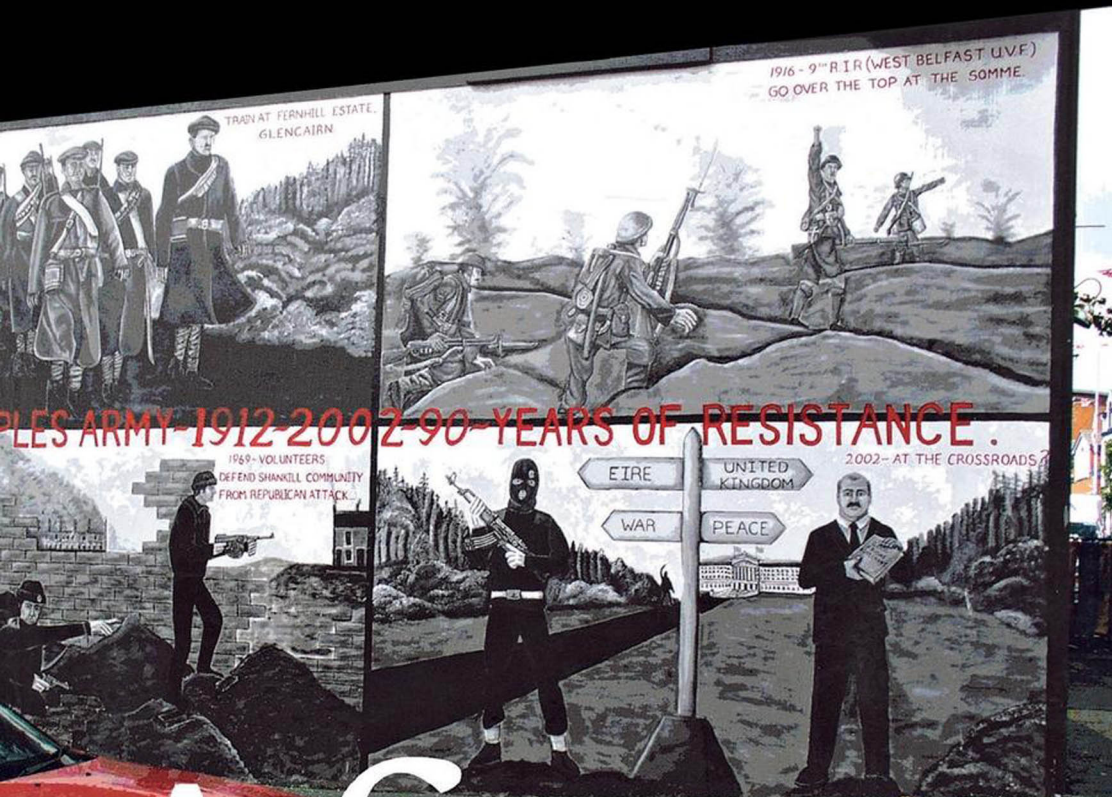


Carolyn
Gallaher

LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES

IN POST-ACCORD NORTHERN IRELAND



After the Peace

After the Peace

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AFTER THE PEACE

*Loyalist Paramilitaries
in Post-Accord
Northern Ireland*

CAROLYN GALLAHER

Cornell University Press

ITHACA AND LONDON

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First published 2007 by Cornell University Press
First printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 2007

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gallaher, Carolyn, 1969–

After the peace : Loyalist paramilitaries in post-accord Northern Ireland / Carolyn Gallaher.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8014-4570-5 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8014-7426-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Ulster Volunteer Force. 2. Ulster Defence Association. 3. Loyalist Volunteer Force.
4. Paramilitary forces—Northern Ireland. 5. Political violence—Northern Ireland. 6.
Protestants—Northern Ireland—Political activity. 7. Northern Ireland—Politics and govern-
ment—1994– I. Title.

DA990.U46G333 2007

941.60824—dc22

2007018951

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Cloth printing	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Paperback printing	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

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Fig. 1. Central Belfast. By Nuala M. Cowan, Department of Geography, George Washington University.

Preface

This book is about the backwash of a conflict that has largely ended. It has been almost a decade since a peace agreement was signed in Northern Ireland and even longer since a joint 1994 cease-fire was announced. This is a significant duration of time—most conflicts have a high likelihood of reigniting within the first five years of peace. Northern Ireland has witnessed its share of brinkmanship in the intervening years, but its peace has held. Nevertheless, formal peace has failed to rid the province of its paramilitaries. Loyalist paramilitaries, the subject of this book, have killed over fifty people, mostly Protestant, since 1999. They have maimed or otherwise wounded countless others. Indeed, they continued to recruit as if the Troubles were ongoing.

In Northern Ireland, as in any society emerging from conflict, the preferred scenario is for paramilitaries to demilitarize (or be demilitarized) shortly after a peace agreement is signed. With paramilitary members sent home and weapons put beyond use, civil society can emerge and peace can take root. When wars were primarily state-on-state affairs, demilitarization was routine. The victor state seized the enemy state's weapons, imprisoned or killed its military leaders, and decommissioned the rest. Contemporary warfare is different. States still fight wars (no one has yet figured out how to eliminate them), but increasingly guerillas, paramilitaries, and contract fighters join states on the battlefield. When such conflicts end, there is usually no clear victor and no entity capable of forcibly demobilizing all the armed factions.

