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## The Making of ‘Hesitant Peace’ in Northern Ireland

### Kuzey İrlanda’da ‘Gönülsüz Barış’ın İnşası

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#### Abstract

This article examines the early stage of the Northern Ireland conflict from the beginning of the ethno-nationalist conflict called the Troubles of 1969 to the beginning of the ‘peace process’ through the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 by focusing on a process of political, non-violent resolution efforts of political agents, which affected the route of the conflict. It utilises conflict resolution approaches to determine the variables with regards to the perceptions, positions, and decisions of conflicting parties, which provide an understanding of their role in peacemaking during the high-intensity conflict. Particularly, it offers three major aspects for analysis: inter-party collaboration, popular support, and interchangeability between armed and political struggle. It uses rich data from archival documents to analyse the influence of early peace efforts to de-escalate the conflict and establish foundations for peace prior to official negotiations. It argues that peace efforts do not consist of official negotiations in the 1990s. The article finds that they had been initiated long before multilateral negotiations through political conferences, direct and indirect dialogues between major political parties in Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish governments. However, the reluctance of political agents towards peace prevented making progress towards peace.

#### Keywords

Peace process, Northern Ireland, Conflict resolution, Peacemaking, Political parties

#### Öz

Bu makale Kuzey İrlanda sorununu etno-milliyetçi çatışmanın başladığı andan, yani 1969’daki Büyük Sıkıntı’dan barış sürecinin başladığı, yani 1993’de imzalanan Downing Street Deklerasyonu’na kadar geçen zamana kadar, politika yapıcılarının çatışmanın seyrini değiştiren siyasi, şiddet içermeyen çözüm çabaları bağlamında analiz etmektedir. Bu çalışma, yüksek-yoğunluklu çatışma sürerken çatışan tarafların barış yapımına ilişkin algılarını ölçebilmek için, çatışma çözümü teorisinin rakip algısı, siyasi yönelimler ve çatışan tarafların kararlarını belirleyen temel faktörlerinden faydalanmaktadır. Bunu yaparken literatüre üçlü bir analiz yöntemi sunmaktadır: partiler arası işbirliği, popüler destek, ve silahlı çatışma ve siyasi mücadelenin birbiri yerine kullanılması. Bu analizi gerçekleştirebilmek için çatışmanın başladığı ilk dönemdeki barış çalışmalarının şiddeti azaltmadaki ve resmi görüşmeler başlamadan önce barışı inşa etmedeki rolüne ilişkin zengin bir arşiv analizinden faydalanılmaktadır. Bu makalenin iddiası; literatürde iddia edildiğinin aksine, barış çalışmalarının 1990’lardaki resmi görüşmelerden ibaret olmadığıdır. Çalışmanın bulgusu; siyasi konferanslar, ve doğrudan ve dolaylı görüşmeler yoluyla Kuzey İrlanda siyasi partilerinin, ve İngiliz ve İrlanda Hükümetleri’nin çok yönlü görüşmelerden çok önce barış çalışmalarını başlattığı yönündedir. Ancak, siyasi parti ve aktörlerin isteksiz tavırları bu dönemde çözümü engellemiştir.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Barış süreci, Kuzey İrlanda, Çatışma çözümü, Barış yapımı, Siyasi partiler

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### **The Making of ‘Hesitant Peace’ in Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland conflict is one of the most intractable ethno-nationalist conflicts of the twentieth century which turned into a violent conflict in the late 1960s. The conflict has largely been assessed in terms of terrorism and peace process (Arthur, 1990; Byrne, 2001; Cronin, 2009; McGarry & O’leary, 2013; Neumann, 2007). However, the existing literature has paid relatively less attention to how political parties and actors played a role in the route of the conflict and resolution efforts at the early stage of the conflict. The article aims to close this gap in our understanding through a special focus on the British and Irish governments and major political parties in Northern Ireland.

The article offers a differing analysis from studies which compare the views of political parties and actors in regards to their relationships with each other and the government. Rather, this paper focuses on events and approaches which made it so difficult to make peace at the early stage of the conflict. Because there is a wide agreement that the peace process in Northern Ireland began through official negotiations, the role of political parties and actors in peace attempts, political initiatives, and parties and actors’ motivations for peace during the high-intense conflict have not been sufficiently investigated (Boyle & Hadden, 1995; Darby & MacGinty, 2000; O’Kane, 2004). This mainly stems from the idea that if there is an on-going conflict, it is not possible to discuss a negotiated settlement (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011). The investigation of political, non-violent resolution efforts will provide an important insight into the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict with regards to early peace efforts.

The article aims to analyse to what extent the Northern Irish political parties and British government disagreed and where political initiatives were successful and unsuccessful. In order to investigate these issues, the article asks the following research question: How did political agents play role in bringing the Northern Ireland conflict to an end from the beginning of the conflict until the doorsteps of official negotiations? To answer this question, the article utilises conflict resolution literature and suggests a threefold analysis: inter-party collaboration, popular support, and interchangeability between armed and political struggle. These aspects offer a comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons for the political actors’ views, roles, decisions and actions in creating and promoting, or preventing and obstructing a conflict resolution process in the Northern Irish peace process. The article argues that while some political agents were in favour and others were against peacemaking attempts, there were also changing dynamics and decisions from rejection to consent or vice versa.

The Northern Ireland conflict was crystallised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921) between unionists and nationalists. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 determined the map of the island as twenty-six counties gained independence (the Republic of Ireland), and the other six counties remained part of the UK as the majority demanded union with Britain (Cairns & Darby, 1998). Since then, the opposition between Protestant unionists who defend Northern Ireland to remain in the UK and Catholic nationalists who claim the reunification of Ireland has never ended. This ethno-nationalist tension turned into a violent conflict when the Civil Rights Association’s protests caused uprising between Catholic and Protestant extremists. The situation became worse and led to a violent conflict through the Troubles in the late 1960s (Little, 2006, p. 58). The

conflict maintained until the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998. On the one hand, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) of the republican community claimed to defend the rights of Catholics against the unionist community and the British troops. On the other hand, the unionist community welcomed British security forces to secure their rights against Catholics. The early stage of the conflict was dominated by the armed struggle between the IRA, loyalist extremists, and British forces. The British government applied repressive politics along with the armed response to end the violence. While the armed struggle was dominating the conflict, the IRA and British government applied several unofficial negotiations. These covert negotiations helped reduce the level of violence when it was not possible to meet officially. Although this is not the main topic of this article, it is important to acknowledge the history of these negotiations briefly. From the early 1970s to the 1990s, the backchannel communications were the most applied method in understanding the demands of both sides. These communication channels aimed to reduce the concerns of conflicting parties on trust and reliability. Particularly, backchannel communications built by Brendan Duddy, an Irish businessman, were very comprehensive since he acted as both a messenger and intermediary between the IRA leaders and British government (Craig, 2012).

