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The role of an intermediary in back-channel negotiation: Evidence from the Brendan Duddy papers

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Introduction

During three extended periods between 1973 and 1993 the British government was involved in intensive secret contact with the IRA leadership through the same intermediary, Brendan Duddy, a businessman from Derry who had extensive contacts with the Provisional Republican leadership. During the first period Duddy's home was the venue for a series of secret meetings in 1975 between the IRA leadership and senior British officials. During the second period, in 1980-81, Duddy was at the centre of intricate negotiations aimed at resolving the hunger strikes and between 1990 and 1993 he was intensely active in contacts between the British government and the IRA. The 1993 contacts culminated in an IRA offer of a ceasefire that was a precursor to the public ceasefire declaration of 1994. Throughout this period he held on to documentation related to these communications while also keeping a diary during particularly intense periods of negotiation in 1975 and 1976, the period on which this paper focuses. Brendan Duddy deposited his papers in the NUI Galway archive in early 2009 and they are a prime source of documentary evidence for this paper. They are supplemented by multiple research interviews with Brendan Duddy conducted by the author between 2004 and 2009, including over thirty hours of interviews conducted during 2009. These recorded interviews will be deposited in the archive. This paper also draws on interviews with former Sinn Féin President Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, and a senior British official involved in these contacts, as well as other primary sources including documents from the UK National Archives and newspaper reports, to identify some of the key dimensions to the role of intermediary in back-channel communication. It argues that these sources help us to better understand the complexity and ambiguity of the role of intermediary in sensitive covert negotiations, as well as shedding light on the extent to which an intermediary shapes

communication between two parties rather than simply acting as a channel between them.

Context: the background to a covert diplomatic initiative

Negotiation and communication between representatives of the British state on the one hand and IRA representatives on the other, date back to the very beginning of direct day-to-day British involvement in the politics of Northern Ireland with the deployment of British troops on the streets of Derry and Belfast in August 1969. Negotiations to remove the barricades that then surrounded parts of Derry and west Belfast involved senior military officers, British government officials and police officers in contact with local defence associations in which IRA figures played central roles. Although fully prepared to authorise negotiation with known IRA commanders, even at this early stage the British government established a distinct hierarchy of communication limiting contact with the IRA. Thus, when a delegation travelled to London to discuss the barricades, British Home Secretary Jim Callaghan ensured that he did not come into direct personal contact with senior IRA commander Jim Sullivan (Callaghan 1973).

Close contact and negotiation that would subsequently be minimised and disowned not only by the British government but also by the IRA continued to one degree or another into early 1971 but these lines of communication were severed as the Provisional IRA launched an offensive campaign against the British army (Hamill 1985).

These early contacts differed fundamentally from later contacts because the IRA was not then involved in an armed offensive and they involved a wide range of relatively low-ranking officials and military personnel but they nonetheless share certain key features with the channels of communication that later developed. They were shrouded in secrecy. They aroused powerful opposition from Unionists and were characterised subsequently as a cause of escalating conflict through the recognition and authority they accorded to the IRA. They involved a careful limiting of the level of contact made with the IRA. The central aim, in the beginning as during later periods, was to reduce violence and confrontation and restore public order. Contact

with the IRA could be justified on the basis that senior IRA figures, and the IRA as an organisation, enjoyed significant popular support and was a source of power with the capability to restrain violent action against the security forces. Despite criticisms that such contact legitimised the IRA, the benefits of such contacts were often direct and immediate, with those early contacts securing a removal of barricades without violent confrontation.

Despite involving direct contact between the British army, police commanders and government officials on the one hand and groups that included IRA commanders on the other, even at this early stage third party intermediaries such as the Catholic church and moderate Catholic politicians also played a role, exerting direct pressure for a negotiated agreement and acting as a bridge between the security forces and those maintaining the barricades (Bishop and Mallie 1988; McElroy 1991). As the Provisional IRA campaign escalated during 1971 and direct contact with the British state was broken off, intermediaries became the primary means by which communication took place.

