**“The Anglo-Irish Agreement put us on side with the Americans”:**

**Margaret Thatcher, Anglo-American relations and the path to the**

**Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1979-1985**

‘… failure to go ahead now [with the Anglo-Irish Agreement]

would be a great disappointment to the Americans’.

[Charles Powell to Margaret Thatcher, 30. Oct. 1985][[1]](#endnote-1)

**Introduction**

This article offers a critical re-evaluation of British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher’s relationship with U.S president, Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) and his successor, Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict from 1979 to 1985. Specifically, it examines the impact that the ‘Irish Question’ had on the changing nature of Anglo-American relations from Thatcher’s entry to No. 10 Downing Street in May 1979 to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in November 1985.

Firstly, the article provides a fresh interpretation of the Carter-Thatcher relationship, rebuking the argument that the 39th U.S. president’s interest in Northern Ireland amounted to ‘no more than well-intended sound bites’, as suggested by Joseph E. Thompson.[[2]](#endnote-2) This worn out claim has been peddled by the academic community and indeed amongst Carter’s peers for a generation. In a 2006 interview, for example, U.S. senator for Massachusetts (1962-2009), Ted (Edward) Kennedy, accused Carter of not showing ‘any interest’ in Northern Ireland.[[3]](#endnote-3)

On the contrary, the available archival documentation, particularly regarding the U.S.’s supply of arms to the Royal Irish Constabulary (RUC), provides compelling new evidence that Carter took an active, interventionalist, role in Northern Ireland during the early period of Thatcher’s premiership. In doing so, it is argued that Carter helped to break a half century of silence regarding the U.S. government’s attitude to Northern Ireland.

Secondly, although Carter certainly showed a genuine interest in the Northern Ireland conflict (particularly compared to his immediate predecessors in the White House), it is argued that he had minimal *influence* over Thatcher’s thinking on this subject. In fact, despite suggestions to the contrary,[[4]](#endnote-4) there is ‘little evidence to demonstrate that policy decisions taken’ by the Thatcher government after 1979 were impacted directly by Carter’s intervention, to borrow Eamon O’Kane’s wording.[[5]](#endnote-5) Indeed, although the growing American role under Carter was reluctantly accepted in London, the evidence for a shift in British policy in response to U.S. pressure is ‘circumstantial’.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Thirdly, this article disputes the hypothesis that U.S. president Ronald Reagan’s active interest in the Northern Ireland conflict, chiefly *after* November 1984, was motivated by his ‘personal interest in Irish affairs’, to quote Andrew Wilson.[[7]](#endnote-7) Rather, it is argued that Reagan’s decision to intervene directly with Thatcher on the subject of Northern Ireland and thus ditch his previous policy of non-intervention (1981-1984) was not because he was ‘proud of his Irish roots’, but due to two more pressing factors. Firstly, and most importantly, due to persistent pressure which Reagan experienced from the Irish-American lobby in Washington, under the auspices of ‘The Friends of Ireland’ (FOI), notably Tip O’Neill, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1977-1987). Secondly, as a result of the personal intervention of William (Bill) Clark Jr., U.S. deputy secretary of state (1981-1982).[[8]](#endnote-8)

Lastly, it challenges the argument that U.S. pressure, channelled through Reagan’s close working relationship with Thatcher, played a *pivotal* role in her decision to sign the AIA. Luke Devoy, for instance, argues that Reagan ‘played a significant role in persuading Thatcher to soften her stance on the path to the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985’.[[9]](#endnote-9) Thatcher, herself, has a part to play in this misconception. Somewhat disingenuously, in the years following the signing of the AIA, she recorded that ‘It was the pressure from the Americans that made me sign the Agreement’.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The above argument is incorrect. In fact, more prominent factors determined Thatcher’s policy-making in relation to the AIA, not least her determination, in the short-term, to improve cross-border security between the British and Irish security forces. In the medium-term, her wish to reconcile the two major traditions in the hope of achieving a devolved government in Northern Ireland. And ultimately, in the long-term, her genuine desire to help end the Northern Ireland conflict. As Sir Geoffrey Howe, secretary of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1983-1989) noted, ‘the scale and nature of United States involvement in all this [the AIA negotiations] needs to be seen in the right perspective. Only rarely were we under direct pressure from the other side of the Atlantic, specifically to change our policies’.[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Gaps in the knowledge: the historiography of Anglo-American relations and the Irish Question, 1979-1985**

In their 2012 study, Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders argue that the history of Thatcherism and the Conservative Party is ‘still an emerging field’. ‘New questions’, they write, ‘are being asked and new evidence assessed’.[[12]](#endnote-12) This argument is no less true today. In fact, on the subject of Margaret Thatcher’s Cold War ‘special relationship’ with the U.S., in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, major gaps remain within the literature.[[13]](#endnote-13) Indeed, although several writers, including David Brundage,[[14]](#endnote-14) Feargal Cochrane,[[15]](#endnote-15) Luke Devoy,[[16]](#endnote-16) John Dumbrell,[[17]](#endnote-17) Ronan Fanning,[[18]](#endnote-18) Joseph E. Thompson,[[19]](#endnote-19) and Andrew Wilson,[[20]](#endnote-20) had provided useful analysis of the Northern Ireland conflict through the prism of Anglo-American relations, each have failed to adequately explain the motivations behind Thatcher’s attitude to this subject, particularly her reasons for signing the AIA.[[21]](#endnote-21)

With the notable exception of Charles Moore,[[22]](#endnote-22) Thatcher’s political biographers, likewise, have airbrushed out of history Anglo-American relations in the context of Thatcher’s Northern Ireland policy during her premiership from 1979 to 1990.[[23]](#endnote-23) Thatcher, herself, was a victim of this approach. In her memoir, she generally glossed over the subject of Northern Ireland regarding her relationship with U.S presidents Carter and Reagan.[[24]](#endnote-24) Indeed, both men pay scant attention to Northern Ireland in their respective memoirs.[[25]](#endnote-25) More general studies on the Thatcher-Reagan relationship,[[26]](#endnote-26) Thatcherism,[[27]](#endnote-27) the Conservative Party’s relationship with Ulster Unionism,[[28]](#endnote-28) and studies on Anglo-Irish relations during the 20th century,[[29]](#endnote-29) have also offered fleeting attention to Thatcher, the Anglo-American relationship and the Northern Ireland conflict. This article re-addresses the above gaps in the historiography.

Apart from an engagement with the relevant secondary literature, the research on which this work is based consists of hitherto unused and recently declassified primary sources from several archival institutions in Great Britain and Ireland, including, the National Archives of the United Kingdom;[[30]](#endnote-30) the Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge;[[31]](#endnote-31) the National Archives of Ireland;[[32]](#endnote-32) The Margaret Thatcher Foundation;[[33]](#endnote-33) The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum;[[34]](#endnote-34) and lastly, the Miller Centre Oral Archive.[[35]](#endnote-35) In particular, the release of declassified British government departmental files related to Thatcher’s premiership (1979-1990), under the British state’s ‘twenty-year’ rule, has permitted this article to provide a fresh interpretation of the subject matter under investigation. The use of documentary evidence is complemented using reported evidence, primarily published memoirs,[[36]](#endnote-36) interviews,[[37]](#endnote-37) online parliamentary debates[[38]](#endnote-38) and newspapers.[[39]](#endnote-39)

**A subtle, but significant, intervention: The Carter initiative and Northern Ireland, 1977-1979**

Since the outbreak of the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 1960s, consecutive U.S. presidents from Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969), Richard Nixon (1969-1974) and Gerald Ford (1974-1977) had shown little, if any, interest in the Irish Question.[[40]](#endnote-40) In fact, before Carter’s election as U.S. president in January 1977, there had been ‘no signs of any official policy on Northern Ireland’ from within the White House.[[41]](#endnote-41) In the words of Maurice Fitzpatrick, up to this point the U.S. State Department “was effectively a puppet of the British government when it came to Northern Ireland”.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Significantly, Carter’s election, heralded an important change in the U.S. government’s Northern Ireland policy. On 30 August of that year, Carter delivered a major speech in which he asked Americans to ‘refrain from supporting with financial or other aid’ organisations involved with paramilitary violence, re-affirmed the U.S. policy of ‘impartiality’ and promised U.S. investment in Northern Ireland, if the bloodshed ceased.[[43]](#endnote-43)

In delivering this speech, Carter broke a half century of silence *vis-à-vis* the U.S. government’s attitude to Northern Ireland and, in doing so, ‘abandoned the principle of not becoming involved in Northern Ireland’.[[44]](#endnote-44) In fact, Carter’s speech, which laid the foundations for the so-called ‘Carter Initiative’, was the first positive statement from a U.S. president that not only probed the nature of the Anglo-American relationship, but also recognised that the Irish government had a role to play in finding a permanent solution to the Northern Ireland conflict, to quote the *Irish Times*.[[45]](#endnote-45) Moreover, in delivering this speech, Carter instituted what Feargal Cochrane labelled as the ‘beginning of the internationalization of the Northern Ireland conflict’.[[46]](#endnote-46)

In a 2017 interview Carter explained the significance of his speech: ‘it was a rare thing’, he recalled, ‘for the United States to take a position against the policies of the Great Britain government’. ‘I really meant it’, he noted, it became ‘an important part of America foreign policy’.[[47]](#endnote-47) Thereafter, the norm of non-intervention in the Northern Ireland conflict was broken, becoming a ‘legitimate area of official U.S. foreign policy’.[[48]](#endnote-48)

While the British government publicly welcomed Carter’s speech, behind the scenes the British prime minister, James Callaghan (1976-1979) and his secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Roy Mason (1976-1979), were less than enthusiastic about the U.S. president’s remarks.[[49]](#endnote-49) In fact, the emerging U.S. interest in Northern Ireland ‘evoked mixed reactions’ from Callaghan’s government of the time. ‘While they welcomed condemnations of terrorism, they remained suspicious of American motivations and tried to ward off further involvement’, to quote Devoy.[[50]](#endnote-50) Within Conservative Party circles, Carter’s speech, likewise, received a frosty response. The party’s shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Airey Neave (1975-1979), was reportedly annoyed because Carter had ‘breached the rule about commenting on the internal affairs of the United Kingdom’.[[51]](#endnote-51)

