

If Ireland can find Peace, what chance for Israel?

(2010 Josh Rosenthal Lecture, delivered at the Gerald R Ford School of Public Policy by John, Lord Alderdice former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland on 13 September 2010.)

This past weekend saw the ninth anniversary of the death of Josh Rosenthal and so many others on 11 September 2001. On 11 November in Northern Ireland we will remember the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Remembrance Day bombing when the IRA blew up a crowd of worshippers who were at the cenotaph in the town of Enniskillen remembering those who died in two World Wars. Among the twelve people who died that day was a young nurse, Marie Wilson. She was standing beside her father Gordon. He survived, and in a subsequent interview with the BBC he described with anguish his last conversation with his daughter Marie lying in the rubble and holding his hand. "She held my hand tightly" he said, "and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, 'Daddy, I love you very much.' Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say." To the astonishment of listeners, Gordon Wilson went on to add, "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men tonight and every night." As the Ulster historian Jonathan Bardon recounts, "No words in more than twenty-five years of violence in Northern Ireland had such a powerful, emotional impact." Gordon Wilson went on to become an Irish Senator, a warrior for peace, and a shining light in the midst of the horror of some of our darkest days.

I never cease to be amazed by the way in which some victims and their families can find a way of creating something good out of the evil that has brought them awful grief and injury, and I want not only to remember Josh Rosenthal, that bright young man whose life was cut tragically short and in whose memory we meet today, but also to pay tribute to his mother, Marilynn Rosenthal who, like Gordon Wilson, found from some extraordinary depth in herself a way of surviving in her terrible grief and not only remembering Josh but helping others search for a better way of conducting our human relationships in this troubled world.

I very much appreciate the honour that Dean Susan Collins has done me by inviting me to deliver this annual Josh Rosenthal Lecture, and I want to thank her very much for her invitation and her generous welcome and hospitality. She and her staff have been most kind. However her invitation to explore in this presentation the possibility that our experience in Ireland might have some lessons for other communities in conflict, not least the tragedy of the Middle East, is a real challenge, not only because of the calibre of my illustrious predecessors in this series of lectures, but because I am always a little careful about the thought that we in Northern Ireland have lessons for anyone else, particularly our

Israeli and Palestinian brothers and sisters whose problems are so complex and diverse and whose strategic significance is much greater than ours.

Winston Churchill once unkindly said that he loved the Americans because they always did the right thing, but only after they had exhausted all the other possibilities. Whether or not that is true of Americans, it is certainly the case with us in Ireland. We have made progress, but it is only because we have learnt and continue painfully to learn lessons both from our own tragic mistakes as well as from the experiences of others. It has taken us hundreds of years of suffering to come to a new way of dealing with our problems. We are nevertheless happy to share our experiences in the hope that they may be of interest and perhaps even of help to some others. I also do it out of a sense of heart-felt sympathy for peoples caught up in a cycle of violence from which there seems no escape. I and my fellow-countrymen and women understand something of how that feels. During some very dark times we received help, encouragement, and inspiration from others who had trod the path ahead of us in South Africa, and even in the Middle East during the hopeful times of the Oslo Process. So we owe it to others to contribute what we can by way of encouragement to them in their times of difficulty and, as I detect at present, some despair, even as yet another round of Middle East Peace Talks have begun this month in Washington DC.

At the start I also want to acknowledge someone else who I have been privileged to come to know in recent years as a friend and colleague in working for peace in the Middle East. Professor Bob Axelrod has made some remarkable and widely recognized contributions in political science and public policy, and working with him has helped and encouraged me as we have struggled not only to understand but to find ways to intervene constructively in that very fraught situation.

When Nelson Mandela decided to try to help us in Ireland, he and his colleagues did not give us instruction or advice. They brought us to South Africa and simply told us their story. Following that example I will concentrate for much of my time on telling you something of the story of our little offshore part of Europe; but as I do so please keep in your mind the problems faced by Israelis and Palestinians in the crucible of the Middle East.

