



THE PEARSON INSTITUTE

FOR THE STUDY AND RESOLUTION OF GLOBAL CONFLICTS

The Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Annual Lecture
featuring
Jonathan Powell, Director and Founder, Inter Mediate

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Full Transcript

DANIEL DIERMEIER: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Daniel Diermeier. I am the provost of the University of Chicago. And it is my distinctive pleasure to welcome you to the second annual Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Lecture. This event provides an opportunity to bring leading peacemakers to the campus here at the University of Chicago to share their experience in working to resolve some of the most challenging global conflicts.

The Pearson Institute was founded in 2015, and since then, has grown into a flourishing institute. Led by world-renowned scholar James Robinson, the institute has hosted dozens of speakers, funded faculty and graduate student researchers' projects in conflict around the world, offered classes in global conflict at the undergraduate and graduate student level, and provided critical support for master's and PhD students at the Harris School of Public Policy, also known as the Pearson Fellows and Pearson Scholars.

Most importantly, Pearson faculty and Pearson faculty affiliates have active research projects underway in a whole variety of places around the world, including Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Colombia, where their rigorous analytical research is targeted to have direct impact on violent conflicts. We could not be prouder of the work being done by the faculty, staff, and students affiliated with The Pearson Institute and the University.

Today, we are honored to host Jonathan Powell, director and founder of the nonprofit Inter Mediate. Mr. Powell served as chief of staff to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and was one of the chief negotiators from the British government in the peace talks in Northern Ireland. This conflict, also known as the Troubles, in Northern Ireland, spanned three decades and resulted in the death of more than 3,700 people, many of them civilians, and left more than 40,000 people injured and maimed.

The violence between Protestant loyalists, those wanting to remain part of the United Kingdom, and Catholic nationalists, those wanting a united Ireland, has left an indelible mark on the island and its history. Many considered this conflict one of those conflicts that could never be resolved. And indeed, there were many, many attempts, failed attempts, at peace negotiations.

However, as many of you know, just last week, in Belfast, a city that was dramatically impacted by violence and where there's still 30-foot high peace walls separating Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods, people came together to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the historic peace accord. This Good Friday Agreement, signed on April 10, 1998, has resulted in a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. And while challenges still remain, the peace has held.

Representatives from the British government, the Irish government, and eight Northern Ireland political parties participated in the talks that ultimately culminated in the agreement. It was a difficult, challenging, and long process that required trust, bravery, and creativity from everyone



involved. Senator George Mitchell, the US special envoy to Northern Ireland who served as the independent chairman for the talks, has described the process as 700 days of failure and one day of success.

Today, we have the special opportunity to hear from Mr. Powell, who was deeply involved in these historic talks, and who has gone on to share his experience with people around the world who are attempting to build peace and end active violent conflicts. We look forward to hearing from Mr. Powell.

But before we turn to our speaker today, I'd like to invite Sarah Boyle to offer a few remarks. Sarah is a second year MPP student at Harris and a Pearson Fellow. Sarah, please join us on the stage.

[APPLAUSE]

SARAH BOYLE: Good afternoon. Thank you, Daniel. My name is Sarah Boyle, and I'm a second year MPP at the Harris School of Public Policy. I'm also a recipient of the Pearson Fellowship, a scholarship opportunity for Harris students to engage in the study of global conflict.

As an undergraduate at the University of St. Andrews in the United Kingdom, I studied international relations with a focus on conflict development. I was fortunate to be taught by some of the top scholars in the field, who were personally familiar with the Troubles.

As a bright-eyed 18-year-old ready to study, this was one of the first conflicts that I became familiar with. As I think back to my first years of university in the UK and studying the Troubles, the inspiring moment to come out of this was that they ended in successful peace accords. We are fortunate today to hear from one of the-- we have the fortunate opportunity to hear from Jonathan Powell today, one of the key individuals responsible for bringing about this historic accord.

When I was choosing a graduate school, I sought a university where I could once again study the many different elements of conflict. Here at Harris and as a Pearson Fellow, I have been able to study. I have been able to research conflicts with a new approach, quantitatively and with data. This new approach has not made the topic any less complex. However, it has provided a new perspective for the study and resolution of conflicts.

In my two years as a Pearson Fellow and a Harris student, I have had the opportunity to meet with several individuals from across sectors working in international policy and conflict resolution. Here at Harris, Professor Blattman taught me the theory of why government institutions develop in order to curb violence. Professor Wright taught me the many challenges of undertaking conflict when using open source data. And Professor Robinson taught me the importance and impact that institutions have on conflicts and peace processes.

Today, I'd like to introduce Professor James Robinson. James is the institute director of the Pearson Institute. He is the Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson professor for global conflict studies,



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and a university professor at Harris Public Policy. Professor Robinson conducts research on the political economy of development and the factors that are the root causes of conflict.