Unfortunately, paramilitaries have a poor track record of dismantling themselves. And as contradictory as it may seem, most paramilitaries lack the wherewithal to do so. Indeed, while paramilitaries generally have enough largesse to provide members with generous “retirement” payouts, one-time payments, even large ones, tend to be less attractive than the promise of

continued kickbacks from racketeering, smuggling, and the like. The horizontal leadership that benefits paramilitaries on the battlefield is also an obstacle at peace time. A flat organizational chart means that brigades are designed to operate autonomously; they purchase and store their own weapons, and they run their own rackets. In short, a battalion can afford to ignore a stand-down order if it so chooses. Even in organizations that have sufficient power to enforce dismantlement, the motivation to shut down can be weak. Protracted fighting often becomes a way of life—a source of income, status, and security. Convincing hardened fighters, or their admirers down the demographic ladder, to forgo the life is easier said than done. Indeed, some fighters grow weary of fighting, but others fear their prospects under peace and resist it. Fighting the “traitors” in the ranks becomes a new *casus belli* and a reason not to stand down.

After World War II, the nature of warfare changed. Intrastate wars gave way to so-called low-intensity conflicts. Like contemporary conflicts in Colombia and East Timor, as well as more recent wars in Sierra Leone, Chechnya, and the Balkans, the Troubles of Northern Ireland involved a mix of state forces, guerilla groups, and paramilitaries loyal to the government. Many of these societies are currently at peace, but organized violence remains a problem in all of them. In some cases fighters have refused to fully demobilize. In others, fighters have demobilized, but they have simply shifted their efforts into criminal enterprises. In Colombia, for example, the right-wing paramilitary—the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)—has murdered over three thousand people since its cease-fire in 2002 (Vieira 2006). In the spring of 2006 the East Timorese military, made up of former combatants, fragmented into warring factions that mirrored the old conflict divide. Dili, the capital, became a battlefield, with jobless youths and common street gangs joining the fray.

Peace agreements are never perfect. Far more fail than succeed. And many have only partial success. The Belfast Agreement certainly has its problems, and I discuss many of them here, but my primary focus is on the paramilitaries themselves. Their continuing violence and descent into criminality cannot be blamed on the agreement alone. Indeed, the agreement was signed by the same Loyalist paramilitaries that chose to ignore its mandate to decommission and otherwise dismantle in a timely manner.

Loyalist recalcitrance has as much to do with internal divides as external forces. Since the march to peace began in the run-up to the 1994 cease-fire, Loyalist paramilitaries have become trenchantly divided. The split began as a divide about the peace process but has since morphed into a wider struggle. On the one hand are Loyalists, many of them ex-prisoners, who helped negotiate the 1994 cease-fire and the 1998 peace accord. They still support peace, but they find themselves in the unenviable position of supporting peace from *inside* a paramilitary structure that was meant to be dismantled long ago. On the other hand are Loyalists who decry peace as a form

of capitulation and spend most of their time running criminal enterprises that have nothing to do with maintaining the province's union with Great Britain. The intricacies of this divide are fascinating in their own right, but they beg larger questions: why did Loyalist paramilitaries stay on the battlefield after peace, and what can convince or force them to leave it for good? This question is the subject of this book. It is clear there is much yet to learn about the topic in Northern Ireland, and beyond, as the problems in Colombia, East Timor, and other places suggest.

Before delving into the issue of paramilitary reintegration, it is worth noting the baggage that comes with any study of Northern Ireland. It is heavy baggage. As John Whyte once famously observed, "in proportion to size, Northern Ireland is the most heavily researched area on earth." The level of scrutiny is particularly noteworthy when one considers that between 1969 and 1998 only 3,480 people were killed. Of course, even one death is too many. And, to be sure, the numbers are more significant when put into demographic and geographic context—the population is just under 1.5 million, and most murders were concentrated in a handful of neighborhoods in West and North Belfast. A new researcher to Northern Ireland, as I am, cannot help but wince at Whyte's observation. It was with not a little trepidation that I embarked on this study.

I am not a specialist in Northern Ireland. I cut my research teeth an ocean and mountain range away, studying the militia movement in central Kentucky. Militia groups have certainly enacted their fair share of violence, but even the Kentucky movement's most ardent opponents would never put them in the same league as the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Ulster Defence Association. Although this project was never intended to be a comparative one, I prefaced most of my interviews for this project with a brief introduction to my previous work. I wanted Loyalists to know that I had some experience with armed groups, that I was not as green as I looked. I also wanted my research subjects to know that I could engage fairly with maligned or otherwise unpopular groups. Indeed, the militias are routinely dismissed as anachronistic—disaffected white men who cannot deal with the changing face of power in the United States. I did not agree with my militia informants' worldview, but I did my best to present the militia as it was and to analyze it without reference to stereotyping. And I tried to consider alternatives to the grievances they identified. I would, I told my informants, be as fair to Loyalists as I had been to the militia.

My brief introduction, however, seemed to give my informants more pause than comfort. Indeed, many of them assumed I was doing a comparative study and warned me off it. One community worker bluntly interrupted my preview to advise me, "You'd be well to steer clear of that comparison." An ex-prisoner suggested my foray into Loyalism would be more complicated. There is, he told me, "no single ideology that explains Loyalism." Even people I was not interviewing thought my experience with

militias was irrelevant. When I remarked on my background to a Unionist in a pub one night, he retorted, “But, those people are crazy!” My response, “They’re not as crazy as you think,” did little to soften the blow I had unwittingly delivered.

John Whyte’s solution to writing about a well-covered and controversial topic was to reconsider the literature rather than add to it. “In these circumstances,” he explained, “the most useful contribution which a specialist on Northern Ireland can make is, not to add yet another item to the already daunting pile of research, but to provide a guide through it” (Whyte 1990, viii). Although I deeply admire Whyte’s work, my study will add to, rather than sort through, the daunting pile. I believe, however, that there are contributions still to be made.