The origins of the channel of communication that operated intermittently between 1973 and 1993, can be traced to a meeting between Howard Smith, the UK Representative in Northern Ireland, and representatives of a wide range of moderate nationalist opinion in Derry in August 1971, a meeting that has featured prominently in debates over Bloody Sunday. The meeting was arranged by the local RUC Chief Superintendent, Frank Lagan and after the meeting Smith commented in a report to London:

General Tuzo and I both consider the meeting to have been worthwhile...I am inclined to think that we might usefully develop our contacts in other places as well as Londonderry...This extension of our contacts would mean going outside Belfast and while I should wish to do a certain amount myself I would need to share it...'

(Smith to Woodfield 1971)

The official appointed as Smith's deputy in October 1971 in response to this request was senior MI6 agent Frank Steele. Steele's appointment was directly justified on the

basis of following up the kind of contacts developed through Lagan with a wide range of critical voices in the Catholic community. In a communication to London a few weeks after his appointment Steele mentioned:

...conversations during the last few days [on policing], for example in Londonderry yesterday afternoon with a group of people who included Catholics (admittedly moderate ones) living in or working in Creggan' (Steele to Woodfield, 1971).

Creggan at that stage was a no go area surrounded by barricades, behind which the IRA operated openly. It seems highly likely that it was through Lagan that Steele was meeting Catholics from Creggan on occasions like this, particularly since policing was the topic of discussion. Lagan's wide circle of contacts in the Catholic community, many of whom Steele now gained access to, included Brendan Duddy, who had an ongoing working relationship with Lagan in which a high degree of mutual trust had been established (Ó Dochartaigh 2005; 2008).

Duddy was not involved in Steele's first attempts to negotiate with the IRA in 1972. With SDLP leader John Hume and others acting as intermediaries, Steele arranged a meeting on the outskirts of Derry in June 1972 with senior IRA commander Daithí Ó Conaill and Gerry Adams and subsequently brought an IRA delegation to London to meet Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Willie Whitelaw. This contact subsequently broke down with recriminations on all sides and a British ban on future direct contact with the IRA (Garnett and Aitken 2003).

The 1972 contacts organised by Frank Steele shared a number of key features with the channel of communication established from 1973 onwards in which Brendan Duddy was involved. In the first place, they were sanctioned at the highest level, directly involving British government ministers. The communication Duddy was involved in was similarly sanctioned at the highest level with the direct involvement, to one degree or another, of the various British Prime Ministers in power at the time. Thus, the 1975 talks held at Brendan Duddy's house appear to have been personally sanctioned by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson and knowledge of the talks was initially so tightly restricted that not even the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

was informed (Taylor 2001). Documents on the hunger strike negotiations in 1981 recently released under the Freedom of Information Act similarly illustrate that detailed proposals for compromise worked out through this channel were subject to the direct approval of Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. And the accounts of John Major and Patrick Mayhew confirm that both were directly involved, to different degrees, in assessing the communication with the IRA through this channel (Mallie and McKittrick 2001).

Secondly, it appears that contact through this channel was predominantly dealt with by senior MI6 agents, albeit acting under the auspices of MI5 in the case of the 1990-93 communications. That is, they were conducted by senior British covert diplomats. It is worth emphasizing that Steele, who originated these contacts, and Oatley who succeeded him, were extremely senior personnel, both of them with extensive experience in situations of conflict outside Europe. In this sense this channel from the beginning was not only sanctioned at the highest level, but had something of the character of an international diplomatic initiative. The channel involved an implicit recognition of both the international and political dimensions to the conflict. This was in tune with the eventual settlement arrived at in Northern Ireland under the Belfast Agreement / Good Friday Agreement but in tension with an 'internal security' approach dominant among policy-makers for long periods of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Finally, this channel was treated as a primary channel of direct communication between the British government and the IRA. A coded summary of the development of this channel in the Duddy papers, apparently written by a British official, describes an ongoing struggle to establish this as the primary channel of communication, a struggle that finally ended in early 1975. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh has confirmed this characterisation of the channel as the single approved communication route. He recalls an occasion when the IRA leadership sent a message to the British government by another route, in case the message sent via Duddy had not reached its intended recipient. He recalls that this attempt triggered a message from the British that the Provisionals should not attempt communication by any other route (O Brádaigh interview).