His work explores how institutions emerge out of conflict and the relationship between inequality, conflict, and democracy. He is widely recognized as the co-author of *Why Nations Fail-- The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, translated into 32 languages since its publication in 2012. It is my honor today to welcome Professor James Robinson to the stage.

[APPLAUSE]

JAMES ROBINSON: 700 days of failure and one day of success-- it sounds like academic research, doesn't it? It's like the story of my life. Anyway, I'll be very brief. So I just-- I'm James Robinson, the institute director. We're just super excited and happy and honored to have Jonathan Powell here.

I tend to think about my research. You know, it's about-- like many social scientists, we're sort of describing something. We're describing an equilibrium. We're describing a constellation of forces that creates poverty or creates violence or creates inequality or underdevelopment.

But the idea of this lecture when we conceived it was not to have somebody else describing poverty or inequality or underdevelopment, not describing an equilibrium. We wanted to invite people who get up out of bed every morning and try to think about, how do you construct a different equilibrium? How do you move people to think in different ways, to bury their conflicts, to conceive of the world differently, their relationships to other people differently?

And I can't think of anyone with a better track record of constructing different equilibria in society, and not just in Northern Ireland, but in many parts of the world, than Jonathan Powell. So we're just delighted to have him here. Thank you for coming.

[APPLAUSE]

JONATHAN POWELL: I am pleased and honored to be asked to give the second Reverend Richard L Pearson Annual Lecture, following on from my friend and colleague, Sergio Jaramillo, who gave it last year - a wonderful guy and someone I've worked with for seven years. And let me thank the University of Chicago, the Harris School, and Professor James Robinson for making it possible.

Most of all, I'm thrilled to be asked to talk about something I'm absolutely passionate about. As James said, I'm a practitioner, not a theoretician. I was a British diplomat for 16 years. I had no training in negotiation, but spent most of that time working on negotiations. I became Tony Blair's chief of staff and I became the chief negotiator for a decade on Northern Ireland by accident.

On leaving government, I worked on the ETA conflict in Spain, which happily ended with an agreement in 2011. Unhappily, I worked in Libya as special envoy for David Cameron, which didn't end and still hasn't ended, sadly. Now, with my little charity Inter Mediate, I work on 11



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conflicts around the world. And I've decided that I will devote the rest of my life to trying to work on this kind of thing, to try and see if we can end conflicts. Often we fail. But when you succeed, it is the most wonderful thing of all.

I've written a couple of books on the subject, one on the Northern Irish negotiations - 'Great Hatred, Little Room' - and one on negotiations with terrorist groups more widely, 'Talking to Terrorists'. I have to say I wasn't always in favor of talking to terrorists. The first time I knowingly met two terrorists, I refused to shake their hands, when we met Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in 1997 in a little room we'd specially chosen with no windows so no one could film through the windows when they came in.

The IRA had shot my father through the ear in an ambush in 1940. They put my brother, who worked for Mrs. Thatcher, on a death list for eight years. I had spent a year at the embassy in Washington trying to stop Gerry Adams getting a visa to come to the United States, unsuccessfully. I didn't feel warm and cuddly about these people.

About a couple of weeks later, I got a call from Martin McGuinness out of the blue. And he said, would I come and visit Northern Ireland incognito and not tell the police and not tell the army? I asked my boss, Tony Blair, and he said, 'yes, go'.

I took a plane to Belfast International, a taxi to Derry, and I stood on the street corner feeling faintly foolish, like someone out of a spy novel. Two guys with shaved heads turned up and pushed me into the back of a cab saying, 'Martin sent us'. They drove me around for an hour till I was completely lost in Derry, and then they pushed me out of the car outside of a little modern house on the edge of an estate.

I knocked on the door, and Martin McGuinness came to the door on crutches. Martin McGuinness was one of the best-known leaders of the IRA. He made a very unfunny joke about kneecapping, which used to be the IRA's way of punishing people, by drilling holes in their knees, their ankles, and their elbows. We spent three hours sitting in that house. The lady of the house had gone away and left us some sandwiches and some tea. We made no breakthroughs.

But it came home to me that if we were going to make peace, we had to be prepared to talk to people like this, our enemies. We had to be prepared to go onto their turf, not to demand they come to castles or to Downing Street. And we had to be prepared to try and build trust with them, because only if you could build that trust, only if you listened to them, were you likely to have any prospect of success.

Now, of course, there's a limit to how much trust you can build in those circumstances. I do remember later on, 2004 I think it was, negotiating with Adams and McGuinness in a monastery in West Belfast. And actually, I had this very watch on. We negotiated late, and I was quite worried I was going to miss my flight. The monks had given us dinner in the refectory. And I kept looking at my watch, and the minute hand had come loose and was swinging around uselessly.

