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Peacemakers in Action: The Secret Role of Intermediaries in the Northern Ireland Peace Process

İ. Aytaç Kadıoğlu*

Abstract

This paper assesses the Northern Ireland conflict, which is one of the most comprehensive ethno-nationalist conflicts and conflict resolution processes in contemporary world, through the analysis of the role of the British government, the IRA and its political wing, and independent third parties. The paper argues that while official negotiations between governments and political wings of sub-state armed groups is a fundamental element of peacemaking, this method is not sufficient to understand non-violent, political resolution efforts towards ending sub-state terrorism. Hence, backchannel communication channels are a significant aspect of conflict resolution processes with regards to exchange information and trust-building measures between parties in conflict, and to comprehend the credibility and flexibility of covert talks. This paper aims to expand the framework of peace efforts by including independent third parties, namely intermediaries and so to help reconsidering the scope of conflict resolution field. It argues that the covert negotiations initiated by third parties in the Northern Ireland peace process reduced the trust and reliability concerns of conflicting parties and so facilitated official negotiations. The paper analyses backchannel communications through declassified archival material.

Keywords: backchannel communications, intermediaries, peacemakers, conflict resolution and Northern Ireland.

Öz

Bu çalışma günümüzdeki en kapsamlı ve karmaşık etnik-ulusal temelli çatışmalardan ve çatışma çözümü süreçlerinden biri olan Kuzey İrlanda sorununu analiz etmektedir. Bu analiz yalnızca çatışmanın tarafları olan İngiliz Hükümeti ve İrlanda Cumhuriyetçi Ordusu (IRA) ile onun siyasi kanadını değil, üçüncü tarafları da kapsamaktadır. Hükümetler ve silahlı örgütlerin

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İ. Aytaç Kadıoğlu is an assistant professor of Politics and International Relations at the Adıyaman University. He holds a Ph.D. in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham and an MA in the School of Politics and International Relations at the University of Leicester. To contact the author, please e-mail: aytac@aytackadioglu.com

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siyasi kanatları arasındaki resmi görüşmeler çözüm için temel olsa da, terörizmi sona erdirmede şiddet içermeyen siyasi çözüm yollarını tam anlamıyla anlayabilmek için bu yöntem yeterli değildir. Bu yüzden, arka planda yürütülen iletişim; fikir alışverişi, çatışmanın tarafları arasında güven inşası ve iletişimin esnekliğinin sağlanması bakımından çatışma çözümü süreçlerinin önemli bir bileşeni olarak görülmelidir. Bu araştırma, bağımsız üçüncü tarafların rolüne odaklanarak, barış süreçleri çalışmalarında çatışma çözümü ve yönetimi alanına katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmanın iddiası, Kuzey İrlanda barış sürecinde bağımsız ve uluslararası üçüncü tarafların, sorunun tarafları arasındaki güven sorununu gidermede önemli bir rol oynadıkları yönündedir. Çalışmanın sonucu, bağımsız üçüncü tarafların barış süreçlerinde resmi görüşmeleri gerçekleştirmeyi kolaylaştırdıklarıdır. Çalışma; arka plan iletişimini çatışmanın taraflarının gizli görüşmelerini içeren arşiv analiziyle incelemektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: arka plan görüşmeleri, arabulucular, barış elçileri, çatışma çözümü ve Kuzey İrlanda.

Introduction

This paper assesses the role of intermediaries in the backchannels in the Northern Ireland peace process. The reason for choosing backchannels as one of the three major aspects of the analysis is their role in initiating a peace process and forming the pre-negotiation stage of a conflict resolution process. The article examines the secret channels which were opened to make contact between the British government and republican movement that included both SF and the IRA. These channels were active for more than twenty years in both conflicts.

Ethno-nationalist conflict has taken place in Northern Ireland since the early 1920s (Bell, 1973, p. 398). However, this paper has a specific timeframe that involves the latest Northern Irish conflict between the beginning of the Troubles in 1969 and the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998. This conflict has mostly been shaped by the British government on the one hand, and the republican movement on the other. The reason for the selection of the Northern Ireland case is due to the fact that this conflict embodies very comprehensive peace efforts including secret negotiations conducted by not only conflicting parties, but also independent third parties. It also contains various resolution methods, settlement strategies, involvement of national and international third parties and the approaches of the officials of the British government. Therefore, the investigation of the insight of this peace process help understanding the role of intermediaries as independent third parties

towards ending this conflict.

