

## The Northern Ireland Conflict:

### A Struggle Thought to Never End

The Northern Ireland conflict is especially noteworthy because of the increasing concern about terrorism Worldwide and the apparent progress being made in reducing the violence there. The Isle of Ireland is about the size of South Carolina and Northern Ireland only accounts for one sixth of it. The flight from Belfast to London is just a little more than an hour's time. It is a struggle, which began more than 800 years ago. It, however, began to again intensify in 1968, making it part of most peoples' entire adult Life. This paper will examine the impact of the struggle, its history and origins, and the recent progress towards an ultimate resolution.

The Troubles: "The Troubles," as the current Northern Ireland conflict is known, did not break out on any specific date, but emerged as the result of several years of escalating incidents between Catholics and Protestants. This latest episode of the long-standing conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland has been going on for more than thirty years, and although a peaceful resolution to this costly struggle is now in sight, it is not guaranteed. The Troubles have been protracted and costly in every sense of the word. From the time of the first civil rights marches in 1968 the cost, in both human and material terms, has been steadily mounting. Between 1968 and 1994, over 3,500 people died and over 35,000 were injured in Northern Ireland as a direct result of the fighting. Despite numerous cease fire and peace agreements, more than another 100 have died and 5,000 more have been injured. Much of the casualties have been civilians. Robberies, bombings (mostly car bombs), assassinations, and terror tactics spread to engulf Great Britain and the Irish Republic, greatly decreasing the common person's sense of security and impinging on the populace's personal freedom. The violence has even spread to other countries, such as the Netherlands and West Germany. Civil rights in Northern Ireland have been seriously eroded, and freedom in the name of safety has been sacrificed to some extent in both Great Britain and the Irish Republic. In material terms, Northern Ireland drains over £3 billion annually from the British treasury while increased security and border patrols cost the Irish Republic over one-quarter of its annual budget.

The garrison, which was charged to controlled the conflict, was comprised of the regular British army regiments, the locally recruited Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) and the militarized state police of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC),. In 1994, they held the occupied area with a combined military strength of 32,085 personnel. The British army had a total of 135 installations within their control, while the RUC had a total of 161. It was estimated that 1994 troop levels equaled one British Army/RUC member for every 3.7 Catholic males between the ages of 16 and 44.

The economy of Northern Ireland was also deeply affected by the conflict. Manufacturing employment in Northern Ireland declined by over 40 per cent between 1968 and 1994; increasing the province's dependence on Great Britain for subsidies to maintain its standard of living. While part of this decline can be attributed to the then decline of the world economy in the early 1970s, the 'branch plant' structure of industry in Northern Ireland also contributed to the sharp deterioration in economic conditions within the region. These foreign-owned assembly or secondary production branch plants closed down when violence increased operating costs in the province. The fact that these plants lacked research and development or marketing facilities and were secondary (as opposed to main) plants meant that these low priority plants in Northern Ireland could shift their production elsewhere at minimal cost to their foreign owners. The constant threat of bombings, high cost of security, and lack of a stable internal market made plant openings unattractive and drove away large manufacturers in great numbers. In fact, only massive growth in government and security service jobs held off increases in unemployment figures until the second oil shock of 1979, when Northern Ireland joined the rest of the world in recession.

The History and Origins of the Conflict: England took control of Ireland in the twelfth century, introducing their own people and spreading their influence and Catholic religion. Then Scottish Protestants immigrated to Ireland, both voluntarily and involuntarily, in the sixteenth century. England encourages the immigration of their own Protestant settlers in the seventeenth century, as part of the plantation of Ireland, because they believed it would increase the agricultural productivity of Ireland. The English appropriated lands from the native Irish, making them tenants of the Protestant landlords.

