



Then and now:
10 years on from the
Belfast Agreement

FOREWARD BY JIM ALLISTER MEP

10 years ago on 10 April 1998 the iniquitous Belfast Agreement was concluded. Thereafter it languished in the face of Unionist rejection but sadly today it is being implemented in all its glory, because those who were instrumental in seeing it almost done to death have themselves breathed new life into it. Without the DUP volte face the Belfast Agreement was dead.

There is lots of furious re-branding and repackaging going on, but the fundamentals of the Belfast Agreement survive. St Andrews did not alter its basic architecture. Yes, it had additional and evil transient elements, like outrageous prisoner releases, the destruction of the RUC and failure to deal with decommissioning, but it was much more flawed than that. The wicked legacy of its transient parts lives on, but its basic structures are themselves still very much with us.

The basic structures of the Belfast Agreement were, and are, these:-

- government by mandatory coalition, so that a party can never be voted out of office and Opposition is denied. The purpose, of course, is to guarantee IRA/Sinn Fein a permanent place in the government of the state they are dedicated to destroy.
- the dysfunctional office of Joint First Ministers, OFMDFM, whereby equality is guaranteed for republicanism and the right of veto is enshrined by reason of the First Minister being unable to do anything - even sign a letter - without Sinn Fein's agreement.
- entrenched north/south executive bodies to advance harmonisation on an all-Ireland basis.

The intended trajectory of the Belfast Agreement was, and is, eventual Irish unification. Hence the continuing pledge of the British Government to legislate for Irish unity, as and when the people agree - with the only proposal on the constitution which can ever be put in referendum being one for unification. The essence of the referendum provision is to permit the people to be asked, after sufficient all-island harmonisation, "Are you yet ready to join the Republic of Ireland?" This is the indisputable scheme and objective of the Belfast Agreement.

The Belfast Agreement was wrong and flawed in 1998. It is still equally so. Everything that was said about it in 1998 can still be said in 2008. Hence, within this document are timely reminders of what its prime detractors said about it in 1998. The fact that they are now its prime implementers is a sad commentary on their departure from traditional unionist principles.

Then

“Martin McGuinness described the Mitchell Agreement as the completion of a phase in the Republican struggle for full independence and a bridge to the future. Again significantly he summed up the Agreement as “*a transitional process towards a sovereign and independent Ireland*”.

(Peter Robinson, speech near Ballymoney Tuesday 14th April 1998)

Now

"Since 28 July 2005 IRA volunteers are playing a positive role in the new phase of our struggle."

(2008 IRA Easter Message)

"This is a defensive statement from the IRA and is an indication unionists should be optimistic about the current situation, rather than pessimistic."

(Sammy Wilson responding to the 2008 IRA Easter Message)

Then

“Mr Trimble has not only provided cabinet positions for Adams and McGuinness but he has accepted All-Ireland bodies.... He has conceded to Nationalists not just a power-sharing Assembly but a direct tangible legislative link with the Republic through All-Ireland bodies. The distinction between Northern Ireland and the Republic has been torn away, under this deal North and South come closer together and Northern Ireland ever more distant from Great Britain”.

(Peter Robinson, speech near Ballymoney Tuesday 14th April 1998)

Now

The DUP have made Martin McGuinness joint First Minister and the first DUP/Sinn Fein budget resulted in more money going to cross-border bodies than ever before.

Then

On 10 April 1998 the DUP issued a press release headed "*10 Ways in which the Union is Fundamentally Weakened*". Among these were:

- The creation of an all Ireland Ministerial Council with the full Framework Document powers of consultation, harmonisation and executive decision taking over a wide range of subjects. This is a beefed up Maryfield style secretariat.

Now

DUP ministers regularly accompany their Sinn Fein/IRA colleagues to meetings of the North-South Ministerial Council, where Unionism is in a permanent minority.

Then

It was dismissive of changes to the Irish Constitution:

- The Government of Ireland Act 1920 establishing the supreme authority of the British Parliament over Northern Ireland is abolished. In return for the total abolition of this legal claim, Dublin's illegal claim is merely amended to include an all Ireland consent clause.

Now

Dublin's illegal claim remains – “It is the firm will of the Irish Nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland” – while the Government of Ireland Act 1920 has disappeared. However, the DUP is now silent on these issues.

Then

On 1st May 1998 Nigel Dodds published *A Plain Guide to the Agreement – What Every Unionist Should Know*. In it he stated that the Agreement fundamentally undermined Northern Ireland's constitutional position:

“The original objective of “balanced constitutional change has not been fulfilled. The Government of Ireland Act 1920 which forms part of the title deeds of the United Kingdom's sovereignty over Northern Ireland is to be abolished immediately. In contrast the illegal claims contained in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution are merely amended.... Other parts of the Irish Constitution which form the basis of Dublin's illegal claim remain intact. Having achieved the objective of Articles 2 and 3 there is no need for the Articles in their original form....