For starters, research on combatant groups in Northern Ireland has been heavily weighted toward the study of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA, or IRA for short). Academics, journalists, and even IRA men have taken their turn explaining the group. By contrast, relatively few books have been written about Loyalist paramilitaries. Steve Bruce’s *The Red Hand* remains the definitive account fifteen years after it was published. Although the method is hardly scientific, a quick search on Amazon.com is telling. A search for books about the IRA returns over 37,000 entries. The combined total of searches for the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defense Association, and the Loyalist Volunteer Force is ten entries.

This book is also designed to examine the aftermath of the Troubles rather than the Troubles itself. Comprehending contemporary Loyalism obviously requires an awareness of the past, but peace has presented paramilitaries with a new set of opportunities, and it has prompted new reactions from them. My examination of the post-peace landscape has benefited greatly from the work of scholars such as Pete Shirlow, Brian Graham, Steve Bruce, and James McAuley, who have done much to rescue the Loyalist paramilitary figure from caricature by acknowledging their motivations and fears as well as their internal debates in this new context. I see this book as a continuation of their work, for it could not have been conceived without it.

Finally, this book is designed to provide an analytic counterweight to the recent crop of journalistic accounts of Loyalism. It is an attempt to analyze the factual information presented in these accounts (as well as information gathered in my own research) in a wider frame. I hasten to add, however, that I remain appreciative of the genre even as I depart from it. Veteran reporter Peter Taylor’s *Loyalists*, for example, is an important exposition of Loyalist history; the book is all the more significant because it is the first to lay out Loyalist history using first-person accounts. I frequently turned to it as I tried to put the Loyalist present into its historical context. Jim McDowell’s *Godfathers* and David Lister and Hugh Jordan’s *Mad Dog* are equally compelling. Both accounts juxtapose details of the paramilitary high life

with gory facts about betrayal, untimely death, and bereaved families. These accounts are certainly salacious, with voyeuristic asides about paramilitary vanities and conceits, but they lay bare the often arcane personal grudges that lie behind the ideological banners raised to legitimate Loyalist criminality. Although this book contains no gossipy tidbits, I believe Loyalist criminality is an important topic of analysis. Indeed, the changing balance between criminal and ideological motivations underpins the current divide within Loyalist paramilitaries and helps explain why everyday Loyalists, trapped in desolate neighborhoods between feuding paramilitaries, feel peace has passed them by.

This book raises as many questions as it answers. My hope is that by laying out the complexities of paramilitary demobilization in one small place, I can provide insight and prescriptions, however tentative, for peacemakers in Northern Ireland and abroad. Northern Ireland is a small place, but its experiences carry lessons beyond its borders.

I must also say a few words on terminology. Like many conflict zones, terminology varies depending on which side of the fence you are standing. The terms used to describe the peace accord prove a cogent example. Catholics refer to it as the Good Friday Agreement, after the day it was signed, while Protestants call it the Belfast Agreement for the city in which it was signed. Because this book is about Loyalists and relies in part on ethnographic methods, I use the term my informants use: the Belfast Agreement.

There is also debate about what to call the territory that is Northern Ireland. Catholics prefer to call it the North because the term denotes geographic location in the Republic, as in the north of the country. Protestants tend to use the formal appellation, Northern Ireland. Here, I stick to the formal name or to the term “province.” Again, I do so because these are the terms my informants use. In using Protestant terminology I mean no disrespect to Catholics or nationalists. At the end of the day, the future of the place is not in my hands. I only hope to chart it, however briefly, for the lessons it might teach us. Finally, I try to avoid the term “conflict resolution.” Not only do few people use the term in Northern Ireland, but many actually despise it. Indeed, a number of my informants pointed out that the underlying problem around which the conflict revolved—the constitutional status of the province—has not been resolved. The Loyalist paramilitaries, ex-prisoners, and community workers I spoke to stressed that conflict was not the problem; instead, it was the manner in which the conflict was handled, with violence, that was the real problem. Thus, the most urgent thing peacemakers can do is to shift the conflict away from violence. Only then can a real resolution be found. It is only fitting then that this book is about the transformation of Loyalism rather than its resolution *per se*.

Finally, as transformations occur, so do passings. During the write-up phase of this book, two of the Loyalists I interviewed—Billy Mitchell and

David Ervine—died. While political Loyalism's future may look grim without them, it is also clear that they were much more than charismatic leaders. They worked hard to build a base from which political Loyalism could grow into the future, and the fruits of their hard work can and will live on.

My first research trip to Belfast was in the summer of 2002. I had no paramilitary contacts then and only a hazy idea about what it was about Loyalist paramilitarism that I wanted to study. I viewed the trip as a sort of fact-finding mission. I wanted to develop my research questions *after* talking to a few men in the Loyalist paramilitary structure so that I could tailor my questions around what Loyalists themselves saw as important.

It was a lucky fluke, therefore, that one of the first articles I stumbled across in my research at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast was written by Martin Snodden, an ex-prisoner with the Ulster Volunteer Force. I am especially grateful that Martin agreed to sit down for a chat with the nosy American who cold-called him a few days later. It is hard for me to overstate how important that interview was for this project. Martin put a human face on Loyalism for me. We began our chat with scones and tea—Northern Ireland's thirty-year civil war has done nothing to diminish the graciousness of its people—and we progressed to cigarettes in short order. For me, sharing food and vice leads to good conversation, and we had one. It was not a happy conversation, nor an easy one for either of us to have. Martin told me about his path into paramilitarism and later into jail. His story was short on bravado and long on humility and regret, but it was told with hope and humor. Martin showed me that ex-prisoners could leave prison and give back, that they could help others pull back from the brink. It was only one interview, but it convinced me that the story I needed to tell was not just about Loyalist paramilitary violence but also about what individuals within these structures could do to stop it. It is not a stretch to say that I do not think this book would have come to pass without Martin.

