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Trends. The Decommissioning of Reality: Towards a New Northern Ireland Government

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The soundbite heard throughout the world about Northern Ireland is that the impasse of decommissioning still remains. Until the Irish Republican Army (IRA) agrees to commence disarmament, Sinn Fein, the IRA political wing, will not be permitted to occupy its two seats in the executive of the new power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly.

Although the peace accords of 1998 clearly do not stipulate the contingent requirement of IRA decommissioning for Sinn Fein Assembly representation, the argument that no political party can participate in the Assembly with--as journalist Warren Hoge cites--"arms under the table" has evolved as emotionally and logically impelling. This seems to be the case regardless of (1) weapons fungibility in the context of the international weapons trade, (2) the vulnerability of minority status, (3) problems in disarmament verification, and (4) the disarmament intent of adversary paramilitaries.

Political fixes such as calling mandatory disarmament "obligatory" or "voluntary" and referring to decommissioning as putting (weapons) "beyond use" may yet lead to political progress. In essence, however, a formal accord has been superseded by propaganda--viz., a propagation of faith, to wit, bad faith. (See Gillespie, J.J., & Bazerman, M.H. (1997). Parasitic integration: Win-win agreements containing losers. *Negotiation Journal*, 13, 271-282; Hoge, W. (April 14, 1999). Sinn Fein rejects proposal to end impasse over disarmament. *The New York Times*, p. A11; Northcraft, G.B., Preston, J.N., et al. (1998). Non-linear preference functions and negotiated outcomes. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 73, 54-75; Vorauer, J.D., & Calude, S-D. (1998). Perceived versus actual transparency of goals in negotiation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 371-385; Wallihan, J. (1998). Negotiating to avoid agreement. *Negotiation Journal*, 14, 257-268.) (Keywords: Decommissioning, IRA, Irish Republican Army, Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein.)