McGuinness noticed, and he said to me, 'Jonathan, give me your watch. I've got a very good watchmaker at the end of my street. I'll get it fixed for you'. I said, 'no, honestly, Martin, really,



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you don't need to worry. No problem at all'. He insisted on taking my watch away. And he gave it back to me two weeks later when we met at Leeds Castle for negotiations.

It was nicely fixed. And I, of course, had to give it to security authorities to have it checked for trackers and for bugs. So they took it to pieces and broke the minute hand again. And I had to have it fixed at great expense. So I wouldn't exaggerate the trust you can build. But you do need to do it if you can.

Last week in Belfast, we had the 20th anniversary celebrations for the Good Friday Agreement. We had Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, George Mitchell, and others. And I should say, I found it a moving ceremony. I hadn't expected to, but it was, really.

I chaired a panel of the remaining political leaders, party leaders, those who haven't died, from the original negotiations-- Gerry Adams and David Trimble, Peter Robinson, and so on. And I asked all of them why it was that we succeeded in 1998. Why did the Good Friday Agreement succeed when previous negotiations had failed?

And I think this is the key thing I'd like to talk about today, because I think we can see many of the same lessons, many of the same reasons for success in Colombia that Sergio talked to you about last year, with ETA in Spain, in the Philippines and El Salvador and elsewhere. And I want to try and touch on some of those lessons in the next 30 minutes or so.

The first lesson I want to touch on is the importance of inclusivity. The reason that previous efforts in Northern Ireland had not succeeded was we never actually invited Sinn Féin, the most radical party. They were never included in the talks. And if they weren't included, they were unlikely to stop fighting.

But it's very difficult for democratic governments to be seen to be talking to terrorists who are killing your people. How do you justify such talks? How do you make sure such talks don't collapse as soon as the terrorists carry out another outrage? And it's a very difficult political and moral challenge, whether you should talk to people when you have either violence or the threat of violence hanging over your head.

As a result, governments have always said, 'we will never talk to terrorists'. If you look right back to 1919, Lloyd George, who was prime minister dealing with the first iteration of the IRA in Ireland, said, 'we will never talk to this murder gang'. Two years later, he sent out someone in more or less my position in Downing Street to try and find Michael Collins, the leader of the IRA, to start negotiations that led eventually to the treaty in 1921. So we always say we won't talk to terrorists, and yet we nearly always do. And we nearly always do it by opening up secret channels.

Now, in 1972, the British government opened a secret channel to the IRA through a very brave secret intelligence officer called Michael Oatley. This channel operated from '72 onwards to '93. It served as a number of purposes along the way, but crucially, it allowed a correspondence between John Major, who was the prime minister before Tony Blair, and Martin McGuinness, as leader of the IRA.



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Now, John Major completely denied this. He stood up in Parliament and he said 'he would never talk to Gerry Adams. To do so would turn his stomach'. On exactly that same day, he was writing a letter to Martin McGuinness. And thank goodness he was doing so. If he hadn't, we would not have got to peace.

You have to offer these armed groups some prospect of success a political way out before they'll engage. And as a democratic government, it's incredibly hard to engage if they're carrying out violent acts. In fact, very shortly after that exchange in the House of Commons, the IRA blew up two bombs in Warrington that killed two young children.

I've talked to the father of one of them, Colin Parry, whose son Tim, who was 12, was blown up. And he said to me that if anyone had told him when Tim lay dying in his arms the British government was talking to the IRA, he would have been horrified. But if anyone had told him six months later the British government was talking to the IRA, he'd have been delighted. He'd have known that his son did not die in vain, that there was going to be peace, there was a chance of success. So even the victims, in many circumstances, understand why this has to happen.

But it nearly always has to happen in a deniable way. It's not just in Britain. If you look at Spain, with ETA, every prime minister so far since Suárez, has talked to ETA. Immediately after Franco died, Suárez was the first prime minister who stood up in the Cortés, their parliament, and he said he would never talk to ETA. The leader of the opposition stood up, Felipe González, and said, 'but you told me over dinner last night you were talking to ETA'. And Suárez said, 'no, I would never talk to ETA', and just denied it blankly.

In Colombia, we had a similar-- almost identical, actually, almost identical in every way-- secret channel to the FARC, to start the negotiations while they were still in the jungle and to enable those negotiations to take place. So there is this problem where you need this channel if you are going to start, and that trust-building, that channel, takes much longer than people often think. It can't be done quickly.

There's a huge burden of history that these conflicts carry. I used to joke in Northern Ireland, if we ended a meeting with any political party after just 30 minutes, we'd have got to 1689 and there'd be 300 more years of grievance to get through before we could actually get to today and the substance. That burden of history is enormously heavy. Many of these armed groups have lived in ghettos, either physical ghettos or at least intellectual ghettos, only talking to each other and very rarely getting to understand how they're seen elsewhere, and very rarely with governments hearing from them how they see those governments.