Carter’s address was one of two major speeches delivered by leading U.S. politicians in 1977 that sought to raise the profile of the Northern Ireland conflict in Washington. The second of these speeches had been issued six months previously, on St Patrick’s Day, 17 March 1977, on behalf of ‘The Four Horsemen’ (named after the famous backfield of Notre Dame’s 1924 football team).[[52]](#endnote-52) This group had been recently formed and comprised of four highly influential Irish-American Democratic politicians: Tip O’Neill, Ted Kennedy; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, U.S. senator for New York (1977-2001); and Hugh Carey, U.S. governor of New York (1975-1982).[[53]](#endnote-53)

From the outset, The Four Horsemen played a leading role in the creation of an Irish lobby in the U.S. Congress, exercising ‘political influence’ which no politician or U.S. president ‘could afford to ignore’, to quote a confidential British memorandum.[[54]](#endnote-54) In fact, it was as a direct result of intense lobbying on behalf of The Four Horsemen that Carter had been persuaded to deliver his Irish speech on 30 August 1977.[[55]](#endnote-55)

With the instrumental support of John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and Irish government diplomats, Seán Donlon (head of the Anglo-Irish division of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and Irish ambassador in Washington, 1978-1981)) and Michael Lillis (counsellor to the Irish Embassy in Washington), The Four Horsemen mounted a sustained anti-Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) propaganda campaign amongst U.S. senators and congressional representatives. Chiefly, O’Neill and his three allies ran a determined campaign to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of Irish-Americans, to borrow David Brundage’s description,[[56]](#endnote-56) against those organisations sympathetic to Republican terrorism, including the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAID),[[57]](#endnote-57) believed to be a front for the PIRA in the U.S.; the Irish National Caucus (INC); and an *ad hoc* U.S. congressional committee for Irish Affairs, chaired by Mario Biaggi, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from New York (1969-1988).[[58]](#endnote-58)

By the time of the 1980 census, 40.7 million Americans claimed Irish ancestry (representing approximately 18% of the total population).[[59]](#endnote-59) Throughout the U.S., chiefly since the outbreak of the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 1960s, Irish-American ‘civil society existed structurally’ in the form of several organisations, notably The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), together with ‘other NGOs that had grown up around Irish neighbourhoods’ in the U.S., to quote Feargal Cochrane.[[60]](#endnote-60)

Within the Irish-American community there was a wide spectrum of opinion, from those committed to the aims and methods of Republican terrorism, to those horrified by violence, but with a natural bias in support of Irish unity. Even those opposed to violence, to quote a confidential British memorandum, tended to have a ‘romantic and distorted view of history’, which led many of them to believe that the Irish Question could be solved by British withdrawal from Northern Ireland.[[61]](#endnote-61) Indeed, by this period, three-quarters of all PIRA weaponry was coming from the U.S.[[62]](#endnote-62)

In their St Patrick’s Day speech, on 17 March 1977, The Four Horsemen issued a joint statement appealing to “all those organisations engaged in violence to renounce their campaigns of death and destruction and return to the path of life and peace”.[[63]](#endnote-63) The issuing of this statement, Ted Kennedy recalled, was a way of ‘indicating a different course to follow for Irish-Americans, but it needed to be followed up with policy actions and policy expression, and the place to do that was with the Democratic President, who was President Carter’.[[64]](#endnote-64) He continued: ‘we started on a personal campaign to see how we could involve … [U.S. president Carter] … to appeal for a partnership in the North with a promise of [a] political solution’.[[65]](#endnote-65) As is analysed below, Kennedy’s reference to seeking from Carter a pathway towards finding a ‘political solution’ was to be a recurring message for the remainder of his presidency, signalling the U.S. government’s interventionalist policy *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland.

**‘I don’t have any background knowledge about it [Northern Ireland]’: The Carter-Thatcher relationship and Northern Ireland, 1979**

On her election as British prime minister, in May 1979, Thatcher made it clear that she resented ‘any American intervention’ in the affairs of Northern Ireland.[[66]](#endnote-66) She particularly disliked the manner to which the Irish government ‘cultivated’ the Irish-American lobby in Washington, under the auspices of The Four Horsemen, in the hope of pressuring the ‘U.K. Government to maintain political momentum in Northern Ireland’.[[67]](#endnote-67) Thatcher was convinced, to quote a confidential British government memorandum, that this ‘very powerful group of Irish-Americans’[[68]](#endnote-68) were determined to make ‘life very difficult’ for her.[[69]](#endnote-69) Later in life, Ted Kennedy recalled how Thatcher never missed an opportunity to express how the Irish-American lobby in Washington was a constant ‘source of antagonism’ to her.[[70]](#endnote-70)

Thatcher felt that U.S. politicians, particularly O’Neill and Kennedy, intentionally misrepresented Britain’s position on Northern Ireland, depicting her government as a colonial imperialist overlord. As James Prior, secretary of state for Northern Ireland, 1981-1984, later pointed out, the Irish-American lobby in Washington, while sincere in their wish to end the violence, refused to listen to the British side of the story, content to ‘indulge in rhetoric, rather than actually to get down to the details of what was happening in Northern Ireland …’.[[71]](#endnote-71)

Indeed, shortly into her premiership, the U.S. State Department picked up on Thatcher’s resentment towards the Irish-American caucus in Washington. Consequently, the U.S. State Department strongly counselled Carter *against* directly involving himself in the affair of Northern Ireland. Traditionally, Carter was reminded by his political aids, the U.S. government had followed a non-interventionist approach, which accepted that Northern Ireland was an ‘internal’ issue for the U.K..[[72]](#endnote-72)

However, under pressure from The Four Horsemen, Carter soon buckled. As Carter, himself, conceded some years later, ‘the State Department was not in favour of what I did [i.e. the Carter initiative] … but I didn’t really consult with them too thoroughly …’.[[73]](#endnote-73) It is unclear why Carter gave in to lobbying on behalf of the The Four Horsemen. Apart from his personal desire to make Ireland ‘an important part of America foreign policy’,[[74]](#endnote-74) a second factor may have been in relation to domestic politics, as Carter had, on occasions, to depend on Tip O’Neill’s co-operation (as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives) to pass his legislative programme through the U.S. House of Representatives.

Following receipt of a letter from Tip O’Neill, on 22 June 1979, in which the speaker of the House of Representatives asked Carter to write personally to the incumbent British prime minister, with a request that she ‘encourage the new Government to pursue a political solution [for Northern Ireland] more vigorously’,[[75]](#endnote-75) the U.S. president promptly obliged. In the margins of a G7 summit in Tokyo, 27-29 June, Carter breached the subject of Northern Ireland with Thatcher. Perhaps, in the words of Paul Arthur, ‘this was the first time in decades that a U.S. President and a British Prime Minister have spoken [on a one-to-one basis] about the Northern Ireland problem’.[[76]](#endnote-76) According to one insider, Carter allegedly told Thatcher that once she had settled into her new role he would like to discuss Northern Ireland, “maybe to ask what progress has been made”.[[77]](#endnote-77)

The following month, on 4 July, Carter telephoned Thatcher, with a request that she provide him with a policy paper setting out the situation in Northern Ireland, in order, as he phrased it, that he could ‘read over just to describe the present situation and any prospects for the future’. ‘I don’t have any background knowledge about it [Northern Ireland]’, he admitted, and with Thatcher’s agreement would like to share the contents of the paper ‘confidentially’ with Tip O’Neill and Ted Kennedy.[[78]](#endnote-78)

Whilst Thatcher resented U.S. interference in what she believed to be an ‘internal affair’ for the U.K., she nonetheless agreed to Carter’s request. In truth, she had little room for manoeuvre. As an ‘ardent transatlantist’, to quote David Cannadine, Thatcher looked to Britain’s relationship with the U.S. ‘as more friendly and important than that of any other country’.[[79]](#endnote-79) Therefore, dutifully, on 20 July, she sent Carter four policy papers on Northern Ireland, ‘one on the background, one on present Government policy, one on terrorism and one on security and its impact on human rights’.[[80]](#endnote-80)

‘The essence of our position today’, Thatcher informed Carter, ‘is that as a Government we have a good majority in the House of Commons and five years in which to make progress over this problem, and all those directly concerned with this’. ‘Our present view’, she continued, ‘is that we can best make progress by patient and persistent negotiation with the [Northern Ireland] parties, rather than by more precipitate action’. Despite her gesture of goodwill towards Carter, Thatcher counselled that she did not foresee grounds for ‘any early solutions’.[[81]](#endnote-81) She was also deliberately vague on the political future of Northern Ireland, deciding against making a direct reference to devolution and specifically power-sharing. Instead, Thatcher was non-committal, making the document ‘as cautious on politics and as tough on security as possible’.[[82]](#endnote-82)

In fact, the U.S. president’s intervention confirmed Thatcher’s personal indifference towards him. This sense of coolness dated to Carter’s U.S. presidential election victory in 1976, on the Democratic Party ticket, at the expense of Gerald Ford, the Republican Party candidate. Thatcher always felt a stronger kinship with the Republican Party and had been disappointed to learn of Ford’s defeat. She had first met Carter during his visit to Britain in May 1977 and although their meeting had been cordial, thereafter, she always felt somewhat underwhelmed by his presence and frustrated by his attitude to foreign policy.[[83]](#endnote-83)

As Charles Moore explained, Thatcher opposed Carter’s ‘rather starry-eyed belief that the hearts of dictators could be changed by the expression of the West’s sincere desire for peace’. This stance was ‘emotionally at odds with her alert suspicion of the Soviet Union’.[[84]](#endnote-84) In her memoir, Thatcher was scathing of Carter’s abilities as a politician (although she was at pains to stress that she liked him as an individual). Apart from pointing out his many ‘political flaws’, including his ‘flawed analysis’ on foreign affairs, she harshly wrote that Carter was ‘ill-suited to the presidency’ because he agonised over ‘big decisions’ and was ‘too considered with detail’.[[85]](#endnote-85)