Despite a prohibition on contact with the IRA after the 1972 talks, Steele continued to receive feelers from people seeking to act as intermediaries between the British government and the IRA in late 1972 and we can see a direct continuity between Steele's efforts in 1972 and the contacts that Steele's replacement Michael Oatley built up from 1973 onwards. The coded summary of the development of this channel in the Duddy papers refers to the period from September 1972 to January 1973 as 'Phase One'. It was during this period that Steele recorded approaches from a number of intermediaries and it seems likely that the document posits a continuity between Steele's late 1972 consideration of various approaches and Oatley's subsequent establishment of indirect communication with the IRA. Oatley was posted to Northern Ireland in spring 1973 and worked alongside Steele during a transition period. During this transition period Duddy was among the people that Steele mentioned to Oatley as a possible contact. Duddy does not recollect meeting Steele although he has been told by a colleague of Steele's that he did meet him in 1973. He does recall being aware of Steele through Chief Superintendent Frank Lagan (Duddy, interviews 2009).

While maintaining close contact with the RUC Chief, Duddy also had long-established links to people who were centrally involved in the Provisional IRA in Derry. Duddy's relationship with senior Republicans in Derry dates back to personal friendships and dense social connections forged in the 1950s and 1960s (Duddy interviews 2009).

Duddy was also, by his own account, in contact with two of the most senior Provisional Republican leaders, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, and Daithí Ó Conaill well before he met Oatley. It's not possible to date this connection precisely. Duddy's direct contact with national leadership figures in Provisional Sinn Féin and the IRA may date back further but it dates back to at least August 1971. Duddy recalls meeting Ó Brádaigh, and Ó Conaill at a meeting in Monaghan attended by a wide variety of nationalist figures. This appears to be the August 1971 meeting of Dáil Uladh to which Sinn Féin invited representatives from all political persuasions, including the SDLP and Ulster Unionists (White 2006). It involved people outside Sinn Féin, some of them present as observers. Thus by the time Duddy first had contact with Michael Oatley, his links with Republican leaders at national level had been in place for some time.

The dangers of simultaneously being in touch with a senior police chief, the IRA leadership and an MI6 agent at the heart of British security policy in Northern Ireland, illustrate the extreme difficulty and ambiguity of an intermediary in a violent conflict situation, particularly at such an early stage when they have no formal mandate or permission from any of these parties to be simultaneously in contact with the other. This ambiguity created a minefield. Even after Duddy began to act as an intermediary with formal sanction from both sides to engage with their opponents and convey their views, there was always the danger that those lower down the hierarchies of both the British state and the IRA, could interpret these necessarily secret contacts in their own way and punish what might appear to be illegitimate activity. In addition there is an inherent tension involved in the role of moving back and forward between two sides involved in violent confrontation, conveying the thinking and explanations of one side to the other. Even where both sides mandate such contact they inevitably have a complex and ambiguous relationship with the intermediary.

Some time in 1973 Brendan Duddy and Michael Oatley were introduced in Derry and began a long period of intense cooperation. The coded document referred to above identifies the 14th and 29th of November 1973, just before the Sunningdale agreement began to collapse, as the 'Opening of Phase Two'. This cooperation culminated in the beginning of direct talks between the IRA and British government representatives in Duddy's house in Derry in early 1975.