I am also indebted to Pete Shirlow, Mary Gilmartin, and Gerald Mills. Research is often a lonely endeavor, and all three cut the loneliness for me in ways big and small. Pete took me on my first tour of Belfast and to Belfast haunts I would never have gone to on my own. I learned more about the Troubles and their aftermath from him than from any book I read, before or since. Often times I did not even realize I was learning something until several months later when I would stumble across a fact, figure, or anecdote only to recall a conversation we'd had that would put it all into context. In Dublin, Mary Gilmartin was my savior. She was always ready to collect me at the airport, feed me, and send my jet lag on its way. She diverted my attention when I was tired, acted as a sounding board when I needed it, and kept me laughing all the way to Sligo and Kathleen's potatoes. For his part, Gerald Mills (often in concert with Mary) made sure I was a true geographer, getting me out of my research shell, taking me on

tours, hikes, and the pub, and always to good effect. Pete, Mary, and Gerald always made me feel like I was home.

I am also grateful for the institutional support I received for this project. American University's summer research stipend was crucial in helping me pay for my research. When I began this project I chose not to apply for outside grant funding. I certainly wanted the money a grant would provide, but I did not want the baggage that could come with it. I knew paramilitary men would already be wary of an outsider from the States, and I did not want to add suspicion of third-party interests to the mix. I am also grateful to Rob Kitchin at the National Institute for Regional and Spatial Analysis (NIRSA) at the University of Ireland, Maynooth. The fellowship I received for the spring of 2005 allowed me the time and space to begin writing this book and to conduct more interviews as well. The NIRSA folks were an inviting lot, and I enjoyed their institutional and personal support.

Finally, no manuscript ever comes to print without the careful and sage handling of an editor. For me, fortunately, Peter Wissoker was that person. Peter proved invaluable in helping me chart the unknown waters of a university press review process. When I grew dejected, he put things into context. When I was exasperated, he helped me steer my energy into more productive emotions. And he was always willing to give my ideas a chance. Peter also chose excellent external reviewers for this project. Steve Bruce and Brian Graham both gave my initial manuscript a careful, meticulous read. Their advice was detailed and substantive. They pointed out factual errors and analytic gaps and helpfully offered nuance to my interpretation. Most importantly, both helped me avoid pitfalls I did not know existed. Both took more care and time than the average reviewer, and I am grateful for it. Their care helped me take this book to another level. Of course, any errors that remain are my responsibility. Thanks also to the rest of the Cornell team—Susan Specter, Karen Hwa, Kathryn Gohl, and Lou Robinson—for their eagle eyes. They smoothed out punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors I did not even see and got my graphics up to par. This is a far more readable book because of them. And a heartfelt thanks to Priya Dixit for doing such a meticulous index for this book.

As always, thanks to Morris and Carrie Gallaher. You both inspire me!

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Abbreviations

Armed Groups

CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IRA	Irish Republican Army
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
OIRA	Official Irish Republican Army
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

Paramilitary-Affiliated Groups

EPIC	Ex-Prisoners' Interpretive Centre
LINC	Local Initiatives for Needy Communities
MARC	Multi-Agency Resource Centre
UPRG	Ulster Political Research Group

Political Parties

DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party

Civil Society and Governmental Entities

EU	European Union
NICEM	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities

NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
PSNI	Police Services of Northern Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary

I *Staying Put*

Paramilitaries respond to formal peace in different ways. Some issue prompt stand-down orders and implement them with efficiency. Others drag their feet, dismantling by fits and starts. Still others stay put, endorsing peace but refusing to stand down.

In Northern Ireland a formal peace accord was signed in April 1998. Nine years later the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) finally stood down. Its counterpart, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) remained on the battlefield. Loyalist paramilitary foot-dragging defies the accord they signed and the aspirations of the citizens who supported it. This book is about the delayed business of Loyalist demilitarization. It explains why Loyalist demilitarization included more fits than starts in the decade since formal peace arrived and how Loyalist paramilitary recalcitrance has affected everyday Loyalists.

Loyalist paramilitaries are a vestige of Northern Ireland's thirty-year civil war, known locally and euphemistically as the Troubles. Although the war began in 1968, enmity between the province's two ethnoreligious blocks—Catholics and Protestants—stretches back to British colonization of the island in the sixteenth century.¹ At the time, the British established control through a razed-earth campaign; locals were driven from their land and threatened with reprisal if they returned. Protestant “planters” from England and Scotland were then brought in to resettle the land. The goal of the plantation period was to stamp the island with a politically British and culturally Protestant imprint while developing a thriving export economy in

¹ Most scholars define Northern Ireland's Catholic and Protestant populations as ethnoreligious groups. Centuries of each group's segregation from the other and the secular nature of contemporary Northern Ireland mean that religion is primarily a marker of one's “descent group” (McGarry and O'Leary 1995, 218).

agricultural goods (Mulholland 2002). To secure its objective the British established a rigid social hierarchy in which Irish Catholics were deprived of basic rights and privileges. Protestant settlers often lived marginal lives (the majority were peasants), but they were spared many of the degradations, symbolic and otherwise, of their Catholic counterparts. When Ireland gained its independence in 1921, the British retained control of the northern portion of the island, where Protestants were in the majority. And they continued to support local Protestant dominance in political and economic affairs. The Protestant elite who ruled the province called themselves Unionists and vowed the province would remain British.