The article argues that secret communication channels in Northern Ireland reduced the concerns of disputing parties about trust and reliability. Therefore, they facilitated a level of understanding when it was not possible to meet officially. The article states that indirect backchannels made it possible to carry out official negotiations and played a significant role towards de-escalating the conflict in Northern Ireland. These talks enable a discussion of conflicting parties' demands in a flexible environment which do not require any preconditions to come together (Wanis-St John, 2004). There is relatively little exploration of both cases about the influence of independent third parties in this conflict resolution process (Dochartaigh, 2011b; Mumford, 2011). There is also little interest in how these secret initiatives defined the nature of official negotiations. The article asks the following question to explore these initiatives: 'How did intermediaries play a role in the Northern Ireland peace processes during the pre-negotiation stage?'

To answer this question, the article assesses recently available archival sources in the National Archive (TNA) of London and official reports, as they are the only available sources to examine the influence of intermediaries in Northern Ireland due to the timeframe of the research (1969-1998). The article is organised as follows: The article firstly describes the evolution of the Northern Ireland conflict which is followed by the discussion on the theoretical assumptions about the secret talks. It frames backchannel communications within a wider theoretical framework and brings an explanation to the under-explored pre-negotiation stage of conflict resolution. It then assesses the impact of indirect secret talks in the Northern Irish peace process. Their impact is described through the role of intermediaries in building trust and exchanging information between the two conflicting parties.

The Background of the Northern Ireland Conflict

The Troubles in Northern Ireland began in the late 1960s, subsequently almost 3,500 people died as a result of the political violence until 1999 (Archick, 2014, pp.1-2; Lavery, 2002). Both Catholic and Protestant communities caused violence during the civil rights marches in the mid-1960s. The reason for violence was the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant communities over the future of Northern Ireland regarding the reunification of the whole island or Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK. The British government applied two major methods to bring the Troubles to an end. The first method was the military intervention of British forces in Northern Ireland which created different expectations on the unionist and nationalist sides. The

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Catholic community initially welcomed the British troops as it halted Protestant attacks on their communities. However, the IRA militants blamed their leaders for their inability to secure Catholics and Republicans in Northern Ireland. The division of the IRA stemmed from another group within the IRA which sought to participate in the political system instead of organising violent attacks (Copeland, 2001). This dissidence led to a division within the IRA. While the new group named itself the Provisional IRA (PIRA or Provos), the original IRA became known as the Official IRA. The dissidence emerged over decisions on maintaining the armed campaign or appealing to the political struggle. While the Official IRA was inclined to declare a ceasefire in 1972, the PIRA (henceforth: IRA) began its violent campaign in 1970 (Little, 2006, p.60).

The violent campaign of the IRA was dominated by bombings, murders and violent protests. The marches were brought to an end by the British Army in 1969 (Little, 2006, p.59). However, the intensity of the violence did not decline because of the belief of the British government and republicans that they could defeat their respective enemies through military mean. One of the worst disasters in the conflict was the day when British troops interfered in a march on January 30, 1972 a day that became known as 'Bloody Sunday' as thirteen unarmed Catholics were killed by British soldiers (Little, 2006, p.60). This disaster deteriorated the situation. For example, an Official IRA bombing caused three civilian deaths, this was followed by an attempt to assassinate a Northern Ireland government minister. Immediately after this attack, British PM Edward Heath, introduced the 'direct rule' system from Westminster. Although the purpose was to bring violence to an end, it was dramatically increased following the events of July 21, 1972, known as 'Bloody Friday' when nine civilians were killed and 130 people injured by IRA bombings across Belfast. Direct rule would be maintained until the GFA (Little, 2006, p.61).

The second method was political intervention. In August 1969, the British government was suspicious about the Stormont administration and hence, established the Office of the UKREP to pay attention to Stormont's reform programme led by three officials: Oliver Wright, Ronnie Burroughs and Howard Smith. The purpose of the UKREP was to gather political intelligence and to begin discussions about Northern Ireland politics. Wright obtained information by creating a 'backdoor' channel to talk to the IRA which was completely separate from the Northern Ireland government sources (Craig, 2012, p.101). These backchannels were initiated by intermediaries during the

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period of intense violence since the early Troubles. For example, Tom Caldwell, a former British Army officer, was the first intermediary between the British government and IRA whose personal intention helped the declaration of the first IRA ceasefire in March. It is an important question why the British applied to secret communication channels. Arguably, it was because of the difficulty to initiate official talks due to the on-going violence. While the aim of the British government to attend these talks was to stop violence, potential outcry in the society against talking to the enemy was the reason for confidentiality.

With the participation of Whitelaw, the Sunningdale Agreement was signed. At Sunningdale, the Irish government recognised Northern Ireland for the first time (McDaid, 2013, p.25). Nevertheless, the Agreement collapsed in 1974 that resulted in a change of the approach to talking to armed groups. James Allan of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Michael Oatley followed a low-level discussion strategy and organised meetings with loyalists instead of republicans. As Craig (2012, p.108) notes, Allan and Oatley played an important role in talks by communicating with loyalist paramilitaries within the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) before and after the UWC strike in relation to prisoners and community politics. As these talks were achieved within the unionist bloc, their influence in changing the nature of the conflict and reducing the level of violence was limited.

