

# Simulation I

## **NOETHERN IRELAND CONFLICT BACKGROUNDER**

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The roots of the conflict in Northern Ireland lie in competing aspirations for self-determination under British rule, beginning with a series of English invasions of Ireland from the 12<sup>th</sup> century that set off more than seven centuries of Anglo-Irish struggle, marked by fierce rebellions and harsh repression. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Irish nationalism had gathered momentum, as had many other European and anti-colonial nationalisms, and began to pose a challenge to British rule.

The British response to Irish political mobilization was to propose home rule for Ireland within the United Kingdom. But the reaction to this policy within Ireland polarized Catholics and Protestants, and by the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century longstanding religious divisions hardened into an ethnic divide. Catholics increasingly saw themselves as Irish rather than British and politically pursued the goal of independence, while Protestants, particularly those concentrated in the north-east of the island, retained their sense of British identity, wished to maintain the union with Britain and strongly opposed home rule.

Catholics at this point constituted approximately 75% of the population, with Protestants a significant minority of 25%.

As Irish demands for independence increased in strength, so too did Protestant opposition to any form of accommodation with Irish nationalism. The British government also encountered strong opposition at home, including from the British army, to negotiations with Irish nationalists, because this was seen as imposing a solution on the loyal Protestant community. Opposition politicians exploited the difficulties the government found itself in. It was only on the eve of the First World War that the government enacted home rule legislation, but it involved the assumption that much of the north-east of the island, which fell within the province of Ulster, where Protestants constituted a majority of the population, would be excluded from home rule, though agreement was not reached on a precise mechanism for determining the area to be excluded.

The issue of what area should be excluded was an important one because it was based on religious demography. Should the whole province of Ulster (comprising nine counties) be permitted to opt out on the basis that Protestants constituted 55% of the overall population, or should each county decide for itself? On that basis only four counties in Ulster, and in fact, all of Ireland, would have been excluded, undermining Unionist aspirations. At a minimum, the Unionists wished for six Ulster counties to be excluded from home rule, leaving only the three Ulster counties with substantial Catholic majorities to have home rule. But even this minimum position caused the Unionist leadership difficulty. Why should Protestant leaders encourage the subdivision of Ulster, the hardliners asked.

On the Catholic side, the Irish Parliamentary Party's co-operation with the British war effort during World War I alienated many Irish nationalists and led to increased support for more radical parties, most particularly Sinn Féin ("ourselves alone"), which had been formed in 1905. Though home rule legislation was put on the statute book in 1914, it was accepted that implementation of home rule would be suspended for the course of the war. Unlike the IPP, radical Irish nationalists wanted to exploit the circumstances of the war to secure independence from the British, and this culminated in the Easter Rising of 1916. This armed uprising of Irish nationalists was crushed by military force. The execution, by the British, of the leaders of the uprising triggered an enormous wave of support for Irish independence and made resolution of the Ireland conflict imperative. But it also strengthened the position of Unionists in relation to the area to be excluded from rule from Dublin, so instead of four counties it was now accepted by Britain that six counties, including the cities of Belfast and Londonderry, would form part of a northern political entity.

Sinn Fein swept the 1918 Irish polls, formed an Irish Assembly and declared independence. Partly under the pressure of these events, the British government proposed the Government of Ireland Bill in 1919, by which Ireland would have two parliaments, one for the southern provinces and one for the northern counties. Both would be joined in a loose federation with Britain, under which Westminster (London) would retain control over foreign affairs, defense, trade, communications and "treason," and all other government functions would be transferred to the two parliaments.

Sinn Fein rejected the ensuing Government of Ireland Act of 1920 for two reasons: one, it embodied the continued subordination of both parts of Ireland to Britain; two, it would open the

door for the partition of Ireland, and the creation of a Unionist- controlled Northern Ireland. Anglo-Irish conflict spread across the south, west and north of the country, escalating to guerrilla war with the formation of the Irish Republican Army in the same year. By this point, Sinn Fein preferred that Ulster should remain under direct British rule because this would keep the possibility of eventual unification open, whereas a separate Northern Ireland parliament would provide a political and institutional base for partition.

Their fears were well-founded: the enactment of the Bill at the end of 1920 in a context of growing communal violence fueled the physical process of partition and allowed it to institutionalize itself. While the Act continued to be rejected by the Sinn Fein and so did not operate in southern Ireland, the Unionists began to prepare for an Ulster parliament, and well before elections were held in May 1921, the interim Unionist government had created and controlled Northern Ireland's institutions of administration, including an armed Special Constabulary for territorial defense, which was recruited from men determined to resist the IRA.