The conflict gradually de-escalated through several agreements and declarations. While the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 determined the change of Northern Ireland's status if the majority demanded, the Downing Street Declaration (DSD, also known the Joint Declaration on Peace) of 1993 affirmed Northern Ireland citizens' right of self-determination (Little, 2006, p. 77). Particularly, the DSD was an attempt towards politically ending the conflict. Afterwards, the support for the political resolution was increased among society and political elites, and this attention helped declare a ceasefire and multilateral negotiations. Thus, the label of 'peace process' has mostly been referred to the term between the DSD and the GFA. While official negotiations have been applied during this term, the article has revealed that conflict resolution efforts had been initiated long before these initiatives. Several political attempts had been achieved through conferences, bilateral talks, and political pressure before official negotiations.

The article is split into four sections: The first section discusses theoretical assumptions on conflict resolution in the existing literature. The second section examines data collection methods and justification of the methods used in this article. The third describes positions of parties in Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish governments towards the conflict and peace efforts. The fourth offers a detailed analysis of party politics to understand what made it so difficult to make peace in Northern Ireland in the early stage of the conflict. The last section assesses the underlying reasons for hesitant peace attempts in Northern Ireland.

### **Theoretical Approach**

The scholarly literature on conflict resolution addresses assumptions of political, non-violent resolution efforts in ending political violence. When conflicting communities in a society are represented by different political parties, the resolution of a conflict depends upon positions and demands of these political agents. While party politics are influenced by their respective communities, the level of violence and perceptions of parties can result in either a political agreement or hesitance toward a non-violent

resolution. Two factors can play a role in party politics to establish a political agreement. First, a dialogue between the main political protagonists of a conflict is a prerequisite to come to a consensus in a conflict-affected society. The influence of support for a political party, its effects on the route of a peace process, and the root causes of a party to resist changing their views towards a conflict are significant factors. Second, political parties and government officials might use armed and political strategies simultaneously. How and why the selection between these two strategies occur is also critical to understand what makes it easy or difficult to make peace in the Northern Ireland conflict.

### **The Quest of Cooperation between Conflicting Parties**

Ethnic, nationalist, and unionist demands are major factors which cause a violent conflict to gain support in society. As these demands are political claims by nature, they require a dialogue between political parties and actors. According to Babbitt and Hampson (2011, p. 46), conflict resolution is a multilateral process that addresses both state-level and group-level goals behind political violence. Therefore, peaceful resolution attempts should be directed at two levels: First, the perceptions of parties as well as the relationship between political parties and governments provide an understanding of the underlying reasons for difficulties in making peace before official negotiations at the state level. Second, how conflicting groups and communities react with each other, and determine their support and reaction towards political and armed struggle address group-level goals.

Dialogue between major shareholders of a conflict is the first step of peacemaking in ending ethno-nationalist conflicts. However, this dialogue is not an official negotiation process between conflicting parties. While official negotiations commonly contain conflicting parties and an independent third party, initial contact between political shareholders of a conflict is mostly not an attempt to bring all conflicting parties under the mediation of an independent intermediary or to reach a comprehensive and binding agreement between conflicting parties (Fisher, 1983; Kelman, 1996; Kremenjuk, 2002). The initial meetings between different political parties in an unofficial environment aim to understand possibilities to close the gap between the main political protagonists of a conflict. At this stage, negotiable and non-negotiable issues during a peace process are identified (Burton, 1990a, 1990b).

Positions, values and goals, and the willingness of political parties for a negotiated agreement are major aspects for a successful outcome (Burton, 1972; Lederach, 1997; Ramsbotham et al., 2011). In this context, the distribution of popular support for conflicting parties, and their progress by delivering the support of their communities are vital (Dunning, 2011; Lederach, 1997). However, it is assumed that resistance describes the origins of the difficulties of a political solution and how the armed struggle was maintained by conflicting parties. Parties who represent the status quo can resist a change by being unwilling for any reforms in decision-making mechanisms and, thus, resist any attempts for political resolution (Ramsbotham et al., 2011; Wallensteen, 2007). These assumptions are assessed to comprehend how political agents affected the nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland during on-going violence.

### **Substitution between Violence and Political Resolution**

After making contact between conflicting parties, it is important to move away from defending armed struggle. It is argued that terrorist groups use violence as a tactical tool to reach their political aims and to create fear in society (Hoffman, 1998, p. 43). While the only legitimate powers to use violence are states, security forces of a state are also criticised due to disproportionate force. In addition, both security forces of a state and sub-state armed groups can be reluctant to lay down their arms. It is assumed that conflicting parties are less likely to join political initiatives if they believe that they can reach their objective through armed struggle (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011, p. 52).

The dilemma between conflict and peace maintains when the gain of conflict is relatively less than before. Zartman (1989) states that if conflict pays, conflicting parties are unwilling for a negotiated settlement. In this situation, both sides of a conflict might want to use armed and political struggle interchangeably. The contradiction between violent conflict and political struggle as strategic alternatives with each other and increasing political support to any party may increase the degree of violence. According to Ramsbotham et al. (2011), this condition reveals a strategic dilemma which identifies a contradiction of political actors between abandoning the political arena and armed conflict. The article examines whether political parties and actors utilised violence and politics as strategic alternatives with each other and, if so, how this situation affected the course of events during the conflict and peace process in Northern Ireland.

During a high-intensity conflict, the use of violence by sub-state armed groups can be responded through military tactics of states. It can also be possible that repressive politics by a government can be responded to by a sub-state armed group through the use of violence. This vicious cycle can proceed one after another. The reasons for engaging in violence and hesitancy towards peace are also aimed to be assessed in this article.