Secret talks between the representatives of the British government and the republican movement were not the only resolution attempts. Constitutional reforms were also applied to facilitate the peace process. For example, the White Paper published in March 1973 by the Callaghan government and entitled the Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals determined the specific issues such as direct rule, ethnic divisions and civil violence since 1969. Although the Paper was published through a majority of votes, there was strong opposition from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) (Arthur, 1984). These constitutional changes could not contribute to progress as a majority of the constitutional reforms were only put into action after the GFA.

Another important issue in the conflict was the change of the status of political prisoners in 1976. Since then, they no longer had the same status as prisoners of war. Thus, the prisoners organised two 'hunger strikes': The first was in the Maze Prison on 27 October 1980, led by an IRA member, Brendan Hughes, the second was organised by Bobby Sands, another leading IRA member, in 1981. Although these strikes helped to increase the popularity of

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the IRA and SF, British PM Thatcher refused to step back. Thatcher's position was that of not treating terrorists differently than other prisoners (Mallie & McKittrick, 1997, p.20). After ten prisoners died in the hunger strikes, other strikers' families accepted medical support which followed by the prisoners to declare an end to the strike on 3 October 1981 and Thatcher made concessions to their requests (Little, 2006, p.66).

The hunger strikes led to the 'New Ireland Forum' (NIF) in 1983 along with the attendance of all major nationalist parties from both north and south. It was because of SF's policy change from rejecting any political initiatives to participating in elections. The reason for this policy change was the belief amongst republicans that it could be possible to reach their aim through political campaign. The NIF helped to think of alternative ways to move forward beyond merely Irish unification such as the rights and interests of Northern Catholics/nationalists (Boyle & Hadden, 1995, p.274). The NIF also opened the way to an agreement that was followed by Thatcher and Taoiseach[1] Charles Haughey's assignment of a commission to work on the future of the UK, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The commission's reports on the future of Northern Ireland had an influence on the later talks between the two governments. After discussions, the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985 was signed by the declaration of Britain and Ireland on the possible change of Northern Ireland's status if only the majority demanded it.

The DSD (the Joint Declaration) was signed between PM John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds on December 15, 1993, affirming the right of self-determination for Northern Ireland citizens. It also affirmed that 'Northern Ireland would be transferred to the Republic of Ireland if the majority of the island's population favoured this move; and parties associated with paramilitaries could play a role with the governments in seeking a peaceful solution, if they renounced violence' (Little, 2006, p.77). By August 1994, the IRA declared a ceasefire in the hope that it would lead to an agreement. However, the loyalist paramilitary groups did not announce a ceasefire due to the lack of trust in the IRA's ceasefire. The Combined Loyalist Military Command eventually declared a ceasefire six weeks later. The peace environment lasted eighteen months until the IRA declared the end of the ceasefire in February 1996, blaming the British government for not stepping forward in negotiations, but helped decrease the level of violence. Fortunately, this ceasefire facilitated to improve the relationship between loyalists and

[1] Taoiseach is the Gaelic name of the prime minister of the Republic of Ireland.

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republicans and led to the Good Friday Agreement (the Belfast Agreement, GFA) (Little, 2006, pp.79-80).

During the ceasefire, the international mediation of the US stepped into the process through the Clinton administration's granting of a visa to Gerry Adams to attend a conference in 1994. Irish commentator Deaglen de Breadun perceived this moment as a fundamental change in the US policy as it had a great influence on advancing the peace process (De Breadun, 2001, p.11). However, British diplomats were affronted by the granting of a visa to Adams which caused a rupture in Anglo-American relations and caused Clinton-Major relations to become 'frosty' (Lynch, 2003). Fortunately, this confrontation did not bring the peace attempts to an end in Northern Ireland.

Official and high-level secret talks between the British government and SF were maintained during 1995. Nevertheless, there was no significant success in these negotiations. The end of the IRA's ceasefire in February 1996 interrupted the peace process. However, it was not a long-term interruption since multilateral peace efforts coincided with the beginning of all-party meetings with the declaration of the Irish and British governments. All parties who wanted to attend negotiations had to sing the Mitchell Principles of democracy and non-violence which were the key element of negotiations indicating an obligation to move forward politically. Michael suggested that all-party negotiations must declare their agreement to the principles for 'democratic and exclusively peaceful means of resolving political issues' (Michael, 1996, quoted in Knox, 2002, p.170).