Ireland finally gained a measure of independence at the beginning of 1922, following agreement with the British in December 1921, but at the price of partition. Southern Ireland became the Irish Free State, with twenty-six counties, and the six counties of Ulster that comprised Northern Ireland remained with Britain. A civil war followed in the south over the terms of the treaty under which the Irish Free State had been established, with nationalists divided over the treaty. The pro-treaty forces eventually won it. As a concession to Irish nationalists, the British government had agreed to the establishment of a boundary commission chaired by the South African jurist Richard Feetham. Nationalists expected that the boundary commission would recommend substantial change to the boundary so that areas with Catholic majorities adjacent to the Irish Free State would be incorporated in the southern state. However, on grounds of economic viability, the commission proposed only a very modest modification of the border. The modification was so unsatisfactory from the perspective of the Irish government that it quickly agreed to the existing division of Ireland on the basis of the old country boundaries.

The partition of Ireland created a predominantly Catholic state in the south and a Northern Ireland in which the Protestant-Catholic ratio was almost two to one, though the gap was to narrow considerably in the following years. Demographically, Irish Protestants were concentrated in Northern Ireland, where they had migrated from bordering Scotland and further flung areas of Britain following English invasions from the 12<sup>th</sup> century on. Today, the Republic of Ireland,

comprising some 3.9 million people according to the 2002 census, is more than 95% Catholic. The population of Northern Ireland, on the other hand, comprising around 1.7 million people, was divided according to the census of 2001 between Protestants at 53% of the population and Catholics at 44%. Curiously, these figures were arrived at by assigning people not merely on the basis of their professed religion but on the basis of their religious upbringing.

Considerable violence accompanied partition in 1921-22, with more than 200 deaths in Northern Ireland in 1922. There was further violence after the Second World War, with the IRA launching a border campaign in 1956. In response, the governments in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland introduced internment without trial. The IRA called off its border campaign in 1962. In the 1960s, partly in imitation of events in the United States, Catholics launched a campaign for civil rights in Northern Ireland.

The emphasis of the campaign was on the discrimination that Catholics suffered under Unionist rule, rather than on self-determination for Northern Ireland's Catholics, which could entail further partition. Nevertheless, some Protestants remained very suspicious of the motives behind the campaign and responded violently to the peaceful protests organized by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, founded in February 1967. The Unionist government came under pressure from the Labour government in power at Westminster to introduce reforms.

Political tensions rose in Northern Ireland and there was increasing disorder on the streets. Ultimately the Unionist government was forced to seek assistance from the government in London. In August 1969, the British government sent troops into Northern Ireland, and in December, Catholic separatists formed the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA). Two years later, in 1971, a number of locally based Protestant vigilante groups came together to form the Ulster Defence Association, to fight the IRA.

Negotiations for a peaceful settlement began almost immediately after, yielding the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, under which the different Northern Ireland parties, the British government and the Irish government agreed to allow some measure of autonomy to Northern Ireland through devolution to a power-sharing executive, and also to provide a role for the Irish republic in Northern Ireland's future through a Council of Ireland. (Even though Irish claims to reunion were formally enshrined in its Constitution—"the national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas"—the Irish government was pursuing a more limited

agenda, which included a peaceful solution to the conflict, cross border institutional links and protection of the rights of Northern Ireland's Catholics.)

The Sunningdale Agreement laid the framework for the Good Friday Agreement nearly twenty years later, but at the time was brought to a halt by the powerful Protestant Ulster Workers' Council, which launched a general strike against the agreement, accusing its authors of paving the way for a united Ireland (in which Catholics would vastly outnumber Protestants).

The years following the failure of the agreement saw an intensification of violence. Over 1500 civilians and troops were killed in the 1970s, which also saw the British army and Royal Ulster Constabulary employ draconian counter-insurgency measures. By the early 1980s, the army and police succeeded in containing the loss of life to some extent, but the polarization between Catholics and Protestants continued to deepen.

## **Peace Process**

Despite the failure of the Sunningdale Agreement, back-track efforts to reach a durable peace continued, and in November 1985 the British and Irish governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement under which the British government undertook to consult the government of the Republic of Ireland on its policies in Northern Ireland (i.e., the British government gave the Irish government a role in Northern Ireland).

The rapprochement between Britain and Ireland set the stage for behind the scenes involvement of the Irish Government in talks with Sinn Féin in the period 1987-94. The talks marked a significant change of policy in the Republic of Ireland. Since 1973 successive Irish governments had sought to build a solution around getting the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and the biggest unionist party the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), into a power-sharing government, isolating the radicals on both sides—the Unionist paramilitaries as well as the Sinn Féin and the IRA.