In Europe, the focus of the last two decades on expansion, integration and constitutional amendment treaties and the current preoccupation with the economic crisis, can obscure the fact that for the architects of the European Union the driving force was not primarily the wish to build a diplomatic counterbalance to the United States, nor even a powerful commitment to economic liberalism and the development in Europe of a free market for its own sake, but rather a reaction to the horrors of war and a determination never to fall into that abyss again. Do not forget that my generation is the first in the history of Europe not to have experienced a major war at least in Western Europe. The unprecedented destruction of two World Wars demonstrated that the traditional rivalries of nationalism and imperialism were now just too dangerous, and

scientific advance had created the prospect of even more catastrophic wars in the future. Sixty years on, the building of an ever-closer European Union has made war between historic rivals like Britain, Germany and France unthinkable, and the success of this process also manifests itself in the way we have understood and tried to resolve the long-standing but smaller scale conflict in Ireland.

Trouble in Ireland is no new thing. The greatest battle fought on Irish soil was the Battle of Moira in 637 AD. It lasted seven days. Congal of Ulster fought with Domnall of Meath and brought his friends from Scotland to help him. Mythology takes us even further back into the mists of Irish history. The great hero Cuchulainn, the Hound of Ulster, is said to have died defending Ulster from Queen Maeve and the men of the rest of Ireland. Long before the United States, long before the Reformation brought its religious divisions, even before England was England, the Northern Irish were fighting with the rest of the people of the island, and lest you think that this is mere ancient myth or history you need to understand that in places where there is conflict, time is telescoped; the past is not really completely past, and people will talk of what happened in 1969 as though it was yesterday and of 1916, 1690, or 1641 as though it was just a month or two ago. Disputes over religion, invasion, plantation, displacement and discrimination are all layered on top of each other and none is of itself the cause alone. There is a long history and tradition of fighting and the signs of that culture of conflict are all around. The name of the city of Derry or Londonderry is disputed because its name was changed to note that the Guilds of the City of London had financed the plantation of the Ulster; for Catholics the name change represents occupation and defeat, for Protestants the link with Britain and victory in a historic siege. When I spoke at the Mansion House in London a few years ago the Lord Mayor of London enquired of me how things were with the Honorable the Irish Society which was set up in Derry/Londonderry hundreds of years ago to manage affairs in the area and still exists as a charitable body on which each succeeding Lord Mayor of London has a seat. Almost every cultural image embodies divisions of loyalty and a history of conflict. For the whole of our long history there have been regular rebellions including of course those that are well known like the 1798 Rebellion, inspired I may remind you by the American and French Revolutions.

Two hundred years later, events in America again played their part when the civil rights marches of the 1960's inspired similar protests in Northern Ireland. When these civil rights marches in 1967 and 1968 broke down into serious urban unrest, the first reaction of the government was to deal with the problem as a matter of internal security. It is worth noting that nationalist leaders at the time demanded British rights for British citizens. However it soon became obvious that while the trouble was triggered by dissatisfaction about current discriminatory measures affecting the Catholic nationalist community within Northern Ireland, the context was the still unresolved historic problems of relationships between and within Britain and Ireland. Britain had hoped in vain

that it had laid the matter to rest by the 1922 settlement that partitioned Ireland, since which it had in practice treated Northern Ireland largely as a self-governing dominion, though still within the United Kingdom. The Southern Irish state meanwhile emphasized and developed its independence by leaving the British Commonwealth, becoming a Republic, remaining neutral during the Second World War and refusing to join the NATO military alliance.

During the period from 1923 to 1968 there was only relatively sporadic terrorist activity and much could have been done to address the needs of the catholic minority in the North and the protestant minority in the South. Cross-border economic cooperation would also have made a substantial difference to relations. Instead little was done and after fifty years of partition few protestants remained in the Irish Republic and the substantial catholic minority in Northern Ireland felt isolated, and alienated. Breakdown was almost inevitable and when it came it was bloody. In a population of only 1.5 million more than three and a half thousand were killed and tens of thousands injured in the violence that followed. These numbers may not seem large but the per capita equivalent for the USA would be the deaths of 500 – 600, 000 people and millions injured.

In 1972 the internal government was prorogued and the protestant/catholic power-sharing arrangement that followed talks between the moderate unionist Ulster Unionist Party, the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party and the cross-community Alliance Party collapsed in June 1974 after only six months in operation.