The multi-party talks could not reach an agreement in the first year. In the UK general election of 1997, the Labour government was elected and the election created a perception particularly among nationalists regarding the change of the British government's approach to Northern Ireland. The IRA therefore renewed the ceasefire and SF signed up to the Mitchell Principles. Therefore, it can be said that two expectations had primary importance in changing the perceptions of both sides: the prospect of the republicans regarding the British government to include SF in the official negotiations, and the expectation of the British government related to SF to force the IRA to accept disarmament. Then, the party was permitted to join the multi-party talks at Stormont which resulted in the UUP and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leaving the talks. Intensive negotiations took place for more than six months among the British and Irish governments, and eight Northern Irish parties resulting in the GFA (Knox, 2002; Powell, 2008; Wolff, 2002, p.55).

Finally, the GFA was conducted by President Bill Clinton, PM Tony

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Blair, Senator Mitchell and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern created a semi-autonomous government body in Northern Ireland (Hammer, 2009). The GFA has brought various changes. Firstly, the GFA recognised ethno-national cultures, accepting nationalists as nationalists not simply as Catholics (Evans & Tonge, 2013; McGarry & O'Leary, 2009, p.34). Secondly, the Agreement declared that Northern Ireland citizens should decide their constitutional future. For this purpose, the Agreement was voted both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland in 1998 (Little, 2006, p.81). Thirdly, the GFA contained the transfer of power from London to Belfast through the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee. Fourthly, the GFA also addressed questions related to decommissioning, policing, disarmament, human rights, the UK's demilitarisation in Northern Ireland and the status of prisoners in terms of being war criminals (Archick, 2014; Galtung & Duffy, 2000). Lastly, the Agreement created two councils; a North-South Ministerial Council which enables the northern and southern leaders to consult on cross-border issues, and a British-Irish Council which allows the examination of regional issues by the representatives of the two governments, the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland (Archick, 2014, pp.1-2).

Locating Backchannels and Indirect Communications into Conflict Resolution Processes

Backchannel communications are the major initiatives to resolve a conflict in a non-violent way when it is not possible to achieve discussions openly during the pre-negotiation stage of conflict resolution processes. These communications are assessed as secret negotiations between the main armed protagonists who are state officials and the leadership of sub-state armed groups (Pruitt, 2008). The pre-negotiation stage of a conflict resolution process occurs during the period when the resolution of a conflict begins and explores the right conditions for moving conflicting parties to the negotiating table (Kelman, 2010, p.394). The pre-negotiation stage began during the early 1970s and lasted until the early 1990s when the Northern Irish parties and British government commenced official negotiations.

The existing literature on backchannel negotiations encompasses several analyses of talking to terrorist groups regarding concessions, stalemate and psychological approaches. Although these interpretations have partial insights, they do not offer a comprehensive framework on talking to terrorists. In contrast, track 1.5 diplomacy, and Pruitt (2006) and Wanis-St John's (2006) classifications on different types on backchannel communications present a

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detailed understanding, including not only disputing parties, but also intermediaries and different communication chains.

Track 1.5 diplomacy explains backchannel communications as unofficial diplomatic initiatives between representatives of conflicting parties, and which are facilitated by unofficial groups or actors (Nan, 2003; 2005, p.165). The major characteristic of track 1.5 is that while the official parties are represented in the secret talks, the communication channels are initiated by independent groups acting as third parties. Track 1.5 diplomacy is significant as it builds a bridge between official negotiations (track-one) and informal conflict resolution initiatives (track-two), hence, it is called 'hybrid diplomacy' (Mapendere, 2005, p.77). It is stated that track 1.5 initiatives enable the outcome of these meetings to be transferred to the official negotiation process (Nan, 2004, p.62).

Indirect communications are achieved through communication chains which are built by one or more intermediaries. The role of the intermediaries can be to pass messages between disputing parties, including their desires and claims (Pruitt, 2006, p.382). These intermediaries can be a third party - someone unofficial - who makes contact between conflicting parties, acts as a messenger engaging in officially sanctioned diplomatic efforts or defines the agenda to facilitate de-escalation of the conflict (Wanis-St John, 2006, p.121). Intermediaries in the Northern Ireland conflict played a role as unofficial, individual agents who did not represent any of the conflicting parties. Besides, the influence of intermediaries depends not only on their position as key influencers, but also as independent actors (Princen, 1992, p.6). For instance, Tom Caldwell and Brendan Duddy were unofficial and individual intermediaries whose mediation was accepted by both the British government and republican movement.

