militant accepted Curran and Casey as representatives in order to stave off more violence but kept hammering away at internal reform. Militant, established in 1964, was a Marxist organisation that campaigned inside the Labour Party. It advocated nationalisation, public works and workers' rights against British and Irish governments. It became the Socialist Party in 1997. It had a reputation for being anti-Thatcher and for campaigning against British soldiers in Northern Ireland. Militant campaigned for a socialist Ireland united front against both unionist and nationalist ruling classes, demanding the radical transformation of the economic and political order in North and South.

IV. Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) was formed in 1996 as a response to the exclusion of women from political representation in the peace process, particularly after the Northern Ireland Office rejected proposals to require gender-balanced electoral lists. Founded by Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar, the NIWC represented a cross-community initiative that focused not on constitutional questions, but on shared values of equality, human rights, and inclusion. It drew members from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds and avoided taking a stance on whether Northern Ireland should remain in the UK or join the Republic of Ireland.

The party quickly gained visibility through the 1996 Forum elections, winning two seats due to minority representation provisions. It was the first single-issue party in Northern Ireland, advocating for victims' rights, integrated education, mixed housing, and the creation of a Civic Forum.

On decommissioning, the NIWC supported the twin-track approach, believing disarmament should occur alongside political negotiations. It endorsed the Mitchell Principles and saw decommissioning as essential but stressed the dangers of turning it into an unrealistic precondition and also believed that the political process should be based on the principle of consent.

The party also called out the hypocrisy of those demanding a strict divide between democratic politics and paramilitarism, noting how all sides had historically blurred that line. They supported the creation of an international committee of experts to propose a viable disarmament framework and endorsed the findings of the International Body on Decommissioning.

Although the NIWC supported Sinn Féin's participation in the talks process on democratic grounds, it remained critical of any political party that did not commit fully to non-violence. It opposed exclusionary tactics but insisted that Sinn Féin, like all parties, must be held to the same standards of peace and democratic accountability.

V. Progressive Unionist Party

The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) had its roots in the UVF's attempts to establish a political arm, with the Volunteer Political Party in 1974 being short-lived. Following its collapse, a fresh bid came from Belfast's Shankill district, creating the PUP in 1979. The party sought to speak for the loyalist working class, feeling that this was overlooked by mainstream unionism. It broke away from old unionist elites and concentrated on grass-roots loyalist issues. The PUP had connections with the UVF but existed as a separate political organization. The PUP facilitated the release and reintegration of political loyalist and republican prisoners. It favoured talks with Sinn Féin and called for a Bill of Rights and a written Constitution to safeguard minority rights.

The party advocated power sharing in the unionist and nationalist communities, decrying DUP and UUP opposition. It was opposed to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which it saw as giving the Irish government too much influence. The PUP blamed mainstream unionist leaders of riding over paramilitaries while disavowing connection with them. In 1993 the PUP engaged in negotiations with the Irish Government, contributing to a loyalist ceasefire via the CLMC.

The PUP always championed "Sharing Responsibility" as a devolved government model. It backed the restoration of local authority only under guarantees that it would not be abused. The party voted for a Bill of Rights administered by a representative

judicial committee. The PUP embraced Northern Ireland's constitutional role within the UK and resisted the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It self-defined itself as a *democratic socialist party* of the Protestant working class. The PUP condemned Conservative neoliberal policies for exacerbating poverty in loyalist estates. In spite of ideological divergences, the PUP entered negotiations with Prime Minister John Major in 1994. The socialist and democratic PUP had some similar viewpoints to Labour, but Labour assisted the SDLP in Northern Ireland. Labour was less dependent on Unionist voters than the Conservatives. Labour endorsed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which was opposed by the PUP.

VI. Social Democratic and Labour Party

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) was founded in 1970 as a nationalist, social-democratic alternative to more militant republicanism. Formed by members of the Republican Labour Party, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, and the Nationalist Party, the SDLP advocated peaceful Irish unification, civil rights, and social justice. Early on, the SDLP gained strong support among the Catholic community and was the first nationalist party to participate in governance through the 1973–74 power-sharing executive. Under John Hume’s leadership, the SDLP rejected violence, promoted Anglo-Irish cooperation, and played a vital role in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. It supported a “three-stranded” approach to peace negotiations—addressing internal Northern Irish issues, North-South cooperation, and East-West relations.