The war that began in 1968 was set against this historical backdrop. It pitted the Provisional Irish Republican Army (known commonly as the IRA or Provos) against the British government and the Unionist elite in a protracted, often nasty fight. The conflict began benignly enough, when Catholics embarked on a civil rights struggle in the late 1960s. A harsh response by law enforcement upped the ante, however, and the civil rights campaign soon morphed into an armed “liberation struggle.” Using guerilla tactics such as targeted bombing and hit-and-run assaults on police and military installations, Republicans hoped to force a British retreat from the province—achieving victory by a war of attrition. Many of their assaults, however, affected everyday Protestants. And not surprisingly, many in their ranks rose up to protect themselves and defend the state. These paramilitaries called themselves Loyalists and vowed to defend the Union to the death.² Embracing the tactics of their Republican counterparts, they argued that if the Unionist state would not destroy Republicanism, they would do it themselves.³ The UVF and the UDA were seen by many Protestants as an important bulwark against IRA violence.⁴

After almost thirty years of fighting, the IRA announced a cease-fire in 1994. The UVF and the UDA responded in kind a few weeks later. These announcements were met with relief and guarded optimism by a war-weary population. Four years later, on Good Friday 1998, the province’s armed groups signed a joint peace accord in Belfast. The agreement, known by

² Scholars of political violence make a distinction between guerilla and paramilitary groups. Both are nonstate actors, but guerillas fight the state whereas paramilitaries fight on its behalf and often have structural links to it. Steve Bruce (1992) uses the terms “anti-state terrorism,” and “pro-state terrorism” to mark this distinction in Northern Ireland. As a matter of convenience, however, most people in Northern Ireland refer to groups on both sides as paramilitaries.

³ This rhetoric signaled the emergence of a key divide within the Protestant fold. The Unionist label came to be associated with establishment forces and a law-and-order ethos. By contrast, Loyalism implied lower rank on the social hierarchy and a greater tolerance for stepping outside legal bounds to fight the IRA.

⁴ The UVF was actually formed in 1966, before the civil rights movement. The group was formed to protest Prime Minister Terrence O’Neill’s efforts to bring Catholics into the Unionist fold. It is not likely, however, that the group would have consolidated into a full-scale paramilitary without an organized and armed enemy on the Catholic side of the equation.

Catholics as the Good Friday Agreement and by Protestants as the Belfast Agreement, was designed to bring paramilitaries out of violence by bringing them into the political system of the province. The accord required paramilitaries to decommission their weapons within two years and established a power-sharing Assembly that would include both paramilitary and traditional political parties.⁵

Demilitarization did not, however, proceed as hoped. Indeed, the IRA only formally dismantled in July 2005, a full seven years after the agreement. Loyalist demilitarization remains incomplete. And almost a decade into the peace process, everyday Loyalists have grave doubts about the agreement. Their antipathy to it, often encouraged by paramilitaries, has become a serious impediment to complete peace (Hayes, McAllister, and Dowds 2005; McAdam 2005).

This book proffers three broad findings about the delayed business of Loyalist demilitarization. First, because pro-state paramilitaries are as a rule less politically developed than anti-state groups, they are poorly positioned to follow the paramilitary-cum-political-party trajectory laid out in the agreement.⁶ Second, and as a consequence, a formal state-run demilitarization scheme is needed to effectively dismantle paramilitaries and end their individual members' violence.⁷ Indeed, even though the UVF has finally issued a stand-down order, it is likely that many of its former members will remain in the violence "business." Most have few marketable skills and limited hopes of finding alternative employment. Residual violence will likely continue, therefore, under new flags of allegiance, whether to a local "boss," a turf-based gang, or the like. Finally, although Loyalist paramilitarism has left an indelibly negative imprint on the province, there are people *within* Loyalist paramilitary structure who support peace and whose efforts deserve support despite their location within the paramilitary fold. Indeed, these men, though few in number, have access and credibility that few outsiders possess. They are therefore better positioned than any other entity in Northern Ireland to push Loyalism toward peace.

Lest readers think Loyalist paramilitaries are inherently atavistic, I begin with a brief explanation of why contemporary demilitarization is such a

⁵ Most of the paramilitaries that signed on to the Belfast Agreement had at least nascent political parties. The largest, most developed paramilitary party was the IRA's Sinn Féin Party. The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), affiliated with the UVF and the UDA, respectively, were smaller and less developed.

⁶ Because anti-state groups want to seize power from the state, they are compelled to develop a political alternative. Pro-state groups do not have a similar impetus. Their goal, at least initially, is to protect the political establishment (Bruce 1992). Although most paramilitaries go on to form their own political parties, they must compete (for votes, allegiance, "airtime") with the political establishment they claim to protect. And they must explain why they chose illegal means to fight when their side had legal means to fight the enemy.

⁷ Demilitarization schemes usually embrace a wide array of programs, including gun buy-backs, job training, and counseling. The goal is to dismantle paramilitary structures, decommission their weapons, and reintegrate members into mainstream society.

difficult endeavor. Indeed, although the continued existence of Loyalist paramilitaries after almost a decade of formal peace is an aberration, demilitarization is not as simple or speedy as it used to be.

Demilitarization and Its Complexities

THE DIFFICULTIES IN GENERAL

When wars were primarily fought between states, demilitarization was usually a straightforward process. The winner confiscated enemy weapons, executed or imprisoned military leaders, and discharged soldiers. The victor then sent its own soldiers home, *without* their weapons.

Warfare today is different. States continue to fight wars, but increasingly they are joined on the battlefield by guerillas, paramilitaries, mercenaries, and even criminal gangs. Conflicts with nonstate actors are known by a variety of labels, including low-intensity conflict (Kitson 1991), postmodern war (Gray 1997), criminal warfare (Mueller 2004), and new war (Kaldor 1999, 2001). Although scholars have found much to debate about these conflicts,⁸ they generally agree that demobilizing nonstate actors is more difficult than demobilizing conventional forces. A number of reasons explain the increased difficulty.