Carter, likewise, found Thatcher difficult to deal with, frustrated by her tendency to dominate discussions and to occasionally lecture her U.S. counterpart. While the two leaders respected one another, they did not ‘particularly like one another’.[[86]](#endnote-86) For example, in the margins of the G7 summit in Tokyo, in June 1979, where Carter met Thatcher for the first time as British prime minister, the U.S. president recorded in his diary that she was ‘highly opinionated, strong willed, cannot admit that she doesn’t know something’.[[87]](#endnote-87) Indeed, during a previous meeting in the Oval Office, in September 1977, when discussing the subject of Rhodesia, Thatcher managed to irritate Carter to such an extent that a blood vessel in the neck of the U.S. president was reported as throbbing.[[88]](#endnote-88)

The strained Carter-Thatcher relationship was symptomatic of Anglo-American relations during this period. Simply put, in the U.S. administration, the idea abroad was that Britain ‘no longer mattered’.[[89]](#endnote-89) As Johnathan Aitken wrote, by 1979, the so-called ‘special relationship’ between the two countries was ‘now fading’.[[90]](#endnote-90) Indeed, a C.I.A. report sent to Carter, in October 1979, argued that the “special relationship” between the U.S. and Britain had “lost much of its meaning”,[[91]](#endnote-91) that Washington was no longer “significantly closer to Britain than to its other major allies”.[[92]](#endnote-92)

**‘[T]he difficulty was one of timing’: U.S. supply of arms to the RUC and the deterioration of the Carter-Thatcher relationship, 1979-1980**

By June 1979, Anglo-Irish relations gradually came under increasing strain following a decision on behalf of the Carter administration to suspend the sale of U.S. arms to the RUC. The origins to this diplomatic crisis date to the U.S. State Department’s initial agreement to sanction the sale by the Sturm, Ruger Co-operation of Connecticut of approximately 3000 .375 magnum handguns and 500 .223 semi-automatic rifles to the RUC. This decision on behalf of the U.S. State Department was not unusual. Throughout the 1970s the RUC had purchased a significant number of weapons from U.S. arms manufacturers. However, on this occasion, the Irish-American lobby in Washington, led by The Four Horsemen, immediately condemned the Sturm, Ruger-RUC deal.

O’Neill issued a press statement calling on the Carter administration to block the U.S. State Department’s decision to facilitate the sale of arms to the RUC, on the pretext that the continued supply of weapons would conflict with the Carter administration’s commitment not to supply arms to countries violating human rights.[[93]](#endnote-93) O’Neill was being liberal with the truth. On this occasion, domestic concerns, not human right issues abroad dictated the reason for his intervention. To satisfy the appetite of his Irish-American audience O’Neill decided to focus on the sale of U.S. arms to the RUC to force the Irish Question to the top of the Anglo-American political agenda.[[94]](#endnote-94) O’Neill’s endeavours quickly bore fruit. In the last week of July 1979, the U.S. secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, who had a ‘good relationship personally’ with Ted Kennedy,[[95]](#endnote-95) intervened in the developing crisis. On his orders, an immediate ban was introduced prohibiting the sale of U.S. arms to the RUC.

The question arises, why did the Carter administration agree to support O’Neill’s latest intervention? In truth, the decision was dictated by domestic rather than international political considerations. At the time, the U.S. president relied on O’Neill’s support to ‘get legislation through the U.S. Congress’ and ‘could not afford to criticize such a powerful and essential ally’. As Wilson phrased it, the U.S. administration ‘felt that maintance of good relations with O’Neill was more important than the risk of offending the British. Therefore, the RUC arms sales were suspended’.[[96]](#endnote-96) Moreover, by now Carter was in election mode as he looked ahead to the 1980 Democratic National Convention, scheduled for mid-August of that year.[[97]](#endnote-97) He, thus, was courting the Irish-American vote to fight off Ted Kennedy’s charge for the Democratic nomination for the 1980 U.S. presidential election.

Thatcher was furious on learning of this ban. In the words of Luke Devoy, ‘seen from London, this was the source of considerable anxiety and the arms ban was the final sign that American interest was getting out of hand’.[[98]](#endnote-98) As Nicholas Henderson, the British ambassador to the U.S. (1979-1982) recounted, Carter’s actions encouraged Thatcher to enact ‘her fighting mood’.[[99]](#endnote-99) In August 1979, for example, she ordered her secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Humphrey Atkins, not to attend a meeting in New York with Irish minister for foreign affairs, Michael O’Kennedy, which had been scheduled by one of the Four Horsemen, Hugh Carey. “Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom”, she wrote to Atkins, “and she herself would not think of discussing with President Carter, for example, U.S. policy towards his black population”.[[100]](#endnote-100)

Privately, Lord Carrington, secretary of state for foreign and the commonwealth affairs (1979-1982), wrote to Vance to express his ‘very grave concern’ regarding the ban. ‘It would certainly be seen as a sharp shift in US policy’, Lord Carrington noted, ‘and could only greatly encourage the Provisional IRA’.[[101]](#endnote-101) Ulster Unionists were equally perturbed by this *volte-face* on behalf of the Carter administration. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MP for East Belfast, Peter Robinson reportedly urged London to protest to the U.S. government about the ‘continuing meddling of “this supposedly” responsible “American” [i.e. O’Neill] in Northern Ireland affairs’.[[102]](#endnote-102)

Despite her personal frustration regarding perceived U.S. interference in the ‘internal affairs’ of the U.K., together with her continued frustration towards Irish-American support for Irish Republican terrorism,[[103]](#endnote-103) Thatcher was advised to ‘keep in close touch with The Four Horsemen’. As pointed out in a steering brief on behalf of the FCO, although O’Neill and his Irish-American supporters continually ‘criticise us over alleged human rights violations and lack of political progress … they help by condemning violence …’. [[104]](#endnote-104)

It was not until December 1979, on a state visit to Washington, that Thatcher again had an opportunity to petition Carter regarding the ban of supplying U.S. arms to the RUC. When the two leaders met at the White House, on 17 of that month, Thatcher lobbied her host to end the ban of supplying U.S. arms to the RUC; she had reason to believe that Carter might be receptive to her request considering that the previous month he had inferred, via an intermediary, that London ‘should get what’ it had ordered.[[105]](#endnote-105) To Thatcher’s frustration, however, Carter remained evasive on the issue. Instead, he sought to turn the conversation to more pressing matters, including the implementation of further economic sanctions against Iran, London’s support for SALT II and the ongoing Rhodesian negotiations.[[106]](#endnote-106) The meeting, thus, ended without agreement regarding the ban of supplying U.S. arms to the RUC.

The net result of the fallout over the proposed sale of U.S. arms to the RUC was that by the time Carter left office, following Reagan’s inauguration as U.S. president in January 1981, Anglo-American relations remained at best strained, at worst, antagonistic. As is examined below, initially at least, on entering the White House, to Thatcher’s relief, Reagan reverted to the U.S. administration’s traditional, non-intervention Northern Ireland policy.

**‘Soul mates’: The Reagan-Thatcher relationship and Northern Ireland, 1981-1984**

It is widely recorded how close the Reagan-Thatcher relationship was during their respective time in office, so often referred to as the ‘special relationship’.[[107]](#endnote-107) In the words of Charles Moore, the personal chemistry between Reagan and Thatcher was ‘undeniable’.[[108]](#endnote-108) Indeed, Thatcher was one of the first foreign heads of government to visit the incumbent U.S. president following her visit to Washington in late February 1981. She had first met Reagan as far back as 1975 (and again in 1978 and 1979) when she had sat down with the former governor of California in her office in the House of Commons. They immediately warmed to one another. Thatcher later affectionately recalled that ‘I was immediately won over by his charm, directness and sense of humour’.[[109]](#endnote-109) Reagan, likewise, expressed admiration for his host: “It was evident from our first words that we were soul mates when it came to reducing government and expanding freedom”.[[110]](#endnote-110)

Although the two leaders might have very well been ‘soul mates’, to borrow Reagan’s description, they certainly had very different temperaments. Reagan, a known charmer, with a ‘disarming style’, had ‘no taste for detail’ and was ‘not deeply interested in international affairs’.[[111]](#endnote-111) Thatcher was quite the opposite, known to be hyperactive, zealous and an ‘intensely knowledgeable leader’, she was a passionate internationalist.[[112]](#endnote-112) Yet, despite such differences, what they had in common, what they both cherished, was ‘a common moral outlook on the world’.[[113]](#endnote-113) Indeed, although they would often disagree on policies and tactics (including over Reagan’s new Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) and the U.S. invasion of Grenada in October 1983) ‘their basic personal trust and sense of common purpose never failed’.[[114]](#endnote-114)

Following his inauguration as U.S. president in January 1981, unlike Carter, Reagan pursued a neutral, non-intervention, Northern Ireland policy, which focused on deploring paramilitary terrorism and promoting reconciliation. As Ronan Fanning wrote, following Reagan’s election, U.S. foreign policy “reverted to its traditional stance: that the United States should not anger Great Britain, its closest Cold War ally, by meddling in its internal affairs”.[[115]](#endnote-115) This policy position was given public credence during Reagan’s first public comments on Northern Ireland during his St. Patrick’s Day speech, on 17 March 1981 (thereafter, for the remainder of his presidency, Reagan routinely used his annual St Patrick’s Day speech to outline the rudimentary aspects of his Ireland policy) . Although he called for a ‘swift solution to the current problems in Northern Ireland’ he pledged to respect that the conflict was an internal matter for HMG.[[116]](#endnote-116)

U.S. non-intervention policy on behalf of the Reagan administration was confirmed during the height of the second Republican hunger-strike in 1981.[[117]](#endnote-117) Although coming under huge pressure from the Irish-American lobby regarding Thatcher’s alleged “intransigence”, to quote a collective statement on behalf of The Four Horsemen, Reagan refused to intervene as one by one the Republican protesters, led by Bobby Sands, lost their lives on hunger strike.[[118]](#endnote-118) In fact, during a breakfast meeting at No. 10 Downing Street, on 20 July 1981, neither Reagan nor Thatcher breached the subject of Northern Ireland.[[119]](#endnote-119) Reagan’s unwillingness to involve himself in the plight of the Republican hunger strikers seemed to endorse Kevin Kenny’s argument that not since the presidency of Woodrow Wilson had a U.S. president shown such an anti-Irish bias.[[120]](#endnote-120)