It was presumed that popular support for such an initiative would allow the British and Irish governments to isolate and defeat the IRA. The lack of success with this strategy led the Irish government in the late 1980s to look at the possibilities for an inclusive peace process, involving Sinn Féin and the loyalist (unionist) paramilitaries, which sought to achieve cease-fires in

advance of all-party negotiations. This change in perspective was partly influenced by the SDLP leader, John Hume, who decided to engage in talks with Sinn Féin in 1987, and was greatly strengthened with the election of Albert Reynolds as Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and leader of the biggest political party in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fáil in 1992 (Mansergh, 1996).

The Sinn Fein-SDLP talks, which lasted one and a half years, were central to the origins of the peace process. Hume argued that a nationalist consensus—that is, a narrowing of the gap between the radical and moderate nationalist parties—as sought by Sinn Féin, was indeed possible, but it could only take place if there was an IRA cease-fire. These initial talks collapsed as the IRA did not see the need for a cease-fire at that time, and the collapse pushed the SDLP towards a new round of talks with the unionist parties, and a period of bitter attacks on Sinn Féin and the IRA. But the SDLP-Unionist talks did not progress either, and Hume turned again to talks with Sinn Féin.

The British government, then led by the Tory party, was clearly not convinced of this approach. Though the Tories signed the Anglo-Irish agreement, supported track II talks amongst moderates, and went so far as to declare Britain had “no selfish or strategic interests” in Northern Ireland, their focus was on minimal internal reform and a strategy to contain and marginalize the Sinn Fein and IRA. However, the combined Irish government and SDLP efforts did lead to a series of breakthroughs that paved the way for a cease-fire. In 1992, the Sinn Fein published the landmark, *Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland*, and in 1993 John Hume and Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein, issued their first joint statement calling for an inclusive resolution to the conflict, which was marked by a historic handshake. In December, the British and Irish governments followed suit, by issuing a *Joint Declaration* that reiterated that neither Britain nor Ireland had selfish intent towards Northern Ireland.

The ending of the Cold War also created some pressure for change. Other conflicts with which the IRA had identified were coming to conclusions or developing peace settlements in South Africa, Palestine and Central America. The IRA campaign was clearly in a position of stalemate—it could not be militarily defeated, neither could it militarily succeed. The election of Bill Clinton in November 1992, with the overwhelmingly support of Irish Americans, saw the emergence of the first U.S. administration with an interventionist policy on Northern Ireland, which put equal pressure on the British government, the Irish nationalists and the Irish American Diaspora, to support a peaceful, negotiated settlement. This new international context created its

own dynamic for change and helped persuade the IRA leadership that more progress could be made if they called a cease-fire, and in August 1994 the Provisional IRA proclaimed it would cease-fire. In October the Combined Loyalist Military Command, an umbrella group of unionist paramilitaries, proclaimed it would cease-fire too.

Until the IRA cease-fire was announced in August 1994, the British government did not believe that it would happen. Even after the cease-fire, the Tory Government remained uncomfortable with the Irish government's approach, and feared that bringing Sinn Féin into talks would reverse years of intensive efforts at isolating the Sinn Féin leadership.

This view led the British to set stringent conditions for Sinn Féin's entry into all-party talks, in particular that the IRA would have to first decommission some of its weapons, and their decommissioning would have to be certified by an international committee. These conditions strained the IRA's commitment, and when the international committee published their report, which said the IRA was dragging its feet, the IRA ended its cease-fire by bombing London's Canary Wharf in February 1996.

It was only after a Labour government was elected in May 1997 that a comprehensive settlement could be agreed. The Labour government, while retaining some worries about the Irish government's approach, sought to actively engage with the talks' process. In July 1997, the IRA resumed its cease-fire, paving the way for a final agreement—the Good Friday Agreement that was signed in April 1998.

## **Negotiations for Good Friday**

Though the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement incorporated many of the provisions of the Sunningdale Agreement, they went much further. The Sunningdale Agreement did not envisage the participation of Sinn Féin in a power-sharing government; the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement put that controversial proposition firmly on the agenda. Nor did the Sunningdale Agreement commit Britain and Ireland to renounce their claims to Northern Ireland in favor of a decision by the majority within Northern Ireland, issues that were central to the Good Friday negotiations. Similarly, the Good Friday negotiations brought up issues such as provision for prisoner releases, commitment to an equality agenda, and decommissioning and

reintegration programs for paramilitaries, as well as police reform, all of which were lacking in the Sunningdale Agreement.