### **Methodology**

The research question of the article led to an analysis of a specific timeframe: from the emergence of the conflict to official negotiations. While the Northern Ireland conflict was initiated through the Troubles in 1969, the foundations of the official negotiation process were formed through the DSD in 1993 which led to the Provisional IRA ceasefire in 1994 and then multilateral negotiations. Therefore, the timeframe of this research is between 1969 when the Troubles began, and 1993 when the DSD was signed.

Due to the nature and timeframe of the article, the primary data were collected from the National Archive (TNA) of London in 2017. The archival research was the most convenient method to collect data because many of the major actors of the conflict were not available to contact as the conflict had ended more than twenty years ago. The fieldwork consisted of the collection of declassified archival papers in TNA of London focusing particularly on the Cabinet Papers (CAB), records of the Ministry of Defence (DEFE), Home Office and Northern Ireland Office (CJ) files, and Prime Minister Office's (PREM) declassified confidential papers. These three record series provided rich information through the analysis of numerous archival folders in regards to the perceptions of political agents, support or resistance for the conflict and peace initiatives, and underlying reasons for their positions during the timeframe of the research.

The Northern Irish peace process was surrounded by controversy among three major sides: The Northern Irish parties, and the British and Irish governments. While many different actors were involved in the conflict, the article concentrates on these three components since the influence of other minor parties and actors remained very limited. The article uses the Northern Irish parties as a geographical term rather than a constitutional definition. This term addresses the unionist, nationalist, and republican parties which operated in Northern Ireland. While it acknowledges that Sinn Féin and the SDLP describe themselves Irish parties, they predominantly operated in Northern Ireland, and so this term is utilised to address their actions in Northern Ireland. The archival documents provide detailed information about not only the role of the British and Irish governments' officials on the conflict but also the response of political parties in Northern Ireland through the views of their leaders and high-level officials which helped prevent a one-sided analysis. There is one limitation of the research that is the thirty-year rule in TNA where confidential papers are released to the public only after thirty years of their publication. The research complemented secondary documents which have been published about this topic earlier to close the gap in the research.

### **Positions of Parties towards the Conflict and Peace**

The Northern Irish parties were at the core of the conflict between the Troubles and the GFA. The major actors are nationalists (the Social Democratic and Labour Party – SDLP), republicans (Sinn Féin), unionists (the Ulster Unionist Party – UUP, and Democratic Unionist Party – DUP), and the British and Irish governments. The SDLP's ultimate goal has been a united Ireland whose position has been centred around two major demands. The first demand was to acquire a constitutional guarantee from the UK government. This was a significant claim since it revealed the major difference within the nationalist fraction. The second demand was power-sharing between the nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland (TNA-PREM/19/280, 1980b). However, there was also disagreement within the nationalist community. While John Hume, then the leader of the SDLP, focused on the significance of the Irish aspect which addressed North/South bodies concerning the governments on both sides and an expanded role for the Republic of Ireland in the North, others defended power-sharing (Dixon, 2008, pp. 9-10).

Sinn Féin represents the republican community whose major aim is to reunite Ireland just like the nationalist SDLP. However, Sinn Féin is seen as the IRA's political wing as they adopted the same ideology. Further, there is a widely accepted argument that Sinn Féin and the IRA are historically associated with each other because Sinn Féin's senior members are also members of the IRA Army Council (McAllister, 2004; Richards, 2001; Silke, 1999). This resulted in Sinn Féin rejecting to join political initiatives and any legislation from the beginning of the Troubles to the Republican Hunger Strikes in 1981 (Hancock, 2008). The two issues are key for explaining Sinn Féin's rejection to join any political efforts: First, Sinn Féin's advocacy of the IRA's terrorist campaign took the party away from the political environment. Second, Sinn Féin's main argument was the invalidity of the separation of Ireland. Hence, it condemned for serving a government which recognised division of Ireland (Murray & Tonge, 2005, p. 14). Thus, while the ultimate goal of nationalists and republicans are the same, their methods have been differing since, while the former defends political struggle, the latter defends armed conflict for the reunification of Ireland.



The unionist community were represented through two major parties: the UUP and DUP. The UUP was the largest party of Northern Ireland from the beginning of the Troubles to the GFA. The UUP aimed to demonstrate the common interests of the Protestant community and defend their rights in the Province. The DUP aimed to protect the union with Great Britain. The position of the party towards a political resolution was that there was not a political conflict to be solved. Therefore, according to the DUP, there was no need to change anything in terms of constitutionalism and administration. Besides, the DUP had always rejected to sit at the negotiating table with Sinn Féin since it was blamed for being the political wing of the IRA. Moreover, the relationship between the unionist parties and loyalist paramilitaries have been in question. The unionist parties and loyalist groups (Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Defence Association, Red Hand Commando, Ulster Freedom Fighters, and Ulster Young Militants) have shared the same goal: to remain the status quo in Northern Ireland. Besides, the unionist parties were blamed to back loyalist groups as the increasing violence of these groups caused the unionist parties to be excluded from negotiations (Curran, Sebenius, & Watkins, 2004). It was evident through British officials' aim to keep their contact with Sinn Féin secret because this would result in unionists feeling that they had been betrayed, which would result in possible loyalist violence (Dixon, 2006, p. 67).

The British and Irish governments also played a critical role in the Northern Irish conflict and peace process. The British government's position was dissimilar from the views of the Northern Ireland parties. The decisions taken by officials of the British government were influenced by the act of violence in the Province. The British government utilised a twofold strategy: military response against sub-state armed groups and diplomatic efforts along with political parties for peace. While the targets of these two strategies were not the same, the use of one was mostly the reason or the result for the application of the other. The Irish government's position towards Northern Ireland was not very consistent. On the one hand, the Irish government sought a more constructive political approach in Northern Ireland since it was considering both the demands of unionists and nationalists. According to the British government, Jack Lynch, the Taoiseach of Ireland, did not want to use the term 'power-sharing' since this phrase was not received well by the Catholic community. However, the archival sources demonstrated that the Irish government hoped to see some form of shared responsibility in Northern Ireland (TNA-PREM/19/79, 1979). On the other hand, it revealed through a declassified archival paper that Charles Haughey, then the Taoiseach of Ireland, declared that he was 'hopeful' for a united Ireland (TNA-PREM/19/280, 1980a). This was a handicap for the British government's political initiatives.