There were numerous revolts by the Catholics against their Protestant landlords. The historic province of Ulster, a stronghold of Gaelic culture in the north of Ireland, successfully resisted British encroachments until the Plantation of 1609. Earlier waves of colonization had supplanted the Irish gentry with Protestant British landlords, leaving the bulk of the population Catholic and Irish. The settlement of Ulster in 1609, by contrast, was massive in scale and resulted in the intrusion of a Protestant culture that was completely alien to its Catholic inhabitants. Massacres of both Protestants and Catholics took place throughout the 1600s, as the two sides battled for supremacy and the right to occupy the land each now called home. The most important of these to the folklore of Ulster was the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, in which the Protestants scored a massive victory over the Catholics.

Mistrust and bad feelings resulting from the colonization of Ireland by Protestant settlers were followed by centuries of political and social segregation of Catholics and Protestants in all of Ireland. After the victory of William of Orange (the Protestant challenger who deposed the Catholic king, James II), laws were enacted by the all-Protestant Parliament of Ireland barring Catholics from all offices, land ownership, schooling, and other avenues leading toward wealth and education. These laws effectively entrenched the existing hatreds between the two communities and glorified violent action by one community to 'defend' itself from the other. The conditions created as a result of these laws became important during the early part of the twentieth century,

when escalating violence and rebellion forced Great Britain to consider granting Ireland some form of 'Home Rule', a limited form of self-government.

Both Catholic and Protestant extremists rejected the plan out of hand. The Catholics, led by Sinn Féin, felt that only full independence could satisfy them. The Protestant Unionists, on the other hand, greatly feared being ruled by the Catholic majority and went as far as to threaten the secession of Northern Ireland from Great Britain into a sovereign state if the British did not back away from their plans to give all of Ireland Home Rule. The resulting compromise was the partitioning of Ireland into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in 1920.

The Partition of Ireland did little to ease the sectarian mistrust and separateness between Catholics and Protestants left in the six counties of Ulster which were devolved to Unionist rule. Each community continued to be defined by its religious affiliation, with little mixture between the two groups. Education, neighborhoods, workplaces, entertainment, and numerous other social activities remained segregated. The names of places also continue to be used to denote religious and national affiliation. For example, those aligned with the Protestant Unionists call Londonderry<sup>1</sup> by its official name, while those of Nationalist sentiment refer to it as Derry.

After the Partition of Ireland in 1920, sporadic violence continued between the two communities. A party of Catholic Irish in the Northern Ireland then formed the Provisional Irish Republic Army (PIRA or commonly known as IRA) to fight for both civil rights in Catholic areas and to press for the unification of the six northern counties with the 32 counties in the newly partitioned republic of Ireland to the south. The original IRA had been the armed combatants fighting for the independence of the Republic of Ireland, which they succeeded in winning by 1921.

The violence in Northern Ireland after the partition was cyclic in nature and often coincided with downturns in the local economy (e.g., riots during the depression of the 1930s). Conversely, when the economy picked up, as it did in the post-war years, ethnic violence subsided; for example, during a peak of the economy in the 1950s, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was unable to launch a successful bid for secession due to apathy in the Catholic community. The pattern of separate settlements, school districts, and employment, however, continued as before.

In the late 1960s groups of Catholics and liberal Protestants gathered together to form the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). They were inspired by the civil rights movements in the United States and elsewhere. NICRA set out to right wrongs through the dissemination of information, street protests, and later the use of civil disobedience campaigns aimed at changing the discriminatory practices and policies of the Unionist government. Centered around equalizing the political and continued economic disparity between Catholics and Protestants, NICRA's demands called for universal suffrage; the repeal of the Special Powers Act; the disbanding of the B Specials (Protestant paramilitary); the re-drawing of electoral boundaries; and the imposition of laws designed to end discrimination in public employment and public housing. NICRA,

unlike the IRA and its disciples, had decided to take a stake in the existing political formation and was demanding certain changes so that their participation could proceed on an equal and fair level. Rather than attacking the legitimacy of the state or opting out, members of NICRA saw their future as part of Northern Ireland's state, and they were therefore willing to take steps to integrate more fully into the existing system.