These provisions required major policy shifts on the part of the British and Irish governments; but they posed even greater dilemmas for the contesting parties on the ground, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Sinn Féin.

Most of the UUP leadership, including David Trimble, had been active in the Unionist opposition to the more modest Sunningdale Agreement of 1973-4. Unionist opposition to Sunningdale had centered on the UUP's traditional opposition to power sharing even with the SDLP and the creation of a consultative Council of Ireland. Yet they would have to go much further in agreeing to the Good Friday agreement.

The draft papers for the Good Friday negotiations committed the two governments to maintaining the Union with Britain only for as long as that was the wish of a majority - a formal statement of what had been the position of the two governments and the SDLP for many years. This would mean the return of a government and parliament to Northern Ireland, with David Trimble as its most likely First Minister. The drafts also contained two possible paper victories for Unionism. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which Unionists had resolutely opposed, was due to be repealed and the Irish Government agreed to call a referendum seeking to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution – which laid claim to the territory of Northern Ireland.

Unionism, however, also had to face a number of previously unthinkable propositions, which led the Democratic Unionist Party led by Ian Paisley to oppose any deal. Unionists would be forced to share power not only with the SDLP but also with Sinn Féin, facing even the possibility of Sinn Féin in government. They were also being asked to agree to a cross border body with a much stronger structural position and powers than under 'Sunningdale'; the possibility of police reform, and equality measures which they had previously opposed.

Given the unpalatable nature of the package on offer from the perspective of many Unionists, an understanding of some Unionists' willingness to support this agreement has to look beyond the actual content of the deal and examine the strategic choices available to mainstream Unionism. Unionism was faced with an Irish nationalist consensus that was growing and becoming increasingly politically united—that is, the gap between the nationalist moderates and radicals

was narrowing. In addition, the leaders of Irish nationalism, including northern nationalists, had formed an effective alliance with a US administration and a reasonable working relationship with the British Labour government, which was likely to be in power for another eight or nine years. Northern nationalists now made up over 40% of the voting population, moderate Unionism as represented by Alliance Party, which supported the peace process, could mobilize perhaps as much as 5%; the centrist Northern Ireland Women's' Coalition (NIWC), 1%, and the loyalist paramilitaries (who had the motivation of having their prisoners released), 3%. Mainstream Unionism, for the first time since Partition, was faced with the possibility that it could become a minority within Northern Ireland. Nationalists were still a long way from securing a majority for a united Ireland, but if nationalists were united they could secure majority support in Northern Ireland in a referendum for far-reaching political change.

The UUP leadership was quite explicit about this threat during the negotiations. One of them, Anthony Alcock, argued that if the UUP walked out it was likely that a section of mainstream unionists would vote in a referendum to accept a peace deal that had been negotiated in their absence.

For Sinn Féin, the draft papers also fell short of what had in the past been key demands. They clearly did not offer a united Ireland, reaffirmed what republicans call the 'unionist veto' (i.e., the requirement that a majority within Northern Ireland must vote for constitutional change and not Ireland as a whole), and contained no firm commitment to either disband or reform the police. They also restored a local parliament that was for many Sinn Fein supporters the symbol of previous discriminatory unionist rule. Thus, some Sinn Fein members were very skeptical.

On the other hand, there were reasons for Sinn Féin to support a deal. Part of the explanation is to be found in the roots of Sinn Féin's engagement with this peace process. As late as May 1987 Sinn Féin produced a policy document, *Scenario for Peace*, in which, in line with the traditional republican position, the Irish Government is seen to play no role of any significance in either bringing about a united Ireland or building its new government. The Irish Government was treated as a 'Vichy' like regime—effectively seeking to frustrate the republican movements attempts to secure Irish unity, and as irrelevant after the event as the Vichy regime was to building the new government in post war France.

In the following years, Sinn Féin acknowledged publicly that the republican movement was not strong enough, on its own, to achieve a united Ireland and that therefore a 'broad front' of nationalist parties and organizations or a 'nationalist consensus' was required to achieve that goal. *An Phoblacht* (the republican weekly newspaper) changed its editorial style. The pejorative term 'Free State' was no longer used to describe the Republic and its Government but more neutral terms like 'the South' or the '26 Counties' and the 'Dublin administration'. There followed a shift in attitudes to constitutional nationalism. The SDLP and the Irish Government (especially Fianna Fáil and to a lesser extent Labour) were now seen as potential political allies rather than as simple collaborators with British rule. In a new policy document *Towards a Lasting Peace* (1992) Sinn Féin placed the Irish Government, and the need for a nationalist consensus, at the heart of its political strategy - marking a reversal of previous perspectives.