The positions of the British and Irish governments had clear differences from each other. As opposed to the Irish government, the British government's position was consistent in terms of fighting against armed groups and having discussions with political leaders. It also had to use traditional counter-terrorism tactics during the term of violence. It can be said that the Irish government's position was contradictory since it was both under the influence of the British government and the Catholic community. Although the Irish government officially recognised the partition of the island through the Sunningdale Agreement, its intention was the reunification of Ireland and thus was reluctant to contribute to the peace process.



### **Comprehension of Party Politics on the Peace Process**

The positions, perceptions and decisions of political agents are analysed through a tripartite assessment to understand the reasons for the difficulties to make peace in Northern Ireland: inter-party collaboration, popular support, and the interchangeability between armed and political struggle. Inter-party collaboration assesses how multilateral political attempts and the views of parties influenced the peace process. It aims to reveal the underlying reasons for the reluctance of the parties toward peace during political efforts. Popular support analyses how support for disputing parties in society affected the route of the peace process. It also analyses whether the distribution of popular support encouraged or discouraged parties to be involved in the conflict resolution process. Interchangeability between armed and political struggle examines the reasons for the selection between the armed campaign and political attempts during the on-going violence and whether this choice stems from their reluctance towards peace.

### **Inter-Party Collaboration**

The nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland has compelled parties to organise multilateral political efforts through the participation of all major political stances in Northern Ireland and the British government prior to official negotiations. Inter-party collaboration has been a major element to reach a peace settlement which has been formed through political conferences and agreements.

The Darlington Conference of 1972 was the first intention of the British government to bring political parties of Northern Ireland together for the first time which have different perspectives on the resolution of the conflict (TNA-CAB/129/165/8, 1972; TNA-CJ/4/136, 1972). The change of strategy from solely armed struggle to both political and armed struggle can be explained through the high-level violence. While the year 1972 witnessed the biggest total number of deaths (479 people) and in terms of civilian loss (249 people) since the beginning of the Troubles, it did not prevent organising the Darlington Conference (Melaugh, 2002; Sutton, 1994). As Zartman (2003) argues, there is a hurting stalemate which demonstrates a specific time when conflicting parties think that they cannot reach their aims through the methods they use. Thus, they might seek a way out of the conflict to bring this stalemate to an end. The British government's approach was in line with Zartman's argument. It can be said that as a result of the high number of casualties, the British government began to think about the insufficiency of security policies and the armed struggle.

Political parties suggested several different points to end the Troubles at Darlington. In terms of the insight of the discussion, the UUP proposed constitutional changes and majority rule which demonstrate its focus on law and order issues rather than peace in the Province. Further, these suggestions were on maintaining the current political system. There was only one inclusive suggestion; a 'tripartite declaration' by embodying officials from the Governments in London, Belfast, and Dublin; and aiming to secure the right of the people to self-determination in Northern Ireland. The inter-governmental discussion of a tripartite declaration towards ending terrorism in Northern Ireland was also proposed (TNA-CAB/129/165/8, 1972). However, it was clear that the UUP had little appetite for ending violence at the early stage of the conflict. The reluctance of the UUP towards

political resolution was due to the party's aim to keep an administration that was elected by a majority of citizens. Therefore, the change of the UUP's attitude towards a political resolution remained limited in the early 1970s.

The DUP's position was against political resolution claiming that there were not any political or constitutional issues to be resolved. However, there was a change in the attitude of the DUP. Although the DUP was criticising each political effort, the party attended the Darlington Conference. Two of the four members of the DUP had resigned their seats at the beginning of the conference, but the party continued to be represented at the Conference. The DUP's main perception was that Northern Ireland should end any initiative regarding executive and legislative powers on its own and Northern Ireland should be integrated with the UK (TNA-CAB/129/165/8, 1972). The Darlington Conference did not illustrate a great change in the DUP's attitudes. However, it produced a change from rejecting any political efforts to joining them. The article has also revealed that there was also a clash of ideas within the DUP which also affected political initiatives. Whilst this disagreement seems a prohibitive effect in general, this illustrated a positive influence by the inclusion of the DUP in political discussion. Even though there is a consensus that the DUP had always been against a political resolution, the archival research reveals that DUP members attended peace initiatives even at the early stage of the conflict.

The SDLP's view towards political resolution did not change during the Darlington Conference since it had an emphasis on guaranteeing the position of the British government if a united Ireland was declared. The SDLP offered an interim system of government for Northern Ireland under the joint sovereignty of the UK and the Republic of Ireland until the reunification of Ireland (TNA-CAB/129/165/8, 1972; TNA-CJ/4/136, 1972). The SDLP's proposal demonstrated that the party aimed to guarantee nationalists' rights in the region since the beginning of the Troubles. The willingness of conflicting parties is a crucial factor to consider a negotiated settlement (Ramsbotham et al., 2011). In this context, the SDLP's willingness for inter-party collaboration is an important dimension. Nevertheless, the Darlington Conference did not meet expectations since the British government could not bring all nationalist and unionist parties together. Despite its limited success, it has found that the Darlington Conference was the first political initiative in the history of the Northern Irish conflict. As Burton (1990) suggests, early meetings between parties in a conflict aim to understand major demands of political protagonists which helped to put forward claims of the Northern Ireland parties in an unofficial environment.

The Sunningdale Agreement was signed in 1973 to reduce discrimination, encourage disputing parties to be included in the decision-making mechanisms and reduce instability in the region. The agreement established three administrative bodies: the Northern Ireland Assembly to be elected by proportional representation, the Council of Ireland whose members were from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and an executive government which was a power-sharing body between unionists and nationalists. This agreement was viewed as the precursor of the GFA. Similarly, Mallon, an Irish politician, argued that the GFA 'was Sunningdale for slow learners' (Mallon, quoted in Irish Times, 1998). The Irish government recognised Northern Ireland for the first time through the Sunningdale Agreement (McDaid, 2013). This was one of the major

collaborations between the British and Irish governments as both governments acted as mediators, which collapsed in May 1974 because of the opposition of the unionist parties and loyalist violence.