Civil society in the form of the churches, trade unions, the business community and non-governmental organizations all appealed for, and worked very hard for a settlement but to no avail. In the mid 1970's a major peace movement was led by women who felt particularly grieved by the death and injury brought by terrorism. Subsequently joined by many men, these Peace People held marches and organized many activities bringing ordinary people from the two sides together. It seemed to have mass appeal and its leaders were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, but in the end it too came to nothing. Business and professional people who had been the backbone of the public institutions left political life, while the terrorists on both sides seemed oblivious to the suffering and economic havoc they were causing.

It all seemed very hopeless, indeed at that point and frequently during the process that followed it was very emotionally difficult. We are a community of people who are not easy to work with because both sides feel betrayed – the catholics were historically ill-treated by the British and with partition felt neglected and betrayed by their southern co-religionists. Protestants felt they had served Britain faithfully for centuries and not least in the First and Second World Wars where the cream of their young men volunteered for service and died in the trenches of France and many a foreign field. Now no-one remembered or appreciated those sacrifices and instead they were being abandoned and the

very regiments and police service in which they served and which were their defence against the IRA were being disbanded and they were being sold out by Britain. Every single lesson I will describe was fought against by some or all of us at every step of the way. We did not come to them willingly, and we saw them from very different perspectives. I do not just mean that we viewed them through different historical prisms and that the different sections of our community inhabit a different cultural identity, but more than that our people actually think differently. Catholics as a community tend to see problems in a broader perspective and think in a less linear way about them, and when their leader decides on a course of action they will tend to follow. Protestants will with difficulty agree the agenda of a meeting prior to getting an indication of its likely outcome, and will not move to item two on the agenda until item one has been disposed. Leaders are regarded as being there to be criticized and the tendency to split into different religious groups and political parties is remarkable.

You will know that ours was a long-term process with many ups and downs – I started to get involved as a Party Leader nearly a quarter of a century ago. People are sometimes impatient with the idea of a long-term process and many in the Middle East have said to me that say that they can't wait for such a process. My response is that we can't start sooner than now, and if they have a better way, that is wonderful, but if so why haven't they been doing it before now?

On the other hand there is the temptation to wait until you have the right leader or set of circumstances to start working, but there is rarely a good time and when you start even the little changes you make can begin to change the situation and the attitudes of the people you are working with. Not only when we started, but even a very long way into our process no-one would have imagined that the man who would finally deliver the implementation of an agreement was Dr Ian R K Paisley. I will return to this question of leadership later, but please understand that leadership does not mean that we started from the beginning with a grand plan in anyone's mind. Principles emerged and we worked by trial and error, trying to learn from both, from unexpected successes as well as disappointing failures and setbacks, and turning disadvantage to advantage wherever possible. Although it may take a long time if you get the process under way and meetings are taking place the violence level tends to reduce – not least when the community begins to see those who do the violence as being against a peace process in they have invested hope.

Although it may be necessary to have some private meetings at the start and even at times during the Process, in the main it is better that they are public knowledge, and I will happily say more about this later since I know that for some of you it may seem counter-intuitive. One of the reasons is that the key to resolving such problems is the negotiation of new ways of groups relating to one another. People tend to focus on the content of a solution and try to negotiate that but for much of our time we were actually negotiating the process and then

subsequently the fundamental principles. It was only very late in the game that we got to the detailed content. Let me put it in individual terms. If a young man invites a young woman out to dinner and she focuses on whether or not she is hungry and what is the content of the menu in the place where they go, she is entirely missing the purpose of the enterprise and it will almost certainly fail. The young man is not trying to address her need for food, but his need for a relationship. It is not that the menu and the venue are unimportant, nor even that if they are disastrously wrong they will stand in the way of a good outcome, but they are not the essence of developing a relationship, which is what the young man's invitation is really all about. If these two young people have a history of failed relationships and if their friends and family are opposed to this one, and if she falls ill from food poisoning then a good outcome is difficult, but even without these problems a good outcome is not guaranteed. Much more than in relationships between individuals you will easily appreciate that addressing historic, disturbed relations between communities of people requires considerable time, stamina, understanding, and external support; even humour can be helpful and a beneficent Providence is essential.