The fears of the Protestant Community were of extinction. It is generated out of a perception of threat to Cultural Identity, with past perceptions being projected onto current events. In the case of the Protestants in Northern Ireland, historical incidents of violence and massacre have been mythologized and used as the template for understanding modern Protestant-Catholic relations. One event that has colored perceptions of Protestant / Catholic relations was the massacres of Protestants that took place during the Catholic uprising of 1641. Irish rebels in Ulster then killed and expelled several thousand Protestant settlers. This event, particularly the massacre of eighty Protestant men, women and children at Portadown, has repeatedly been used by Protestants (most notably the Reverend Ian Paisley) in making comparisons between Catholic behavior at that time and the contemporary actions of the IRA. Although it seems improbable, fear of extinction is quite real in the minds of Protestants who not only do not want to lose their position in society, but fear a cultural 'genocide' if they are forced into a union with the Republic of Ireland to the south. Shortly after the Act of Union was passed by Westminster in 1800, Irish extremists staged several unsuccessful revolts. The bloodiest of these was called the Tithe War and was fought because Catholics did not want to pay legally-owed tithes to the Protestant Anglican Church of Ireland. The result was the conversion of tithes into rent in 1838, severing the direct connection to the church and easing the sectarian tension for a time.

The third reminder of violence between the two communities took place between Irish Nationalists and British authorities between 1919 and 1922. Sparked by the 'Easter Rebellion' of April 1916, Sinn Féin members and a nascent IRA instigated attacks on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the Auxiliaries and later the infamous 'Black and Tans', resulting in an ugly war of attack and reprisal, which killed hundreds. It was during this uprising and subsequent civil war that the British passed the Act of Partition and set up Home Rule for the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. By the mid-1920s the pro-treaty forces had won the bitter civil war and Northern Ireland had been created as a Protestant enclave.

Among the issues which contribute the most to Protestant insecurity and their fear of extinction in Northern Ireland is the 4.2 million Catholics who lived south of the border and their link (through the Roman Catholic Church) to Catholics in continental Europe and the Vatican in Rome. Within Northern Ireland itself Protestants make up about only 45 per cent (compared to 40 percent who are Catholic) of the population of 1.8 million people, but if united with the south, then the Protestants would move from being a majority to a minority, subject (they fear) to the will of the Catholics.. The portion of the Northern Ireland population, which is Protestant is declining as the higher birth rate

among Catholic families increase their numbers. Protestants accounted for 58 percent 10 years ago.

The fear of extinction manifested itself as fear of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion and divorce (although recent changes will allow women to leave the country for an abortion) and the difficulty of obtaining legal divorces. Another target of Protestant fears was the special status of the Roman Catholic Church in the republic's constitution, which was not changed until the passage of a referendum in 1973. The twin fears of Catholic violence and Catholic domination have become a part of the Cultural Identity of Protestants in Northern Ireland, lying below the surface and waiting for events (or individuals) to bring them into full bloom, which is precisely what happened when activists with NICRA began their public demonstrations in 1968.

The physical segregation of the two communities can be attributed to various reasons, not all of which stem from a fear of violence. For instance, as most schooling is conducted by religious denomination, it makes sense for Protestant and Catholic families to find housing closer to their schools. Church attendance is high in Northern Ireland, with the church community providing the structure for social interaction. In addition, marriages in Northern Ireland primarily take place with people from the same local area, creating elaborate family-based structures that tend to be exclusionary and segregated. These trends tend to isolate and insulate local communities from outside influences, preserving old attitudes towards outsiders and considerable conformity within the community.

Like most cultural differences, the roots of the Protestant-Catholic enmity in Northern Ireland are buried in the distant past, with fresh incidents only serving to reopen old wounds and solidify negative stereotypes. The siege mentality of the Unionists continues to stem from the fortified townships in which they were forced to live following the 'Plantation' of 1609. Thus, each new threat is perceived as dire, within the context of brutal pogroms which took place hundreds of years before. For example, in 1964, the Unionists rioted in response to the legal Nationalist opposition party flying the Irish Tricolour; rather than the Union Jack, from their local headquarters in Belfast.

