



Program Director:  
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# DELHI POLICY GROUP

*Program on Developing Durable Peace Processes & Partners*

## *Simulation I*

### **Simulation Exercise** *Northern Ireland*

#### **The Scenario—Last Round of Negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement, April 1998**

#### **Summary**

**Place:** Northern Ireland

**Time:** Beginning of April 1998, just prior to the achievement of the Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement)

**Context:** Ceasefires by the main organizations engaged in political violence in Northern Ireland in 1994 opened the way for a peace process in Northern Ireland. These ceasefires were seen as essential to the prospects for a political settlement because of the existence of political parties with significant levels of popular support that had close links with illegal organizations engaged in political violence.

The expectation was that the ceasefires would be quickly followed by talks among all significant political parties in Northern Ireland on a new political dispensation to replace direct rule of Northern Ireland from London. However, arguments over the terms of the ceasefires delayed talks until September 1997. In February 1996 Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) abandoned its ceasefire in protest against delays in talks; they reinstated the ceasefire in July 1997 after its political wing, Sinn Féin, received assurances from the British and Irish governments that multi-party talks on a political settlement would be held in 1997.

The simulation is set in the week before the achievement of the Belfast Agreement (also known as the Good Friday Agreement). At the time, it seemed little short of a miracle that a settlement was reached.

Part of the objective of the simulation is that participants should be able to understand the political dynamics that made agreement possible among antagonists with diametrically opposed long-term objectives. At the same time, participants will be aware (as the actual participants of the talks in 1998 were not) of the difficulties that would be encountered in implementing the settlement and its political impact.



#### **Simulation Structure**



You are a member of one of the negotiation teams in early April 1998. The US chairperson of the talks, Senator George Mitchell, has said that he wants a deal within one week, or he will leave and publicly blame those he believes to be responsible. He says everyone has had long enough to consider the issues and now they must make choices.

A number of issues remain to be resolved. On some questions there is a clear need for one actor at least to alter its view. The question is—which demands are negotiable and which are absolute deal breakers. On other issues there may be room for an imaginative compromise that satisfies everyone (or most people)—what might those be?



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The entire simulation will be a negotiation around the table, chaired by the US. However, different negotiating teams can ask for time out to consult. Moreover, if a sufficient number of teams feel that they need to consult with each other on an issue, the chair can take an on the spot decision to set aside a session for teams to consult and decide their positions accordingly.

The key question to be discussed will be:

*What would you do, and expect others to do, to arrive at a solution that is based on the draft negotiating papers, and make it acceptable to all, keeping in mind the needs of implementation?*

**You will have about ten minutes to make your presentation, so prepare accordingly.**

Participants should consult the chronology provided as well as the information on the outcome of elections before and after the settlement to get a sense of the period in which the settlement occurred and its place in the longer history of the problem. However, of course, participants should not refer to developments after April 1998 in conducting any of the negotiations during the simulation. Also provided for the participants are statistics on fatalities during Northern Ireland's violent conflict. They will help participants in the simulation get a sense of what was at stake for the parties involved in the talks that led to the settlement, since it was a common assumption that if the negotiations failed, there would be a general return to political violence by the main paramilitary organizations. The level of violence needs to be seen in the context of small society numbering only slightly more than one and a half million people.

### Brief Description of the Negotiating Teams

The different negotiating teams at the table are:

Sinn Féin  
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)  
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)  
US Government  
British Government  
Irish Government  
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

The position of each group is:

1. ***Sinn Féin***. The negotiation team will most likely have internal divisions with some very supportive of a deal and others fearful that it means abandoning their campaign for a united Ireland.
2. ***Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)***. Moderate nationalists, internally relatively united. Some might fear that including Sinn Féin in an agreement will make Sinn Féin more attractive as a party and see their party lose support to a new 'post ceasefire Sinn Féin'; others fear that if they make too many concessions to Unionists or are too hostile to Sinn Féin, Nationalist voters will blame them and shift their support to Sinn Féin.





