

# When the Sh

IMAGINE that the IRA declares a ceasefire in the next month. What happens then? The answer depends on the nature of the ceasefire.

At least two scenarios are possible.

● The first is that demanded by the two governments: an unconditional renunciation of violence in compliance with the Downing Street Declaration. The Irish Government would then establish a forum for peace and reconciliation; the British government would publicly talk to Sinn Fein after, at most, a three-month interval, and Sinn Fein would eventually, be invited to join the talks initiated by Peter Brooke, which are currently in suspended animation.

Somewhere down this road — assuming that both unionists and loyalist paramilitaries were open to continuing dialogue and peace — both governments would have to manage the handing-in of arms and explosives; the conditional release of imprisoned paramilitaries, and the construction of a constitutionally agreed — but not unified — Ireland.

This scenario is not going to happen. There will be no unconditional renunciation of violence by the IRA. Any ceasefire will be strategic, designed to test the merits of "unarmed struggle" as opposed to "armed struggle". Sinn Fein's rejection of the Downing Street Declaration at Letterkenny showed that republicans are not going to surrender — even though they want to come in from the cold. A much messier transition to peace is the best we can hope for.

● The second type of ceasefire is that being floated by republicans, a conditional one. A three-month ceasefire would put pressure on both governments to deliver an environment which continues the IRA ceasefire, while an indefinite ceasefire would generate more subtle and sustained pressure — because governments, like paramilitaries, do not respond well to deadlines. This kind of ceasefire is also easier for the IRA leadership because the military instrument will not have been abandoned, and their militants can be persuaded to "wait to see" what benefits unfold.

In this scenario the republican leadership announces an indefinite ceasefire "to advance the peace



## Dr Brendan O'Leary, Reader in Political Science at the London School of Economics, analyses the possible consequences of an IRA ceasefire.

process", calls on other "armed parties" to suspend their use of violence, and demands all-party constitutional "inclusive dialogue". If it is thoughtful, the republican leadership will call the ceasefire before rather than after the two governments announce the "framework document" which they say they have been working on.

What happens then? Loyalist paramilitaries must choose between playing "dumb" and playing it "smart". If they play it dumb (rumoured to be the UDA's preference), they will maintain — or increase — attacks on republicans, republican sympathisers, and any available Catholics. They might also consider cross-border bombing missions in the Republic.

The tactics would be to entice the

IRA into breaking its ceasefire; the goal would be to stave off possible concessions to the IRA and Sinn Fein. These tactics would be dumb because the security forces, anxious to demonstrate their impartiality, would have to clamp down hard on loyalists. (If they did not then the IRA could return to its *Long War* as the defenders of Northern nationalists — having exposed the British government to embarrassing international scrutiny.)

In these circumstances, loyalist paramilitaries would be blamed for any breakdown in the ceasefire. Their actions would also have deepened the estrangement from all brands of unionism felt by most of the British public. Republicans would welcome British repression of loyalists. The prospect would also loom of the British government facing a war on two fronts — if and when republicans resumed "armed struggle".

For these reasons loyalist paramilitaries may react more intelligently to an IRA ceasefire — as the UVF appears to advocate. They may say that they too will halt the violence, just as long as the British government makes no concessions to the IRA which are unacceptable to the unionist community.

They would presumably draw up a list of unacceptable concessions. It would minimally include any attempt to establish a united Ireland without majority consent in Northern Ireland. Adding any further items beyond this fundamental one will make them appear much more unreasonable, but they will doubtless add some. They would not, however, rule out amnesties or conditional releases for paramilitaries, because their jailed members would hope to benefit from such policies.

Assume then that loyalist paramilitaries play it smart, so that there is a temporary lull in political violence, apart from small-scale actions by freelancing loyalist paramilitaries and INLA personnel. The focus must then shift to the two governments.