The Duddy Papers

The Brendan Duddy papers deposited at NUI Galway in 2009 consist of several hundred items spanning the years 1969-2006. The process of listing the papers is still underway. Many of these items are secondary material, including newspaper clippings, official documents and pamphlets that provide valuable context. There is huge variety in the type of material included with some of the listed items consisting of no more than a short scribbled note while others extend to over a hundred pages. The papers are supplemented by a series of research interviews with Brendan Duddy conducted by the author during 2009. The interviews are aimed at clarifying and elaborating on some of the issues associated with the papers, providing oral testimony

on periods and topics for which there is no written record, adding to the documentary evidence.

The new empirical material in the papers related to these channels of communication is relatively sparse for the earliest period, prior to 1975. The first direct contemporary written evidence in the Duddy papers is a March 1974 letter from MI6 agent Michael Oatley, ostensibly requesting a meeting with Duddy in relationship to the 'House' project for alcoholics that he was involved in. This provides written confirmation that contact dates back to at least that date, but existing oral evidence establishes that it began considerably earlier. Duddy identifies the letter as providing cover for a meeting between him and Oatley and as an example of the way in which Oatley worked. The most substantial evidence for this early period comes from a coded narrative of the development of this channel of communication between late 1972 and February 1975 written at a later date, and mentioned above. The earliest period for which there is a large volume of new primary documentary evidence is 1975 when formal negotiations between British government and IRA representatives were held in Duddy's home in Derry. Throughout 1975 and for much of 1976 Duddy kept a diary providing a dense detailed narrative and analysis of the ongoing negotiations and his contacts with both the Provisional Republican leadership and British officials involved in those negotiations.

There are clear difficulties with using diaries as evidence but the diary entries can be checked against other sources and Duddy's narrative is compatible with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh's notes of the 1975 meetings between British officials and the IRA. Further work is necessary to trace the connections between the conversations that Duddy reports with British and Republican representatives and the progress of the direct face-to-face negotiations between the two sides. The diary entries can also be related to public statements by republican and British leaders and to the public records now available for this period. The diaries are particularly valuable as evidence of the role played by an intermediary in such a delicate situation, and evidence of that intermediary's analysis of the positions and strategies of the two sides and of the progress of negotiations.

The diaries are coded and many individuals and locations are identified only by codenames. Some of these codes match the codes used in the Republican notes of the talks, but they include codes that haven't appeared in other documents including the designation of a regular meeting place between Duddy and MI6 agents near Derry as 'the coffee-house'. One immediate question to be raised over a diary of this kind is the question of authenticity. The handwriting and Duddy's own evidence make it clear that he is the author. The complex, fractured, ambiguous, sometimes contradictory and sometimes very personal story that they tell also strongly suggest that the diaries are a contemporary record that has not been subsequently altered.

The 1975 papers also include scraps of paper that provide additional evidence, directions to a meeting-place, for example, written on the back of an envelope, or a handwritten note from participants involved in the negotiations. In addition, interviews have been conducted with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and a British official involved in the talks in 1975 which provide additional sources confirming some of the evidence from the diaries.

Dialogue

The word dialogue is frequently employed to describe the way in which this channel of communication was used but there has been relatively little academic analysis of the role that dialogue played. Written messages and records of formal meetings predominate in the existing documentary evidence and tend to direct attention to the details of negotiation and the meaning of short cryptic messages and away from the long drawn out and largely unrecorded dialogue that formed the background to the 1975 negotiations and that remained a crucial element throughout those negotiations.

British officials involved in these contacts identify dialogue as a key element. Michael Oatley, for example, told Taylor that a central problem for him was "how to begin and then conduct a dialogue with the IRA leadership without doing so directly. If at some stage there were to be negotiations, the ground had to be prepared". Frank Cooper similarly used the phrase in relation to these contacts indicating that dialogue had a quite precise meaning for those involved on the British side, and was consciously deployed by them (Taylor 2002: 166-7, 170).