It is difficult to reveal these channels as there is no physical contact between the conflicting parties. Lieberfeld (2007) states that governments are more likely to engage with intermediaries than talk directly to rebels as they have concerns about talking to armed groups due to the potential result of legitimising these groups. Furthermore, these channels can be built between different actors, but this article focuses only on the talks which have had direct influence on peace processes. Therefore, the secret talks between the nationalist or unionist parties are not the topic of this article. For example, although Father Alec Reid played a role in secret initiatives, his primary aim was to create a pan-nationalist approach by bringing both nationalist parties together and creating a shared democratic strategy (Alonso, 2004; Rafter,

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2003; RPM, 1988). Even though these efforts were significant, they did not affect the peace process directly, so they are not the focus of this article.

Indirect communications between conflicting parties are provided by one or more chains and by personal and collective attempts. Pruitt (2006) identifies these channels through the length of communication channels: whether a communication channel is built by a single or more than one intermediary. Although more than one intermediary's involvement is common in complicated issues, it is assumed that they might create 'messy, difficult and even chaotic' results if they are not well-organised (Crocker et al., 1999, p.4). However, a single intermediary can also create problems in a backchannel initiative as it is hard to be sure whether he is talking to the appropriate people in a terrorist group when he builds the channel (Pruitt, 2006, p.385). These two issues are investigated in the Northern Ireland case as these conflicts witnessed the involvement of more than one intermediary.

The role of intermediaries is also a significant aspect that determines the success of secret negotiations. The role of intermediaries has two aspects: weak and powerful third parties. Weak intermediaries are the people who transmit messages between disputing parties and coordinate concession making, whereas powerful intermediaries help parties in a conflict by planning the process and recommending attainable solutions or putting pressure on these parties to reach a political settlement (Pruitt, 2006, p.385). The role of third parties determines the success of backchannel communications as they initiate the dialogue between warring parties, define the strength or looseness of the channel, dominate or facilitate the two groups' discussions and help to gradually move towards official negotiations. This article examines the consequences of weak and powerful intermediary efforts in order to understand whether they were useful for closing the gaps between states and sub-state armed groups in the Northern Irish conflict.

A significant question regarding the nature of backchannels is: How and why do conflicting parties engage in indirect dialogue? There are three major factors which define the parties' involvement in a peace process: invitation by one party or both sides, demands of other concerned outsiders to a specific group or actor to involve themselves in the process, and the personal intention of third parties (Mapendere, 2005, p.72). Zartman (2000) and Pruitt's (1997) 'ripe moment' term will be investigated to investigate the reasons for the application of backchannel communications. Ripeness is a predictive tool which describes whether a specific time for negotiation is a ripe moment or not depends on if a dispute has successfully been resolved (O'Kane, 2006). The

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question of engaging in these talks is investigated through indirect communications led by intermediaries.

Indirect Communications in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland peace process was initially started with a dialogue between the SDLP and SF in the mid-1980s (Spencer, 2005). However, when the secret contact between the British government and republican movement through the intermediaries was revealed after the archival sources had been investigated, the peace process needed to be examined in a greater context. This section aims to reveal the secret contact between the British government and republican movement. Thus, it gives the opportunity to assess the role of backchannels in the whole peace process.

In the early 1970s, an anonymous letter written on behalf of the Northern Ireland Office revealed that British authorities rejected contact with the IRA by claiming 'there was not any one man or group in the IRA who were both willing and able to deliver an efficient and lasting ceasefire' (TNA-PREM/15/1016, 1972). Therefore, they initially tested each other's authority on minor issues such as releasing hostages or the transfer of prisoners. These minor issues in the early 1970s helped to establish an understanding that both sides had the authority to deliver their promises. Indirect communications initiated secret contact between the British government and republican movement through intermediaries.

The first intermediary in the Northern Irish peace process was Tom Caldwell, a former British Army officer. Although his contact with the republican movement began at the Dublin Horse Show when he bumped into a senior Provisional in 1971 where they 'exchanged pleasantries but nothing more', the nature of these talks changed after the Abercorn explosion on March 4, 1972, which killed two women and injured more than a hundred people (Taylor, 1998, p.131). This explosion triggered Caldwell's initiation of secret dialogue. The structure and consequence of Caldwell's initiatives are crucial for understanding the impact of the first covert peace effort. Regarding the structure, as Caldwell states, it was his own intention to make contact with SF leader Ruairi O'Bradaigh, but not a negotiation on behalf of anyone (Caldwell, 1972, cited in Fortnight, 1972). However, the information was being passed on to British officials. Therefore, there was no binding discussion between the two sides, but it was still helpful in understanding both sides' demands. His contact with the IRA was only known by Harold Wilson, leader of the opposition, not the British government (Taylor, 2002). Although Caldwell was the only intermediary for this channel, his mediation was supported by Wilson, which

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demonstrates that it was a collective attempt between an unofficial intermediary and a British politician. However, it was not supported by the British government, and this affected the result.

