



The Irish Republican Army

The History of Terrorism
as a Strategy of Political
Insurgency

April 2011

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Sections sources include PBS Frontline and Tim Pat Coogan's The History of the IRA and Richard Clutterbuck's section on

Where did the Irish Republican Army come from?

Historical Roots in Genuine Oppression

- Economic – land redistribution, famine, race laws
- Political – various associations with England, protestant maneuvers
- Social - sectarian identification overwhelming national sentiments
- Cultural – church opposition and romantic failures

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Did it pop up in a vacuum? Did England beat Ireland in a soccer game, and then get all rowdy on them? We all know how British soccer fans are, so this seems quite plausible. Was there a shortage of Guinness, leading to all kinds of issues? Did just all the cranky Irish stay home in Ireland, while all those who had mellowed out the national mood left for America, until finally it just boiled over?

Or were there historical underpinnings to the troubles? Maybe there were reasons to fight, other than the lack of food and land, religious and ethnic oppression, unemployment, slums, and high reasonable infant mortality rates?

Perhaps there were predecessor groups? Were the Irish really born in Ireland, and can they produce birth certificates? How do we really know they are Irish?

Let's assume all of the above were factors, but only focus on the historical underpinnings part.

IRA – Notes from Richard Clutterbuck's Guerillas and Terrorists Ohio University Press, Athens Ohio 1980.

Special factors in the Irish Troubles

For Clutterbuck Northern Ireland is seen as unique in the 20th century terrorist pantheon for a variety of reasons. The unique characteristics are:

- Although Belfast was the scene of most of the Urban Guerilla campaign, there also was considerable violence along the border with the Irish Republic.
- The fighters themselves were drawn almost entirely from the working and lower classes of society, on both the Catholic and the Protestant sides.
- None of the main fighting groups had a political ideology, i.e. they were not popping off about Marx and the proletariat as their motivation. The main combatants were fighting for nationalistic and sectarian reasons. Although the Official IRA was Marxist, it also was not in the fight.
- Due to the communal nature of the struggle, rather than a conflict of ideology, the historical roots are much deeper than typical in other states.

There is also a comment about both groups in the conflict feeling and behaving like embattled minorities – Catholics a minority in the north, protestants a minority in Ireland.

The official IRA, which was as mentioned Marxist, withdrew from terrorist actions in 1972. They were more than replaced and eclipsed by the actions of the Provisional IRA, whose goals were:

- Wear away the political will of the British public and government.
- Terrorize the local protestant population in order to erode their support for the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF -the Protestant terrorists)
- Terrorize the local Catholic population in order to erode their support for the Official IRA (their rivals)

The UVF had a much simpler set of goals

- Thin the ranks of the IRA
- Terrorize their Catholic supporters

One, two, three, four what are we fighting for!

In the end, the fight
was about a divided
nation

Divided by

- Territory
- Religion/Community
- Prospects (economic opportunity)
- Historical perceptions
- Decency



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The Irish Divide

Richard Clutterbuck sees the Irish divide as having some unique dimensions

- Mostly Urban fighting, but significant rural dimension
- Fighters were working class
- Absence of political ideology
- Deep historical roots to the communal violence
- Both communities behave like embattled minorities

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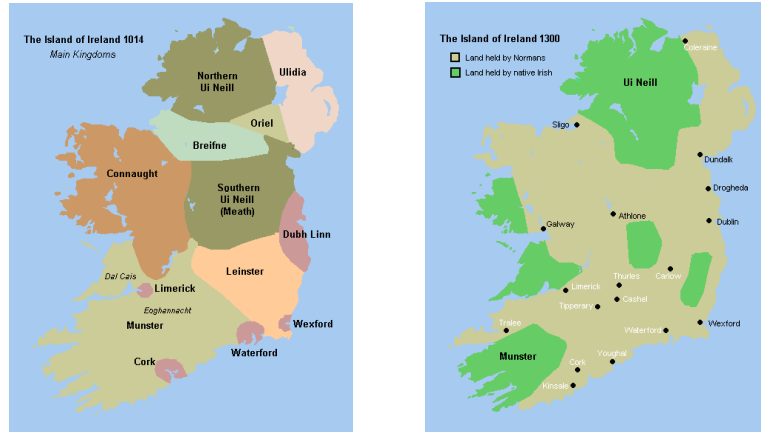
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Deep origins – from 1014 to 1912

Patchwork Kingdoms of 1014 gave way to Normans extending some control in 1300s, but by the end of the 15th century English control was lost (for a little while)



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THANK YOU WIKIPEDIA FOR THE MAPS

Quiz your students – can anyone else remember another country the Normans whacked in 1077?

Where were the Normans from? Does that possibly explain why it was called Normandy? And what were the beaches Henry Fonda had to invade in 1944? What were their names and where were they located?

Name two other actors from the longest day? John Wayne, Richard Burton, Red Buttons, Robert Wagner, Peter Lawford, some German guys speaking German, and some French guys speaking French are all acceptable.