By a fortunate turn of history the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland joined the European Economic Community on the same day in 1973. As a result government ministers and others met regularly within the structure of the EEC and this changed the context of Anglo-Irish relations. Mutual respect grew as practical working arrangements developed, and twelve years later in 1985 an Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Irish Taoiseach, Garret Fitzgerald, laying the foundations of unprecedented cooperation between the two states in addressing the Northern Ireland issue. In today's world, wars between states are less common than intra-state conflicts but even internal conflicts may be symptomatic of wider issues. This is one of the many reasons why international cooperation is so important in addressing internal conflicts.

That 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement improved relations between Britain and Ireland, but while catholic nationalists felt less isolated, the IRA continued its terrorist campaign, and protestant paramilitaries, feeling betrayed by Britain took revenge through further sectarian killings. It took a further six years of diplomatic activity to get political representatives of the two sides in Northern Ireland to sit around a table to talk, and even then the parties with terrorist involvement were not present – that took a further five years. This emphasizes two things. The first is that you can have a political process without those who are conducting the terrorist violence, but you cannot have a peace process in such long-term struggles unless they are involved. If security or other measures could have worked without them being involved the war would have been over long since. You cannot make peace with someone unless you engage with them. This was one of the most difficult things for us to accept and we came to it only because of the repeated failure of all attempts to find peace by bringing together the moderates on both sides. Now it seems self evident to us that it is necessary to

bring in the people who are causing the violence, but it was in no way obvious at the time, and still is not obvious to Israel and the US in dealing with Palestinians.

The second lesson is the length of time that such processes can take, and during all of this long period it was crucial that whatever Prime Minister or party was in power in London or in Dublin, the Process continued. Margaret Thatcher, Charles Haughey, Garret Fitzgerald, Albert Reynolds, John Major, John Bruton, Tony Blair and Bertie Aherne all led different governments in London and Dublin during this period, but all in their own way regarded the Peace Process as something that transcended party politics. Without that sense of national commitment in both Britain and Ireland we could not have come so far.

The degree of painstaking administrative and procedural discussion necessary in the pre-negotiation period should also be noted. During those years of what became known as 'Talks about Talks' the parties edged slowly towards the Table, not by exploring the substantive issues, but by discussing how they could begin to engage. This required commitment and devotion by small teams of civil servants and party officials behind the scenes, setting up arrangements, smoothing the way, and keeping records, notes, and contacts in place. This orderly conscientious work was necessary to hold the Process together over the years, and to facilitate the involvement of people in all the communities through their own representatives, without which little progress can be made. People will not feel a sense of confidence in or ownership of a process or its outcome unless their own representatives are involved, but creating the structure and the political context where that can happen is painstaking and frustrating work. Those years were not years of perfect achievement. Mistakes were made regularly, but the consistent, gradual and increasingly inclusive approach was essential. I have seen a number of processes fail in other parts of the world at least in part from a failure to understand how essential this infrastructure is.

I have already noted that the wider international community was important, and particularly during the two Clinton administrations, the United States of America. They provided economic assistance, encouragement, expertise and mediation. Visits were arranged for Northern Ireland politicians to other parts of the world to see conflict resolution at work. South Africa was especially helpful here. The International Fund for Ireland was established to channel financial aid from the USA, the EU, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This aid was targeted to give training, consultancy and advice to small businesses and community groups trying to build a more entrepreneurial economy. Just as the political task was to enable the divided community to take shared responsibility for its own governance, so the economic emphasis has been to help people build their own wealth, take control of their own affairs, and increase their engagement in commerce and trade with the outside world. Economic development is important in itself, but it is an instrument with which to build peace; it is not the essence of the peace-making. Just as the European Coal and Steel Community enabled France and Germany to engage with each other after World War II, so economic

development is everywhere an important confidence-building measure which addresses real human needs, but it is not the heart of peace-making - a misunderstanding often held by people from stable developed countries.