The efforts at indirect contact by Caldwell helped to bring the British government and senior republicans together (Guardian, 2008). Prime Minister's Office noted that their first meeting was on 20 June 1972 between the IRA representatives David O'Connell and Gerry Adams on the one hand, and officials from William Whitelaw's office; Sir Phillip Woodfield and Frank Steele on the other (TNA-PREM/15/1009, 1972). It was a step towards the meeting with Whitelaw. As a result of Steele's initiatives, William Whitelaw, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, had a meeting with six IRA leaders on 7 July 1972. This talk was offered by a public IRA statement for Whitelaw, with the group inviting him to Londonderry on 13 June 1972 through the republican media. Although the invitation was officially refused by Whitelaw, John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, and a senior member of the SDLP, Paddy Devlin, convinced the government that the offer was genuine (Taylor, 1998, p.136). Hence, Whitelaw accepted to meet the republicans secretly.

Trust between disputing parties is one of the most salient aspects of a successful negotiation process (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011). Due to the lack of trust, there were many disagreements during the meeting such as over self-determination and the withdrawal of British troops. However, there was minor progress in the form of an agreement between the two sides on a week-long bilateral ceasefire with immediate action and on arranging another set of negotiations after this ceasefire. According to an anonymous meeting note of the Northern Ireland Office of the British government, after the Whitelaw talks had come into effect, the ceasefire was immediately announced, but lasted only two days (TNA-CJ/4/1456, 1972). Fortunately, the intensive discussions between warring parties is a sign that these talks provided a flexible environment by encouraging informality and discussions about both sides' fears, aims and proposals (Pruitt, 2006, 2008). Even though this initiative was unsuccessful, it illustrated the British government's intention to conduct political resolution efforts, as Whitelaw defended secret negotiations by saying that 'a refusal to talk would leave the political initiative in the hands of the IRA' (Whitelaw, 1989, p.100). Overall, it was a constructive effort to reach a mutual understanding.

After the ceasefire ended and the level of violence dramatically increased, the British government sent in troops and carried out the largest military operation in the entire history of the Troubles, called Operation

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Motorman. Fortunately, the Operation on 31 July 1972 did not result in a cessation of secret talks as the former General Officer Commanding (GOC) Northern Ireland, General Sir John Hackett, contacted the Provisional IRA Army Council member David O'Connell after this incident. It was a personal initiative and the communication channel was built only by one intermediary, just like Caldwell's attempt. The letters between Whitelaw and Hackett illustrated that Whitelaw was reluctant to talk to O'Connell and was unhappy about Hackett's dialogue with him; he said that Hackett's contact with an IRA member was very damaging and dangerous (TNA-CJ/4/319, 1973). There is an important question here: although the existing backchannel literature (Wanis-St John, 2006) assumes that there is no cost of entry to indirect communications, why was the British government reluctant to engage in these initiatives?

The failure of Hackett's efforts stemmed from two factors. Firstly, these initiatives were achieved immediately after unsuccessful talks undertaken by Whitelaw himself. Thus, the British government was reluctant to carry out another covert initiative immediately. The disagreement between Whitelaw and senior republicans made it difficult to organise another set of meetings in a short time period. Therefore, it was not a ripe moment to start dialogue between the conflicting parties even though it was initiated by a mediator. As Zartman (2000, p.227) argues, even if communication is commenced by a third party, it cannot be turned into negotiations if parties in a conflict are not in favour of a non-violent resolution. Secondly, although on-going violence did not cease covert initiatives, they created mistrust between the parties. This situation could only be overcome by an intermediary who was accepted by both sides (Princen, 1992, p.10). Hackett's mediation was clearly not accepted by the British side.

The last indirect communications were built by Brendan Duddy[2], a Londonderry businessperson. Duddy's intermediary role began when he was asked by Steele and Oatley, senior Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) officers, to make contact with O'Bradaigh (Taylor, 2002). As Duddy personally knew O'Bradaigh, he played a key role in passing the messages between the British and republican sides (Dochartaigh, 2011, p.217). Therefore, even though Duddy was the only intermediary between the two sides, the communication channel was initiated by the SIS officers, Frank Steele and Michael Oatley. It

[2] Brendan Duddy was an intermediary between the British government and IRA between the mid-1970s and 1993. The Brendan Duddy papers were archived at the James Hardiman Library Archives, National University of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland.

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was a clear sign of the demand of the British officials to communicate with the republican movement. However, it was not only the British government's intention, but also that of the republicans as the collapse of the political arrangements of Sunningdale aroused the 'dovish' component of the republican movement (Mumford, 2012, p.103; Taylor, 2002, p.170). Duddy's intermediary efforts can be examined in three periods: the mid-1970s, early 1980s and early 1990s.