The first meeting we had in Downing Street with Adams and McGuinness was in December 1997. It was a very big occasion. There were more TV cameras outside the front door than there had been for the election of Tony Blair in May of that year. And everyone was a little bit nervous.

Adams and McGuinness came into Downing Street. They came down the long corridor that takes you to the cabinet room at the end of the building. And I brought them into the room and took them round to the far side of the table with the windows behind them. And in an attempt to break the ice, Martin McGuinness, put his hands on the back of the chair and said, 'so this is where the damage was done, then? '



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I was horrified. I said, 'yes. The IRA mortars landed in the garden behind you. The windows blew in. My brother, who was with John Major at the time, dragged him under the table to get him away from the falling glass'. And he looked horrified and said, 'no, no, no. I was talking about the treaty with Michael Collins in 1921'. It was a completely different sense of history on the two sides you had to break through if you had any chance of getting an understanding.

One of the problems is the need to actually listen to the people you are talking to, people who have never been shown any respect and never really had their arguments heard. Indeed, in Britain, they were banned from using their own voices or appearing on television until after the Troubles were over. And it can take a very long time.

Erik Solheim, who worked on the negotiations in Sri Lanka with the Tamil Tigers, says it took him thousands of hours of very unpleasant meals in South London with warm chardonnay with Balasingham, the political leader the Tigers, listening to him, listening to the same story again and again, before he built enough trust to actually get the talks started.

It's crucial, as you all know from studying negotiations, to actually understand what people's interests are rather than what their positions are. If you take the IRA, their position was the Brits should leave Northern Ireland. Their position was there should be a united Ireland. We never even discussed that in the negotiations. It was never even discussed at the table.

We talked about other things, what their real interests were-- power sharing to get away from the Unionist domination, North-South bodies, the Irish language. And that process of a channel, of building trust, is perhaps the single most important thing in any of these negotiations, rather than trying to fly straight into them. Unless you have that proper preparation, you are unlikely to succeed.

The second lesson, I think, is that it's not always the right time to move from a channel to a full negotiations. Now, there is an academic theory, as you all know, of 'ripeness'. I think that's nonsense, personally, because how can you possibly know if a negotiation is ripe or not? You can't reach up and pinch it like a pear on a tree, and see if it's ripe to pick. You only know it's ripe afterwards. It's purely tautological. You know it's ripe because you succeeded.

Now, there are, however, it seems to me, looking back at nearly all of these conflicts, two factors that need to be in place if you're likely to succeed. The first is, again, as the academics call it, a perceived mutually hurting stalemate. And the second is strong leadership.

If you look, for example, at the Middle East peace process at the moment and you wonder why it's not succeeding, well, you have neither of those. You don't have a perceived mutually hurting stalemate. The wall has essentially worked. Suicide bombers are not getting through, so you're not hurting on one side. And there isn't strong leadership on either side. You've had people who've been around a long time and long since given up on the idea of negotiating peace.

In Northern Ireland, I think the British army, in about 1980, give or take a few years, decided that they could contain the IRA forever. They could keep violence at an 'acceptable level', as it was



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called, indefinitely. But they could not defeat the IRA. They were not going to defeat them militarily.

Adams and McGuinness, who joined the Republican movement very young, were by the mid-1980s, well past fighting age. They were in their 30s. And they could see their nephews and nieces, sons and daughters, getting arrested, getting shot. They could see they wouldn't be defeated, but they weren't going to drive the Brits out by military force.

At that stage, they started reaching out, first, to John Hume, the very brave, moderate Catholic leader, then to the Irish government, and finally to the British government. And if you talk about it, as I used to talk to McGuinness before he sadly died, I think they would accept, broadly, that's what happened. So we had a mutually hurting stalemate by about the mid-1980s. And it took the period from then until we actually got to the agreement to bridge the gap.

There's often an effect of generational change. If you look at the FARC in Colombia, the members of seven-man secretariat, are all in their 60s now. And it's a lot less fun running around in the jungle when you've got lumbago or gout than it is when you're a 20-year-old guerrilla. And that has an impact on what some of these groups actually think.

The second factor, I think, that is common to nearly all of these successful negotiations is strong leadership. If you think about South Africa, you would not have had peace, obviously, without Nelson Mandela. But you wouldn't have had peace without FW de Klerk as well. It's having that strong leadership on both sides that allowed peace to be possible.

In Northern Ireland, Tony Blair, in his autobiography, accuses me of saying that he succeeded in peace in Northern Ireland because he had a 'messiah complex'. In fact, it was Mo Mowlam, our very colorful first Northern Ireland secretary, rather given to earthy phrases, which I won't repeat in this company, who said that Tony thought he was 'f...ing Jesus', which is not the same thing as a 'messiah complex', but it's closely related. It is the belief that you can succeed in a negotiation, that you can do it and it can be done. Unless you have a leader who has that, it's very rare to see a negotiation succeeding.