One of the most important contributions made by our outside friends was the quality of the help and people which they provided. The personality and the approach of Senator George Mitchell as chairman of the multi-party talks that led to the Belfast Agreement in 1998 were particularly important in this regard. He did not bring his own solutions to the talks. He listened patiently and carefully for a very long time to all the different parties to the problem. He excluded no-one, and developed the process in such a way that parties brought their proposals to him in the presence of each other. They did not reach agreement in this way, but he built such trust that when the parties had exhausted the process of talking, they asked him to bring forward proposals. This work of building a process, rather than conjuring up a solution, is the heart of conflict resolution. It requires skill and stamina and like the preparatory phase may take years. There are many aspects to this negotiation. The careful use of agreed, non-arbitrary deadlines, gradual building of respectful behaviour (even the absence of feelings of respect), devices to break through when there is deadlock, and the imaginative use of different formats for the talks are just a few of the skills needed in this key phase of the Process. Perhaps the most elusive lesson however is the appreciation that there will inevitably be breakdowns but that this should not be seen as the end of the process. A physician does not abandon his patient because of a relapse. He knows that this is an essential feature of the ailment and he manages both his expectation and his patient with this in mind. The same is necessary in managing inter-communal relationship breakdown. I recall for example that as we approached an election at one point in the process parties began to take stances which would have made a post-election resumption of talks much more difficult. I asked for a private meeting with the other leaders at the home of one of their colleagues, and within fifteen minutes over a cup of tea we had agreed a public statement undertaking that whatever happened in the election within days of the poll we would return to the Talks on the same basis as before; and so we did.

I have said much about relationships and perhaps I should describe how this affected the construction of the Talks. Over a period of years we came to a shared view that while there were disagreements over the control of territory, the form of government, historic responsibility for our problems and grievances of all kinds, there were three crucial sets of historic, disturbed relationships which we needed to address – between the people who lived within Northern Ireland; between the people of Ireland, North and South; and between the Governments of Britain and Ireland. Even this description is carefully couched – you will notice that I say the people who live within Northern Ireland, not the people of Northern Ireland; I say Ireland, North and South, not Northern and Southern Ireland, and the description of the two Governments has a degree of ambiguity about how they relate to the North of Ireland. Words are profoundly important and the

sensitivities of such descriptions of relationships will be essential for those who are involved, though the on-looker may be as puzzled and bemused as the average American watching a cricket match.

Having agreed these three sets of relationships, the talks were constructed to address them, with the parties representing the people in Northern Ireland meeting under Strand 1 and the British Government present as the responsible Government; Strand 2 dealing with North-South relations included the Irish Government as well; and Strand 3 dealing with British-Irish issues was inter-governmental involving only the British and Irish Governments.

The process not only came to include invitations to all parties (though contrary to what you may imagine, at no time did all the parties actually agree to be at the table together at the same time); it was also important to include all the issues that needed to be addressed. One of the most controversial was the possession of illegal weapons, and a parallel process, involving all of the same participants, was created to deal with what became known as 'decommissioning' weapons. Again not only structure and process, but language was important; it was not surrender of weapons, implying defeat of the IRA, but decommissioning which they undertook, under international supervision, as their contribution to building the peace.

When we finally came to struggling with the content of what would become the Belfast Agreement, the experience of the Europe Union showed itself again. In Strand 2, EU cross-border cooperation is mirrored in the North-South Ministerial Council which brings together ministers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to deal with areas such as agriculture, economic development, environmental protection and transport. In Strand 3 the variable geometry of the British-Irish Council brings together not only ministers from London and Dublin, but also the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. The political and legal protection for human rights which is central to the new Europe is similarly a fundamental feature of every aspect of the Belfast Agreement and a key aspect of its implementation.

The most novel and creative element of the Belfast (or 'Good Friday') Agreement is the sharing of power in the Northern Ireland Assembly. A winner takes all approach in a first-past-the-post election would entrench unionist majoritarianism and was out of the question from the start. The new Assembly and the Executive drawn from it are entirely proportional. If a party takes 10% of the votes, it will get 10% of the members of the Assembly, 10% of the memberships and chairmanships of committees of the House, and most unusually 10% of the Ministers in the Government. In addition the First and Deputy First Ministers who represent the two largest parties – unionist and nationalist, one from each of the two main sections of the community - can only act by agreement with each other. The First Minister may be the leader of the largest party in the larger section of

the community, but he or she cannot act without the full agreement of the Deputy First Minister.

All these components - the critical part played by influential **international relationships**, the **sustained political commitment** over a long period of time whatever government is in power, a significant **preparatory period of pre-negotiation**, the difficult but necessary **inclusion of the representatives of all parties**, the creation of **sustainable economic development and cross-border trade**, the deployment of **patient, imaginative and skilful mediation** through a long-term talks process, an element of **institutional creativity**, and the embedding of **international instruments of human rights protection** - were all vital aspects of our conflict resolution, but they were not themselves sufficient for success. There are at least two others.