Political attempts were applied more frequently in the 1980s compared to the 1970s (Evans and Duffy, 1997). The Northern Ireland Conference (NIC) of 1980 was a significant initiative to bring the main political protagonists together. There were not any significant attempts to bring political parties together after the Sunningdale Agreement. The reason for the interruption of peace efforts for seven years can be explained through the perception of major political agents. The British government had the intention to apply the Sunningdale Agreement and to maintain the war against the IRA. Similarly, the unionist parties aimed to maintain the status quo. However, the belief that solely military response against republican and loyalist armed groups would end the conflict did not help resolve the conflict.

The change in the perception of the parties led to the NIC. The conference witnessed the change in the positions of conflicting parties. Particularly, after eight years of the beginning of 'direct rule', the British government changed its position and decided to transfer some of the powers of government from Westminster to Northern Ireland (TNA-PREM/19/83, 1979d). It demonstrated the intention of the British government for a political resolution. However, as suggested by Burton (1972) and Lederach (1997), a long-standing conflict can only be ended through dialogue and intention of political parties and actors. In Northern Ireland, an inter-party collaboration between all major Northern Ireland parties and the British government was a prerequisite for sustainable peace.

The intention of one side of the conflict was not sufficient to establish peace. The Northern Irish parties were still unwilling to come together. Particularly, the SDLP and UUP were unwilling to attend the conference which might have prevented an inclusive outcome. In this context, it is important to understand the underlying reasons for their hesitance to attend the peace conference. The archival research reveals that while the SDLP aimed to give priority to other topics on the agenda rather than minority issues, James Molyneaux, then the leader of the UUP, blamed the conference of being 'time-wasting', given the lack of prospect of agreement on devolution (TNA-PREM/19/83, 1979a). However, the SDLP joined the conference when the modus operandi of government was discussed (TNA-PREM/19/279, 1980; TNA-PREM/19/280, 1980c). Besides, the UUP sent a statement to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to prevent the DUP from representing the unionist community as a whole (TNA PREM 19/280, 1980c). Even though the DUP did not attend the conference, the party sent its preconditions to achieve a political resolution. It was a significant change in uncompromising approaches of the political parties even though the violent conflict remained.

There is an important position change in terms of the DUP's approach. Unlike the Darlington Conference, the DUP focused on majority rule instead of the emphasis on ending any initiative related to an executive. Furthermore, the DUP's suggestion on a limited role of the minority community separated it from the UUP. The general perception of the DUP was against any peace initiatives. In contrast to its perception, the party attended the political peace attempts and changed its demands, which facilitated a political settlement. The change in the willingness of parties from the 1970s to the 1980s

assisted for a more approachable dialogue between parties. The NIC was a clear example since the change in the British government's position facilitated the political parties in Northern Ireland to join peace initiatives. When each party is sufficiently informed of the perceptions of the other in terms of the alternative objectives and costs of achieving them, outcomes of their perceptions can be acceptable to the parties in conflict (Ramsbotham et al., 2011). The conflicting parties did not choose to inform the others about their perception of the conflict and the peace process, which prevented an acceptable outcome.

Another significant change was seen in the attitude of Sinn Féin. When the Northern Ireland government had difficulties in controlling the Troubles, the British troops were sent to restore order in Londonderry and Belfast. The significant point was that the Catholic community initially welcomed the British troops as the cause of the threat for them was loyalist groups instead of the British troops (TNA-CAB/128/46, 1969a). The underlying reasons for the attitude help understand the perception of republicans. Republicans thought that the British troops intervened in Northern Ireland temporarily. A cabinet paper proves that the British government was in favour of working in collaboration with the administration in Northern Ireland instead of taking direct control during the early Troubles (TNA-CAB/128/46, 1969a). In addition, Sinn Féin's support for the IRA's violent campaign had prevented it from being represented in the previous political initiatives. However, Sinn Féin's attitude changed after the republican hunger strikes in 1981. While Sinn Féin committed only for an armed campaign before the hunger strikes, its position changed after the hunger strikes through both political commitments and armed struggle.

The political system of the Northern Ireland government started to change in the 1980s. Sinn Féin's decision to join elections to the UK House of Commons and local elections was a big step towards a political resolution. While the SDLP joined the elections in 1974 for the first time, Sinn Féin's decision to be represented in the Northern Ireland politics was significant for political collaboration. In addition, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), a centrist and liberal party, had been the fifth largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. It initially aimed to represent non-sectarian and moderate unionists but became a neutral party in the region. Thus, it played an important role in bridging the Catholic and Protestant communities during the Troubles. However, the APNI was not able to close the gap between the unionist and nationalist political parties towards peace. The British government decided the statutory granting of powers from the Parliament of the UK to the Northern Ireland executive which facilitated the conflict resolution process. Nevertheless, the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention of 1985-1986 and Northern Ireland Assembly of 1982-1986 were not successful for devolution (TNA-CJ/4/4173, 1982).

The New Ireland Forum (NIF) of 1983-1984 was another political attempt which witnessed an active role of the SDLP for moving the process forward. The NIF was organised by the SDLP and witnessed a voice of nationalists on the whole island on the ignorance of nationalists' rights in Northern Ireland. The collaboration between the SDLP and Irish government led Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to send her Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Geoffrey Howe, to the conference (New Ireland Forum, 1984). Therefore, it can be said that the SDLP helped bring the Irish and British authorities together. However, these political attempts were inadequate either to reduce the level of violence

or to establish a political agreement between the Northern Ireland parties and the British government. Instead, these conferences were organised as a result of the de-escalation of violence. Therefore, it can be said that the early stage of the conflict was dominated by the act of violence, and political attempts were applied only when republicans, loyalists, and the British security forces were willing to try another source for ending the violence. However, main armed protagonists were not ready for a political resolution as they still believed that they could destroy their enemies through armed struggle.

### **Popular Support**

Support for political parties and governments within society had a great impact on the route of conflict resolution efforts. The investigation of popular support for parties and their power against adversaries is crucial to understanding what made it so difficult to make peace. While increasing support for the SDLP played a supportive role on peace attempts, support for the IRA and Sinn Féin on the one hand and the unionist parties on the other prevented making progress towards non-violent resolution.