There's also an interesting aspect to this of life-threatening illnesses. Ian Paisley, who was one of the more radical - was the most radical-Unionist leader who had a good claim to having started the troubles by his provocation of Catholics at the time, went into hospital in 2004, and very nearly died. He came out much reduced physically. And he told us he'd had a close encounter with his maker.

He wanted to end his life as Dr. Yes rather than Dr. No. And from then on, he was constantly trying to get to an agreement, much more so than his party. He was pushing his party to try and to get to an agreement-- an agreement on his terms, but nonetheless, to get to an agreement.

The same could be said of Chavez in Venezuela, who was crucial to the peace process in Colombia. Chavez, when he got cancer, started to go to church twice a day. But he also was persuaded by President Santos of Colombia to try and help bring about peace. He started pushing the FARC to go to talks. And since the FARC lived in Venezuela, he had real leverage



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over them. So this kind of personal transformation can also be enormously important in negotiations succeeding.

The third factor I'd like to mention is the importance of process. When I researched my book on the Northern Ireland peace process, which I did immediately after I left government in 2007, the government let me go through the files from Downing Street from '97 to 2007. And I sat in a little, chilly room below the cabinet secretary's office going through them.

There was one thing that leapt out of the pages of those files, and that was the importance of process. If you have no process, you have a vacuum. The vacuum is filled by violence, because no one has any hope there's going to be a solution. If you can have a process, then people have some hope. And if you can keep that process going, you have a chance of succeeding.

Shimon Peres, the former president of Israel and the master of the one-liner, captures this rather beautifully. In the case of the Middle East, he says, we all know, more or less, what the outcome will be in the Middle East. We know it on territory. We know it on refugees. We sort of know it on Jerusalem. But we don't have a process to get us there. He said, 'the good news is, there's light at the end of the tunnel, and the bad news is, there's no tunnel'.

And what you're trying to do as a negotiator is to construct that tunnel, to actually build a process, to try and create something that will enable you to succeed. And once you've got it up and running, you really want to keep it going. I think of it as the bicycle theory - if you get the bicycle moving, you must not allow that bicycle to fall over. Even if you suffer personal or political pain, you've got to absorb that pain and keep the bicycle going till you get to eventual success.

In 2004, the Northern Ireland negotiations had collapsed at Leeds Castle. I was the only person still arguing we should keep negotiating with Sinn Féin. Everyone else, including the Irish government, had backed out. I flew over to Belfast. I was met then at the airport by an official from the Northern Ireland Office. He had me driven about a mile he stopped the car and got out. He said the biggest bank robbery in world history happened last night, and the dogs on the street know the IRA carried it out.

I was on my way to a meeting with Adams and McGuinness in a monastery in West Belfast. And I was furious. I was out on a limb, in terms of my government, and they've just cut it off behind me. I kicked a stone and stubbed my toe and felt like getting right back on a plane and going back to London. But I didn't, thinking of my bicycle theory.

I went to the meeting. I kept the thing going. I couldn't even tell Adams and McGuinness about the bank robbery because the police weren't going to announce it till lunchtime. So I had to sit there stewing in silence while trying to negotiate with them. You have to keep that process going if you're to have any chance of success. And you have to be prepared to deal with spoilers.

In Northern Ireland, immediately after we concluded the Good Friday Agreement, that August, the biggest bomb in Irish history blew up in Omagh, killing 29 people. In normal circumstances,



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that would have completely derailed the negotiations. The Unionists would have walked out. They'd have said it was Republicans. It doesn't matter what kind of Republicans-- they were dissident IRA-- it doesn't matter what kind of Republicans. We're leaving. And for the Republicans, they would never historically condemn an act by any other Republican movement.

By some very swift action, we managed to get Adams and McGuinness to actually condemn this bomb, which was unprecedented. And we managed to get David Trimble, who, to his credit, was going to do it anyway, to stay in the process. You have to have that insurance against spoilers if you're going to have any chance of succeeding.

In essence, what you're are trying to do is to stop people walking out of the negotiations. You have to do everything you can to make it hard. There's a wonderful story about Ian Paisley negotiating with John Major when John Major was prime minister. John Major used to work in the cabinet room in Downing Street, this great, grand room. And they were arguing, and Paisley accused John Major of being a liar. And John Major took it very seriously and said unless Paisley withdrew that accusation, he was going to leave the room and walk out of the meeting. Paisley refused to withdraw the accusation, and Major walked out of the meeting. What John Major had forgotten was he'd just walked out of his own office. And it took the rest of the day to negotiate for Ian Paisley to leave the office so John Major could go back to work. So if you are going to walk out, do remember to walk out of somewhere you can get back in to.

Governments- this is the fourth point I want to make. Governments are very chary of using third parties in negotiations, of having independent chairmen. They worry that it will be used against them. The Indian government has never countenanced any foreign interference in Kashmir or on the issue of Kashmir. The British government refused to have any international participation in the Northern Ireland negotiations until George Mitchell took over as chairman.