The Catholics still feel as if they have an alien culture living amongst them. This feeling has been enhanced through the separation of the two communities and the continued enforcement of the Special Powers Act of 1922. This act, designed to combat IRA resistance to Partition, was left in force until well after the beginning of the Troubles, thus perpetuating a climate of mistrust that has yet to be dispelled.

With the exception of their competition for the same resources, the two communities can be characterized by a lack of contact. Their lack of contact has created feelings of deep distrust between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Those deep feelings do not condition daily relations, but flare up in response to specific events. For example, the IRA started a new campaign for secession between 1956 and 1962; however, its decision in 1962 to renounce military activity resulted from the fact that it's "defeat owed more to apathy than to the efficiency of law enforcement machinery." Since the Catholic

community did not have a strong perception of relative deprivation, the feelings of mistrust and hatred did not surface. As a result, the IRA was unable to generate support for its secessionist campaign.

The IRA was able to re-establish itself and its military methods in 1969 / 1970, as a result of the rising frustrations of the Catholic populace, rather than the continuing ethnic hatreds between the two communities. Many authors have noted that violence in Northern Ireland stems from reactions to real (or perceived) discrimination between the two groups. This discrimination has a long historical record, dating to the fifteenth century when it was sanctioned as a tool to pacify an occupied land and settle a Protestant populace who would prove more loyal to the Crown than its Catholic inhabitants.

Under representation of Catholics extended throughout most levels of Northern Ireland's government. For example, the proportional representation (PR) system left in place by the British ensured that the Catholics would control about 40 per cent of the local councils; but, the ending of PR and the redrawing of local government boundaries by the Unionist parliament at Stormont (The Northern Ireland Capital body) quickly reversed the trend. While Catholic Nationalists won control of twenty-five out of the eighty local councils in 1920, the gerrymandering of 1922 ensured that in the 1924 elections they controlled only two out of eighty local councils.

The redrawn boundaries were particularly effective as a result of new legislation introduced to restrict voting rights. Two categories of voters were formed to ensure Protestant dominance at the polls: (1) the 'ratepayers', primary occupiers of a household as either tenants or owners, and (2) persons who owned commercial property valued at £10 or more per year. As only two people per house were allowed to vote, the ratepayer category effectively excluded lodgers or adult children living at home. Both lodgers and adult children living at home tended to be Catholics due to their lower overall economic status and larger families; thus, Catholic franchise was restricted. People in the second category, that is, owners of commercial property, were allowed to nominate special voters for each £10 of value of their property, up to a maximum of six voters. Since over 90 per cent of the commercial property in Northern Ireland was Protestant owned, this provision expanded their voting franchise and, along with the ratepayer category, extended Unionist control over the ballot box and the government.

These types of discrimination were so blatant that the Cameron Commission investigation of 1968 issued a report critical of the local electoral system. The Commission reported that in Derry, while Catholics made up over 60 per cent of the electorate, due to the districting system, they won only 40 per cent of the County Borough seats. This is only one example among many in which the gerrymandering of districts produced Unionist majorities on local councils in communities that were predominantly Catholic.

Acts ostensibly aimed at increasing security but used to intimidate and discriminate against Catholics were utilized by the Unionist parliament at Stormont to ensure Protestant control of Northern Ireland. The most prominent of these was the Special

Powers Act of 1922, which was implemented to stem the tide of Nationalist violence by splinter groups of the IRA who did not accept the terms of Partition. Although most of the secessionist violence ceased by 1927, the Special Powers Act remained in force until it was repealed by the British government in 1973, well after the beginning of the Troubles. Under the Act, government forces were given considerable latitude in their conduct towards suspected individuals and broad powers of search and seizure. The Act permitted actions such as Internment without trial for unspecified periods of time, search and seizures without a warrant, and powers of censorship. The most interesting feature of the Special Powers Act was its clause that "if any person does any act of such nature as to be prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland and not specifically provided for in the regulations, he shall be deemed to be guilty of an offence against the regulations." Thus, if the police suspected an individual of not preserving the peace or maintaining order, they could detain the individual for an indefinite period of time without charges or a trial.