Until people in any conflict begin to turn away from violence as a means of solving their predicament they are unlikely to be prepared to accept that the prize of peace is worth the price of peace. The community needs to be weary of war and prepared to accept an outcome which is less than their ideal – a compromise – for the sake of peace. Central to this is the **rebuilding of the rule of law**. Demilitarization, decommissioning of illegal weapons, and reform of policing and the criminal justice system were the most difficult and contentious issues of all in Northern Ireland, frequently threatening to bring down all that had been achieved and only really being fully implemented now, more than ten years after the 1998 Good Friday itself was achieved. Rebuilding the rule of law is an exceptionally complex and emotionally demanding area and it is closely linked to the position of minorities.

Rights, responsibilities, and respect for minorities are also very difficult issues, but they cannot be avoided for they are at the core of many conflicts. The classic liberal commitment to freedom under the rule of law creates an environment for the protection of minorities, but even international legal norms and structures are rarely a sufficient guarantor for the partisans in a conflict. Usually particular political protections are required, at least for a transitional period. In Northern Ireland, as I have just described, the formation of the Assembly, its committees and even ministerial positions involve complex formulae and guarantees for both sides, precisely to give everyone protection. It is a very tight model of power-sharing constructed to deal specifically with our own situation. It is not without its problems because it can lead to political stasis and gridlock, and no-one can tell whether it will survive in the long-term. In the end it is necessary to move beyond processes, formulae and regulations in preventing and resolving conflict.

While relationships and communities cannot survive without the stability of structures and boundaries they are based on more than the observance of rules and laws. There must also be a spirit of generosity and respect. Without this they cannot flourish and conflict is never truly put to the past. Rules and rights

can provide the context for a conflict to be stopped, but only a new culture of mutual respect can prevent it returning. Developing that political culture of respect and trust is not a pre-condition or pre-requisite for reaching agreement, much less for starting a process. It is a possible outcome and is the task that this generation in Northern Ireland has shouldered. It cannot be delegated to the next generation for this would be to hand on to them the poisoned legacy which we inherited, and that is no commendation for any generation, in Northern Ireland, or in the Middle East.

This has been the story of a community made up largely, though not exclusively of two groups of people and those with whom they relate. One body of people, mostly protestant, who for political reasons, and in some cases because of religious persecution, left their homeland, relocating under the aegis of British rule to another territory where they displaced many of the catholic people who were already living there and established a new legal and political entity which they maintained for some hundreds of years but which the original community never ceased to respond to as occupation. Eventually the strategic circumstances changed so that Britain no longer required their loyalty or for them to act to maintain its hegemony. Within a very few decades the stability of the territory became increasingly uncertain in the light of a long-standing terrorist campaign whose purpose was to remove the British presence. The enormous security requirements, the movement of people and polarization of the community as a result of violence, and the high economic and political price, led to a withdrawal of emotional attachment by Britain, despite the determination of the majority of people in the North to maintain the status. That determination however was not enough to achieve stability, on the contrary it led them to miss opportunities for a peaceful settlement even when it was in their best interests and eventually they had to accept a much less beneficial outcome in order to achieve some measure of peace and stability.

I do not think it impossible to see some similarities between the Israel which emerged after the Second World War and the Northern Ireland that emerged after the First World War, but most Israelis do not see it. Prime Minister Netanyahu told me that the difference was that the IRA did not want to destroy Britain, but Hamas wanted to destroy Israel. He missed the point. The protestant unionists of Northern Ireland were not exercised about Britain. Their concern was that the IRA did indeed want to destroy Northern Ireland. The IRA posed, in the current political parlance of the Middle East, an 'existential threat'.