Apart from its goal, the SDLP opposed violence and was in favour of a non-violent resolution. It is one of the positive dimensions in shaping conflict resolution efforts in Northern Ireland. Lederach's argument on popular support explains the importance of promoting and extending the peace process. He notes that political parties 'possess the power, or at least the influence to deliver the support of their respective communities for the implementation of any agreements reached' (Lederach, 1997, p. 45). It aimed to defend political settlement which provided the Catholic community's support. The electoral support for the SDLP increased from 13.4 in 1973 to 21.9 in 1998. Although there was a fluctuation in the votes for the SDLP, the party received 24.1 of votes in the 1997 Westminster elections which illustrated that (Melaugh, 2015). Sinn Féin's participation in the elections did not decrease the electoral support for the SDLP which can be explained through SDLP's position to stand against violence.

Considering the SDLP's vision for political struggle, it can be said that the increase in electoral support can be explained through growing support for the non-violent resolution in the Province. This electoral support facilitated the British government to build a communication channel with the SDLP. Even though the British government intended to respond to terrorism with solely military tactics, the government had to talk to the SDLP because the SDLP opposed violence and had the electoral support of nationalists. William Whitelaw, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, stated that the SDLP could be representative of the Roman Catholic community (TNA-CAB/128/52/13, 1973). The SDLP helped move the peace process forward thanks to a great degree of support, which facilitated achieving political talks and settlement even if violence was maintained during the 1980s and 1990s. This was followed by the SDLP insisting that Sinn Féin bring the violent campaign of the IRA to an end. The Cabinet discussion on the high-level of violence confirms the SDLP's effort in encouraging both Catholic and Protestant communities to move away from violence (TNA-CAB/128/48, 1972a). Although the SDLP's positive impact on the two communities was acknowledged, its influence on the republican community was questionable.

The distribution of popular support particularly for an armed group and its political wing has great importance. According to Dunning (2011: 327), the dissemination of

popular support for conflicting parties can encourage parties to carry out institutional methods that can help bring violence to an end. While Sinn Féin and the IRA were against any political initiatives in most of the history of the conflict, popular support for Sinn Féin was maintaining to defend armed struggle. Gerry Adams's speech is significant to understand the relationship between the armed struggle and goals of Sinn Féin, which represented the demands of the IRA. He gave a speech at the ceremony on 17 June 1979 to remember Patrick Pearce, who was a nationalist and republican political activist. He clearly expressed the position of republicans by stating that the British government is the enemy of republicans: 'We buried yet more of our comrades, while enemy forces suffered also, yet again, at the hands of the IRA' (TNA-PREM/19/80, 1979). In the same speech, he explained that the IRA remained determined, organised, and unbeaten. Adams defended the IRA's violent campaign and said that '...a continuation of the IRA's War Effort would be sufficient to secure victory for the rest of us' (capitals in original) (TNA-PREM/19/80, 1979).

The armed struggle strategy of republicans changed when Sinn Féin joined political discussions after the republican hunger strikes in the 1980s because the party decided to join elections. Republican hunger striker Bobby Sands was elected Sinn Féin's member of Parliament when he was in prison. Sands and his comrades demanded that 'not because they are denied political recognition, but because they are denied the right to human dignity and treatment as political prisoners' (TNA-PREM/19/503, 1981b). The party supported this statement which did not help end the strikes and discuss the situation with the British government. In fact, maintaining the armed struggle of a sub-state armed group and the support of its political wing for continuing a violent campaign were significant dimensions of the Northern Irish conflict. This approach can be explained through the resistance of opposition groups to a political resolution. As Zartman (1989) suggests, parties become willing to acknowledge a negotiated solution when they do not attain their goals by creating violence in armed conflicts. The approaches of political parties in Northern Ireland were in line with this assumption since Sinn Féin repeatedly supported the republican hunger strikers' claims which demonstrated that the party did not aim to condemn the IRA's violent campaign. In addition, the electoral support for Sinn Féin was 10.1% in 1982 Assembly elections when the party joined elections for the first time since the beginning of the Troubles. The support for the party gradually increased and had a peak in the 1998 Assembly election and received 17.7% of votes (Melaugh, 2015). This demonstrates that the nationalist community supported Sinn Féin to remain in the political arena. It also put pressure on the British government to include Sinn Féin in the peace process.

The other primary aspect of popular support in the Northern Ireland conflict was the unionist community. While the UUP was the largest party in Northern Ireland and one of the main actors throughout the conflict, the electoral support for the DUP gradually increased. The UUP's main concern was about the political environment of Northern Ireland. The DUP focused on security issues and instability in the province due to the Catholic community. Further, these two parties had a shared mission: to maintain the status quo. On the one hand, the UUP's insistence on a majority vote was reflected by the British government, and there were many further steps towards peace. On the other hand, the DUP had concerns over security issues, and its leader Ian Paisley expressed concerns



to Thatcher. The concerns over violence maintained during the late 1970s and caused the focus to be more on security issues rather than peace talks (TNA-PREM/19/83, 1979b). As Wallensteen (2007, p. 137) states, parties which represent the status quo aim to keep the current situation if any possible changes influence their goal negatively. Similarly, the unionist parties utilised their popular support for preventing any political and security changes in the Province.

Furthermore, even though both unionist parties aimed to maintain the status quo, there was a competition between them in the 1980s. The position of the DUP and UUP were starkly opposed to each other since the UUP was attending negotiations with the British government and nationalists and demanding on keeping the union with Great Britain. In contrast, the DUP was opposed to most of the political initiatives even though the party delivered its will in peace attempts. The only exception was the AIA of 1985, as both unionist parties were opposed to the agreement (TNA-CAB/128/83/1, 1986). Competition within the unionist bloc appeared when the DUP attended the NIC of the Province, but the UUP did not. Even though the UUP did not attend the conference, James Molyneux, then the leader of the UUP, met with Thatcher and explained the attitude of the UUP (TNA-PREM/19/279, 1980). Although the two parties' goals were different, they were against the inclusion of republicans in peace initiatives. Whilst they competed to lead the Protestant community, their common goal was the exclusion of Sinn Féin from the political arena. Therefore, the influence on the change in their attitudes did not create momentum to produce talks.