Despite Reagan’s personal indifference regarding the Northern Ireland conflict his administration’s interest in the subject was awakened, albeit momentarily, following the personal intervention of William (Bill) Clark. In December 1981, the U.S. deputy secretary of state conducted a tour of Ireland. Described in British circles as one of Reagan’s ‘oldest and closet associates’, as belonging to the White House ‘inner circle’,[[121]](#endnote-121) Clark had a personal interest in Ireland and more specifically had a personal ‘attachment to the cause of Irish unity’.[[122]](#endnote-122) In fact, Clark had some Irish roots and had first met and subsequently married his wife in Ireland.[[123]](#endnote-123) He owned a holiday home in Malahide, Co. Dublin, owned a ranch in California called ‘Hibernia’,[[124]](#endnote-124) and even, for a time, had a private aeroplane at Dublin Airport.[[125]](#endnote-125)

On arriving to Ireland in December 1981, Clark carried with him a letter, dated 7 December, to the taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald from Reagan, in which the latter noted, *inter alia*, ‘we believe a lasting solution can be found only in a process of reconciliation between the two Irish political traditions and between Britain and Ireland’.[[126]](#endnote-126) Contained within Reagan’s letter to FitzGerald was also an invitation to the taoiseach to visit Washington on St. Patrick’s Day 1982. This invitation was duly accepted by FitzGerald and subsequently taken up by his successor Charles Haughey who, in a speech at the White House, on 17 March 1982, overtly sought U.S. support for the ‘cause of Irish unity’.[[127]](#endnote-127)

Reagan’s speech that day reiterated themes in his St. Patrick’s Day speech the previous year and in his letter to the taoiseach in December 1981, placing emphasis on the importance of bringing an end to paramilitary violence and encouraging U.S. investment on the island of Ireland.[[128]](#endnote-128) At the same time, Reagan reaffirmed his government’s policy of ‘non-involvement’ in the internal affairs of the U.K., instead urging ‘the parties in Northern Ireland to come together for a just solution and to condemn all acts of terrorism and violence’.[[129]](#endnote-129) Reagan’s comments won the wholehearted approval of the Thatcher government, described as signalling ‘a proper and sensible expression of U.S. interest in Northern Ireland’.[[130]](#endnote-130)

In a sign of how low the subject of Northern Ireland ranked in Reagan’s political thinking, when the two leaders met for formal discussions at No. 10 Downing Street, on 9 June 1982, the issue was again ignored. Instead, their meeting focused on the state of Western Alliances, the Soviet Union and the Middle East.[[131]](#endnote-131) Indeed, during a meeting with the British ambassador in Washington, in mid-October of that year, William Clark (by now Reagan’s national security advisor following the enforced resignation of Richard Allen in January 1982) reaffirmed that ‘U.S. policy remained unchanged’. ‘The U.S. view’, he said, ‘was that the momentum for progress must come from within the Northern Irish community’ and, therefore, the U.S. would not become involved in the internal affairs of the U.K.[[132]](#endnote-132)

By 1983, London was confidentially reporting that the Reagan administration had ‘consistently refused to be drawn into taking sides on Northern Ireland, despite pressures to the contrary’.[[133]](#endnote-133) During his annual St Patrick’s Day speech, on 17 March, Reagan acknowledged that it was ‘not for the United States to chart a course for the people of Northern Ireland’, but rather to encourage reconciliation between the two communities.[[134]](#endnote-134) This stance was confirmed following U.S. vice-president, George Bush’s visit to Ireland in early July of that year. He held talks with the taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, during which Bush said he had come to Ireland to “listen and learn”.[[135]](#endnote-135) Regarding the New Ireland Forum, Bush said that it was ‘not his Government’s role to support or not to support the Forum’.[[136]](#endnote-136) Indeed, in October, Reagan turned down a resolution for the appointment of a special U.S. envoy to Northern Ireland.[[137]](#endnote-137)

The Reagan administrations’ non-intervention strategy in relation to Northern Ireland remained a common feature of U.S. foreign policy during 1984. Again, during his annual St. Patrick’s Day speech, on 17 March, Reagan avoided aligning his administration with either the British or Irish governments. Instead, his speech ‘consolidated his administration’s position of support for reconciliation between the two traditions in Ireland’.[[138]](#endnote-138) Reagan reiterated the same message during an interview with the Irish national broadcaster *RTÉ* in May of that year. The Northern Ireland conflict, he said, ‘… is a problem to be settled there between, not only the governments of England and Ireland, but also of the people in the North and the people of the South … I don’t think it’s our place to do that [to intervene]’.[[139]](#endnote-139)

The following month, in June, Reagan made his first (and only) official visit to Ireland as U.S. president. From 1 to 4 of that month, he travelled around the country, visiting his ancestral village of Ballyporeen in Co. Tipperary.[[140]](#endnote-140) Although on each of his four days in Ireland Reagan spoke about Northern Ireland and his wish to see an end to violence, he continued to follow his strategy of not commenting on the internal policies of the British government *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland. At Shannon Airport, on 1 June, for instance, he noted that ‘Americans are people of peace … those who advocate violence or engage in terrorism in Northern Ireland will never be welcome in the United States’.[[141]](#endnote-141) In the words of David Tatham of the British Embassy in Dublin, ‘President Reagan’s handling of Northern Ireland was exemplary. He refused to be dawn on possible solutions and came down hard on [P]IRA “terrorists” and their supporters’.[[142]](#endnote-142) Indeed, during a private *tete-à-tete*, on 5 June, in London, Thatcher thanked Reagan for ‘his public references to the evils of terrorism and the U.S. policy of non-intervention in the problems of Northern Ireland’.[[143]](#endnote-143)

**‘[H]is desire for political progress’: Reagan’s interventionist Northern Ireland policy, 1984-1985**

Significantly, however, in the aftermath of Thatcher’s ‘out, out, out’ comments in November 1984[[144]](#endnote-144) (following her Anglo-Irish summit meeting with taoiseach Garret FitzGerald on 19 November) a gradual metamorphosis occurred regarding U.S. thinking on Northern Ireland, in which Reagan abandoned his hitherto neutral stance. It was at this point that William Clark’s involvement became pivotal (by now Whitehall was reporting that Clark was ‘undoubtedly closer to a Dublin line than a London line’ *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland).[[145]](#endnote-145) Shortly after Thatcher’s Anglo-Irish summit meeting with FitzGerald, in November 1984, Clark received a request from Seán Donlon, head of the DFA in Dublin that the former use his influence to press Reagan to ‘express his concern about the Anglo-Irish situation’.[[146]](#endnote-146) Clark duly obliged.[[147]](#endnote-147) In advance of an Anglo-American summit meeting at Camp David, between Reagan and Thatcher, pencilled in for late December 1984, the U.S. president agreed to Clark’s request that he raise Northern Ireland with the British prime minister and express ‘his desire for political progress’.[[148]](#endnote-148)

Moreover, there was another, arguably more important, reason why Reagan decided to ditch his previous non-intervention policy in relation to Northern Ireland: the influence of the powerful Irish-American lobby in Washington. The lobbying campaign on behalf of the Irish-American community was spearheaded under the auspices of the FOI, which was established in March 1981. Most prominent amongst this lobbying group were The Four Horsemen (mentioned earlier in this article), Tip O’Neill, Ted Kennedy, Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Hugh Carey. Described in Irish government circles as ‘the most important Irish organisation’ in the U.S. Congress, the FOI promoted a moderate, non-violent, approach to the ‘Irish Question’.[[149]](#endnote-149) Chief among their aims was the re-unification of Ireland, by peaceful means, based on the principle of consent.[[150]](#endnote-150)

O’Neill was particularly integral to the successful operation of the Irish-American lobbying process. Described by Michael Lillis as a man of ‘tremendous stature and political skill’, as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, O’Neill held considerable influence in Washington and regularly used his political muscle in the arena of Irish-American politics.[[151]](#endnote-151) In the words of Ronan Fanning, as in his previous dealings with the former U.S president Carter, ‘O’Neill’s influence was decisive in persuading’ Reagan to “drop the ‘“hands off”’ U.S. policy towards Northern Ireland”.[[152]](#endnote-152) Throughout the mid-1980s, working closely with the Irish government in Dublin and John Hume’s SDLP in Northern Ireland, O’Neill (and the FOI network) regularly lobbied Reagan on the Irish Question, pressurising the U.S. president to raise the subject of Northern Ireland with Thatcher whenever the opportunity arose.[[153]](#endnote-153)

Apart from pressure from the Irish-American lobby, Reagan had his own reasons for supporting O’Neill’s appeals. Firstly, by giving into such requests, the U.S. president hoped that he could soften O’Neill’s ‘critique of his Nicaragua policy’.[[154]](#endnote-154) As Henry Patterson pointed out, as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, O’Neill had ‘unprecedented leverage’ with Reagan because of his record of opposition to U.S. funding of the ‘Contras’ (the counter revolutionaries fighting against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua). Thus, the ‘muting of O’Neill’s criticism on Nicaragua was the price of the Irish state’s most important political advance in relation to Northern Ireland since partition’.[[155]](#endnote-155) Secondly, in relation to domestic politics, Reagan depended on O’Neill’s co-operation and goodwill to pass his legislative programme through the U.S. House of Representatives, ‘which O’Neill dominated’, to quote Maurice Fitzpatrick.[[156]](#endnote-156)

For her part, the fallout between London and Washington regarding the U.S. invasion of Grenada in October 1983, most certainly played an important role in Thatcher’s thinking *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland. She had personally opposed the U.S. invasion of Grenada and was ‘dismayed’ by Reagan’s decision to use military force against her express wishes.[[157]](#endnote-157) After all, Grenada was at a member of the British Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II was the island’s head of state and the U.S. invasion took place without her prior knowledge, let alone consent.[[158]](#endnote-158) Therefore, Thatcher saw Reagan’s latest intervention in relation to the Northern Ireland conflict, as an opportunity to mend some broken fences. In the words of Charles Powell, Thatcher’s foreign affairs private secretary, Thatcher was keen on “keeping that old Irishman Reagan on side” and the best way to achieve this objective was to be “seen to be talking to the government of the Republic [of Ireland]”.[[159]](#endnote-159)