The Special Powers Act was enforced by the police force, the RUC, and its paramilitary reservists, the Ulster Special Constabulary.

The RUC was unique at that time in that, unlike their British counterparts, its officers were required to carry arms and trained with heavy weapons in military tactics. The RUC also differed from the British police in that it was centrally controlled by the RUC Inspector General and the Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs. Although the 3,000-man force (later raised to 3,400) was legally required to reserve one-third of its spots for Catholics, the number of Catholics never reached higher than 12 per cent of the force. The small number of Catholics on the force is more reflective of the perception in the Catholic community that the RUC was a partisan force that bowed to political pressure than of discriminatory hiring practices. Numerous incidents of the RUC facing off with Catholic demonstrators while ignoring violence from Protestant corners testify to the differential treatment accorded the two communities.

In addition to the RUC, the government of Northern Ireland created the Ulster Special Constabulary in 1920 to combat IRA secessionist fighters, who were opposed to Partition. The Ulster Special Constabulary was divided into three corps: the A, B, and C Specials. The A and C Specials disbanded after Partition-related violence subsided, but the 'B Specials' survived until their group was disbanded by the British government at the beginning of Direct Rule by the British in 1972. Membership in the B Specials ranged from a maximum of 25,000 people to a minimum of just over 8,000 in 1969. The B Specials were usually several times larger in number than the police force and, given the task of combating potential subversion of the state, they were recruited as an exclusively Protestant paramilitary force. There were open ties between the B Specials the Orange Order and also with illegal Protestant paramilitary forces such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Many members of the B Specials were also members in the latter forces, and the units of the B Specials often used Orange Order lodges for training exercises and practice drills. The B Specials engaged in activities such as manning roadblocks and protecting selected installations during times of suspected IRA activity. Due to the large number of Protestant extremists in their ranks, the B Specials gained notoriety for their use of violence in the execution of their duties; offences included beatings, harassment,

and body searches of Catholics at checkpoints. Some of the victims were known to the B Specials as neighbors, but were nonetheless subjected to harsh treatments, unlike Protestants who were merely waived through. The B Specials came to be universally loathed by the Catholic community as a tool of Protestant repression and intimidation as a result of these and other well-published incidents.

The Increase of Violence Leading to “the Troubles”: By the mid-1960s there were several movements to expand Catholic awareness and participation in Northern Ireland's politics. Foremost among them was NICRA, but others (including the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), the Campaign for Social Justice, and the People's Democracy) were all advocating the return of Catholics to the ballot box and the revamping of Northern Ireland's legal structure to provide more equality for Catholics. Furthermore, Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, Terence O'Neill, had launched a mostly symbolic campaign to enlist Catholic support for the Unionist Party. During his tenure in office (1963-69) he attempted to move toward greater accommodation with the Catholic community by offering limited reforms that were primarily economic in nature (though some were political reforms). These reforms, while not enough for most of the Catholic community, did result in the Catholic Nationalist Party ending its twenty-five-year boycott of Stormont in 1965.

The dominant Unionist Party in Northern Ireland was not sufficiently separated from its Protestant support base to safely seek to bridge the gap between Catholics and Protestants by offering economic and political reforms. This can be seen in the harsh rhetoric and reprisals from hard-liners in the Protestant community. One such hard-liner, the Protestant fundamentalist leader Ian Paisley, stated that O'Neill was selling the Protestants down the river with his reform campaigns. By using the threats of O'Neill's reforms; NICRA's actions (which Paisley thought was merely a cover for the IRA); and the SDLP's call for an Irish dimension to Northern Ireland's politics, the Protestant fundamentalists fragmented the Unionist front through their creation of the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party in 1971 (DUP).