Firstly, his personal archive acknowledges that 'the contact'[3] played a key role in extending the 1975 IRA ceasefire since he acted as both a messenger and an intermediary between Wilson, Oatley and the IRA Army Council by hosting several meetings in his home (Craig, 2012). The importance of Duddy's role was explained by Oatley later on, as the primary problem for him was 'how to begin a dialogue and then contact with the IRA leadership without doing so directly. If there were to be negotiations at some stage, the ground had to be prepared' (Oatley, 1975, quoted in Taylor, 2002, p.170). It was also essential for the IRA leadership to feel that there was an on-going and a secure contact with the government. It is evident through the statement of Frank Cooper, a senior British official in Northern Ireland, that it was necessary for 'O'Bradaigh and, to some extent, O'Connell to feel that they were in contact with part of the British government which might, at some stage, help them to move in a political direction' (Cooper, 1975, quoted in Taylor, 2002, p.170). However, it was still very risky for the government to contact the IRA directly. Even Whitelaw was not informed about these talks (Taylor, 2002). Therefore, it can be said that the reason for the secrecy of these meetings was the difficulty to consider it government policy during the early stage of the conflict. As Pruitt (2006) indicates, secrecy might help disputing sides to discuss their demands without any precondition. It could have been harder to conduct covert negotiations by including or informing a government representative. Therefore, this initiative provided a twofold advantage to making progress: It, firstly, reduced uncertainty on both sides as both parties were feeling that they were in contact with their opponents. It was also successful on the government's side, as it did not mean that they gave *de facto* legitimacy to the IRA.

Concerning the content of the discussions, he put pressure on the British government to make concessions that would help the IRA leaders who

[3] Jonathan Powell (2008), one of the key architects of the GFA revealed that Duddy was the key in the secret talks and was called 'the contact' during the secret initiatives.

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took a pro-ceasefire position. In that time, Billy McKee, Commander of the Belfast IRA was in the position of declaring a unilateral ceasefire. Duddy told his British contact:

Be generous, give McKee a chance. Consider his position; he needs help... He is not a miracle worker... Pull out some mar[ine] comm[andos]. Release his buddy from Purdysburn. Release nineteen internees on Tuesday; give the names to McKee... We are all in this together (NUI-POL/35/4/62, 1975).

Even though Duddy's intention was not successful in bringing the British closer, it was clear evidence of Duddy's active role as a powerful intermediary in the secret negotiations. However, this initiative demonstrates that despite the credibility, powerful mediation and reduction in uncertainty, it did not provide a clear outcome towards peace. Therefore, this research reveals that the success of backchannels is not reliant only on the inclusiveness of the initiative, but also the intentions of disputing parties. It can be said that these negotiations were not 'serious' talks in order to lead the discussion to a broader level by discussing the underlying causes of the conflict. It was because the British government's intention to use this dialogue as an opportunity to defeat the IRA by declaring a ceasefire which proved that it was a 'false' motive for a ripe moment (Zartman, 2003). Although the secrecy of these talks secured them from the effect of wider and external issues, for instance national and international politics, it also created an environment in which the intention of the parties were difficult to understand by each other.

Duddy's second major initiative was during the republican hunger strikes in 1980 and 1981. The Duddy papers reveal an intense and accelerating series of phone calls between Duddy and an anonymous representative of the British government. He met the strikers several times in the Maze Prison and forwarded their messages to his contact in the British government. According to the records, Duddy insisted on a negotiated settlement of the hunger strikes. In response to his claim, the British officials stated that 'the British government is prepared to issue a statement only if there is an immediate end to the hunger strike' (NUI-POL/35/166/2, 1981). However, the hunger strikers made a number of demands from the government to end the strike: civilian clothing, the right of the prisoners to decide what work should be done and visits for prisoners (NUI-POL/35/166/3, 1981). While the backchannel communications were being conducted, PM Thatcher refused to negotiate with the strikers as her position was that of not treating terrorists differently to other prisoners (Thatcher, 1993, p.389). Hence, there was nothing to discuss with the republican strikers. However, while the government continued its opposition in

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public, the secret negotiations helped to pursue ways to weaken the conflict behind the scenes. This is in parallel with Wanis-St John's (2006) assumption which is that backchannels make it possible to maintain the governments' opposition to talking to terrorists while they are talking to them behind the scenes. This situation helped both sides to understand each other's major demands which also hindered any potential spoilers to destroy this channel.