The British government will be in the spotlight while Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness conduct public relations campaigns on newly

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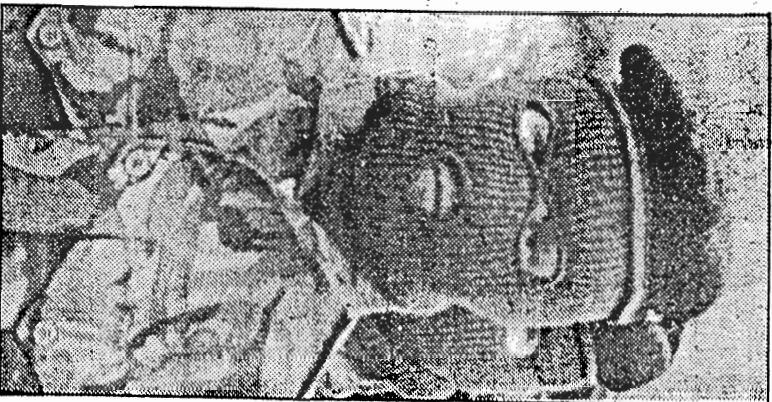
minted visas in the USA — and possibly in Great Britain if court cases challenging exclusion orders succeed.

The British government will be under considerable pressure, not least from America, to react imaginatively — to invite Sinn Fein into talks while requiring it to renounce violence before participating in fully-fledged constitutional negotiations; to lift the broadcasting ban, to treat three months of disciplined ceasefire as evidence of good intentions; to acknowledge the legitimacy of the republican campaign; to agree to act as "the persuaders" for an agreed, if not united, Ireland; to publish proposals for amending the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 which they have already agreed is negotiable; and so on.

However, the British government will be cross-pressured. There will be little or no opposition amongst the British public to conversations with Sinn Fein — there was none when the British government's dialogue with the IRA became apparent last year. But the right-wing of the Conservative Party, Unionist members of Parliament, and editorials in Tory newspapers will tell John Major to make "no surrender".

A prime minister with his poll ratings will, nevertheless, be desperate for a real success — such as a resolution of Northern Ireland. Although his party's narrow parliamentary majority inhibits his willingness to take risks, he must know that any thoughtful constitutional proposals — apart from Irish unification without the consent of the Northern majority — would pass through the House of Commons with the support of the Liberal Democrats and Labour.

He must also know that if he makes proposals through the framework document being drawn up with the Irish government which angered unionists — but do not involve coerced Irish unification — he will at least be in a position to look statesman-like, and to call Sinn Fein and the IRA's bluff. He will be able to claim that the framework document emanated independently



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from the two governments, and not as a response to the IRA ceasefire — even if this is not true, and even if it is not believed.

If this scenario unfolds, the initiative will rest with the Republic's government. It will have to ignore voices from the Progressive Democrats, Fine Gael and Dublin 4 which will tell it to do nothing that might encourage the IRA. It will have to prompt the

British government in an appropriate and principled direction. It will have to reassure constitutional republicans, especially within Fianna Fail.

It will have to make sure that the framework document is imaginative, comprehensive and enticing to Northern nationalists — while not drastically threatening unionists' core values and interests. This means it will minimally have to include:

- Significant amendments to the Government of Ireland Act in return for a referendum to amend or qualify Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution.
- Equitable and workable power-sharing proposals for the North in which there will be a role for all democratically mandated parties.
- Proposals for changes in the administration and security.
- Effective and powerful cross-Border and all-Ireland bodies.
- An equal role for the Republic's government with the British government in the protection of any constitutional settlement.

A framework document of this nature, properly thought through, with an intelligent and workable sequencing of its implementation, could remedy the deficiencies in the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Downing Street Declaration — two previous documents which fell short of what the Irish government knew was needed to resolve matters. Such a framework document could satisfy most Northern nationalists. Sinn Fein and the IRA would look unreasonable if they rejected it.

A republican return to war to overturn such a document, agreed by both governments and marking a significant shift from the *status quo*, would be profoundly difficult to justify. The important question is whether the Dublin government can extract sufficient concessions from the British government to make a republican return to war both unworkable and unthinkable.

■ **Dr O'Leary's book *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* will be published next Spring by Basil Blackwell.**