



US Involvement in the Northern Irish Peace Process and the Good Friday Agreement

Center Forward Basics
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Introduction

Conflict in Northern Ireland has resulted from differing political and religious beliefs for generations. The partition of Ireland in May of 1921 left Northern Ireland part of the United Kingdom. As a result, the country was divided between two groups. The first was the predominantly protestant unionist majority that believed Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom. The Catholic nationalist community believed Northern Ireland should become part of Ireland.

President Clinton and the origin of the Peace Process

The United States involvement in Northern Ireland was traditionally minimal, until President Clinton took office. Several key Irish-American figures engaged Clinton and raised their concerns regarding discrimination and sectarian intimidation of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. The United States' involvement was substantial with regard to the beginning and development of the peace process because President Clinton took a more active role than the careful comments of Jimmy Carter and the behind-the-scenes encouragement of Ronald Regan. First, he appointed George Mitchell as Special Envoy for Northern Ireland to specifically support and aid the Northern Ireland Peace Process. Additionally, the Clinton administration became interested in drawing Sinn Fein, the republican political wing, into the democratic political process. In 1994, President Clinton granted a 48-hour visa to Gerry Adams, the President of the Sinn Fein party, which was a pivotal point for the peace process. This move supported Adams internationally but also was a significant influence on the republican move from the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to constitutional legitimacy, signaling a change in US policy. Adams' visit and Congressman Bruce Morrison were both used to help convince the IRA of the benefits of a ceasefire, highlighting the influence of the US on the historic decision of the IRA to call a ceasefire in 1995.

Despite resistance from the British government, the US granted Gerry Adams a second visa to fundraise in the US for the Sinn Fein party. As a result, Sinn Fein became the richest party in Northern Ireland. During this time, the British government had been discussing the unresolved decommissioning of weapons, which was holding back negotiations in Northern Ireland. Adams' visit to the White House helped nudge this process forward.

President Clinton had a very pragmatic approach to the peace process, highlighting his hopes for all-party talks at the Whitehouse Investment Conference. His efforts got the Ulster Unionist Party involved with the US.

Economic Investment in Northern Ireland

President Clinton had a clear belief that peace, stability, and prosperity were all linked. His beliefs made economics a main component of the US involvement in

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

For more information, please visit www.center-forward.org

Key Facts

- Gerry Adams became Sinn Fein's President in 1983.
- Sinn Fein entered all-party talks in 15 September 1997, having signed-up to the Mitchell Principles.
- Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10th April 1998 which brought an end to the Troubles in Northern Ireland.
- Special Envoy for Northern Ireland is the top U.S. diplomat supporting the Northern Ireland Peace Process.
- 73% of people in Northern Ireland believing that Clinton's contribution to the peace process was helpful.

Ireland because he created an Inter-departmental Committee to consider economic initiatives and the economic potential of a stable Northern Ireland. Additionally, President Clinton appointed George Mitchell, the Special Presidential Advisor on Economic Initiatives for Northern Ireland, the chair of the multi-party talks and the International Body on Arms Decommissioning. This move highlighted the White House's role in keeping direct lines of communication open.

Good Friday Agreement April 1998

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) is one of the Clinton administration's foreign policy successes. This agreement established a new system that devolved power to Northern Ireland from London through a power sharing method between both nationalists and unionists. This Peace-Keeping treaty offered the opportunity of dual citizenship to the population, allowing them to be British citizens, Irish citizens, or both. The US supported a greater voice for the Catholic minority in Northern Irish affairs through the signing of this historic agreement. With President Clinton and George Mitchell's work, Irish republicanism declared two ceasefires which presented potential for political normality. The signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement meant that the US could easily ratify a set of objectives that both governments had already committed to. While keeping Northern Ireland part of the UK, the principles of the GFA stabilized Northern Ireland and improved living standards for the population with the promise of peaceful alternatives.

President Clinton's use of multilateral diplomacy was effective in encouraging peace in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the US involvement helped both parties recognize areas where compromise was possible and narrowed the gap between their political objectives. President Clinton was increasingly welcoming to those who would 'take risks for peace.'

The Bush Administration

The Bush Administration was less involved in Northern Ireland relations. However, the Bush administration did have significant impact to post-agreement Northern Ireland through the first two Special Envoys, Richard Haass and Mitchell Reiss. Both had a hardline approach with Sinn Fein and a much better understanding of unionism than their predecessors. This understanding was crucial on the issue of decommissioning and policing in 2005, which was achieved through the withdrawal of Sinn Fein fundraising visas and helped bring about the famous Sinn Fein-DUP agreement that Northern Ireland relies on today.

Conclusion

President Clinton's interest in Northern Ireland is recognized globally as being crucial to the peace process. During the process, the US saw themselves as "...interested outsiders, not insiders" and aimed to pull rather than push the parties into an agreement. President Clinton was immensely proud of his role in the peace process and often referred to it as examples to Kosovo and Kashmir with his famous line "Let me tell you about Northern Ireland...".

A post-Brexit Northern Ireland is a potential threat to the vulnerable peace process. It may jeopardize the 25 years of hard work that has been invested into the process and raises concern surrounding the safety of the citizens.

Links to Other Resources

- [CNN - President Clinton's remarks at an Irish-American community event](#)
- [Foreign Affairs - The Squandered Presidency](#)
- [Journal of Conflict Studies - American Influences on the Northern Ireland Peace Process](#)
- [Political Quarterly - Promoting Democracy in Northern Ireland; Bush and the Peace Process](#)
- [Royal Irish Academy - The United States and Post-Agreement Northern Ireland](#)

- [Royal Irish Academy - Encouragement from the Sidelines: Clinton's role in the Good Friday Agreement](#)
- [The United States and Northern Ireland - Jimmy Carter's August 1977 Statement](#)