At the Anglo-American summit at Camp David between Reagan and Thatcher, on 22 December 1984, the U.S. president tentatively mentioned the subject of Northern Ireland. Although Reagan did not initially raise this subject with Thatcher during their morning *tete-à-tete,* (instead their discussions focused on Thatcher’s recent meeting at Chequers with Gorbachev and Reagan’s passionate support for his SDI programme),[[160]](#endnote-160) Northern Ireland was briefly discussed later that day during a plenary session. Reagan said that he had received a letter from Tip O’Neill asking him to appeal to Thatcher ‘to be reasonable’ and for her to consider ways to facilitate an improvement in Anglo-Irish relations, specifically in relation to Northern Ireland.[[161]](#endnote-161)

Reagan’s continued support for the ongoing dialogue between the British and Irish governments was reaffirmed during Thatcher’s visit to Washington in February of the following year. By now, to quote David Cannadine, Reagan was ‘gently’ urging Thatcher ‘to adopt a more accommodating attitude’ regardingDublin’s involvement in the affairs of Northern Ireland.[[162]](#endnote-162) At a meeting with Thatcher in the White House, on 20 February, Reagan again brought up the subject of Northern Ireland. He spoke about the current state of Anglo-Irish relations and guaranteed his continued support for ‘all those working for peaceful solutions and reconciliation’.[[163]](#endnote-163)

Later that day, Thatcher briefly touched upon the subject of Northern Ireland when she addressed the joint houses of the U.S. Congress. Significantly, she spoke of the need to work closely with the Irish government in the ‘quest for stability and peace in Northern Ireland’.[[164]](#endnote-164) Her reference to the Irish government, described as ‘concession under duress’, was an acknowledgement of a gradual change in Thatcher’s thinking on Northern Ireland.[[165]](#endnote-165) In the words of Charles Moore, thereafter, it ‘made it much harder for her to break out of the process of Anglo-Irish negotiations. Expectations were rising’.[[166]](#endnote-166) Indeed, the assembled media immediately noticed Thatcher’s reference to the Irish government during her speech. ‘Singing for her supper’ was how *The Washington Post* described the British prime minister’s remarks.[[167]](#endnote-167)

**“The Anglo-Irish Agreement put us on side with the Americans”: Reagan, Thatcher and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, 1985**

By June 1985, the British government had decided privately to ‘take the U.S. Administration a little more into our confidence’ regarding the ongoing Anglo-Irish negotiations, which eventually led to the signing of the AIA in November 1985. On the advice of the British Embassy in Washington, Thatcher was encouraged to provide the ‘Americans with some authoritative account of what is happening’, if London was to ‘maximise’ Reagan’s support for ‘whatever emerges (or to be sure of their understanding if the talks break down and no agreement is reached)’, to quote Leonard Appleyard, Sir Geoffrey Howe’s private secretary.[[168]](#endnote-168)

The origins of AIA date to a series of clandestine negotiations on behalf of British and Irish policymakers, initially under the banner of the David Goodall-Michael Lillis talks, which convened in the summer of 1983 and subsequently under the auspices of the Robert Armstrong-Dermot Nally framework talks from February 1984.[[169]](#endnote-169) By the summer of 1985, as the Anglo-Irish negotiations entered a critical stage, Thatcher presented the taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, with a secret proposal regarding a ‘possible role for the Irish Government in future arrangements for Northern Ireland’, including providing the Irish with a ‘consultative role’ in the affairs of Northern Ireland.[[170]](#endnote-170)

Eventually, after a further round of exhaustive talks,[[171]](#endnote-171) the AIA was signed on behalf of the British and Irish governments at Hillsborough Castle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland, on 15 November 1985. Four central principles underpinned the AIA:

1. That both governments emphatically rejected the use of violence and all those who support it;
2. A binding affirmation that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of its people;
3. A recognition that if in the future a majority formally consented to a united Ireland, the two governments would support legislation accordingly; and lastly
4. The establishment, within the framework of the AIIC, of a new Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference concerned both with Northern Ireland and with relations between the two parts of Ireland.[[172]](#endnote-172)

At the heart of the Agreement, under Article 1, was a commitment on behalf of the two governments that ‘any changes in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland’. Significantly, with the proposed establishment of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental conference, the Irish government was to be provided with a mechanism to put forward views and proposals ‘on specific areas of administration and policy’ in relation to Northern Ireland, including political, security and legal related matters (i.e. a consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland).[[173]](#endnote-173)

Across the Atlantic, on the day of the signing of the AIA, Reagan and O’Neill held a joint press conference at the White House to lend their wholehearted support to the Accord.[[174]](#endnote-174) In a statement, the U.S. president congratulated the British and Irish governments, pledging to give his ‘full support’ to the Agreement.[[175]](#endnote-175) On Thatcher’s contribution to the negotiations, Reagan spoke of her ‘statesmanship, vision and courage’.[[176]](#endnote-176) He indicated that he would work closely with the U.S. Congress in a bipartisan way to lend practical support to the Accord. As Thatcher herself phrased it. “The Anglo-Irish Agreement put us on side with the Americans”.[[177]](#endnote-177) This was complemented by a statement from the FOI declaring strong support for the Agreement and a promise to work with the U.S. president to provide ‘all appropriate assistance’. The statement was signed by the leadership, both Democratic and Republican, in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. Soon after the U.S. Congress unanimously passed Concurrent Resolution 239 in support of the Accord.[[178]](#endnote-178)

In fact, Washington wasted little time in providing financial support for the AIA. In December 1986, in accordance with Article 10 of the AIA, ‘The International Fund for Ireland’ was established with the objective of promoting economic and social advance on the island of Ireland through stimulating private investment and enterprise, supplementing public programmes and supporting voluntary efforts. By the end of 1988, the U.S. had donated US$120 million, while Canada had promised CAN$10 million (of which $1.5 million had been received) and New Zealand had made a single contribution of NZ$3000,000.[[179]](#endnote-179)

Despite the pomp and ceremony surrounding the signing of the AIA, Thatcher harboured grave reservations regarding the entire enterprise. In fact, she regretted signing the Accord almost immediately. Privately, she protested that the Irish ‘… have all the glory. We have all the problems’.[[180]](#endnote-180) The question, therefore, arises why did Thatcher agree to put pen to paper in the first place?

Although an argument has emerged within the relevant literature that American pressure forced Thatcher to sign the AIA,[[181]](#endnote-181) the available archival documentation paints a very different picture. Indeed, Thatcher, herself, has a part to play in this misconception. Somewhat disingenuously, in the years following the signing of the Agreement, she was reported as privately exclaiming: ‘It was the pressure from the Americans that made me sign the Agreement’.[[182]](#endnote-182) Yet, we should tread carefully when considering this hypothesis. While it is correct that Thatcher’s blossoming relationship with Reagan certainly played a part in her decision to sign the AIA, it is entirely inaccurate to state that this was her *primary* reason. In truth, the scale of U.S. involvement has been overplayed. As Thatcher’s cabinet secretary, Robert Armstrong subsequently confirmed in a 2015 interview, ‘one should not place too much emphasis on this point’. While, Reagan certainly ‘encouraged’ Thatcher to reach an agreement, she was ‘like any politician she preferred to succeed rather than to fail’.[[183]](#endnote-183)

In fact, there were three, more prominent factors, that compelled Thatcher to support the AIA. Firstly, and this often is overlooked, Thatcher’s motivations were driven by a genuine desire to promote peace, stability and to reconcile the two major traditions in the hope of achieving a devolved government in Northern Ireland. Following Thatcher’s emphatic success at the 1983 British general election, she felt that Northern Ireland was ‘hanging over’ her from her first administration. Back in office and with a comfortable parliamentary majority, she was now determined to ‘do something’ about Northern Ireland.[[184]](#endnote-184)

Secondly, in the weeks, months, indeed years, leading to the signing of the Agreement, Thatcher had come under increasing pressure from Sir Geoffrey Howe, her secretary of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs and her leading civil servants, namely, Charles Powell and Robert Armstrong, to concede to the Irish their request for a ‘consultative role’ in the affairs of Northern Ireland. For example, in a letter to Thatcher, dated 30 October 1985, Powell noted that, ‘… failure to go ahead now [with the AIA] would be a great disappointment to the Americans’ (Thatcher underscored this line, invariably signifying her approval).[[185]](#endnote-185)

Lastly, by signing the AIA, Thatcher hoped it would help provide the security solution to the Northern Ireland conflict, by isolating the terrorists and formalising security co-operation between Dublin and London. To borrow Seán Donlon’s critique, a central reason why Thatcher agreed to place her weight behind the AIA, he argued, was that she had ‘an expectation that signing the Agreement would be like waving a magic wand – that the security situation would immediately be improved, that the Provisionals [PIRA] would be side-lined’.[[186]](#endnote-186)

**Conclusion**

This article has revealed the impact that Thatcher’s relationship with U.S. presidents Jimmy Carter and subsequently Ronald Reagan had on the evolution of the British government’s Northern Ireland policy from 1979 to 1985.

Despite arguments to the contrary, it provides new evidence that Carter held a genuine interest in Northern Ireland and took an interventionalist approach to the subject, even if this was at the expense of his working relationship with Thatcher. Apart from a personal interest there were, of course, other factors that influenced Carter’s attitude to Northern Ireland, not least the role played by the powerful Irish-American lobby, under the auspices of The Four Horsemen. It is also argued, however, that in the end Carter was unable to meaningfully influence Thatcher’s thinking on Northern Ireland.

This approach continued during the Reagan’s first-term as U.S. president, with Thatcher rarely coming under pressure from the White House *vis-à-vis* Northern Ireland. Rather, Reagan pursued a non-interventionalist approach, which reaffirmed his government’s policy of ‘non-involvement’ in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Yet, in the twelve months leading to the signing of the AIA, a significant metamorphosis occurred regarding U.S. thinking on Northern Ireland. Under the influence of William Clarke and the Irish-American lobby, now under the auspices of the FOI (chiefly Tip O’Neill), Reagan was encouraged to drop his ‘hands off’ U.S policy towards Northern Ireland.

Thereafter, Reagan regularly petitioned Thatcher to continue with the ongoing dialogue with the Irish government towards helping to find a lasting settlement to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Eventually, following several years of extensive talks between Dublin and London, the AIA was signed in November 1985. Despite Reagan ditching his non-interventionalist policy, new evidence has been provided to dispel the argument that he played a *pivotal* role in Thatcher’s decision to sign the AIA. In truth, more prominent factors determined Thatcher’s policy-making in relation to the AIA, not least her determination to improve cross-border security.