One theorist of dialogue characterizes it in the following terms:

“I fully take in your viewpoint, engaging with it in the deepest sense of the term. You do likewise. Each of us internalizes the views of the other to enhance our mutual understanding” (Yankelovich 1999). In this sense, dialogue involves a process of building mutual understanding in order to facilitate negotiation. This kind of communication involves relationships of power and is subject to manipulation just as any other form of communication is. Mutual understanding is not an inherently benevolent concept. Nonetheless, the quality and the intensity of dialogue can directly increase levels of mutual understanding of the constraints within which an opposing party operates and the extent to which the opposing party might be prepared to modify its position. And given that mutual understanding is recognised as a key element in successful negotiation (Fisher and Ury 1999), we can think of dialogue not as a vague woolly term but as a very precise strategy for improving the prospects for successful negotiation.

Inherent to the concept is a willingness to be convinced, to be transformed, to move away from your existing position and closer to that of your opponent. Oatley has provided one small concrete example of this in stating that he came to understand that the ongoing use of violence by the IRA was compatible with a desire for a peaceful negotiated settlement (Taylor 2002).

The Duddy papers do not provide documentary evidence of dialogue prior to 1975 but the diaries provide extensive written evidence of the extent and character of such dialogue in 1975 and 1976, illustrating that the time spent by Duddy in discussion with Provisional Republican leaders on the one hand and British representatives on the other in between formal meetings far exceeded the time spent in formal meetings. These conversations often centred around developing an understanding of the positions of the other party and the diaries suggest that some of the groundwork for the formal negotiations were laid in these conversations between meetings.

The 1975 and 1976 diaries show a pattern and an intensity of contact that provides support for Duddy’s testimony in interviews that he spent hundreds of hours talking to Ó Brádaigh and Ó Conaill on the one hand and Michael Oatley on the other

throughout late 1973 and 1974, explaining the British position to the Republicans and vice versa. By this account, the groundwork for the formal negotiations of 1975 was laid not by a few short cryptic messages transmitted by Duddy from one side to the other in late 1974, but through hundreds of hours of long and often very general conversations on the character of the conflict, the forces constraining both parties and the prospects for negotiation. As Duddy describes it, he would listen for up to four hours to hear a single sentence or half sentence from Oatley or Ó Brádaigh or Ó Conaill that had the potential to produce movement when relayed to the other side. The intensity, regularity and recorded length of contacts between Duddy and senior figures on both sides during 1975 is certainly consistent with a pre-existing pattern of intense ongoing contact and long general conversations.

A few entries from the diary give some flavour of the extent and character of this dialogue in 1975. Duddy's diary includes the following entry just before a formal meeting between British government and IRA representatives in March 1975 for example:

Mon. 10/3/75

4 hour meeting with (British representative) James Allen. Pointed out the lack of British leadership. Police and Internment. Big problem. Total agreement.

I asked who was blocking progress. Again told me the Machine.

Told A. great danger of breakdown in later month.

And the following entry describes a conversation with Billy McKee, Belfast commander of the IRA, just after the formal meeting ended at midnight the following day

Tues. 25/3/75

I had a political discussion from 12:30 until 1:30.

Mc Kee said that James Allen was only a message boy and he wasn't going to waste any more time on him.

I suggested that it was very difficult to really judge, being so close to history.

I explained that the British had no way of controlling the RUC and the BA had its own lobby and was very difficult to control. But really, the British wanted their cake and money back as well.

Other entries illustrate Duddy's efforts to explain Republican positions to his British interlocuters:

Thurs. 19/6/75

Thurs. morning up at 9am... Met [British representative] at 10:15...Told me how impossible it was to get through the British fog. How I was the only one predicting disaster... The total depression I feel is difficult to describe. I spent 11 hrs. today talking, pointing out and out and out the traditional Irish Rep. Nat. position.