That is a problem, because if you don't have a third party, it is much less likely you'll succeed. And you can prove that if you look at the way other negotiations have gone. At the end of the Cold War, the UN managed to take over this role in some places where it had been unable to before because of the standoff between the Soviet Union and the United States: in El Salvador, in Namibia, in Angola, the UN was able to be the mediator.

Now the UN, isn't accepted as a mediator anywhere except for failed states, places like Libya or Somalia, where the states have no say. The third party moved on to being small governments like Norway in Sri Lanka. Then they became too threatening and it moved to individuals like Martti Ahtisaari in the Aceh negotiations or onto NGOs.

Increasingly, governments aren't willing to accept any mediators. In Colombia and in Burma, in the recent negotiations, neither side has been prepared to accept a third-party mediator. An interesting thing seems to be developing, however, which is-- and I may be exaggerating. This is my perception-- that people are now using what you might call 'virtual mediators'.

In the Colombia negotiations, the transitional justice issues proved to be too difficult for the two parties to negotiate at the table. Instead, they were handed to lawyers representing both sides. You had a Spanish radical lawyer, two radical Colombian lawyers on the FARC side, and you had



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an American lawyer and two Colombian government lawyers on the other side. They sat there, and within two to three weeks, they were able to negotiate a transitional justice agreement.

Now, there are plenty of problems with that transitional justice program. But what is interesting is instead of a mediator, you had people representing the two sides talking to each other. And that can form a virtual mediation.

Fifthly, I want to talk about how you overcome blockages in negotiations, because that's what you're bound to run into. Every time, in these type of negotiations, you're going to find some sort of blockage. The worst sort of all is the one you get into even before you start the negotiations, when one side or the other sets preconditions for the negotiations.

In the case of Northern Ireland, John Major had been hoping the IRA would go into a permanent ceasefire, that they would say they were never going to take up violence again. But they wouldn't. They just went on ceasefire. He challenged them to say it was permanent. They wouldn't.

He then looked for another way of removing the threat of violence so he felt he could legitimately negotiate. And he demanded the IRA give up their weapons, decommission their weapons, before they went into negotiations. The IRA said they wouldn't. He was stuck.

He then demanded they give up the majority of their weapons. They said they wouldn't. He was stuck. They went to Washington. He said the so-called Washington conditions. They should give up a token amount of their weapons. They wouldn't. He was stuck. In the end, he had to just give up on his preconditions and then go into negotiations, which failed and the IRA went back to violence.

This notion of setting preconditions is nearly always a mistake. If you set preconditions, it's simply a way of stopping negotiations happening. If there's anyone on either side who doesn't want negotiations, they will use those preconditions to block it. So it's much better, if you possibly can, to avoid preconditions because in the case of decommissioning weapons, that took us another six or seven years to resolve. Once you set a precondition like that, people get attached to it, and finding a way out becomes extraordinarily difficult.

The second way of getting through a blockage when you actually get into the negotiations is 'constructive ambiguity'. You get to a point where you simply can't agree. You put language in that can mean different things to different people. The Good Friday Agreement, where we sat there for three days and three nights without sleep to negotiate that agreement. If instead we sat there for three years, we wouldn't have been able to agree on decommissioning of IRA weapons. There was no way the two sides would agree what would happen.

The IRA wanted the Unionists to share power with them before they gave up their weapons. The Unionists said they wouldn't share power with people who had a private army. We couldn't resolve that issue. So we put language into the agreement that was ambiguous. That was fine. We got to an agreement.



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But then trust in the agreement began to evaporate, as the Unionist side saw they were not going to get what they wanted. The IRA did not give up their weapons. And by the time we got to 2003, support for the agreement amongst Unionists was down to 30%, and we had to do something. We had to break the impasse at that stage.

And Tony Blair went to Belfast, to the Harbour Commissioner's office. He gave a speech demanding the IRA choose between two things. They could no longer continue with the ballot box in one hand and the ArmaLite in the other. They had to choose between the two. And luckily for us, they did.

I remember Gerry Adams gave me a call two days after the speech. I was a bit nervous. And he said, 'very good speech'. And I said 'thank you'. And he said, 'will you write my speech for me?' in response. I was rather taken aback. And I said, 'well, OK'. So I sat there and put a towel around my head and tried to think like a Republican. And I wrote a speech, and I sent it to him, which ended with, 'can I imagine a future without the IRA? Yes I can'.

I was even more surprised when, three days later, I turned on the television to see Gerry Adams giving this speech ending with those words 'can I imagine a future without the IRA? Yes, I can'. At that stage, the ambiguity went out of that process, and we got to a solution. So constructive ambiguity may get you around the fix, but it is a real problem going forward. You have to be very, very careful in its use.