For starters, states find themselves in a relatively weakened position in contemporary warfare. Guerillas have both inferior numbers and firepower, but they have an important advantage—flexibility. Free from cumbersome command chains, bulky weapons systems, and technological dependence, guerillas elevate hit-and-run tactics to a full-blown strategy (Guevara 1998). Thus, although they can rarely overthrow a state, guerillas can nag it endlessly, zapping its strength in the process. As Mao Tse-tung succinctly explained in his treatise *On Guerilla Warfare*, “when guerillas engage a stronger enemy, they withdraw when he advances; harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws” (2000, 46).

To defeat a guerilla movement (and there is no consensus that guerillas are beatable), states must adopt aggressive counterinsurgency tactics such as internment, “draining the swamp,” and collusion.⁹ These tactics carry risks, however. They tend to harm as many civilians as guerillas, and over

⁸ The debate about contemporary wars largely centers on how to categorize them, with secondary debates stemming from these varied positions. Some scholars argue that contemporary warfare represents a radical break in the nature of war (Kaldor 1999; Münkler 2004; van Creveld 1991). Other scholars argue that contemporary warfare represents a return to primitive violence (Ignatieff 1998; Kaplan 1994, 2001). Still others argue that warfare is in serial decline and that contemporary conflicts are the “remnants of war” (Mueller 2004).

⁹ Martin van Creveld argues that counterinsurgency operations usually fail. “The British lost India, Palestine, Kenya, Cyprus, and Aden, to mention but the most important places where they tried to make a stand. The French spent six years fighting in Indochina and another

time their use may erode the state's moral authority and legitimacy. Given the high costs, it is not surprising that many states opt to use such tactics sparingly, to contain rather than eliminate guerillas. And, when most low-intensity conflicts end, they do so in a draw (van Creveld 1991). This state of affairs is reflected at the peace table, where guerillas and paramilitaries are usually able to win broad concessions, including amnesty, release of prisoners, and flexible decommissioning. In some conflicts, armed groups are even allowed to decommission on their own or to join state-run demobilization programs voluntarily rather than by force.

Contemporary conflicts are also difficult to demilitarize because they contain more armed factions than conventional wars do. Although low-intensity conflicts usually begin with two warring parties—a guerilla group and the state—they grow to include many more. When a state becomes mired in a guerilla conflict, its advocates often form private armies to help, reasoning that paramilitaries can operate free of the constraints that limit the state. Moreover, because paramilitaries tend to be organized locally, they spring up at different times and places, substantially adding to the mix of groups already on the battlefield. Criminals are also attracted by the opportunities that conflict presents, and enterprising ones tend to create their own security forces with an eye to protecting assets and warding off competition. To wit, none of these groups wear uniforms or are easily identifiable, and when conflict ends it is not always clear who should be demobilized. Weapons are equally difficult to impound given that they are controlled by multiple parties and stored in disparate locations.

The protracted nature of low-intensity conflict also tends to create inveterate fighters. Being a guerilla or paramilitary is dangerous, but it is also a way of life. For those who manage to ascend the ranks, it can be an attractive one. The lifestyle affords power, status, and security and includes added perks such as easy access to sex, free drinks in pubs, and personal cuts on rackets, among other strokes to ego and pocketbook (Kaplan 1994; Mueller 2004). Although some inveterate fighters resist peace on ideological grounds, many simply refuse to give up the benefits associated with the lifestyle (Kaldor 1999; Mueller 2004). Others fear that peace will bring prosecution, so they soldier on. Whatever an individual's motivations, inveterate fighters tend to clash with their comrades who support peace. These clashes can result in the formation of splinter groups or devolve into internecine feuding.

seven trying to stave off defeat in Algeria. . . . Even the South Africans, who held out longer than anybody else, ended up by agreeing to withdraw from Namibia" (1991, 22–23). Other scholars, such as Kitson (1991), point to Cyprus and Kenya as examples of successful counterinsurgency campaigns.

Internment involves the roundup and imprisonment of people who fit a profile considered dangerous (for example, Japanese Americans during World War II). Draining the swamp is a euphemism for destroying a village or neighborhood where guerillas hide out. Collusion involves state forces working covertly with paramilitaries to circumvent the law.

The horizontal structure of guerillas and paramilitaries also makes it difficult for leaders to enforce cease-fires and stand-down orders. While some guerilla and paramilitary groups have relatively hierarchical chains of command, most are horizontally organized. Brigade commanders purchase and store their own weapons, control their own rackets, and organize their own recruiting. They are operationally independent and can resist a stand-down order if they so choose.

None of this precludes an eventual return to peace and stability. Low-intensity conflicts have ended in places as diverse as Sierra Leone and El Salvador. For all intents and purposes, the conflict in Northern Ireland has come to an end as well. Peace, however, only tends to root firmly once armed parties have been fully demilitarized. In Northern Ireland demilitarization has proceeded slowly, and the results have been predictable—continuing violence.

DEMILITARIZATION AND THE BELFAST AGREEMENT

In Northern Ireland the government approached demilitarization narrowly by concentrating on decommissioning. The narrow focus was signaled early on, in 1994, when the IRA announced its cease-fire. Although the group called a cease-fire on the understanding that doing so would lead to formal talks with the British government, the then secretary for Northern Ireland, Patrick Mayhew, abruptly changed course and announced he would only hold talks with the IRA's political wing, Sinn Féin, if the IRA met three new conditions. Mayhew laid out these conditions, the so-called Washington 3, in a speech he gave in Washington, D.C., in March 1995 (Taylor 1999a). The IRA would have to agree to “to disarm progressively,” accept guidelines on how and when decommissioning would take place, and engage in a round of decommissioning *before* talks to demonstrate its commitment to peace (Hennessey 2001; Taylor 1999a).