The violence itself began in 1968 at the beginning of NICRA's campaign of peaceful demonstrations to enlist the support of the Catholic community. Their first march, from Coalisland to Dungannon, took place peacefully in March 1968, but the second march in Derry was violently broken up by the RUC and the B Specials. Three months later the more radical student group, the People's Democracy, staged another peaceful march from Belfast to Derry. Police and Unionist crowds both attacked the marchers outside of Derry and within the city itself. The Cameron Commission investigation of these outbreaks of violence established "that on the night of January 30<sup>th</sup>, a number of policemen were guilty of misconduct which involved assault and battery, malicious damage to property in the streets in the predominantly Catholic Bogside area....and the use of provocative, sectarian and political slogans."

By the summer of 1969 increasing violence between the Unionist demonstrators (and police) and the Catholics (and a rejuvenated IRA) led to the intervention

of the British government, in the form of the military. The main incident was the annual Protestant Apprentice Boys of Derry parade, which marched through the city and around the city walls and close to the Catholic Bogside area. Instead of the usual stony looks and silence from the Catholic community, stones, petrol-bombs, and barricades met the marchers. After two days of fighting between the Catholics and police, the British Army was finally called in to separate the combatants. Between 1969 and 1971, the British government tried to introduce a number of reforms including many that had been demanded by NICRA and the SDLP. These included universal suffrage; the re-drawing of electoral districts; the disbanding of the B Specials; and the establishment of a new housing executive to handle distribution of public housing through an objective needs-based system. These reforms, however, were only partially implemented and (by that time) were not enough to satisfy the demands of the increasingly polarized Catholic community. For example, even though the B Specials were disbanded and the RUC disarmed, many of their members were allowed to enlist in the new Ulster Defense Regiment and the British Army. This only served to strain the relationship between the Catholic community and the Army, which was increasingly seen less as saviors and more as oppressors as time passed without significant lessening in violence.

The final straw, which escalated the violence to an insurgency, was the 1971 introduction of Internment without trial by the government of Northern Ireland. Using legislation from the Special Powers Act, Stormont introduced interment in August of 1971, with 342 men picked up in the first dawn raids. Since the British Army was instructed to carry out the Internment raids; they then became the focus of Catholic anger and demonstrations. The most famous of these anti-Internment demonstrations resulted in the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry in January 1972, when British soldiers fired into the Catholic crowd, killing thirteen people. Investigations into the event showed the soldiers had unnecessarily fired on the protestors, shooting some in the back and running over others. . By March of that year, the British government had dissolved Stormont (to rule directly from Westminster), Internment was in full swing with the implementation of the 'Diplock Courts', and the IRA had reconstituted itself fully by providing defense from police and Protestant paramilitaries to Catholic areas. The Troubles, which have lasted thirty plus years to date - resulting in thousands of deaths and millions of Pounds of damage - moved on that fateful morning from small-scale clashes to a full-blown sectarian conflict.

IRA and Cease fires: The Provisional IRA was largely young people when the Troubles began, amounting to 1,000 to 1,500 throughout the conflict. However, their leaders claim they have had eight to 10 thousand members pass through their ranks, quitting when they were either imprisoned or grew tired of the conflict. It is interesting to note the British government says they also had eight to 10 thousand IRA members imprisoned for some time during the conflict.

There is much debate about who the IRA is; be it made up of individuals who are criminals, civil rights fighters, separatists, or some combination of all these. It is clear they limited their options for bringing about change by choosing "the gun" as their means

of advocating change. Both their chosen method of advocating and their stated demand for unification of all 32 Irish counties made their demands “absolute.” Given the fears of the Protestants and the plurality of the Northern Irish populous in favor of partition, the British and other Ulster interests could not negotiate with the IRA.

Then the IRA changed their tactics in the 90s, supporting a cease fire in 1994 and then renewing it in 1997, after the initial truce failed due to the discovery of spies within their ranks. While some hoped these cease fire agreements were intended to allow negotiations, the British government and Northern Irish parties wanted disarmament of the IRA as evidence of their willingness to compromise. Hence, peace talks were making no progress.