“As far as the so-called principle of consent is concerned it is provided that it is “for the people of the island of Ireland alone ... to exercise their right of self-determination” [Par 1(ii) + (iv)]. The right of self-determination should be a matter for the people of Northern Ireland alone”.

Now

Mr Dodds and his DUP colleagues are content and we've seen more north/southerly in the last 10 months than in the previous 10 years.

Then

“Only one thing has changed – Mr Taylor and the Trimbleites. They opposed the weaker Anglo Irish Agreement and now embrace this full-blooded Dublin interference.

“With Adams hailing the deal as “a step towards the goal of a united Ireland” Mr Taylor and Mr Trimble sound increasingly ridiculous claiming it strengthens the Union. Trimble and Taylor's comical assertion that the Union is stronger may be entertaining but it is not credible set against the presence of Adams and McGuinness in government by the summer; a nationalist veto in the Assembly; an all-Ireland Executive structures and murderers walking out of jail. Come off it! The deal is the launch pad to a united Ireland.”

(Peter Robinson, undated press release issued in the run up to the 1998 referendum).

Now

St Andrews did nothing to change the basic architecture of the Belfast Agreement. Its key structures of mandatory coalition, joint OFMDFM and multiple north-south bodies all remain.

In fact only one thing has changed – Peter Robinson and the DUP!

Then

“The extent of David Trimble’s desperation can be seen by his erroneous suggestion on LWT that Ian Paisley and Jim Molyneaux had previously proposed proportional government involving IRA/Sinn Fein. This unmitigated lie cannot stand the light of day. The DUP proposal was for Northern Ireland to be run by a committee-style system without any cabinet. Without a cabinet there would be no seat in government for IRA/Sinn Fein to have. Moreover in the 1992 Talks the DUP specifically stated (in writing) that terrorists must be excluded from holding any office in the new Northern Ireland Assembly.”

(Peter Robinson press release 19th April 1998)

“The hapless fools who ask what our alternative is to such a process are implicitly suggesting there is no alternative to a united Ireland process. They are not entitled to make that claim as there are many alternatives to Dublin Rule. Complete and total integration within the United Kingdom is one such alternative and the fashion of devolution given recently to Scotland within the United Kingdom is another. However, these pint-sized political thinkers are not really asking “have you got an alternative?” They are implicitly asking “what alternative have you that the IRA will accept?”
(25th April 1998 Peter Robinson speech in Tandragee)

Now

As Peter Robinson once admitted, there are numerous alternatives to terrorist inclusive government. Yet now he has joined the ranks of the “pint-sized political thinkers” who claim there is no alternative to the Belfast Agreement.

Then

“This agreement signals a seamless and progressive process leading to a united Ireland. with McGuinness and Adams joining Trimble and Taylor in executive government and with a unionist minority in powerful and developing all-Ireland bodies, unionists are entitled to ask why the Official Unionist Party ever opposed Sunningdale, the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Framework Document when they accept this republican-green arrangement which is many times worse. Messrs Trimble, Irvine and McMichael would seek to con the Ulster people into believing that the Union is now safe. Ulster people are not fools. They will know, with murderers being released from prison and elevated to ministerial posts, that the Union is far from secure.

“Did thousands of our fellow citizens die and tens of thousands become maimed in order to secure cabinet positions for Adams and McGuinness and set up a united Ireland process? Unionists from every party and none must band together to stop this drive towards a united Ireland. **This agreement is a turbo-charged model of Sunningdale – the Anglo-Irish Agreement with a vengeance – a fully armed version of the Framework document**”.

(Peter Robinson press release 10th April 1998)

Now

Now that Robinson and the DUP are enthusiastically working the Belfast Agreement Unionists are entitled to ask why they ever opposed Sunningdale, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Framework Document and the Belfast Agreement? Why did the unacceptable suddenly become acceptable once they became the largest party?

Then

Now that IRA/Sinn Fein has officially joined the “Yes” campaign any room for doubt as to the real nature, purpose and intent of the Stormont Deal is gone. IRA/Sinn Fein has embraced the Stormont Agreement because they recognise it for what it is, a vehicle to trundle us into a united Ireland. Hence, the republican vision of a transitional arrangement, which Adams and McGuinness will use as a fresh phase in their relentless pursuit of Irish Unity.

The question for every unionist in Ulster is whether they will assist the Provos by endorsing the Sinn Fein deal. Unionists must now decide if they are prepared to join the IRA godfathers in an unholy alliance by voting “Yes”. Sadly, some Unionists politicians, in pursuit of political office, are willing to do so, but the grassroots of Unionism will recoil from fulfilling the IRA/Sinn Fein strategy.