I have previously seen the failure of leaders to read the runes and learn from historical similarities despite differences. Years after the fact an Ulster Unionist leader came to my home to meet me and bemoan his own failure to recognize and grasp an opportunity for peace when it was available in the early 1970's, not appreciating then that the next time there would be less on the table. Of course there are many differences. Northern Ireland is no longer of strategic significance. In the past it was the crucial back-door for invasion of England by

the Spanish, the French and others, as they demonstrated repeatedly over the centuries. But things changed after World War II and within a few decades a British Secretary of State was able to say that Britain no longer had any selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. This is not yet the situation for Israel and the USA, but that time may come. What cannot be doubted is that when the United States no longer regards Israel as an essential strategic asset, (and only recently General Petraeus reflected on the beginning of just such a change in a report to President Obama), then Israel's isolation in the region could develop very rapidly and with it terrible violence and an outcome not in the best interests of Israelis – whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim. Much sooner than that it could be concluded that a two state solution is not feasible and that Israel may have to retain all of the territory it has been occupying for more than forty years, but of course that would mean the end of the Jewishness of the State of Israel. It is not the Palestinians that need a two state solution; it is those Israelis who wish to maintain Israel as both Jewish and democratic, a not inconsiderable challenge in the long term.

When I began five or more years ago to try to explore how far the experience we had in Northern Ireland might be relevant to Israel and the Palestinians, I reflected on what had been the most difficult lesson for me – the realization that it would not be possible to end the IRA terrorist campaign without talking to their leaders. The obvious read-across was to Hamas and Hezbollah and so I made it my business to start meeting them in the region. I came to the conclusion that they were both prepared, in their different contexts, to engage in working towards a peaceful outcome but they did not know how to do so, and could not without a constructive engagement with Israel and the West. Hamas repeatedly emphasized their preparedness for a long-term hudna, or ceasefire and Khalid Meshal the leader recently went much further in a meeting with Bob Axelrod, Scott Atran, myself and other colleagues. Prior to the disastrous South Lebanon war Hezbollah asked me to write a paper for them on how we had addressed the decommissioning of IRA weapons because they wanted to explore Western concerns about their materiel – of course the South Lebanon war knocked that completely off the agenda and things have moved on with Hezbollah now in government. However the consistent message was the same. Palestinians, including those who were leaders of the violent struggle – resistance or terrorism depending on your viewpoint – all wanted to find a peaceful outcome for the sake of their long-suffering people.

My experience of meeting with Israelis at every level of society, including with some settlers, is that they too really want a different future for their children and grandchildren – one where they can live in peace, security and prosperity. We could never have found a way forward without the British and Irish Governments coming to understand that they had a critical role to play in dealing with their own historic differences, engaging with all parties to the problem (including the men of violence), and acting as the engine of a peace process through all the ups and downs and for as long as it would take. In the same way I believe that while

other governments and groups have a role to play in finding peace in the Middle East, without leadership and support from the USA and Europe it will be well nigh impossible to succeed.

After many frustrations during the period of George W Bush's time in office, I had high hopes of the new Obama administration, especially after his appointment of George Mitchell, an old friend who had played such a key role in Northern Ireland, and Hillary Clinton who was very familiar with what had been necessary by way of engaging with the leadership of the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries. President Obama's Cairo speech had the possibility of being a watershed in relations with the Muslim world, but since then we have had the difficulties over the settlements in the West Bank. There is also a perception in the region that he became, albeit understandably, pre-occupied with getting his Health Bill through Congress and making sure that the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico did not become his Katrina. The faltering over the settlements in the West Bank has been mirrored by uncertainty and a slipping back to older rhetoric about how to deal with Iran. This is not the road to peace and stability in the region. Turkey is prepared to help with Syria and Iran, but their positive engagement with both has been ignored, then discouraged, and finally relations with Israel have broken down over Gaza and the attack on the flotilla. Syria has for years been trying to find a way of emulating Jordan and Egypt in negotiating a treaty with Israel, but its reasonable insistence on the return of the Golan, which not only international law and the international community, but Israel itself recognizes as its territory, receives no serious, positive engagement. Robert Malley and Peter Harling in the current issue of Foreign Affairs describe with striking clarity how the flawed analysis of 'good guys and bad guys', 'for us or against us', is leading to an inexorable decline in US influence in the region and a deterioration in the prospects for anything other than war. Two years ago in the journal *India and Global Affairs*, Sundeep Waslekar and I warned that "If time is lost, more and more parties will enter the dynamic of conflict. Currently at least the parties concerned can talk with each other in Arabic, Hebrew and English. If they wait for a few years more, they will have to conduct business in Persian, Russian and Chinese....." if, that is, they are talking at all, for the danger is rising of a major conflagration in the region with implications for all of us, all around the world.