Then US President Bill Clinton invited Sinn Féin’s leader Jerry Adams to the Whitehouse and gave a Visa to IRA leader Joe Cahill, permitting him travel to America. Clinton also appointed former US Senator George Mitchell to go to Northern Ireland to facilitate talks between the conflicting parties. British Prime Minister John Major was openly critical of Clinton’s talks with Adams and Cahill, but the results indicate such communications helped made progress towards the Good Friday agreement.

There is also much debate about what brought about the change in the IRA’s posture. Some contend their members were aging and growing tired of the conflict. They could have also become more accepting of the reality they would not win an “absolute victory” in their Life time. Much of their capital inflow may have been declining as Irish interests in the US were growing weary of the conflict and the IRA’s lack of progress towards a unified Ireland. The cash in flow from Moaham Gidhafi in Libya may have also been declining. The Republic of Ireland was increasingly critical of the IRA, as their actions had mounting impacts on their security and budget. The Republic of Ireland was less enthusiastic about acquiring the northern six counties, since their economy had fallen behind their own and would result in a drain on their treasury, if they were unified. The general populous in Northern Ireland were also growing impatient with the IRA and the damage they were inflicting on their life. Mothers of sons and daughters killed by the violence resulting from the conflict were organizing as the Northern Irish women’s Coalition and initiating peace marches and other protests of the violence by all parties. The economies of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland were significantly improving, reducing unemployment and increasing the home value of many Irish.

The Good Friday Agreement: The Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) was reached in Belfast on Friday, April 10 1998. It sets out a plan for devolved government in Northern Ireland on a stable and inclusive basis and provided for the creation of Human Rights and Equality commissions, the early release of terrorist prisoners, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and far reaching reforms of criminal justice and policing.

The Agreement proposed an inter-connected group of institutions from three ‘strands’ of relationships. Strand One deals with relationships within Northern Ireland and created the Northern Ireland Assembly, its Executive and the consultative Civic Forum. The

Assembly has 108 members, elected by proportional representation and Ministers to the Executive are appointed according to party strength under the d'Hondt mechanism. The last Assembly election was held in November, 2003.

Strand Two deals with relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A North-South Ministerial Conference (NSMC) brings together members of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government to oversee the work of six cross-border implementation bodies.

Strand Three deals with the East-West relationships within the British Isles. A British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference was established to promote bilateral co-operation between the UK and Ireland. It replaced the Anglo-Irish Inter-Governmental Council and Conference set up by the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985.

A British-Irish Council was also created that incorporates members of all devolved administrations within the UK and representatives of the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands as well as the British and Irish governments.

The Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission were created under the Agreement; there was a comprehensive review of criminal justice and policing arrangements and money was allocated to help victims of violence.

The agreement was a major step forward, but it was not a panacea. Violence stilled persisted, as 29 men, women and children died and hundreds were injured when the Real IRA detonated a car bomb in the County Tyrone town on 15 August 1998. The Real IRA and the Continuity IRA were splinter groups from the Provisional IRA. They did not agree with the IRA's changed posture favoring peace and negotiations.

Such groups have also been involved in continued criminal activities to raise funds. Members were arrested, for example, in 2001 in Columbia, accused of training leftist rebels in bomb making.

The Agreement's implementation significantly faltered, when it was discovered the British government had successfully infiltrated the ranks of the IRA with secret agents. Dennis O'Conle, a long time IRA leader, publicly admitted to such and was later found dead. The Irish assembly, which had last been elected in 2003 was disbanded and Northern Ireland returned to direct rule by the Secretary in West Minister.

The lack of progress primarily is centered on the decommissioning of arms of the IRA and Protestant paramilitary (the LUV). Both sides want evidence of such decommissioning and want not to do so before the other. Neither is willing to disarm by turning over their weapons to the British government. They instead are destroying the weapons as witness by the International Inspection Commission, which was established by the agreement. Since the IRA will not provide any further evidence of decommissioning, critics fear they have not truly disarmed, regardless of recent assertions of such.