Leaving aside the motivations for why Thatcher decided to sign the AIA, one point is indisputable: without her support, the Agreement would never have never come to fruition. She was the linchpin of the entire enterprise. In fact, although Thatcher, herself, never saw it this way,[[187]](#endnote-187) the signing of the AIA was one of her finest diplomatic achievements, ranking up there alongside Zimbabwe. Her decision to sign the AIA launched a process of dialogue between the British and Irish governments that would open the doorway to the early stages of the Northern Ireland peace process and eventually the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998.

1. Charles Powell to Margaret Thatcher, 30 Oct. 1985. The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Prime Minister’s Office (PREM) 19/1551. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Thompson, *American policy and Northern Ireland: a saga of peacebuilding*, 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kennedy continued: ‘I might be wrong, but I don’t believe there was any action by the administration during that time [1977-1980]’. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED M. Kennedy oral history’, 27 Feb. 2006. Miller Centre Oral Archive. Available from <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/edward-m-kennedy-oral-history-2272006-senator>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See, for example, Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 163 and Guelke, ‘British policy and international dimensions of the Northern Ireland conflict’, 145. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. O’Kane, ‘The Republic of Ireland’s policy towards Northern Ireland: the international dimension as a policy tool’, 132. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1979-1979’, 232. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 246. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Clarke also held the following posts: U.S. national security advisor (1982-1983) and U.S. secretary of the interior (1983-1985). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Devoy, ‘The British response to American interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 237. See also Gosse, ‘Ronald Reagan in Ireland, 1984: A different Cold War?’, 1168. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. See Thatcher’s comments to Alistair McAlpine. McAlpine, *One a jolly bagman*, 272. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Howe, *Conflict of loyalty*, 422. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jackson and Saunders, ‘Introduction: varieties of Thatcherism’, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Although in recent years copious studies have emerged which assess the ‘special relationship’ between the U.K. and the U.S. since the Cold War, these studies generally neglect to consider the Northern Ireland conflict. See, for example, Cooper, *The politics of diplomacy: U.S. presidents and the Northern Ireland conflict, 1967-1998*; Dumbrell, *A special relationship*; Ovendale, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century*; Baylis, *Anglo-American relations since 1939*; and Louis and Bull (eds), *The ‘Special Relationship’*. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America*, 198-211. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See Cochrane, ‘Irish-America, the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the utility of “soft power”’, 215-231. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See Devoy, ‘The British response to American interest in Northern Ireland, 1979-1979’, 221-238. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See Dumbrell, ‘The United States and the Northern Irish conflict 1969–94: from indifference to intervention’, 107-125. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See Fanning, ‘The Anglo-Irish alliance and the Irish question in the twentieth century’, 185-219. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See Thompson, *American policy and Northern Ireland*. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. See also, Goodlad, *Thatcher*, 153-168; Mulholland, ‘“Just another country”? The Irish question in the Thatcher years’, 180-196; Dixon, ‘Rethinking the international and Northern Ireland: a critique’, 407-426; Arthur, ‘American intervention in the Anglo-Irish peace process: incrementalism or interference?’, 46-64; MacGinty, ‘American influences on the Northern Ireland peace process’, 31-50; and Cronin, *Washington’s Irish policy 1916–1986*. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 365-370, 496 & 589-590 and Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*, 308, 323-325. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See, for example, Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher*; Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher, volume one*; and Young, *One of us*. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. See Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher*, 68-69 & 331. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See Carter, *Keeping faith*; and Reagan, *An American life*. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. See Aldous, *Reagan and Thatcher*; and Smith, *Reagan-Thatcher*. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. See Goodlad, *Thatcher*; Green*, Thatcher*; Jackson and Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher’s Britain*; and Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British politics*, 201-208. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See, for example, Dixon, ‘“The usual english doublespeak”: The British political parties and the Ulster Unionists, 1974-94’, 25-40; and Smith, ‘“Ever reliable friends’?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the twentieth century’, 70-103. See also Moore, *Ulster Unionism and the British Conservative Party.* [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. See, for example, Michael Cunningham, *British government policy in Northern Ireland* (Manchester, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. This article has utilised the follow department files held by TNA: PM; the Cabinet Office (CAB); the Northern Ireland (CJ); and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. This article has utilised the follow personal papers held by University of Cambridge (UC) Churchill Archives Centre (CAC): Margaret Thatcher Papers (THCR). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. This article has utilised the follow department files held by the National Archives of Ireland (NAI): the Department of the Taoiseach (DT). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. See <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. This article has utilised the follow department files held by The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum Folder Citation: Office of Staff Secretary; Series; Presidential Files, Folder: 8/26/77. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. This article has utilised the follow oral interviews held by Miller Centre Oral Archive: interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED KENNEDY AND THE TROUBLES, PART 1’, 17 May 2016; ‘Edward M. Kennedy Oral History (3/20/2006), Senator’, 20 March 2016; Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED M. Kennedy oral history’, 27 Feb. 2006; and interview with Seán Donlon, ‘Garret FitzGerald Oral History, Prime Minister of Ireland’, 28 Sept. 2005 [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. See, for example, Henderson, *Mandarin: the diaries of an Ambassador*; McAlpine, *One a jolly bagman: memoirs*; Howe, *Conflict of loyalty*; FitzGerald, *All in a life*; and Prior, *A balance of power*. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. See, for example, author’s nterview with Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 27 Oct. 2015. See also author’s interview with Michael Lillis, 18 March 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. See House of Commons debates, House of Commons Hansard archives. Available from <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. This article has utilised several newspapers, including, *The Economist*, *The* *Irish Times* and *The Times* and *The Washington Post*. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See Fanning, ‘The Anglo-Irish alliance and the Irish question in the twentieth century’, 204-207. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Quoted in Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 226-227. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *John Hume in American*, 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. A copy of Carter’s Northern Ireland speech was reproduced in *Washington Post*, 31 Aug. 1977. See also ‘Proposed statement on Northern Ireland’, to be delivered by U.S. president Carter, 26 Aug. 1977. The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Folder Citation: Office of Staff Secretary; Series; Presidential Files; Folder: 8/26/77. Available from [http://jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/findings/Staff­\_Secretary.pdf](http://jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/findings/Staff_Secretary.pdf). In fact, the previous year, in 1976, the Irish National Caucus successfully petitioned Carter, the Democratic Party nominee for U.S. president to ‘express a concern over British human rights violations in Northern Ireland, just six days before the election’. See Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America*, 208. See also, McManus, *My American struggle for justice in Northern Ireland*, 121-127 & Guelke, ‘The United States, Irish America and the Northern Ireland Peace Process’, 525-526. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. MacGinty, ‘American influences on the Northern Ireland peace process’, 2-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. *Irish Times*, 31 Aug. 1977. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Cochrane, ‘Irish-America, the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the utility of “soft power”’, 220. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Comments by Carter. ‘In the name of peace: John Hume in America’ (2017). Documentary, written, produced and directed by Maurice Fitzpatrick. For further details, see<https://johnhumeinamerica.com/learn-more/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 227-228. See also Guelke, ‘The American connection to the Northern Ireland conflict’, 33 and Paul Arthur, *Special relationships,* 139-140. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. See, for example, *The Economist*, ‘American spoon in the pot’, 3 Sept. 1977. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. *The Irish Times*, 1 Sept. 1977. Neave was murdered by the INLA in a car bomb attack in March 1979. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. See Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America*, 205. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. See Wilson, *Irish-America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 126-140. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. See British memorandum, ‘United States: Attitude to Northern Ireland’, unsigned and undated, circa 1987. TNA CJ 4/5450. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. See Warren Christopher to Jimmy Carter, 11 Aug. 1977. The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Folder Citation: Office of Staff Secretary; Series; Presidential Files; Folder: 8/26/77. Available from [http://jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/findings/Staff­\_Secretary.pdf](http://jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/findings/Staff_Secretary.pdf). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America*, 205. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. For further reading on NORAID see Hanley, ‘The politics of Noraid’, 1-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Stephen Kelly, ‘*A failed political entity’: Charles Haughey and the Northern Ireland question, 1945-1992* (Kildare, 2016), 129. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Guelke, ‘The United States, Irish America and the Northern Ireland Peace Process’, 523. See also Cochrane, ‘Irish-American the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the utility of soft power’, 218. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Cochrane, ‘Irish-America, the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the “utility of soft power”’, 218. See also Brundage, *Irish Nationalists in America*, 198-199. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. See British memorandum, ‘United States: Attitude to Northern Ireland’, unsigned and undated, circa 1987. TNA CJ 4/5450. See also Cochrane, ‘Irish-America, the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the utility of “soft power”’, 218. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Dumbrell, ‘The United States and the Northern Irish conflict 1969–94’, 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘Edward M. Kennedy Oral History (3/20/2006), Senator’, 20 March 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘Edward M. Kennedy Oral History (3/20/2006), Senator’, 20 March 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED KENNEDY AND THE TROUBLES, PART 1’, 17 May 2016. Miller Centre Oral Archive. Available from <https://millercenter.org/issues-policy/foreign-policy/ted-kennedy-and-the-troubles-part-1>. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. ## Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘Edward M. Kennedy Oral History (3/20/2006), Senator’, 20 March 2016.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. FCO steering brief in advance of Thatcher-Lynch meeting, 3 Sept. 1979. TNA FCO 87/866. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. See confidential NIO memorandum, ‘Northern Ireland and the Irish Dimension’, undated and unsigned, circa 1979. TNA CJ 4/2589. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. See Philip L. V Mallet, Republic of Ireland Dept. to R. M. Russell, Washington, 23 Feb. 1978. TNA CJ 4/4323. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED M. Kennedy oral history’, 27 Feb. 2006. Miller Centre Oral Archive. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Prior, *A balance of power*, 220. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. See, for example, briefing note: ‘U.S. Administration and Northern Ireland and developments relating to the sale of arms to the RUC’, May 1980. NAI DT 2010/53/928/1. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Comments by Carter. ‘In the name of peace: John Hume in America’ (2017). [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Comments by Carter. ‘In the name of peace: John Hume in America’ (2017). Documentary, written, produced and directed by Maurice Fitzpatrick. For further details, see<https://johnhumeinamerica.com/learn-more/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. O’Neill continued: ‘It has been nearly two years since you expressed American concern for the conflict and violence in Northern Ireland. Interest in the Northern Ireland issue has continued to grow among members of Congress and the American public’. See Tip O’Neill to Jimmy Carter, 22 June 1979. The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, Folder Citation: Collection: Office of Staff Secretary; Series: Presidential Files; Folder: 7/17/79; Container 124. Available from <https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/sso/148878/124/SSO_148878_124_05.pdf>. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Arthur, *Special relationships*, 141. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Arthur, *Special relationships*, 141. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Record of telephone conversation between Carter and Thatcher, 4 July 1979. TNA PREM 19/107. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. David Cannadine entry, ‘Margaret Thatcher’, in *The oxford dictionary of national biography*. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Thatcher to Carter, 20 July 1979. UC CAC THCR 3/1/2. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Thatcher to Carter, 20 July 1979. UC CAC THCR 3/1/2. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. SeeMoore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 589-590. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. SeeMoore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 366. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 365. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, 68-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 495. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Carter, *Keeping faith*, 113. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 370. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 496. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher*, 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 496. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Aitken, *Margaret Thatcher*, 296. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Briefing note: ‘U.S. Administration and Northern Ireland and developments relating to the sale of arms to the RUC’, May 1980. NAI DT 2010/53/928/1. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. A second, albeit less important, factor may have also influenced O’Neill’s thinking. According to Andrew Wilson, the speaker of the House of Representatives also hoped that in supporting such a ban Thatcher might be persuaded to initiate a ‘new political initiative’ for Northern Ireland [i.e. The Atkins’ Initiative]. See Wilson, *Irish-America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. ## Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED KENNEDY AND THE TROUBLES, PART 1’, 17 May 2016.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Wilson, *Irish-America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 160. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. See Guelke, ‘The United States, Irish America and the Northern Ireland Peace Process’, 527. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Henderson, *Mandarin*, 284. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 590. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Lord Carrington to Vance, 23 July 1979. Available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/117868>. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Briefing note: ‘U.S. Administration and Northern Ireland and developments relating to the sale of arms to the RUC’, May 1980. NAI DT 2010/53/928/1. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. The assassination of Lord Mountbatten, cousin to Queen Elizabeth II (in Co. Sligo, the Republic of Ireland), together with the murder of eighteen British soldiers (in Co. Down in Northern Ireland) on the same day, 27 Aug. 1979, by the PIRA, reinforced Thatcher’s determination to destroy Republican paramilitarism. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. See FCO steering brief in advance of Thatcher-Lynch meeting, 3 Sept. 1979. TNA FCO 87/866. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. # See British telegram from Washington to FCO, ‘UKE Washington to FCO (‘Arms for the R.U.C.’) [Carter indicates his support for sale of arms to RUC]’, 25 Nov. 1979. Available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/117908>. See also