It is clear that popular support for the UUP as the representative of unionists encouraged the party to be involved in political attempts towards peace. However, the party has never had a positive view of discussions with Sinn Féin towards ending the violent campaign or the rights of republicans as a community. Thus, Sinn Féin's support for the IRA in maintaining armed campaign prevented the unionist community from asking them to sit at the negotiating table. Indeed, both the UUP and DUP resisted Sinn Féin to join political talks. The DUP, therefore, suggested the talks be arranged among three parties which had elected members in Parliament: the SDLP, UUP, and DUP (TNA-PREM/19/83, 1979c). It was mainly because the DUP was completely against the strategy of the IRA and Sinn Féin.

### **Interchangeability Between Armed and Political Struggle**

Armed conflict and political efforts were used interchangeably towards ending the intractable conflict in Northern Ireland. The influence of interchangeability can be assessed through the analysis on the selection between the implementation of military tactics and politics by both the republican movement and the British government. The dilemma in the Northern Irish case appeared in the positions and decisions of Sinn Féin in terms of using armed conflict and electoral politics as strategic alternatives.

Sinn Féin's dilemma stemmed from its support for the IRA's armed campaign. Although the party began to join elections in 1982, it did not move away from the IRA. According to English (2003), the party consistently refused to condemn the violent campaign of the IRA even though it occasionally said that it regretted civilian loss because of the IRA attacks. The strategic dilemma was depending on the controversy between internal dynamics of republicans and the pressure of other parties in the conflict, namely the Northern Ireland



parties and the British government. Whilst the internal dynamics addressed the relationship between the IRA and Sinn Féin, the external dynamics for Sinn Féin were the pressure by the British government and other political parties in Northern Ireland. Particularly, the SDLP put pressure on republicans by trying to persuade the IRA to bring the violent campaign to an end. However, it was not sufficient for ending Sinn Féin's dilemma in favour of political resolution since the SDLP did not have an influence on the IRA.

The reason for the use of violence and the reluctance for a peaceful resolution was justified through undesired political changes. For example, the 'one person, one vote' principle was long criticised by republicans and nationalists as it resulted in the electoral success of unionists in nationalist majority areas (Hewitt, 1981). The implementation of the principle increased the level of violence even though it helped split moderate members of the civil rights movement from the hooligan groups (TNA-CAB/128/44, 1969b; TNA-DEFE/24/1825, 1969). While political pressure was claimed to be the reason for violence, the escalation of the conflict was also followed by more repressive politics. The announcement of the 'direct rule' of Northern Ireland from the UK government illustrated that political pressure and military tactics were used interchangeably not only by the republican movement but also the British government. The British government demanded to handle both political and military aspects of the situation in the 'short-term' rather than a projection for the long-term. It was evident through a confession by an anonymous Cabinet member 'the troops were not equipped or trained to do a longer-term policing job' (TNA-CAB/128/46, 1969b). On the one hand, the British government's temporary plan was an inadequate strategy which prevented to end violence at the Province. On the other hand, the insufficiently trained troops maintained to stay in Northern Ireland which caused trust issues between the British government and Northern Ireland ministers at Stormont. It was argued that the Northern Ireland Ministers did not wish to trust the British Army to secure vital establishments strictly longer than required (TNA-CAB/128/44, 1969a).

The 'internment policy' was another attempt to end violence but caused political agents to be reluctant to establish peace. The British government used this policy to identify and arrest 'terrorists' to reduce violence in the early 1970s. Security forces arrested both the IRA members and Protestant extremists (TNA-CAB/128/51/10, 1973). However, there was a huge imbalance between the number of Protestants and Catholics as a great majority of arrested people were Catholics. Further, the policy overall was deemed inadequate by the Home Secretary since the military action alone could not bring peace and stability to the region and did not even help reduce the level of violence (TNA-CAB/128/48, 1972b). Nevertheless, the violent conflict dominated the early stage of the conflict. This resulted in the British government and republican movement to believe that they would reach their political goal through an armed struggle which is in line with Babbitt and Hampson's (2011) argument.

Political actors may use violence as a tool to reach their political aims or to achieve electoral objectives as strategic alternatives with each other (Dunning, 2011, p. 327). It can be said that the reluctance of political parties towards the peace process stemmed from their strategy to use armed struggle as an alternative if political efforts would not work. Sinn Féin's approach was a clear example of this assumption as the party's strategy continuously changed between violence and politics. The British government, therefore,

aimed to weaken the support of Sinn Féin in the early 1980s. Particularly, the British and Irish governments had a joint interest in weakening the support for Sinn Féin. Both governments agreed to support the SDLP as the representative of nationalists rather than Sinn Féin (TNA-CAB/128/80, 1984). Thatcher's statement clearly expressed that a proscribed Sinn Féin could re-emerge under another name. Further, the proscription could produce defiance in Northern Ireland (TNA-CAB/128/55/24, 1974; TNA-CAB/128/76/38, 1983). The British government's attitude helped maintain political solution attempts on whoever was willing to attend peace talks or to reject the path to peace.

The Westminster Parliament had a twofold approach in relation to the representation of republicans in the Parliament. On the one hand, there was support in the Westminster Parliament for the argument that 'Sinn Féin should not be proscribed and should thus be enabled to contest the forthcoming elections in its own name, since this would show how little public support it enjoyed'. On the other hand, Protestants were strongly opposed to this view. The opposition strengthened particularly after the Provisional IRA had declared maintaining its violent campaign (TNA-CAB/128/51/20, 1973). Therefore, it can be said that despite the mutual interest of the British and Irish governments to eliminate Sinn Féin, there were different voices at the British Parliament which demanded Sinn Féin stay represented in the political arena. Besides, the Irish government was willing to support political rather than armed struggle. Therefore, the Irish government decided to support the SDLP as the representative of the nationalist community. It was also because Sinn Féin used politics and violence as strategic alternatives to each other.