Assembly elections also polarized the struggle for peace. The Ulster Unionist, a moderate party, lost representation to the new majority, the DUP, which is led by Ian Paisley. Paisley is a fundamentalist Christian, who received training at the Bob Jones Seminary in the US. He is extremely intolerant of homosexuals, new immigrants, as well as Catholics.

Despite the polarization of Northern Irish politics, increasing communal friction between Protestants and Catholic neighborhoods, the distrust of the IRA and its true intentions, there has been progress in the peace talks. All parties have successfully avoided significant violence in recent celebratory parades, a major cultural activity for both Protestant and Catholic enthusiasts. The Orange Order, the Protestants, have modified their marches, changing routes or agreeing to march silently through Catholic neighborhoods. Catholic residents in response have not blocked the Orange Order's parades. Such parades have been the stimuli for riots during the Troubles and throughout the centuries.

St Andrews Agreement: On October 13, 2006, Britain and Ireland struck accord on a blueprint for reviving self-rule in Northern Ireland. It resulted from three days of closed door, highly secured negotiations in Scotland. It is a major breakthrough. The St Andrew's Agreement still has to be formally endorsed by parties in the currently British-run province before a power-sharing government can be restored, four years after it was suspended.

Under the plan set out by Prime Minister Tony Blair and his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern, government could begin operating again from Belfast's Stormont Castle March 26, 2007. Northern Ireland's Protestant political leader Ian Paisley said in St Andrews that he hoped "the days of the gunmen (were) over forever", though he declined to comment immediately on the power-sharing draft.

Blair and Ahern were key contributors to hammering out the landmark 1998 Good Friday agreement, ending some three decades of so-called Troubles which left over 3,500 people dead, many at the hands of the IRA. Hopes for a deal were bolstered last week when the IIC confirmed that the IRA has renounced violence. Further cause for optimism came this week when Paisley met the head of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The St Andrews talks started amid general optimism Wednesday, but the mood rapidly chilled as the parties got down to the nitty-gritty of problems which have remained insoluble for years. After two days of negotiations, the talks had narrowed down Friday to a straight stand-off between the Catholic-backed Republican movement Sinn Fein and Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The two key sticking points were the DUP's refusal to share power with Sinn Fein, and Sinn Fein's refusal to back a historically Protestant-dominated police force.

Under the agreement, a so-called Program for Government Committee will meet from next week on a regular basis to begin preparations for the resumption of self-rule. Then

on November 21 legislation will be introduced in parliament in London to implement the St Andrews Agreement. On November 24 the Belfast assembly will meet to nominate a first minister and deputy first minister -- although they will not immediately hold power. That will only happen on March 26 next year.

The deal could yet falter if any of the parties fail to back the St Andrews accord by November 10. If they don't agree by November 10 ... the assembly will be dissolved, keeping Brittan in charge.

Lessons Learned: At the time of this paper, tensions between Unionist and Nationalist, Irish and British, Protestant and Catholic continue to run high. Regardless of the optimism generated by the recently signed St Andrew Agreement and the earlier Good Friday agreement mistrust between the two communities remains high and a host of difficult issues - such as acceptance of shared power and policing, as well the routing of Loyalist parades – continue to challenge leaders and ordinary residents on all sides. One can only hope that this agreement, unlike many that preceded it, can provide the basis for better understanding and a lasting peace between the two communities.

In hind sight, the British army was poorly trained for such a sub-state conflict. Even their poor success in their lost colonies should have given them reason to manage their policing of Northern Ireland and its opposing populous in such a manner as to not make the Security Forces “the enemy.” It may, however, be impossible for a third party to act as a security force between opposing parties in a Civil War without becoming part of the problem and prolonging the conflict.

The greatest lesson learned was to communicate with all parties involved as early as possible. While it may have been premature to open talks to the IRA and LUV at the beginning of the Troubles, it was clearly over due by the mid 1990s. It was and still is the courage of all leaders involved, which will eventually bring a lasting peace to Northern Ireland.