The IRA believed the new conditions were unreasonable (Taylor 1999a). No agreement had been reached, and one might not be reached, so it was premature at best to require the group to decommission. A pre-peace arms dump was also symbolically untenable for the IRA. The IRA and the British state were at a stalemate in 1994, and both knew it (Taylor 1999a). A public decommissioning, however, would send the message that the IRA had surrendered, and not surprisingly its Army Council rejected the condition out of hand.¹⁰ The IRA broke its cease-fire the following February with a spectacular at London's Canary Wharf.¹¹

¹⁰ Even people in the security apparatus thought the condition was unrealistic. Peter Taylor (1999a) reports that Sir Hugh Annesley, then chief constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, advised the prime minister that the IRA would not decommission its arms before peace was established.

¹¹ A spectacular is a euphemism for an attack aimed at a high-value target or designed to produce eye-catching destruction. The term entered the popular lexicon in the early nineties

The IRA returned to the cease-fire in July 1997 after the Labour Party swept the elections that spring. Prime Minister Tony Blair's government agreed to negotiate with the IRA, and he took the Washington 3 off the table. Little progress was made on the issue in the run-up to the agreement, however. Indeed, the two sides were miles apart on the issue. Republicans believed that decommissioning should follow the agreement's implementation. For them, implementation would signal Unionist good faith and secure rounds of decommissioning. Unionists, for their part, saw decommissioning as a confidence-building measure that would move implementation along (CAIN 2006d; Trimble 1998).

Although decommissioning was a chief concern for many Unionists, they eventually agreed to accept general wording on the issue in the final agreement. Save for timing (decommissioning was to be completed within two years of signing), the agreement failed to stipulate who would oversee the process, where it would take place, and how it would be verified. Unionist concerns over decommissioning were placated temporarily by two measures. The first was the so-called exclusion mechanism in Strand One of the agreement, which stated that "those who hold office should use only democratic, non-violent means, and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office under these provisions" (Multi-party Negotiations 1998). The mechanism, which some Unionists considered weak,¹² was buttressed by a sidebar letter that David Trimble, the chief negotiator for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), had requested from Prime Minister Tony Blair. The letter, regarded as a formal interpretation of the agreement, stated that if the exclusion mechanism failed, the prime minister would introduce legislation to strengthen it. David Trimble also persuaded his party that particulars on decommissioning could be worked out in the months between the referendum and actual devolution (Millar 2004).

Although it seems improbable today, Trimble probably believed at the time that he could work out the difficulties. Indeed, he hinged his party's 1999 election campaign on a "no guns, no government" policy.¹³ The IRA refused to decommission before devolution, however, and Trimble was left

when the IRA launched its England campaign. The IRA bombing at Canary Wharf left a gaping hole in a row of glass high-rise buildings in city center London and caused £150 million in property damage (Harnden 1999).

¹² David Trimble told Frank Millar of the *Irish Times* that the wording in Strand One was less forceful than Tony Blair had led him to believe it would be. However, when Trimble reviewed the proposed text and asked for stronger wording, Blair purportedly replied, "Look, I can't unravel this now, everybody is . . . you know . . . this is where we are, we can't change this document now" (Millar 2004, 69).

¹³ The "no guns, no government" phrase is tricky to interpret given that it seems to suggest that guns were a prerequisite for going into a devolved government. However, according to Grimson, "Ulster Unionists believe when Mr. Trimble said 'no guns, no government,' he meant Sinn Féin could only enter the Assembly Executive if the IRA disposed of its weapons at the same time—'jumping together' as it was called" (1999).

in the awkward spot of having to decide whether to allow the Assembly to open without the promised rounds of decommissioning. He eventually chose to participate in the Assembly, but he would suspend it six weeks later after intense pressure from Unionists. Although Trimble had detractors from within his own party, his harshest critics came from his right flank. Indeed, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) made IRA decommissioning a daily battle cry and used Trimble's awkward spot to highlight what it saw as IRA duplicity. The party would go on to capture a majority of seats in the 2003 Assembly elections, dislodging the UUP from its status as majority party. Once in the majority, the DUP made full IRA decommissioning a prerequisite for an operating Assembly, even adding demands that IRA arms dumps be photographed. As the party's founder Ian Paisley explained, "if you sin publicly, you have to repent publicly" (Left 2004). The IRA refused the terms (BBC 2004b), and the Assembly failed to reopen. It remained shuttered until 2007.

These rows have been well documented elsewhere, and it is not my intention to referee them here. What is important to the topic at hand is what was missing from the protracted debates over decommissioning. Two absences are particularly striking. First, during the varied, often heated debates about decommissioning, little attention was devoted to Loyalist decommissioning. Indeed, the great majority of pressure was applied to the IRA and Sinn Féin. This is not to suggest that Unionists did not want or expect Loyalists to decommission. They surely did, and do. However, the general assumption, especially early on and among Unionists, was that Loyalist decommissioning would follow naturally from IRA decommissioning.¹⁴ This assumption is not an illogical one to make. In low-intensity conflicts, paramilitaries tend to be reactive (Bruce 1992). They enter the fray only after a state has proven itself unable or unwilling to defeat guerillas or protect civilians from them. Once the threat dissolves, so, theoretically, do they. In reality, Loyalist paramilitaries have behaved contrary to expectation. Neither the UVF nor UDA responded in kind to three rounds of IRA decommissioning in October 2001, April 2002, and October 2003. And when the IRA finally announced a formal end to its campaign in July 2005, both groups engaged in saber rattling (McDonald 2005b).