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3. **Ulster Unionist Party (UUP).** The traditional, mainstream, and at this time the biggest Unionist party. They are internally divided. Some see the peace process as offering too many concessions to Nationalists and oppose a deal. Others, including the leadership, fear that if they walk away they will be politically isolated by the British and Irish governments and that the governments—to secure the IRA ceasefire—will make even more concessions to Sinn Féin.
4. **Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).** They have opposed the process from the beginning and walked out of talks when Sinn Féin were allowed in, in 1997. They see the process as inevitably strengthening nationalism and argue that the best position for Unionists is to oppose it. They constantly attack the UUP leader for compromising, while being careful not to alienate potential supporters of the UUP who may switch party allegiance—as long as the DUP is not too extreme.
5. **Irish Government.** The Irish government's first priority is to secure a deal. However, it believes that Sinn Féin must be included if the IRA ceasefire is to hold and therefore on occasions joins with Sinn Féin to pressurize the British Government.
6. **British Government.** They also want a deal but are more skeptical about the IRA's long term intentions than the Irish government. They want to keep the ceasefires if possible but are also willing to support a power-sharing deal between the moderate nationalist SDLP and the UUP. They are more open to Unionist concerns and occasionally take their side against Nationalist pressure. They are also very concerned to protect their sovereign claim to Northern Ireland and to have that reflected by maintaining British troops there.
7. **US Government.** Traditionally the US government was always supportive of the British position. However, the Clinton administration is more active on Northern Ireland. While publicly very even handed the impact of its involvement is often to add strength to the (normally weaker) Nationalist or Irish government position over the British government.

The main issues that will be discussed are:

**A local Power-sharing Government.** Sinn Féin would prefer having no local parliament, but no one else supports this position. If there is a local government, Sinn Féin insist that they must be included as they represent 17% of the population. Unionists are very unhappy as they see Sinn Féin as directly linked to the IRA.

**Cross-Border Institutions.** Even moderate Nationalists insist that there must be an institutional link between the governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. They want a Joint Ministerial Council—like the EU Council of Ministers and also functional cross-border bodies to deal with issues of a cross-border nature, such as animal health, tourism etc. Unionists are unhappy with such bodies, seeing them as leading the way to a more all-Ireland focus and reducing links with Britain. Nationalists see them as a trade off for their agreement to accept continuing British sovereignty.

**Constitutional Issues.** Unionists and the British government insist on an explicit recognition of British sovereignty over Northern Ireland. In practical terms, Unionists and the British government want the Irish government to agree to hold a referendum to amend the Irish constitution, to withdraw the claim to Northern Ireland. It also wants an explicit commitment that constitutional change will require a majority within Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin opposes the principle of a majority within NI but is isolated on this. Nationalists in general want some open ended process that could lead to a united Ireland. The Irish government argues that unless the Irish citizenship and nationality of people in NI is constitutionally guaranteed, it cannot hope to pass a referendum in the Republic.





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**Prisoners.** Sinn Féin and loyalists want their prisoners released. They argue they need a *confidence-building measure* of this kind to persuade their skeptical members that a deal is worth supporting. Unionists and the British government are worried that this effectively means that they recognize such prisoners as “political prisoners”, something they reject.

**Security Issues.** Nationalists see the British Army and local police force (RUC) as part of the reasons for conflict and are critical of their attitude to the nationalist community, and their behavior. Sinn Féin accuse them of cooperating with loyalist paramilitaries in the killing of Nationalists. Nationalists want a new police force and maximum withdrawal of British troops back to their bases in Britain, with closure of their bases. Unionists see such forces as ‘their’ defenders against the IRA.

**Equality.** Nationalists want guarantees of reform on issues such as employment equality policy, recognition of the Irish language and Irish national symbols. Unionists fear that such reforms undermine the ‘British’ nature of Northern Ireland.