The unholy alliance is now exposed – Trimble, Ahern, Hume and Adams – partners in the campaign seeking support for the all-Ireland deal. Perhaps now that Sinn Fein are in harness with the Glengall Street leadership we will see the “odd couple” – Adams and Trimble campaigning together.

(Undated press release from Peter Robinson issued in the run up to the 1998 referendum)

Now

We regularly see the unholy trinity of DUP, Sinn Fein and Dublin ministers together.

Then

On the 14th May 1998 Peter Robinson issued the following press release:

THE BIG LIE

The Big Lie of the Unionist Yes Men is that the agreement strengthens the Union.

Consider the facts:

1. The Agreement anticipates only one form of future constitutional change, namely Irish unification and in a separate and binding Agreement solemnly commits the British Government to legislate for it (pages 2 & 28).
2. The Agreement embraces the pan-Nationalist contention that it is “the Island of Ireland” which alone is endowed with the right to self-determination (page 27).
3. The enabling legislation will not only repeal the Government of Ireland Act but take precedence over the Act of Union (page 3).
4. The only proposal for constitutional change which can be put by referendum is one for Irish unity. The wider powers of the 1973 Constitution Act allowing other alternatives, are abrogated. Thus, never again could the Union be bolstered by calling a 1973 type poll, as a poll is only permitted when a nationalist outcome is anticipated (page 3).
5. The Agreement provides as-of-right Cabinet seats for IRA/Sinn Fein, but bans from Government Unionists who refuse to operate the cross-border executive bodies. Does anyone in their right mind think Adams and McGuinness in Government will strengthen the Union?
6. The free-standing All-Ireland executive bodies with their all-island implementation structures, must likewise weaken the Union and advance all-Ireland integration.
7. The replacement of Maryfield with not one but two Secretariats further entrenches Dublin involvement in our internal affairs.
8. IRA/Sinn Fein, which is dedicated by whatever means to destruction of the Union, endorse the Agreement because they recognise it as “a staging post” to Irish unity and as explicitly weakening the British link.

The Union binds Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom. This Agreement deliberately prises it away and enforces a rolling scheme of all-Ireland harmonisation and integration with only one ultimate goal in view, Irish unification. No other outcome is anticipated. The structures in the Agreement are not an end in themselves but are delivered only as a transitional arrangement. Hence the Review in four short years.

If Unionists don't face up to the unpalatable realities of this Agreement then it will be too late.

Now

Peter Robinson has become one of the most enthusiastic peddlers of what he once called “The Big Lie of the Unionist Yes Men”:

“The DUP has settled the constitutional question – Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom is secure - even the Dublin Foreign Minister acknowledged as much on “Hearts and Minds” last night when he said that from an Irish Government perspective the constitutional question had now been “parked”. Sinn Fein are bound into British institutions at Stormont, they are legally obligated to support the police and the courts and the recent IMC report showed that they were committed to peaceful and democratic means.”

(Peter Robinson speech to Fermanagh DUP 22nd September 2007).

Then

In *A Plain Guide to the Agreement – What Every Unionist Should Know* Nigel Dodds said:

“The Assembly created by this Agreement is undemocratic and gives nationalist parties an absolute veto on any key decision”.

Now

In spite of DUP claims to have established a democratic Assembly this remains the case. The present mutual veto is as exercisable by Sinn Fein as by the DUP. Hence, for example, the inability of the DUP to deliver an acceptable definition of "victim", which distinguishes the innocent from the perpetrator of terror, unless Sinn Fein agrees.

Then

A Plain Guide to the Agreement – What Every Unionist Should Know attacked the joint office of First and deputy First Minister:

“Throughout the document the First Minister is given no role independent of his deputy. They act together at all times as joint leaders.”

Now

Now, as Nigel Dodds pointed out in 1998, the First Minister can not have any role independent of the deputy First Minister meaning that a DUP First Minister can do nothing without Martin McGuinness.

Then

Mr Dodds went on to blast a system which guaranteed Sinn Fein/IRA Ministerial posts as of right:

“The bigger parties in the Assembly, including Sinn Fein, have an automatic guaranteed right to a place in the Executive as Ministers”.

Now

The DUP have accepted the iniquitous D’Hondt system which guarantees Sinn Fein/IRA positions in the government of Northern Ireland for as long as the state exists, because they have a veto on the removal of D’Hondt.

In 2004 Jeffrey Donaldson said of the UUP:

“Time and time again, they have been exposed as the tellers of half truths. No self respecting unionist believes a single word they say”

What goes around comes around!

"NOTHING THAT IS MORALLY WRONG CAN BE POLITICALLY RIGHT"