     [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Record of Carter-Thatcher summit meeting, ‘Northern Ireland’, 17 Dec. 1979. TNA FCO 82/991. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. See, for example, Dumbrell, *A special relationship*. See also Aldous, *Reagan and Thatcher*, and Baylis, *Anglo-American relations since 1939*. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 547. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Thatcher, *Path to power*, 372. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Quoted in Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 374. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. See copy of British political profile of Ronald Reagan, circa 1982. TNA FCO 82/1230. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 547. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 547. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one*, 547. See also Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain:* 102. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Fanning, ‘The Anglo-Irish alliance and the Irish question in the twentieth century’, 209. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Copy of Reagan’s St. Patrick’s Day speech, 17 March 1981. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. See also TNA CJ 4/4321. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. For further reading *vis-à-vis* Anglo-American relations during the second Republican hunger strike of 1981 see, Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 176-196 and Thompson, *American policy and Northern Ireland*, 102-106. See also Hennessey, *hunger strike*, 213-214 & 361-362. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Quoted in Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 194. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Record of meeting between Thatcher and Reagan, 20 July 1981. TNA FCO 92/1093. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Kenny, *The American Irish*, 253. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. See Sir Nicholas Henderson to the FCO, 7 Jan. 1982. TNA CJ 4/4323. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. To the frustration of the British government during his vacation in Ireland, Clark gave an interview to *RTÉ* in which he expressed his desire to see eventual ‘[Irish] unification’. See Arthur, *Special relationships*, 148. See also A. K. C. Wood to A. J. Coles, 10 Dec. 1981. TNA CAB 164/1575. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Interview with Ted Kennedy, ‘TED M. Kennedy oral history’, 27 Feb. 2006. Miller Centre Oral Archive. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Interview with Seán Donlon, ‘Garret FitzGerald Oral History, Prime Minister of Ireland’, 28 Sept. 2005. Miller Centre Oral Archive. Available from <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/garret-fitzgerald-oral-history-prime-minister-ireland>. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. Comments by Seán Donlon. *RTÉ* Television documentary, *Thatcher: Ireland and the Iron Lady*. 2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
126. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
127. Comments by Haughey. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
128. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
129. Copy of Reagan’s St. Patrick’s Day speech, 17 March 1982. TNA CJ 4/4321. [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
130. See Jim Prior to Sir Nicholas Henderson, to 31 March 1982. TNA CJ 4/4323. [↑](#endnote-ref-130)
131. Record of meeting between Thatcher and Reagan, No. 10 Downing Street, 9 June 1982. TNA FCO 82/1230. [↑](#endnote-ref-131)
132. Record of meeting between Clark and Sir Nicholas Henderson, 12 Oct. 1982. TNA CJ 4/4321. [↑](#endnote-ref-132)
133. Copy of FCO steering note, ‘meeting with vice-president Bush’, marked ‘Northern Ireland’, circa 14 June 1983. TNA CJ 4/4321. [↑](#endnote-ref-133)
134. See copy of Reagan’s St. Patrick’s Day speech, 17 March 1983. TNA CJ 4/4321. [↑](#endnote-ref-134)
135. *Irish Times*, 6 July 1983. [↑](#endnote-ref-135)
136. *Irish Times*, 6 July 1983. [↑](#endnote-ref-136)
137. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 241. [↑](#endnote-ref-137)
138. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-138)
139. Record of interview with Reagan and Brian Farrell of the ‘Today-tonight’ *RTÉ* television programme, 28 May 1984. See TNA CJ 4/5450. [↑](#endnote-ref-139)
140. See ‘U.S. Administration attitude to Northern Ireland: summary briefing note’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-140)
141. See British memorandum, ‘President Reagan’s visit to Ireland, 1-4 June 1984’, unsigned and undated, circa 1985. TNA CJ 4/5450. See also TNA CJ 4/5020. [↑](#endnote-ref-141)
142. See note by David Tatham, ‘President Reagan in the Irish Republic: summary’, 12 June 1984. TNA FCO 87/1723. [↑](#endnote-ref-142)
143. See note by J. M. Lyon, ‘Prime Minister’s tete a tete with President Reagan’, 5 June 1984. TNA CJ 4/5450. [↑](#endnote-ref-143)
144. Following Thatcher’s Anglo-Irish summit meeting with taoiseach Garret FitzGerald, on 19 Nov. 1984, in response to whether she was supportive of any of the three findings of the New Ireland Forum, she declared, ‘I have made it quite clear … that a unified Ireland was one solution that is out. A second solution was confederation of the two states. That is out. A third solution was joint authority. That is out’. See record of speech by Thatcher, 19. Nov. 1984. NAI DT 2015/51/1374. [↑](#endnote-ref-144)
145. See note by D. J. R. Hill, ‘Meeting with Judge William Clark’, 16 May 1984. TNA CJ 4/5450. [↑](#endnote-ref-145)
146. FitzGerald, *All in a life*, 527. [↑](#endnote-ref-146)
147. Over the preceding years, Clark had built up a close working relationship with Donlon. By this period, Donlon was “an intellectual heavyweight” in the field of Irish-American relations and more generally Anglo-Irish relations. He had previously served as Irish ambassador in Washington from 1978 to 1981, during which time he had built up an excellent working relationship with prominent Irish-American politicians. Uniquely, during his period as Irish ambassador to the U.S., Donlon had also struck up a close personal relationship with Reagan. In fact, Reagan reportedly “came to Donlon’s house [in Washington] regularly: not one of the other 150+ Ambassadors in Washington D.C. – not the British, French or German for example – had a remotely comparable relationship”. See Kelly, *‘A failed political entity’,* 127-128 & 305. [↑](#endnote-ref-147)
148. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*, 244. [↑](#endnote-ref-148)
149. See Irish government memorandum, ‘The Friends of Ireland in the US Congress’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-149)
150. The first formal meeting of the FOI convened on 3 June 1981. Approximately, forty senators and congressional representatives from both the U.S. Democratic and Republican parties were registered as members See Irish government document, ‘The Friends of Ireland in the US Congress’, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. [↑](#endnote-ref-150)
151. Interview with Michael Lillis, 18 March 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-151)
152. Fanning, ‘The Anglo-Irish alliance and the Irish question in the twentieth century’, 208. [↑](#endnote-ref-152)
153. See Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, 434-435. See also Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*, 323-325. [↑](#endnote-ref-153)
154. Bew, *Ireland: the politics of enmity,* 533. [↑](#endnote-ref-154)
155. Patterson, *Ireland since 1939*, 259. [↑](#endnote-ref-155)
156. Fitzpatrick, *John Hume in American*, 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-156)
157. Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, 331. [↑](#endnote-ref-157)
158. Green, *Thatcher*, 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-158)
159. Quoted in Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*, 308. [↑](#endnote-ref-159)
160. See record of *tete-à-tete* between Reagan and Thatcher, 10.30am to 11.15am, 22 Dec. 1984. UC CAC THCR 1/10/78. [↑](#endnote-ref-160)
161. Record of meeting between Reagan and Thatcher, 11.20am, 22 Dec. 1984. TNA PREM 19/1656. Available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/149847>. [↑](#endnote-ref-161)
162. Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: a life and legacy*, 85. [↑](#endnote-ref-162)
163. Copy of speech by Reagan, White House Lawn, 2.30pm, 20 Feb. 1985. TNA PREM 19/1658. Available from <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/148166>. [↑](#endnote-ref-163)
164. Record of speech by Thatcher to joint House of U.S. Congress, 20 Feb. 1985. See <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105968>. [↑](#endnote-ref-164)
165. Fitzpatrick, *John Hume in American*, 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-165)
166. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*, 325. [↑](#endnote-ref-166)
167. *The Washington Post*, 21 Feb. 1985. [↑](#endnote-ref-167)
168. Leonard Appleyard to Thatcher, 20 June 1985. TNA PREM 19/1549. [↑](#endnote-ref-168)
169. For further reading on the Goodall-Lillis talks and Armstrong-Nally framework talks see Kelly, *‘A failed political entity’*, 303-312. [↑](#endnote-ref-169)
170. See Irish government memorandum, ‘Anglo-Irish exchanges’, 30 Jan. 1985. NAI DT 2015/89/89. [↑](#endnote-ref-170)
171. See record of the Armstrong-Nally framework talks, 3 Sept. (Dublin); 12-13 Sept. (London); 22-23 Sept. (Dublin); 29-30 Sept. (London). 7-8 Oct. (Dublin); 13-14 Oct. (London); 29-30 Oct. (Dublin); and 12 Nov. 1985 (Dublin). See NAI DT 2016/22/223 & NAI DT 2015/89/52. [↑](#endnote-ref-171)
172. A copy of the AIA (Nov. 1985) is available from TNA CAB 164/1777. [↑](#endnote-ref-172)
173. See Articles 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the AIA (Nov. 1985). [↑](#endnote-ref-173)
174. Robert Armstrong and Seán Donlon arranged this choreographed performance following their visit to the U.S. in the first week of Nov. 1985. See FitzGerald, *All in a life*, 562. [↑](#endnote-ref-174)
175. # UKE Washington telegram to FCO (‘Anglo-Irish Agreement’), 15 Nov. 1985. TNA PREM 19/1809/1.

