

IMUN Research Report 2024

Historical Security Council Issue #1:

The question of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

31st of July, 1994

The Troubles were a 30-year period of violence that occupied Northern Ireland, mainland UK, and extended into Europe. Bombings, shootings, and assassinations became commonplace as the tensions between the Nationalist Catholics and the Unionist Protestants grew. Over 3,500 people died as a consequence of the violence, and over 30 years over its resolution, tension in Northern Ireland still remains¹.

The conflict was deeply rooted in the divide between Ireland and the UK; Irish leaders had struggled for centuries against British rule, the discontent rose to new heights after the British mishandling of the Irish Potato Famine from 1845 to 1852. Additionally, a religious difference also emerged in the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century which turned England into a Protestant nation while the majority of Ireland remained Catholic². The struggle for independence continued well into the 20th century, forming the nationalist movement in the early 1920s which resulted in the Irish War of Independence. Britain partitioned the country in 1921 with the Anglo-Irish Treaty; majority-Catholic Ireland gained its independence, and Northern Ireland, which was predominantly Protestant, became a "a Protestant state for Protestant people" and remained part of the United Kingdom³. While this may have seemed like meaningful progress, it laid the groundwork for the Troubles 40 years later. The war saw the emergence of paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who continued to believe that Northern Ireland should unite with the rest of the

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, "Understanding Northern Ireland's 'Troubles,'" CFR Education from the Council on Foreign Relations, May 25, 2023, <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/understanding-northern-irelands-troubles>.

² Jeff Wallenfelt, "The Troubles," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history>.

³ Erin Blakemore, "What Were the Troubles That Ravaged Northern Ireland?," National Geographic (National Geographic, April 8, 2022), <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-troubles-of-northern-ireland-history>.

country, and later in response, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) which was set on upholding Northern Ireland's union with Britain at all costs⁴. The conflict lost relevance for decades before it was revived in the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland.

While Northern Ireland was predominantly Protestant, there remained a Catholic minority which was subject to discrimination affecting housing, employment, and education. The people of cities like Belfast and Derry (otherwise known as Londonderry) were inspired by the American Civil Rights movement happening at the same time and took to the streets to protest against the inequalities. Staunch Loyalists feared the Movement was an IRA front, a facade that threatened Northern Ireland's unity. The protests led to riots which were suppressed by the police - the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and Loyalist Paramilitaries⁵. As the riots escalated, the Northern Irish Prime Minister requested that British troops be stationed in the areas of conflict. Initially, the troops were seen as a neutral force to control the violence, but not long after, the Nationalists began to complain that not enough was being done to protect them from attacks.

The British Army began Operation Demetrius and enforced a policy of Internment in 1971. This involved mass British army arrests of more than 340 people from Catholic and Nationalist backgrounds in an effort to reduce conflict and target the IRA. However, the intelligence used in making the arrests was frequently faulty and hundreds of detainees had no connections with the IRA⁶. An anti-Internment protest in Derry in January of 1972 became one of the most significant incidents of the Troubles - Bloody Sunday. The protesters threw rocks at and fought with both the British Army and loyalist counter-protesters until 21

⁴Kimberly Cowell-Meyers and Paul Arthur, "Ulster Volunteer Force | Northern Ireland Military Organization [1966]," Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ulster-Volunteer-Force-Northern-Ireland-1966>.

⁵Feature History, "Feature History - the Troubles (1/2)," *YouTube*, September 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61JisaFGHFY>.

⁶Gerry Moriarty, "Internment Explained: When Was It Introduced and Why?," *The Irish Times*, August 9, 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/internment-explained-when-was-it-introduced-and-why-1.3981598>.

soldiers fired on the crowd, killing 13 men and injuring several others⁷. The violent escalation increased popular support for the IRA and represented Britain's willingness to silence the nationalists. The IRA responded with a series of 22 car bombings around Belfast, killing 9 people. In 1973, the IRA increased their attacks and detonated a bomb in London, killing 1 and injuring hundreds. This created a cycle of attacks and counter attacks between the Loyalists and the Nationalists. Additionally, the attacks weakened Anglo-Irish relations and created strong anti-Irish sentiments in the affected British areas. The Kingsmill Massacre in 1976, an IRA attack that killed 10 Protestants, was the climax of the back-and-forth violence and halted the murders for some time⁸.

Although there had been an attempt to calm tensions with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, this was short lived and Northern Ireland once again descended into violence. In 1991, the IRA launched 3 bombs at 10 Downing Street in London in an attempt to assassinate the British Prime Minister John Major, a clear testament to the prevailing "trouble" in Northern Ireland⁹. In June of 1994, the Loughinisland massacre – in which the UVF shot dead six Catholic civilians and wounded five others during a gun attack on a pub, the hostility continued.

As of July 31st, 1994, the starting date for debate, the Troubles remain a heated conflict with many possible directions for resolution. Northern Ireland is still a deeply divided area between the Catholic and the Protestant and paramilitary groups continue to terrorise the people of Ireland and the UK. The British, Irish, and Northern Irish Governments struggle to control the violence.

⁷Erin Blakemore, "What Were the Troubles That Ravaged Northern Ireland?," National Geographic (National Geographic, April 8, 2022), <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-troubles-of-northern-ireland-history>.

⁸Amy Stewart, "Kingsmills Massacre a Sectarian IRA Attack - Inquest," *BBC*, April 12, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68797074>.

⁹Craig R. Whitney, "I.R.A. Attacks 10 Downing Street with Mortar Fire as Cabinet Meets," *The New York Times*, February 8, 1991, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/08/world/ira-attacks-10-downing-street-with-mortar-fire-as-cabinet-meets.html>.

Focus of Debate:

Debate should focus on the creation of stable and lasting peace in Northern Ireland, simultaneously easing tensions between the UK and Ireland. Additionally, the violence used on both sides of the conflict should be addressed, especially the alarming number of civilian deaths. It is vital that delegates represent attitudes and information available to their nations as of the 31st of July, 1994.

Relevant Resolutions and Documents:

<https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2025/0207/1495159-ireland-government-united-nations-peacekeeping-troubles/>

- Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch's televised address in August 1969 calling on the British government to request a peace-keeping force for Northern Ireland from the UN.

<https://assets.ireland.ie/documents/Anglo-Irish-Agreement-1985.pdf>

- The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 which aimed to resolve the conflict of the Troubles.

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/law/european-court-human-rights-rules-mistreatment-prisoners>

- The European Court of Human Rights ruling from 1978 that found the United Kingdom guilty of the mistreatment of prisoners in Northern Ireland.

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