The third way to try and think about this is if you can enlarge the context. If you face an insoluble problem, if you try and add other things into it and make it a wider question, you have a chance to get to a solution. I remember going to meet Adams and McGuinness in a safe house in West Belfast to try and find a way around the decommissioning issue in, I guess it would have been 2001- 2000, perhaps.

I'd come up with an idea. I had talked to some of our generals who were serving in Kosovo and Bosnia. They said what we do is we put the weapons into dumps. We seal the dumps. And they're still in the ownership of the armed groups, but we inspect them to make sure the seals haven't been broken, the weapons haven't been used.

I went to this safe house in West Belfast. I proposed this idea to Adams and McGuinness. They talked about it for a while. They said to me, no, the Provisional Army Council, the governing body of the IRA, will never accept the idea. It's hopeless.

Three weeks later, they came to a formal negotiation with me and some of my colleagues, and they put the idea to us. They said, we can put the weapons in dumps and put seals on them. And we said, well, that's an interesting idea. We'll go away and think about it. In those circumstances, you want to make that context bigger and make them feel that they own the idea in the first place, if you're going to get them to take that jump.

I would just touch on this, but maybe this is more for my later discussion with James. But peace, and I'm sure that Sergio touched on this last year. But one of the problems in these negotiations is always going to be the balance between peace and justice.



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When we signed the Good Friday Agreement and when we implemented it, we did something that wouldn't be allowed now. We allowed all prisoners, even if they were murderers, out of jail after just two years - basically an amnesty after two years. Now, with membership of the ICC, that would not be possible. The ICC would not permit that. They would come and prosecute instead.

Colombia was the first agreement signed with the ICC having jurisdiction. And they faced a very difficult choice. You can't have an amnesty, which is the traditional way of dealing with it in Colombia, when you had a peace agreement like this. On the other hand, if you sit down with a guerrilla leader and say, 'I want you to sign a peace agreement, and by the way, you, personally, are going to jail for 30 years', for some reason, the incentive isn't there for them to engage in the negotiation seriously and get to an agreement.

You've got to find a sensible balance between these two things. You have a responsibility to the victims of the past. There must be justice for them and their families. But you also have a responsibility to the victims of the future. You've got to be able to stop more people dying. And as a leader, that risk you take in balancing peace versus justice is one of the hardest things you'll have to do, but one of the most important.

Sixthly, and nearly the end, bringing the process into land is often one of the most difficult things. It's like, I don't know if you ever tried to land at Heathrow. You find yourself stacked for hours, going round and round in circles. Getting the plane to land is difficult.

The leadership of armed group are usually consensus-based. Taking difficult decisions or making compromises is not something they find easy to do. So you have to find a way to bring them in.

One way that generally doesn't work very well is deadlines. We tried deadlines in Northern Ireland. We succeeded twice. But mainly we went straight through them. In Colombia, the president tried deadlines repeatedly. Unless they're tied to something real, people will just go through them for the sake of going through them to prove they can.

Deadlines only work if they're tied to a real-world event, as we had with the St. Andrews Agreement that actually ended the Northern Ireland negotiations in December 2006. That's because the parties knew that Tony Blair was leaving government. This was their last chance. And we had legislated to abolish all the institutions. They would lose their jobs. They would lose their pay. The whole thing was out. That concentrated their minds. But without that, a deadline rarely works.

You have to think, too, about the choreography and sequencing of an agreement. The most important thing in an agreement is not necessarily what is said in the agreement, but how you sequence the steps the two sides take. People have to feel that the other side is going to take a step before they take a step. No one's going to do anything irreversible. It's like writing a ballet. You have to write the steps out one by one, and then people actually have to execute them if you're going to succeed.



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We tried this in Northern Ireland repeatedly. At one stage, we thought we had succeeded. We'd agreed to all the steps of the ballet. Unfortunately, it fell over the first step, because John de Chastelain, who was the Canadian general in charge of monitoring decommissioning of weapons, disappeared to check on the weapons, to make sure they were really being destroyed. The IRA kept him hostage for two days.

When he was released, he was told, he said, he couldn't say anything about what had been destroyed. So we had the humiliating vision of him answering questions from journalists unable to say whether a tank had been decommissioned, which is ridiculous. The IRA didn't have any tanks. He couldn't even say that. And the whole thing fell over this first step. But that ballet, that sequencing, is enormously important.

You also have to think about how to avoid the zero-sum game in a negotiation. You cannot have winners and losers. In Northern Ireland, the Republicans were much cleverer at looking as if they had won any particular negotiation. Sinn Féin would come out of any meeting smiling, claiming they'd won, whatever the substance was. And the Unionists would then immediately think they'd lost, even though they'd actually won on substance.

The most striking version of it was probably the ceasefire in 1994, when it was Republicans driving around Belfast and Derry, waving flags, honking their horns, celebrating. And the Unionists went into a gloom, even though it was the Unionists who had been demanding the IRA give up fighting for the last 30 years. The perception of winners and losers is crucially important.