The debates on decommissioning have also failed to address the wider issue of demilitarization, which entails not only decommissioning but dismantling paramilitary structures and reintegrating combatants. Conflict resolution scholars refer to this wider process as demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration, or DDR for short (Gamba 2006). Decommissioning

¹⁴ Republicans did not make this assumption. They have long complained that Loyalist decommissioning has been ignored by the British government, Unionist politicians, and the media (Lane 2001). However, Sinn Féin was unable to use the absence of effective Loyalist decommissioning as a bargaining chip in the Assembly because Loyalist political parties had only negligible representation in the body.

is certainly an important part of any transformation to peace, and reasonable people can debate whether it should occur before, during, or after a peace accord is implemented. However, it is a mistake to assume that decommissioning alone will lead to the dissolution of paramilitaries. Evidence from other conflicts suggests that paramilitary members will turn to (or remain in) criminality even after standing down if there are no formal mechanisms to reintegrate them. Most experts agree that effective conflict transformation must include carrots and sticks to entice/bend combatants to peace (Darby 2006; Gamba 2006). Combatants who are willing to stand down must have viable economic and social opportunities in a post-conflict society; those who refuse to do so must be aggressively policed. In Northern Ireland the state has done little to formally demilitarize its armed groups. Paramilitaries were allowed to organize their own decommissioning, establishing the timing, quantity, and verification process for each weapons dump. Most policy makers also assumed that the voluntary sector would provide the majority of reintegration assistance. However, the voluntary sector is too small to effectively reintegrate the thousands of men in need of assistance. It also lacks the muscle to prevent paramilitary recidivism or to punish those who return to the lifestyle.

Paramilitary Violence since 1998

The limited scope of the province's demilitarization efforts had a predictable effect. While overall numbers of political murder, bombing, and the like are down, paramilitary violence continues to occur in the province. Its character has changed though, with paramilitaries turning their attention inward, "policing" their own communities in often brutal ways. Northern Ireland secretary Mo Mowlam once infamously referred to such violence as "internal housekeeping" (Mackay 1999). The event that prompted her unfortunate turn of phrase was an IRA murder of a Catholic civilian, Andrew Kearney, a few months after the Belfast Accord was signed. The victim's "offense"—to brawl with an IRA man at a bar—had nothing to do with politics, but he would pay for it with his life. Indeed, a North Belfast IRA unit planned and executed his murder with military precision. His attackers slashed the phone lines and shut down the elevator in his high-rise apartment block to delay police and ambulance (BIRW 1998; Oliver 1999).

Mowlam's position was a difficult one. She had to decide if the murder constituted a breach of the IRA's cease-fire. If she determined yes, the agreement could collapse. If no, a young man's death would go unpunished. In the end she decided that the IRA was not in breach of its cease-fire, reasoning that the death, while tragic, was not a traditional military operation. Her decision would send a message to paramilitaries on both sides of the

divide that internal violence would not put cease-fires or their attendant advantages in jeopardy (Mackay 1999). The decision would also spell trouble for civilians on both sides of the divide.

Although it may seem odd to an outsider that paramilitaries would want to use violence against their “own,” Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries have long policed their respective communities (Boulton 1973; Hillyard 1985; Monaghan 2005). For much of the Troubles they did so out of necessity. The police, who were often engaged in military-style operations (investigating bomb plots, diffusing bombs, or cleaning up their aftermath), had little time for community policing. And their use of aggressive counterterrorism tactics afforded them little goodwill to do so (Monaghan 2005; Taylor 1999a, 1999b). The advent of peace in 1998 was supposed to normalize policing and, as a consequence, limit paramilitary forms of “justice.”

Paramilitary policing has continued, however, and in many cases increased. To be fair, some of the increase is relative. That is, as paramilitaries started to wind down their military operations after 1994, internal violence took up a greater percentage of their violence. Between 1969 and 1994, for example, Republican and Loyalist internecine murders accounted for 8.8 percent and 7 percent of their total murders, respectively; between 1995 and 2001 the percentage of internecine murders increased to 13.6 percent and 36.4 percent, respectively. The actual number of internecine killings per year did not increase dramatically after 1994, however. Indeed, for Republicans the average number of internecine murders actually dropped, from 6.7 a year to 1.4. For Loyalists, it rose only slightly, from 2.5 to 3.4.

Evidence indicates that some forms of paramilitary policing have increased in real terms, however. So-called punishment attacks are a case in point.¹⁵ Traditionally, paramilitaries have levied these punishments—both shootings and beatings—for socially deviant behavior, including rape, theft, joyriding, and drug use (Hillyard 1985; Monaghan 2005). Some victims are kneecapped. Others are beaten with bats or planks of wood, and often around the face for maximum visual effect. A particularly macabre punishment nicknamed the six-pack entails having one’s ankles, knees, and elbows shot (Hall 1997). Punishment attacks are designed to keep victims alive but disfigure or otherwise disable them. In the tight-knit communities in which punishments attacks usually occur, the bodies of victims become message boards, reminding a community who is in charge and what can happen to those who step out of line.

In 1995, total punishment beatings (Republican and Loyalists) increased

¹⁵ The Independent Monitoring Commission rejects the term “punishment beating” to describe these attacks. As they note, the term “lends a spurious respectability to the perpetrators, as if they were entitled to take the law into their own hands. And it has the ring of a deserved chastisement when the reality is often extreme cruelty and lasting physical and psychological injuries” (2004, 17).