Lastly, the disagreement between the British and Irish governments created a dilemma in the attitude of the Irish government. There was a clear divergence between the two governments during the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981. When three members of the Irish Parliament – Mr Blaney, Miss de Valera and Mr O'Connell – talked to Bobby Sands, the leader of the hunger strikers, the British government and specifically the unionists reacted to this act. Although these three MPs were chosen by Bobby Sands, the comments of these MPs were strongly criticised by the British government. The British government argued that 'Irish MPs should stop acting on behalf of the British government' (TNA-PREM/19/503, 1981a).

### **Hesitant Peace in Northern Ireland**

The early stage of the Northern Ireland conflict witnessed several political, non-violent resolution attempts. Whilst the conflict was dominated by violence between the British government and republican movement, how the Northern Irish parties and British government played a role in peacemaking efforts has been a significant question.

The existing conflict resolution literature suggests that conflicting parties should come together to discuss their goals to resolve a conflict even though a violent conflict maintains. Therefore, an inter-party collaboration between the conflicting parties is significant to understand positions, perceptions, and changes in attitudes of political agents. The article has found that the Darlington Conference of 1972 was the first political initiative in the history of the conflict which demonstrated that the strategy of parties changed shortly after the beginning of the Troubles. This is mainly because of the lack of political success of both sides despite the high number of casualties. The British government brought

nationalist and unionist parties together and aimed to act as a mediator between them. The clash of ideas between the DUP, UUP, and SDLP was revealed through declassified archival papers. While the UUP focused on majority rule and the DUP insisted on not applying any legislative changes, the SDLP aimed to obtain rights for joint sovereignty in Northern Ireland. Therefore, it can be said that unionists aimed to maintain the status quo, but nationalists had the goal to reunite Ireland in the long term. Even though several peace initiatives were carried out, these different views made it impossible to establish a peace agreement.

The NIC illustrated a change in the strategy of the British government by transferring some rights from London to Northern Ireland. However, it was not sufficient for peace as the Northern Irish parties were reluctant to come together. The archival research revealed that there was an important position change by the DUP since the party began to defend majority rule, while the UUP and SDLP were unwilling to attend the conference (TNA PREM 19/280, 1980c). Undoubtedly, this affected inter-party collaboration negatively along with the lack of representation of the republican community. Sinn Féin's view changed after the republican hunger strikes in 1981 which began to be represented in the Parliament. The Irish government's contribution was the NIF, which organised collaboratively with the SDLP. Although the NIF could not reach its aim to move the process in favour of nationalists, their pressure led the British government to attend the conference.

Popular support for the Northern Ireland parties and their policies affected the route of the conflict and peace process. Although the SDLP aimed for the reunification of Ireland, the party never supported the armed campaign and violence. This condition increased support for the party in the society, which was an important aspect for peacemaking. It can be said that high support for the SDLP forced the British government to build communication channels with the Northern Irish parties. Sinn Féin's exclusion from politics also strengthened the position of the SDLP. It can be said that there were two factors in the exclusion of Sinn Féin from politics: First, Sinn Féin decided to keep supporting the IRA's terrorist campaign. Second, the British government and unionists aimed to isolate the party from the political arena until the party condemned violence deployed by the IRA and dissolved the armed group.

The electoral support is vital to establish a political agreement. The UUP had the largest party in terms of electoral support in the Province throughout the conflict. However, the UUP's hesitance for meeting in the middle with nationalists prevented resolution in the 1970s and 1980s. The archival documents illustrated that both the UUP and DUP predominantly focused on security issues instead of peace initiatives which made it more difficult to de-escalate the conflict (TNA-PREM/19/83, 1979b). The article has found that there was competition within the unionist fraction. However, the competition between the unionist parties did not encourage them for peacemaking. Instead, they used their electoral support to put pressure on the British government for the sake of preventing any constitutional changes. The Northern Ireland case demonstrated that as long as popular support for reluctant parties for a political settlement maintained, they would be unwilling to join any peace initiatives.

The use of armed and political struggle as strategic alternatives to each other affected early peace initiatives profoundly. As Dunning (2011) suggests, political agents may use

violence to reach their political goals and electoral strategies. This explains Sinn Féin's strategy to withhold British troops from the island and for a united Ireland. However, the archival sources revealed that Sinn Féin was not the only political agent who used both methods interchangeably. The British government also used the armed struggle and political pressure as responsive methods to the IRA's attacks. Particularly, internment policy and the intention to see the SDLP as the only representative of nationalists were reactionary approaches to the armed campaign of the IRA. However, this did not prevent the British government to organise political conferences and meetings to discuss the future of Northern Ireland.

### Conclusion

The article has argued that several political initiatives were achieved between the beginning of the Troubles and the DSD when thousands of people lost their lives due to the ethno-nationalist conflict mainly between the IRA and British security forces. In addition, it was not easy to close the gap between parties which had different views on the future of Northern Ireland. The article has found that the political parties had almost the static point of views on their prospect for the Northern Ireland conflict. There is an overemphasis on official agreements and negotiations in the 1980s and 1990s with regards to peacemaking initiatives. In contrast, this article has argued that multilateral collaboration between political parties and actors, the distribution of popular support for the peace process, and to condemn the violence of the terrorist group were discussed repeatedly at the early stage of the conflict. Understanding these events is crucial to reveal which factors and developments prevented building peace before it became an intractable conflict.

The article has demonstrated that the balance of power and support for the Northern Ireland parties determined the route of the peace process. It has also illustrated that the impact of the Irish government in both the conflict and peace efforts was limited. In contrast, the British government aimed to take the conflict under control since the beginning of the Troubles. However, the article has revealed that the British government did not have a solid strategy at the early stage of the conflict and determined its tactics in response to the increasing or decreasing level of violence.

The contemporary developments in the UK, namely the Brexit campaign and post-Brexit politics, might affect the political environment with regards to peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives. Although Brexit has not profoundly affected the divided society in Northern Ireland yet, the rise of nationalism in the UK might emerge through protests and political campaigns by republicans and the nationalist community for Northern Ireland's independence. Considering this potential influence, it is even more crucial to comprehend the nature of party politics and underlying reasons for parties being hesitant towards establishing a peace agreement. The present article has revealed these complicated relationships between the political parties in Northern Ireland, and the British and Irish governments.

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