

THE BELFAST AGREEMENT

10 April 1998

Full text available [here](#).

- Recognises Unionism and separatism as “equally legitimate political aspirations”.
- Allows recurring referendums until the demographics permit the republicans to separate Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. The Agreement states that it is for the “people of the island of Ireland alone”, “without external impediment” (i.e. the British), “to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and *concurrently* given” [italics added].
- Provides for a devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland, with quotas for the parties, meaning Sinn Fein/IRA is always in government, regardless of the electoral outcome.
- The pledge of office for the Stormont Assembly makes no mention of the monarchy
- Decommissioning of weapons was promised (p. 25): “All participants . . . reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. They also confirm their intention to continue to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent [International] Commission [on Decommissioning (IICD)], and to use any influence they may have, to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement and in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.”

[The May 2000 date for decommissioning IRA arms came and went. The new deadline in June 2001 likewise passed. The IRA [claimed](#) to be dragging its feet because say the British government was not sticking to the Agreement, specifically by tempering “reforms” to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and not pulling all troops out of Northern Ireland. Britain would concede, wholly, on both points. In August 2001, the IRA claimed it had agreed a new method for decommissioning with Canadian General John de Chastelain, the head of IICD, and in October 2001 [supposedly began](#) doing so. In September 2005, two months after the IRA issued a [statement formally calling off](#) the armed campaign, Gen. De Chastelain [told a news conference](#) that IICD was “satisfied that the arms decommissioned represent the totality of the IRA’s arsenal.” Needless to say, many others are not satisfied, and the very strange mechanism adopted for decommissioning—where Gen. De Chastelain is effectively the only witness—only arouses further suspicion, as do revelations about [weapons caches](#) from the Soviet Union and North Korea that the IRA had not—and has not—disclosed.]

- Britain committed to withdrawing the army from Northern Ireland, coyly caveated as down “to levels compatible with a normal peaceful society”. The withdrawal was completed in July 2007.
- Britain committing to the “removal of security installations”, uprooted significant parts of its surveillance infrastructure in Ulster.
- The Royal Ulster Constabulary was replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in November 2001. This was in line with the Belfast Agreement’s commitment to creating a police force where its “composition, recruitment, training, culture, ethos and symbols” conformed to a “new approach” that could “enjoy widespread support from . . . the community as a whole”, which is to say its British characteristics were removed and replaced with ones acceptable to secessionists. The new force would also, according to the Agreement, be “designed to ensure . . . structured co-operation with the Garda Síochána”, the police force of the Republic of Ireland.

[Related to this were two further important developments. First, the elimination of the RUC’s effective, if [morally conflicted](#), Special Branch. Second, the near-total eradication of symbols that would suggest Northern Ireland is under British rule. This applies with official documentation and police uniforms, for example. And the British flag is flown in Northern Ireland for [less-than-two-dozen days per year](#), on designated occasions.]

- Britain committed under the Belfast Agreement to releasing hundreds of the most hardened IRA killers—and tacitly agreed to drop all investigations into unpunished republican terrorists, at the same time as an inquiry was set up into “Bloody Sunday” to investigate British soldiers’ conduct in Londonderry in 1972.