Duddy's last intermediary attempt was in the early 1990s which led to the 1994 IRA ceasefire. When Duddy's mediation between John Major's government and the IRA was leaked to the media in 1993, it caused a political storm (Spencer, 2000). Although maintaining the backchannel initiatives was threatened, these secret talks led to the IRA's 1994 ceasefire. It can be said that a sufficient dialogue was built between the British government and republican movement that facilitated official negotiations. A similar situation emerged in Turkey when the secret Oslo talks were leaked to the press. Fortunately, none of these incidents caused an interruption to conflict resolution efforts. The reaction in the wider society was because of the content of the meetings as Duddy pointed out that there was an agreement during the discussions between the two sides:

Walter's [IRA representative] position has been accepted and a new draft British paper has been formulated and approved by Mayhew [when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland] which is to be put in a special meeting on Tuesday May 18th 1993 to Mr Major in Downing Street (NUI-POL/35/266/1, 1993).

These covert negotiations resulted in finding common ground which was evident through the message of the British representative Robert McLarnon to Duddy to facilitate peace efforts: 'We are appalled at the present mess. We are trying to think of questions that you could put that will give you all the assurance of our goodwill and good intentions that you need' (NUI-POL/35/9/279, 1993). Although the message did not find an immediate response from the government's side, the process brought about the IRA's 1994 ceasefire after protracted negotiations. Together with these attempts, Duddy's efforts contributed to an understanding between the main armed protagonists.

Peacemakers in Action: Analysis and Conclusion

The secret communications between the British government and IRA are as old as the history of this conflict. The backchannels in Northern Ireland were determined by the contact of the intermediaries in indirect dialogue. The success of these channels depended upon different factors, including: the

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desires of disputing parties, the influence of the spoilers, whether a violent conflict exists and these parties keeping their promises.

The Northern Ireland conflict embodied personal and official actions to make contact between the main armed protagonists. The first backchannel aimed to decrease the level of violence. Caldwell's intermediary work was his personal initiative, but was known by Wilson. It resulted in the armed groups' ceasefires to show their intention for a political resolution. Which was important was that neither side gave promises to each other, including to lay down arms on the part of the IRA, nor an immediate political reform by the British government. It can be said that the lack of the British government's intention to make progress and information prevented a better outcome. However, it was still significant that this contact was sufficient to make direct contact. Therefore, this article reveals that when the officials of the governments initiate a communication channel, these talks can be more successful than the channels provided by independent third parties with regards to moving towards official negotiations and conflict de-escalation. However, this contact was conducted as personal initiatives, but not the policy of the British government. It was because of the anger of the society regarding any attempts towards political resolution. This anger demonstrated that these were not ripe moments for resolution.

General Sir John Hackett was the second intermediary who established the contact between the IRA Army Council members and the British government as discussed earlier. However, the negative reaction by the British government against this communication channel prevented an outcome towards a peace initiative. The secret letters between Hackett and Whitelaw revealed that the political environment was not suitable to open a communication channel with the IRA. It can be said that this was related to the high-level of violence and number of casualties during the initiation of this channel. Therefore, this contact was an unsuccessful attempt to contribute peacemaking efforts.

Brendand Duddy was another intermediary who made direct contact with leaders of the republican movement. Duddy was asked by the SIS officers to make contact with the IRA (NUI-POL/35/69, 1975). This secret mediation played a more extensive role than only exchanging messages because of the consent of the conflicting parties. Duddy's facilitating role turned into encouraging action to make progress when he put pressure on his British contact to give a chance to McKee to de-escalate the conflict by pulling out some of the British troops from Northern Ireland (NUI-POL/35/4/62, 1975).

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This was also due to both sides' implicit consent for Duddy's mediation. Although Steele and Oatley forwarded the messages to British officials, their role was to represent the British government during the secret talks.

Duddy was not only a messenger, but also a facilitator, as he was involved in the discussions and aimed to keep the communication channels open. However, this was not always possible since the perception of the governments and armed groups were not always in favour of political resolution. For example, the 1975 ceasefire was used as an opportunity by the British government to weaken the IRA. It was evident through Rees's statement during a secret Cabinet discussion: 'The importance of a ceasefire is that it offers us the opportunity to create the conditions in which the Provisionals' "military" organisation and structure may be weakened' (TNA-CAB/134/3921, 1975). Hence, this initiative does not witness a ripe moment for resolution.

To sum up, this article has argued that the indirect communication channels opened by independent third parties helped to overcome trust and reliability issues through the personal effort of intermediaries. It has found that these peacemakers were influential in encouraging both the representatives of the British government on the one hand, and the IRA on the other. The article has demonstrated that the indirect talks in the Northern Ireland conflict were used for the sake of interrupting violence first. This condition gave space to both conflicting parties to discuss their demands in a more peaceful environment without the pressure of violent conflict. Therefore, the declassified secret archival material demonstrates that while the intermediaries formed the basis of communication, the direct talks were built upon these indirect dialogues.

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MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ 1883
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
MARMARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