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**TALKING TO  
TERRORISTS,  
NON-VIOLENCE, AND  
COUNTER-TERRORISM**

Lessons for Gaza from  
Northern Ireland

**Andrew Fitz-Gibbon**



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Lessons for Gaza from Northern Ireland

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Andrew Fitz-Gibbon  
State University of New York  
Cortland NY, USA

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*To Ben*



## PREFACE

Operation Protective Edge (OPE), which lasted for 51 days in summer 2014, was the third Israeli military operation in Gaza in six years. The human impact was extensive: 2132 Palestinians killed, 70% of whom were civilians, including at least 501 children. Over 11,100 Palestinians were injured. Seventy-one Israelis were killed, five of whom were civilians, including one child. Sixty-nine Israelis were injured. Damage to the infrastructure of Gaza was massive: 12,400 housing units were destroyed with reconstruction costs estimated at \$1.82bn. In April 2015, 17,500 families were still homeless. Fourteen health facilities, eight schools, and three universities and colleges were destroyed. Thirty percent of agricultural land was damaged.<sup>3</sup>

\*

On September 12, 2014, Ian Richard Kyle Paisley, Baron Bannside died. He had been active in politics in Northern Ireland for over 40 years. Paisley, known for most of his career as the Reverend Ian Paisley, firebrand preacher, hater of Roman Catholics and homosexuals, was a controversial figure—"politically insatiable and highly divisive."<sup>4</sup> He spearheaded the Protestant retrenchment against a United Irish Republic, and was for a time the leader of a large body of Protestant paramilitaries. He famously shouted, "Never, never, never, never!" outside Belfast City Hall as he addressed tens of thousands of Protestant loyalists about the November 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. To Pope John Paul II, on his visit to the European Parliament in October 1988, Paisley said, "I denounce you, Anti-Christ! I refuse you as Christ's enemy and Antichrist with all your false doctrine." About his enemies the Irish Republican Army (IRA),



Paisley said, “If an IRA man comes to a Protestant home and my men are there, they will kill that IRA man, yes sir.”

Yet after his death, Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister, and former Deputy Leader of the Irish Republican Party Sinn Féin, Martin McGuinness, paid tribute to Paisley saying that he had “lost a friend.” After the Good Friday agreement of 1998, Paisley had taken his Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) into a power-sharing devolved government with Sinn Féin. Paisley was selected as First Minister with McGuinness sitting at his right hand as Deputy First Minister of the new Northern Ireland Assembly, Stormont. In his inaugural speech at Stormont, Paisley said, “I believe that Northern Ireland has come to a time of peace, a time when hate will no longer rule. How good it will be to be part of a wonderful healing in our province.”<sup>5</sup> Like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who vowed never to talk to terrorists, both sides in the conflict, for decades, refused to talk to each other. However, in time, Protestants and Catholics of Northern Ireland sat at table together, became colleagues in power-sharing, and, later, friends who mourn the loss of each other.

\*

In this brief account I look at the process of “talking to terrorists” in the Northern Ireland context, and suggest that just such a process will need to take place between Israel and the Palestinians for there to be any genuine peace in the Middle East. As I will suggest, the Northern Ireland Peace Process was extraordinarily difficult and required much good faith and compromise on all sides. It has not been a perfect peace, and sectarian factions still rumble. Nonetheless, compared to the violence and loss of life of the 1970s and 1980s, it remains appropriate to say that peace has come to Northern Ireland.

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has been, and will be, different to that in Northern Ireland. However, the two situations have so many factors in common that the comparison is at least worth considering.

I recognize, too, the complexities of the Palestinian situation and do not pretend to answer them all in this short account. However, I do think that the lessons learned in the Northern Irish Troubles are pertinent, might lead to additional research, and perhaps help toward a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli/Palestinian situation.

I limit my consideration to Gaza, as this was the conversation I had with my son in summer and fall 2014. I am mindful that Gaza is only one

issue among many in Palestine. I have left untouched the complexities of the Israeli settlements on the West Bank, of the difficult relationship between the Palestinians, other Arab nations and Iran, and the internally exiled Palestinian Israelis.<sup>6</sup> I am aware that any solution for Gaza must ultimately be a viable solution for all Palestinian people. Nonetheless, it was the violence of summer 2014 that gave the initial impetus to write, and so, for good or ill, I focus on the problems of Gaza in the recognition that much that can be said about Gaza can also be said about larger Palestinian issues.

## NOTES

1. At the time Benjamin was director of international programs, an associate professor of history and the Cleveland C. Burton Professor of International Programs at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. He has since become a political officer in the Foreign Service of the USA. See his work on Ireland and the end of the British Empire, *The Irish Experience During the Second World War: An Oral History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), *Turning Points in the Irish Revolution: The British Government and the Cost of Indifference, 1912–1921* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), *Imperial Endgame: Britain's Dirty Wars and the End of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe From the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
2. For my work on nonviolence, see “Is Love Nonviolent?” *The Acorn: Journal of the Gandhi-King Society*, (Volume XIII, 2, Spring-Summer, 2007), “Spiritual Practice as a Foundation for Peacemaking,” Danielle Poe and Eddy Souffrant, *Parceling the Globe: Philosophical Exploration in Globalization, Global Behavior, and Peace* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), “The War in Iraq: What Works?” *Motives* (Boston: Boston University, 2009), “The Praxis of Nonviolence,” *The Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* (19.2) (Philadelphia: Villanova University, 2009), *Positive Peace: Reflections on Peace Education, Nonviolence and Social Justice*. VIBS, Philosophy of Peace Series (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), “Rehabilitating Nonresistance,” *The Acorn: Journal of the Gandhi-King Society* (2010), “Perpetual Violence? Mimesis and Anamnesis.” Rob Gildert and Dennis Rothermel *Remembrance and Reconciliation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), “Somaesthetics and Nonviolence.” *Social Philosophy Today*, North American Society of Social Philosophy (Vol. 28, 2012), “The Reasonableness of Sentimentalism and Violence.” *Peace Review* (Oct-Dec 24:4, 2012), “Loving Nonviolent (Re)Parenting: A Research Note.” With Jane Hall Fitz-Gibbon. *Social*

*Advocacy and Systems Change Journal* (2014), “Peace” in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Political Philosophy*, Andrew Fiala (Editor) (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

3. All data in this paragraph from Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA). *Charting a New Course: Overcoming Stalemate in Gaza*, (Oxford: Oxfam, 2015), 5–6.
4. David McKitterick and David McVea, For Paisley’s direct influence on the beginning of the Troubles in the 1960s see Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland’s Ordeal and the Search for Peace* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 52–59.
5. Quotations by Paisley and McGuinness from BBC. *News: Northern Ireland*. 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-29176439>.
6. Perhaps the best introduction, still, to the Palestinian complexities is Edward W. Said’s *The Question of Palestine*, New York: Vintage Books, 1992, first published in 1977. Though much has changed since its publication, in some respects nothing has changed, and the trajectories that Said explicates have continued.