In the absence of an appreciation of the need to talk with Hamas and Hezbollah, and the British Government has at least taken some steps forward in engaging with the political wing of Hezbollah, what can we do? Is there anything further in the European experience that can aid us? I have referred earlier to the European Coal and Steel Community which the French and Germans developed as an instrument through which the resources for war could be turned to solely peaceful cooperation and the shared economic and political rebuilding of a shattered Europe. In meetings through the World Federation of Scientists we developed the idea of trying to focus on 'Water, Energy and the Environment' as aspects of shared human need and welfare in the region. "Was it possible," we asked "to build joint institutions to address these issues and so begin to create

the kind of institutional cooperation which had been foundational in improving British-Irish relations?" The Swiss, Swedish and Turkish Governments have committed themselves to financial and diplomatic assistance and a number of countries in the region are already participating in the discussions. Our vision is shared by Prince Hassan of Jordan and he participated in the two conferences which have already been held, the first in February 2010 in Montreux, Switzerland and the second in May 2010 in Amman, Jordan. In two weeks time a further meeting will be held in Turkey with a number of Governments from the region and we are trying to persuade other governments to give support to and participate in this process. It is a long a difficult road, but as you will know from what I have said a peace agreement is like a marriage contract. There is much good developing of relationships before it, and unless that work continues afterwards, the fact of a legal contract will not ensure that the relationship survives.

Are the prospects for the official process that was re-launched this month in Washington as bleak as most observers believe?

In June 2010, the Israeli government appointed my colleague Lord Trimble to be one of two international observers serving on an Israeli commission of inquiry along with Canadian former Judge Advocate General Ken Watkin looking into the events surrounding the Israeli raid on the *Mavi Marmara*. You will all be familiar with the events of the flotilla incident and the subsequent adverse diplomatic fallout for Israel. David Trimble, the former First Minister of Northern Ireland was of course the winner of the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize jointly with John Hume, the Northern Irish Nationalist Leader, for their work on the Irish Peace Process, but he was not always seen in this light. I well remember the Saturday night in September 1995 when he was elected Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party. A pall of gloom descended on the gathering in which I was present that night. David Trimble was seen as a real hard-liner. He had defeated four other candidates in the immediate aftermath of his controversial role in the Drumcree conflict, in which he led a controversial protestant Orange Order march, amidst Nationalist protest, down the predominantly catholic nationalist Garvaghy Road in Portadown. He and the Democratic Unionist Party leader Ian Paisley walked hand-in-hand as the parade of loyalist triumphalism proceeded down the road. Local Catholics and Nationalists angrily viewed it as deeply insensitive while many protestant unionists regarded Trimble 'sticking up for them'. Moderates on all sides thought that it spelt the end of any prospects for peace. However shortly after his election David Trimble became the first unionist leader in 30 years to meet with an Irish prime minister in Dublin and then in 1997, the first unionist leader to agree to attend negotiations with Sinn Fein since Ireland was partitioned in 1922. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement resulted in him going into Government, not only with Dr Paisley (a fellow unionist) and the party of constitutional nationalist John Hume, with whom he shared the Nobel Peace Prize, but also with Sinn Fein and the former IRA leader Martin McGuinness in the cabinet.

I have no idea whether Benjamin Netanyahu recognizes, much less admires, the role David Trimble played in the Northern Ireland Peace Process, but as David Trimble himself told his own people at the start of the Talks Process, referring to the Republicans led by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, “Just because people have a past does not mean they cannot have a very different future.” He proved it to be true, and so can the Israeli Prime Minister. What we need is not a change of personalities – peace is about dealing with your enemies whoever they are, not choosing your friends. Peace can be found by changing the approach, of all concerned, not only the partisans to the conflict but all of the stakeholders, and that includes my country and yours too. Both our countries had leaders who profoundly changed their approach in the cause of peace in Ireland. It can be done for Israel and the Palestinians too. We owe not only to future generations, but to all those who have died as well as those who are left behind and still suffering – all the Josh Rosenthals and Marie Wilsons; all the Gordon Wilsons and Marilyn Rosenthals, all the Israeli and Palestinian people who have suffered so much.

But, we must not leave it too late.