     [↑](#endnote-ref-175)
176. # UKE Washington telegram to FCO (‘Anglo-Irish Agreement’), 15 Nov. 1985. TNA PREM 19/1809/1.

     [↑](#endnote-ref-176)
177. Quoted in Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*, 336. [↑](#endnote-ref-177)
178. Irish department government file, ‘U.S.A and Britain’, Vol. 5, circa 1987. NAI DT 2017/10/15. See also TNA PREM 19/1809/1. [↑](#endnote-ref-178)
179. See ‘The International Fund for Ireland’, annual report, 1987/88. TNA FCO 87/2715. [↑](#endnote-ref-179)
180. See record of meeting between Thatcher and FitzGerald, Luxemburg, 3 Dec. 1985. NAI DT 2015/89/67. See also Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher*, 402-403. [↑](#endnote-ref-180)
181. See, for example, Devoy, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1976–79’, 237, and Van Gosse, ‘Ronald Reagan in Ireland, 1984: A Different Cold War?’, *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Special Issue The "Un-American" (Nov. 2013), 1155-1174: 1168. [↑](#endnote-ref-181)
182. See Thatcher’s comments to Alistair McAlpine. McAlpine, *One a jolly bagman*, 272. [↑](#endnote-ref-182)
183. Interview with Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 27 Oct. 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-183)
184. See record of conversation between Goodall and Thatcher, circa early Dec. 1982. Quoted in Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one,* 622. [↑](#endnote-ref-184)
185. Powell to Thatcher, 30 Oct. 1985. TNA PREM 19/1551. [↑](#endnote-ref-185)
186. Comments by Seán Donlon. *RTÉ* Television documentary, *Thatcher: Ireland and the Iron Lady*. 2013. See also Young, *One of us*, 473-474. [↑](#endnote-ref-186)
187. In her memoir, Thatcher conceded that the AIA was ‘not perfect’ and that she was ultimately ‘disappointed’ by how it operated. See Thatcher, *Margaret Thatcher*, 402 & 415.

     **References**

     Aitken, Jonathan*, Margaret Thatcher: power and personality*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2013.

     Aldous, Richard, *Reagan and Thatcher: the difficult relationship*. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013.

     Arthur, Paul, *Special relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem.* Belfast: Blackstaff, 2001.

     Arthur, Paul, ‘American intervention in the Anglo-Irish peace process: incrementalism or interference?’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11 (1) (1997), 46-64.

     Baylis, John, *Anglo-American relations since 1939*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

     Bew, Paul, *Ireland: the politics of enmity, 1789-2006*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007.

     Brundage, David, *Irish Nationalists in America: the politics of exile, 1798-1998*. Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2016).

     Campbell, John, *Margaret Thatcher, volume one: the grocer’s daughter*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 2000.

     Carter, Jimmy, *Keeping faith: memoirs of a president*. London: Collins, 1982.

     Cochrane, Feargal, ‘Irish-America, the end of the IRA’s armed struggle and the utility of “soft power”’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 44 (2) (2007), 215-231.

     Cooper, James, *The politics of diplomacy: U.S. presidents and the Northern Ireland conflict, 1967-1998*.Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016.

     Cronin, Seán, *Washington’s Irish policy 1916–1986: independence, partition, neutrality*. Dublin: Anvil Books, 1987.

     Devoy, Luke, ‘The British response to American Interest in Northern Ireland, 1979-1979’, *I*rish Studies in International Affairs, Vol. 25 (2014), 221-238.

     Dixon, Paul, ‘Rethinking the international and Northern Ireland: a critique’, in Cox, Michael, Guelke, Adrian and Stephen, Fiona (eds), *A farewell to arms?: beyond the Good Friday Agreement* (Manchester, 2006), 407-426.

     Dixon, Paul, ‘“The usual english doublespeak”: The British political parties and the Ulster Unionists, 1974-94’, *Irish Political Studies*, 9:1 (2007), 25-40.

     Dumbrell, John, ‘The United States and the Northern Irish conflict 1969–94: from indifference to intervention’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs* (Reflections on the Northern Ireland conflict and peace process), Jan. (2018), 107-125.

     Dumbrell, John *A special relationship: Anglo-American relations from the Cold War to Iraq.* London: Palgrave, 2006.

     Fanning, Ronan, ‘The Anglo-Irish alliance and the Irish question in the twentieth century’, in Devlin, Judith and Clarke, B. Howard (eds), *European encounters: essays in memory of Albert Lovett.* Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003, 185-219.

     FitzGerald, Garret, *All in a life:* *Garret FitzGerald, an autobiography*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1991.

     Fitzpatrick, Maurice, *John Hume in American: from Derry to DC*. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2017.

     Goodlad, Graham, *Thatcher*. Oxon; Routledge, 2016.

     Gosse, Van, ‘Ronald Reagan in Ireland, 1984: A different Cold War?’, *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 4, special issue The "Un-American" (Nov. 2013), 1155-1174.

     Green*,* E.H.H., *Thatcher*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

     Guelke, Adrian, ‘British policy and international dimensions of the Northern Ireland conflict’, *Regional Politics and Policy*,Vol. 1 (2) (1991), 140-160.

     Guelke, Adrian, ‘The American connection to the Northern Ireland conflict’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vo. 1 No. 4 (1984), 27-39.

     Guelke, Adrian, ‘The United States, Irish America and the Northern Ireland Peace Process’, *International Affairs*, (July 1996), 521-536.

     Hanley, Brian, ‘The politics of Noraid’, *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 19 (1) (2004), 1-17.

     Henderson, Nicholas, *Mandarin: the diaries of an Ambassador*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

     Howe, Geoffrey, *Conflict of loyalty*. London: Pan, 1995.

     Jackson, Ben and Saunders, Robert, ‘Introduction: varieties of Thatcherism’, in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

     Kavanagh, Dennis, *Thatcherism and British politics: the end of consensus?*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

     Kelly, Stephen *‘A failed political entity’: Charles Haughey and the Northern Ireland question, 1945-1992.* Kildare: Merrion Press, 2016.

     Kenny, Kevin, *The American Irish: a history*. Essex: Longman, 2000.

     Louis, Roger, W.M. and Bull, Hedley (eds), *The ‘Special Relationship’: Anglo-American relations since 1945*.Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

     MacGinty, Roger, ‘American influences on the Northern Ireland peace process’, *The journal of conflict studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1997), 31-50.

     McAlpine, Alistair, *One a jolly bagman: memoirs*. London: W&N, 1997.

     McManus, Sean, *My American struggle for justice in Northern Ireland*. Washington: Irish National Caucus Publications, 2012.

     Moore, Charles, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume one: not for turning*. London: Allen Lane, 2013.

     Moore,Charles, *Margaret Thatcher: the authorized biography, volume two*: *everything she wants*. London: Allen Lane, 2015.

     Moore, Jonathan*, Ulster Unionism and the British Conservative Party.* London: London Irish Research Centre, 1997.

     Mulholland, Marc, ‘“Just another country”? The Irish question in the Thatcher years’, in Jackson and Saunders (eds), *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, 180-196.

     O’Kane, Eamonn, ‘The Republic of Ireland’s policy towards Northern Ireland: the international dimension as a policy tool’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 13 (2002), 121-133.

     Ovendale, Ritchie, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century (British History in Perspective)*. London: Palgrave, 1998.

     Patterson, Henry, *Ireland since 1939: the persistence of conflict*. Dublin: Penguin **Ireland,** 2006,

     Prior, Jim, *A balance of power*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986.

     Reagan, Ronald, *An American life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.

     Smith, Geoffrey*, Reagan-Thatcher*. London: Bodley Head Ltd, 1990.

     Smith, Jeremy, ‘“Ever reliable friends’?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the twentieth century’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 490 (Feb., 2006), 70-103.

     Thatcher,Margaret, *Margaret Thatcher: the Downing Street years*. London: HarperCollins 1993.

     Thompson, E. Joseph, *American policy and Northern Ireland: a saga of peacebuilding*. Mayo: Praeger Publishers, 2001.

     Vinen, Richard, *Thatcher’s Britain: the politics and social upheaval of the 1980s.* London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2010.

     Young, Hugo, *One of us: a biography of Margaret Thatcher*. London: Macmillan, 1989.

     Wilson, Andrew, *Irish America and the Ulster conflict, 1968-1995*. Belfast: Blackstaff, 1995. [↑](#endnote-ref-187)