We only got to success in Northern Ireland, I believe, in the end, when Gerry Adams realized he no longer had to just win over his own constituency, to win over Republicans to his side, he also had to explain to Unionists why this deal was in their interest, why they were the winners. It was only when he did that, in 2005 and 2006, we finally got to an agreement.

Even the Biafra war in Nigeria, comprehensively won by the Nigerian army in terrible circumstances, but won. They put posters all over the country saying, 'no winners, no losers'. When I went from Northern Ireland to Spain and said it seemed to me the way to settle this was to ensure there were no winners and no losers, all of the right-wing press went mad and said the government must be the winners, ETA must be the losers.

The trouble with that is, then, you aren't settling the problem. You're simply going to have the problem come back, because people will feel they've been cheated, the agreement is against their interests. So no winners, no losers is essential.

And having a certain amount of ingenuity is certainly key. The very last stage of a negotiation, actually getting over it, can be the most difficult. In Northern Ireland, we had everything agreed by March 2007. We agreed that Adams and Paisley would meet for the first time. They had never met. I had shuttled between the two of them for the previous three years to negotiate.

They agreed they would meet. They would sit down. They agreed it would be televised. They agreed what they would talk about. They agreed how long it would take. But what they wouldn't agree is where they would sit. Adams insisted on sitting next to Paisley, so it would look equal



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and like partners. Paisley insisted on sitting opposite Adams so he would look not too friendly and that they were still enemies. We couldn't get them to agree.

A colleague of mine came up with a brilliant solution, which was to design a new shape of table-- a diamond-shaped table. And at the apex, they could sit next to each other and opposite each other at the same time. And it's that kind of ingenuity you need if you're going to succeed.

Let me just wrap up with two points. One is the importance of implementation. It's really important to understand that an agreement is not the objective of the negotiation between an armed group and a government. You have a piece of paper because the two sides don't trust each other. You wouldn't need one if they did trust each other. And a piece of paper doesn't make each side trust each other anymore than before.

It's only when they start implementing that piece of paper that some trust may grow, and they will gradually be prepared to live alongside the other side. If you think about the Oslo Accords in the Middle East, when the Oslo Accords were published, there was huge celebration. Everyone was delighted that finally there had been a breakthrough. But no one made any effort to sell the agreement to either side or to implement it. And as a result, it disintegrated into the Second Intifada.

If I had thought we'd solved Northern Ireland when we took off in our helicopters on the afternoon of Good Friday, I would have been sadly mistaken. It was nine more years of implementation and difficult negotiations before we had the institutions up and running. That implementation period, as we are seeing in Colombia now, is the most important part of any peace agreement that's going to succeed.

So in conclusion, it seems to me we do need to be prepared to talk to our enemies. We can discuss that if you like. But I've come to the conclusion, if they have political support, you're going to have to find a political solution to these conflicts.

There is a combination you need to use. You're not going to do it just by security pressure. You're not going to do it just by talking. You have to have the security pressure down, deal with the grievances that they feed on, and have a political way out. If you just have the pressure down, they'll fight to the last man. If you just have the way out, they won't negotiate seriously. It's the combination of the two that tends to succeed.

And you don't tend to succeed the first time. Most negotiations that succeed are built on a series of failures. In Northern Ireland, we had Sunningdale in 1973. We had the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. Mrs. Thatcher failed. 1993, John Major, the Downing Street Declaration failed.

But the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 didn't come from nowhere. It was built on those three previous failures. Seamus Mallon who was the SDLP leader, the moderate Catholic leader, at the time, called the Good Friday Agreement, 'Sunningdale for slow learners'. And he was right. It had more or less the same measures in it that Sunningdale had had 30-odd years before, but we'd had to go through that cycle of blood for 30 years before we got to an agreement.



That leads me to think - and by the way, it's the same with Colombia - four failures, one success - almost any agreement you can think of, that's the pattern that you see. It seems to me there is no such thing as an insoluble conflict. There is just a conflict that hasn't been solved yet. And that includes the Middle East peace process.

You have to go through a series of iterations before you have a chance of succeeding. And an interesting thing happens when you get to the end of one of these processes. You're told all the way through that the conflict is insoluble. Winston Churchill thought Northern Ireland was insoluble. Mrs. Thatcher thought Northern Ireland was insoluble.

Once we solved it, everyone said it was inevitable. It was because of 9/11. It was because of economic changes in Ireland. It was all of those reasons. It's really important that people understand, there is no such thing as an insoluble conflict. And there is no conflict that is inevitably going to be solved by economic or other factors.

You have to have leaders who are brave enough to take risks, who've got the patience to stand a long, long negotiation like this, who will lead, and most of all, who can remember what happened last time and learn from it. And that, I hope, is the point of the Pearson Institute. Thank you very much, indeed.