

refused to enter government with Sinn Fein until the IRA began to disarm. Unlike Sinn Fein, no political parties associated with the UVF or the UDA qualified for a seat in the Executive (which is the Assembly's Cabinet), and Loyalist decommissioning, while required, did not have the same urgency in terms of getting the Assembly up and running. By the Fall of 1999 no IRA decommissioning had taken place and the Assembly remained inactive. The Secretary of State recalled George Mitchell to conduct a review of the Agreement, the IRA and the UDA named representatives to the Commission, our talks with them started, and the Assembly was finally convened early in 2000. But as a result of subsequent delays over decommissioning, and later allegations of republican paramilitary spying, it was to be suspended, recalled and then suspended once again in 2002, not to be set up again until May last year.

It was only in November 2001, after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, that the first IRA decommissioning event took place, and it was a further four years before we and the IRA finished decommissioning their arms. Even then the circumstances of the process left some dissatisfied. A decommissioning event by a small Loyalist paramilitary group, the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), had taken place in the Fall of 1998 shortly after the Agreement was approved, allowing for the early release of prisoners. The LVF, which hoped to have some of its prisoners qualify for early release, declared a cease-fire and conducted a decommissioning event in front of the cameras in which some firearms were cut up, and ammunition and explosives were destroyed by the Commission at a British army base. This event, while small in terms of the amount of arms dealt with, nonetheless left a public appetite for visible decommissioning. But our discussions with the IRA representative made it clear to us that if their arms were to be decommissioned it would not be publicly. Citing the International Body's report on the desirability of avoiding the connotation of humiliation, surrender or defeat, the IRA insisted on a process that involved only the members of the Commission, and in later events two church ministers as witnesses. But they accepted that our remit called for us to validate the actual process while it happened, as well as to make an inventory of the arms decommissioned for delivery to the two governments when the decommissioning of all of the paramilitary groups' arms had been completed.

I believe the reason that IRA decommissioning was protracted over more than five years was due to three circumstances. The first was the IRA's intention to see that all the terms of the Agreement were executed as