Existing academic analyses focus, understandably, on the detail of negotiation, analysing the respective positions of the British government and the IRA on the basis primarily of documentary evidence including official papers and the O Brádaigh papers. The very nature of much of the available evidence highlights key moments when the ongoing contact was crystallised in written agreements or formal written messages. The Ó Brádaigh notes do of course provide a more extensive and textured account of the face-to-face meetings between British government and IRA representatives. The notes indicate that these meetings were not simply negotiating sessions dealing with points of detail but also provided an occasion for direct dialogue between the British and the IRA on broader issues. British representatives used these sessions to make broader political arguments that involved an attempt, as the British saw it, to 'educate' the IRA on the limitations on British action. At the same time IRA representatives took the opportunity to put forward political proposals and to argue in more general terms. But even these documents relate to formal occasions focused primarily on direct negotiation. The Duddy diaries provide evidence for the first time of the intensity and frequency of dialogue between the intermediary and both the British and IRA representatives outside those formal meetings.

The extent of this dialogue complicates the image of a communication 'pipe' through which short cryptic messages were occasionally fed. It also casts new light on the role

of intermediary, with the dialogue between intermediary and the two parties as a much more substantial component of this communication than the existing analyses suggest. If we see these messages as devised at one end, parcelled up and handed to the intermediary for delivery to the other end, it obscures the fact that those messages are, to a great degree, the outcome of hundreds of hours of wide-ranging conversations aimed at explaining the dynamics, political positions and needs of one side to the other, and therefore obscures the importance of dialogue in the role of intermediary.

In a situation of violent conflict where direct contact is rejected, there are few opportunities for dialogue, for long exploratory conversations aimed at developing an understanding of the underlying fears, objectives and motivations of opponents. The extent of dialogue, the character of dialogue and the relationship between dialogue and formal negotiations in this channel of communication, and consequently the importance of dialogue to this ongoing intermittent communication channel between the British government and the IRA has been relatively neglected in the existing literature. A more systematic focus on this aspect of the communication and a fuller engagement with the academic literature on dialogue could substantially improve our understanding of the character of such communication channels.

Mediation

Mediators are active at the intersection between opposing sides, actively seeking to draw them closer together. The role of mediator is, by definition an active one, and the literature on the topic has identified a wide range of ways in which mediators shape the interaction between opposing parties, analysing the differences between third parties with the capacity to apply severe coercion, such as the US and NATO in the case of Bosnian peace talks, for example, and mediators with little coercive capacity (Bercovitch 2009).

A certain element of mediation is arguably inherent to the role of intermediary but the Duddy papers provide evidence of the extent to which an intermediary can act as active mediator and can expand this aspect of the role, shaping the communication between opposing sides rather than simply facilitating it. The focus of academic

analysis on the passing of messages and the meaning of these texts tends to obscure the way in which these 'messages' emerge at the intersection between the intermediary and the two sides.

The literature on mediation identifies a variety of ways in which mediators shape contact between opposing parties and apply pressure for compromise. One of the key ways is through their influence on the choice of venue. By exercising influence over the venue they can play a major role in shaping the interaction that takes place and potentially improve the prospects for agreement (Bercovitch 2009). Perhaps the most direct evidence of the active mediation involved in the 1975 talks was the fact that Duddy's house was the venue for those talks and Duddy was responsible for practical arrangements including travel by Republicans to the talks. According to Duddy, this was at his insistence. He was in this sense the host of the talks, placing him at the centre of the formal direct contacts between the two sides, even though he was not officially involved in the formal face to face negotiations. It undoubtedly increased his ongoing influence on the interaction between the two sides and strongly institutionalised his position at the intersection between the two sides.

Academic analyses differentiate between mediators with strong and weak coercive capacities. At first glance an intermediary acting to convey messages does not have any obvious coercive capacities at his or her disposal. If they refuse to deliver a message the parties involved can presumably find a replacement messenger who is prepared to faithfully convey messages. The Duddy papers and in particular the diaries for 1975 and 1976, provide evidence of some of the ways in which an intermediary can exercise both coercive and persuasive force on the two parties.