The SDLP was firmly pro-devolution, advocating a power-sharing model rooted in cross-community consent, minority rights, and North-South cooperation. It promoted inclusive governance and consociationalism (societal divisions), opposing any return to unionist-dominated majority rule. The party supported cross-border institutions and saw devolution as a moral and democratic necessity. On decommissioning, the SDLP endorsed the Mitchell Report's stance that disarmament should occur during negotiations, not as a precondition. It opposed unionist demands for prior decommissioning, arguing this would hinder inclusive dialogue and exclude key actors like Sinn Féin.

Toward John Major's Conservative government, the SDLP maintained a cautious view, criticising its alignment with unionist positions and slow progress. While acknowledging breakthroughs like the Downing Street Declaration, the party remained frustrated by the government's insistence on IRA decommissioning before engaging Sinn Féin.

The SDLP supported Sinn Féin's eventual inclusion in talks, but only within a framework of peaceful engagement. They believed dialogue, not exclusion, would transform republicanism and foster long-term peace. Their approach balanced pragmatism with principle, shaping the foundations for Northern Ireland's modern political settlement.

VII. Ulster Democratic Party

The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), originally formed in 1981 as the supposed political wing of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), evolved from the UDA's earlier think tank, the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG). It is rooted in a staunchly working-class loyalist identity, the UDP emerged as a response to traditional unionism, advocating for a devolved Northern Ireland government within the UK, a written constitution ratified by referendum, proportional representation, a Bill of Rights, and an independent Supreme Court.

The party firmly opposed the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, criticizing the lack of consent from both Catholic and Protestant communities and Irish governmental interference. Their 1987 "Common Sense" proposal promoted a consensus-based political structure, aiming to build a new cross-community democracy. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) viewed the Stormont Talks as a crucial chance to shift loyalist influence from paramilitarism to politics. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) supported decommissioning as a necessary part of the peace process but approached it as a gradual and politically sensitive issue.

While not directly controlling loyalist paramilitary groups like the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) or the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), the UDP provided political analysis and encouraged a move

away from violence. In their public statements, the UDP emphasized that their role was advisory and voluntary, and that the decision to decommission lay solely with the paramilitary organizations themselves. They viewed decommissioning not just as the handing over of weapons, but as part of a broader process of political normalization, requiring mutual trust, guarantees of community safety, and political progress.

The UDP stressed that loyalist disarmament should be matched by republican steps, arguing that unilateral moves could risk alienating their support base. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) was cautious and critical of Sinn Féin's involvement in the peace process, particularly due to its links with the IRA.

While not opposed to inclusive dialogue in principle, the UDP insisted Sinn Féin should only participate after clearly committing to democratic methods and the end of violence. They believed premature inclusion risked undermining trust in the process and alienating loyalist communities seeking a peaceful, balanced political resolution.

VIII. United Kingdom Unionist Party

The UK Unionist Party (UK UP) is a minor unionist party within Northern Ireland, which was created in 1995. It was created to stand in the North Down by-election and subsequently participated in elections to the Northern Ireland Forum. The party was against the Good Friday Agreement and was opposed to power-sharing with nationalists. UKUP advocated robust unionist representation and was opposed to compromises by larger unionist parties. It advocated a strong stance in retaining Northern Ireland's position within the UK.

The UK Unionist Party (UKUP) is independent of the Conservative Party and, apart from matters constitutional, has been taking the Labour whip. It insisted upon a total and enduring cessation of all types of paramilitary violence before entering into talks with Sinn Féin.

The party vehemently opposed ambiguous or partial ceasefires and condemned the Mitchell Report for giving the false impression that republican organisations were willing to disarm as attacks were being coordinated. UKUP opposed phasing out decommissioning as giving in to violence through political concessions.

It refused any process of kicking down the road disarmament and involving Sinn Féin while excluding it. The party demanded that paramilitary-associated parties issue a complete declaration of

ceasefire and transfer credible amounts of guns as evidence of good faith before negotiations could continue.