Sinn Féin could also see this as an agreement in transition, part of the peace process, not its end point. While there were specific possible gains in the deal such as a Ministerial North-South Council, bringing together the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland executive, the strengthening of equality legislation, support for Irish language schools, withdrawal of some British troops and closure of British army bases, and a debate on the future of the policing, the detail was to some extent less important than a clear commitment by the two governments to *move away from the political and constitutional status quo.*

Sinn Féin's strategy was also influenced by the demographic situation, the rising nationalist vote - buoyed by expectations of change, by a rise in cultural nationalism and a sense of growing confidence in the nationalist community. Nationalist voters appear to be increasing in militancy as Sinn Féin had significantly reduced the gap between them and the SDLP.

The Sinn Féin leadership could sell the deal to their support base in the following manner: they did not have the political support to achieve Irish unity but they could achieve, in alliance with other nationalists, the Irish Government and the US, a much strengthened equality agenda and institutional links between North and South and could create a dynamic for further progressive change. The Sinn Féin leadership recognized the potential internal difficulties this relatively limited agenda might cause, but they, like the UUP, were aware of the consequences of walking away, especially as their 'peace strategy' had seen their vote increase significantly.

There was also a churning within the loyalist parties - the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), aligned with the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), aligned with the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Initially, the decision to call a loyalist cease-fire in October 1994 was at least partly a pragmatic response to the IRA cease-fire. Their self-image was one of counter-terrorism and an extended IRA cessation removed this crucial definitional prop.

The circumstances of the post-cessation period however altered the political experience of the loyalist political parties. Since the mid 1980s, both major loyalist paramilitaries had been trying, without success, to follow Sinn Féin in building a strong political base in the context of an ongoing paramilitary campaign. Post cessation, the profile of the PUP and UDP increased, as they acted as conduits to the paramilitaries. The Conservative British Government also had a tactical need for the parties, as contacts with and concessions to Sinn Féin were easier to justify if they were seen as being mirrored by contacts with the PUP and UDP. Thus, a meeting with the UDP preceded the first public contact by officials with Sinn Féin and PUP and the first Ministerial meeting followed a similar pattern. This new profile, and the conditions created by the cease-fires, seemed to offer to the parties an opportunity to do what they had failed to do in the past - build political bases independent of mainstream (and middle class) Unionism. As the peace process and cessation provided the opportunity for growth, seeking to attract support by adopting more hard line, anti-compromise rhetoric was unlikely to succeed, and therefore a shift to more moderate and reformist policies offered a line of development.

The loyalist parties, in spite of their attempts to create an independent base for themselves, remained ideologically linked to mainstream Unionism. Right through the negotiations, the PUP and UDP stuck firmly to the negotiation tactics adopted by the UUP. For example, neither the PUP nor the UDP ever publicly met Sinn Féin, or broke with any of the policy positions adopted by the UUP, other than on issues such as decommissioning and prisoners where they clearly had a strong agenda of their own. While tactically astute, their strategy placed strains on organizations with so little experience of open political activity. In supporting the peace process, the UVF might lose some of its members to the breakaway Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), which opposed the peace process.

Opposition to a potential deal by the Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the smaller UK Unionist Party (UKUP) and UUP dissidents was not surprising as they had been on the record

over many years as opposing compromises and reform well short of what was in the Good Friday agreement. All mainstream Unionist elites have traditionally insisted that there is little point having a veto on the 'final handover' of sovereignty if they cannot prevent political decisions which change the character of the state and/or which move them towards a united Ireland. It is this strong linkage of equality issues and constitutional issues that made it impossible for unionist naysayers to see commitments on the question of sovereignty as being sufficient to persuade them to support internal reform. In their view, reform is seen as undermining the state and paving the way for further change. All the major unionist parties, including those who ultimately supported the agreement, as recently as 1997, articulated this position. It was the adherence of the Unionists who opposed the agreement to traditional Unionist positions that presented difficulties for David Trimble. He needed to convince Unionists that either the commitments on sovereignty were more absolute now than they had been previously, a difficult task, or persuade Unionists that they had little choice but to go down this route - a more accurate but politically difficult message to sell.

**For additional information, including history, texts of agreements and explanations of agreements, try following websites:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/history/stateapart/>

(has extensive links to other relevant sites)

<http://www.nio.gov.uk> (texts of agreements)

<http://www.ireland-map.co.uk/map-of-ulster.htm> (for a map of the partitioned province of Ulster)

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3180.htm>