One key source of power for Duddy derived from the fact that the British government was extremely reluctant to make any concessions of even the most minor kind to the IRA after the first few months of contact. At the same time, it was in the interests of the British government that the IRA remain on ceasefire. In this context a key method for the intermediary to exercise pressure on the British government was to threaten to resign. In the circumstances that existed by the spring of 1975, withdrawal by the intermediary might well be a sufficient, if not a necessary trigger to end the IRA ceasefire. If the intermediary had simply been a messenger he might be replaced, but

the fact that he played an active role as mediator meant that his resignation would have much more serious consequences.

The intermediary sought to use the power generated at the intersection between the two sides to exert pressure for compromise. The following extract provides one example:

Saturday 19/7/75

Phoned [British representative] at 2pm and insisted on a meeting. He immediately agreed. He is due here at 5pm. [British representative] was in British mood. He began to explain that the B. Gov. might not be able come on Tuesday 22nd ... I immediately recognised the usual British backsliding, and I was personally very annoyed after all the work I had done to get the drift to war halted. I reacted very strongly and said I was not going to let this “drift” position develop. I challenged [British representative] saying I would cut off the talks, and that I could then begin to enjoy life with my children, letting whoever likes do the work.

Another entry illustrates the capacity the intermediary had to shape communication between the two sides

I arrived in Belfast at 7pm [for a meeting with a British representative]. .. Sat down smile relaxed, thirty hours of work well spent. [British representative] handed me the British answer.

BOMBSHELL totally unacceptable. All the usual British Humbug. Very badly worded. I said NO, I can't or won't take it. [British representative] said Sir Fr and M Rees had insisted on the changes. Very Bad. I almost walked out. But of course I didn't. Finally at 3am [British representative] agreed to retype the British answer, I said it would be just acceptable in its new form.

This evidence emphasizes not only that the role of mediator is to a degree inherent to the role of intermediary but that an active intermediary can significantly expand the space available for mediation and exert a degree of independent power, even to the extent of exerting a degree of coercion over the actors involved. It is arguably very

difficult to separate out the role of intermediary from that of mediator. At the very least, the tone and the mood in which a communication is conveyed, the emphasis that is placed on it and the commentary accompanying it, in the context of the existing relationship between the intermediary and those to whom they are conveying messages, shapes that communication. In this case an intermediary with long-established personal relationships with key negotiators on both sides, could expand the role to encompass a much more active form of mediation than is usually associated with the role of an intermediary

Conclusion

The role of intermediary in back-channel communication is sometimes understood simply as a facilitator of communication, in its crudest and simplest form as a deliverer of messages, a medium for communication. The role is analytically separated out from the role of the two sides who are seen as distinct and bounded entities, devising messages and strategies and then putting them in the post for delivery to their opponents. The fact that formal records are often dominated by those short written communications that are formally passed from one side to the other, encourages historians and analysts to focus on the delivery of messages, and can obscure the hundreds and thousands of hours of human interaction, changing human relationships, and dialogue which generate these pieces of paper. Such messages can sometimes be jointly devised to facilitate movement at both ends of the communication chain. Ury and Fisher (1991; 80) cite a British diplomat as saying that his job is “helping my opposite number get new instructions...” and the contacts between the British government and the IRA sometimes have the character of a co-operative process, shaped at the intersection between the two, allowing those on either side to ‘get new instructions’. This should not obscure the fact that this intersection can also be a space of deceit, of penetration, of surveillance, of manipulation, and a struggle for advantage, a space of ambiguity, obscure intentions and acts of bad faith. But it can also provide a space for an interactive cooperative process that in itself contributes to the reshaping of relationships between those involved. The Duddy papers provide a significant insight into the role of an intermediary in this cooperative process, illustrating that an individual at the centre of such contact can significantly

expand the role and play a much more active role than is generally associated with the role of intermediary.

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