IX. Ulster Unionist Party

The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), established in 1905, emerged as the dominant political force in Northern Ireland following the creation of the Stormont Parliament in 1921. It governed Northern Ireland until the imposition of direct rule in 1972. Initially formed to maintain the union between all of Ireland and Great Britain, the UUP later focused on securing Northern Ireland's status within the UK. It was traditionally supported by middle- and upper-class Protestants and maintained strong links to Britain's Conservative Party, although these ties were strained by events such as the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

Throughout its history, the UUP has supported devolution, seeing Stormont as a safeguard of unionist interests. However, it opposed the inclusion of Irish nationalists and any role for the Republic of Ireland in Northern Irish governance. The party split over the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement and vehemently opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

By the 1990s, under leaders like David Trimble, the UUP adopted a more pragmatic stance, participating in the peace process and the Multi-Party Talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement. The UUP conditionally supported devolution within the UK and accepted the

principle of consent. It pushed for a Northern Ireland Assembly with power-sharing, limited North-South cooperation, and demanded strong constitutional safeguards.

On decommissioning, the UUP insisted that all parties participating in peace talks must fully commit to peaceful methods and support a binding process for the verified removal of all illegal weapons. They advocated for a legally backed Disarmament and Verification Commission and insisted that no party should enter negotiations without a tangible commitment to disarmament.

Regarding Sinn Féin, the UUP was highly cautious, viewing it as too closely linked to the IRA. The party demanded full decommissioning before engaging meaningfully with Sinn Féin, considering its inclusion without disarmament a threat to democratic legitimacy.

Types of Paperwork

At the Stormont Talks, Directives, Communiques and Press Releases will be allowed. As this is a slightly unconventional committee, the Executive Board will allow two pieces of paperwork unique to this committee. The deadline for position papers is 9th June, 11:59 p.m.

Party Statements

These function much like Presidential Statements in a UN Committee. The purpose of Party Statements is for a party to undertake a new policy in relation to a new development or to alter a pre-existing policy in response to a new development. The key difference between a Press Release and a Party Statement is that a press release is meant to inform the broader public regarding an action or a development by a single individual or even a group of individuals. However, party statements are meant to create or alter the official policy of a party.

Please note that all the members of a party in the committee must agree and be signatories to the decision underlined in the party statement. If even a single member disagrees, the party statement will not be in effect.

A sample party statement can be accessed here.

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) is treated as a formal agreement between two or more parties/delegates that underlines common goals or objectives.

The purpose of an MoU is to establish cooperation and collaboration between the delegates or between two parties. It provides areas of mutual interest and recognises common goals. It may also provide for preliminary plans with regards to furthering mutual interests.

An MoU is not legally binding upon the delegates, however, delegates are expected to abide by any MoUs that they agree to and if a delegate breaks an MoU, a reasonable justification must be provided. If an MoU (public or private) has been concluded between two parties, it must be agreed upon by all the members of both parties and undersigned by the respective party leaders.

Communication lines for MoUs will only be open during and after the first day of the conference.

MOUs between delegates and individuals not present in the committee may be accepted by the Executive Board, only if a private communication is sent to the Executive Board detailing how the MoU was achieved. Further discussions and clarifications regarding this matter will be provided during the Orientation session.

The delegates are free to use creative liberties while writing an MoU, they are free to add content and provisions to it, however, delegates must stick to the broad format of the MoU linked below. The aspirations of every delegate in this committee and unique and any MoUs that are signed should represent the same. MoUs may either be Public or Private. The format for both is mostly the same.

A sample Memorandum of Understanding may be accessed here.

Important Documents

Some important documents that the delegates are advised to read, for a better understanding of the issue at hand are;

- Government of Ireland Act, 1920
- Sunningdale Agreement, 1973
- Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985
- Downing Street Declaration, 1993
- Joint Communique, 1995
- Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning, 1996
- The Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996

Citations

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https://www.quillproject.net/m2/final_text/downing_street_declaration

https://www.ireland.ie/267/Anglo-Irish-Agreement-1985.pdf

https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/legislativescrutiny/parliamentandireland/overview/sunningdale-agreement/

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https://www.quill.pmb.ox.ac.uk/brookesmayhew-talks

https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bmtalks/chron.htm

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