Some key early dates

12th Century – The Normans conquered Saxon England in the 11th Century, and over the next 100 years moved into most of Ireland as well with the Pope placing it under the English king in 1155.

1494 saw the Irish Parliament become subordinate to the English Parliament.

The English Take Control

17th century wars

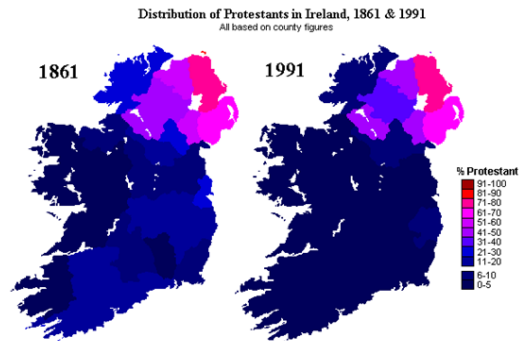
1556 to 1641- Plantations

1641 to 1653 – famine and repression

1689 to 1691 – Civil War

1798 – Wolf Tone and the first Ulster Volunteer Force

1886 & 1893 Home Rule bills fail



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The plan was simple. Henry VIII, a pleasant fellow who knew what to do with a wife who disappoints, had himself declared king of Ireland, and for the next century he and his successors gradually did some really bad things.

When the Irish were not cooperative in not being catholic, more reliable Protestants from England and Scotland were brought in. The solution on where to put the protestants was easy. Just kick out catholic landowners, and give the land to the protestants as plantations. The Plantation system also allowed for considerable economic control of Irish Peasants. It also help create the odd fatalistic and romantic life view that inspired so many obviously futile acts and rebellions.

Later, it would help define the way Ireland was destined to be partitioned. And Gaelic gave way to English as the common language.

17th Century – things really heated up with the English using the Plantations system to both displace Irish, land owners and their peasants with English and Scottish Protestants, especially in the North, to create a political base. Queen Elizabeth sent her army to occupy Ireland in 1601. Between 1605 and 1610 a very large number of Scotts were installed in Plantations in Ulster. The combination of Religious tension, economic dislocation, land confiscation, and ethnic tensions was volatile in the extreme, and the religious divide became quite deep, and the focal point of much of the conflict.

1649 to 1650 - Cromwell launched a particularly brutal repression of the Catholics.

1688 to 1691 – James II, a Catholic King of Ireland and a nasty fellow was overthrown by Protestant William of Orange. He fled to Ireland, and raised a Catholic Army there. William followed, and for two years they fought across Ireland, with Protestant victories at Londonderry in 1689 and the Battle of Boyne still being celebrated by Protestants in the North, specifically to taunt the Catholics.

1798 – Protestant Wolfe Tone initiated a rebellion against the English, which was put down. At about the same time, a Ulster Protestant group called the Orange Order was formed to defend Protestant interests in Ireland.

1840s saw famine grip Ireland, causing 1 million to die and 1 million more to leave, many to the US (where their descendants would become very significant financial backers of 20th century terrorists)

1886 and 1893 saw Home rule bills for Ireland fail in Parliament, with significant opposition from Protestants who did not want to be outnumbers in an Irish free state.

Predecessors and Catalysts

United Irishmen (1798/1803)

Young Irelanders (1848)

Irish republican Brotherhood (1867)

Fenians

The Ulster Volunteer Force then the Irish
Volunteers

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The Irish Republic

Ulster Volunteer Force
(1912)

Easter Uprising (1916)

War of Independence

The Irish Free State

Killing Michael Collins

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1912 saw the formation of the first Ulster Volunteer force with 40,000 rifles smuggled in for Protestants to use in the event of a Civil War.

1916 Easter Uprising saw a few Quixotic Catholic Republican rebels seize some public buildings in Dublin, declare a Provisional Government, and then saw them get defeated and jeered on their way to the gallows. But a funny thing happened along the way. First, World War I was raging, and many Irish were in the trenches fighting the Germans. The revolt felt to many Irish like a betrayal of the troops, which contributed to the initial unsympathetic mood of the Irish towards the Republican rebels. It took an overreaction by the British forces there to turn the public's mood in the other direction, and set the stage for the next period of note

1919 to 1921 War of Independence was led by Michael Collins as a Guerilla campaign. Collins recognized the British had a solid intelligence system, so he went about eliminating it and its informers with a high degree of efficient brutality.

1922 saw Michel Collins agree to a free Irish State in the 26 southern counties while leaving the 6 not at all interested in being part of an Irish free state and armed to prove it northern protestant-majority counties to the English. This upset the Irish Republican Army, which Collins had created, and Ireland was plunged into Civil War, with Collins killed in within that same year. The IRA continued to kill more Southern Irish than Northern Irish.

The Official IRA

IRA is opposed to everybody after
1922

Border Campaign 1956-62

Rise of the Marxists

1965 Political Process between North
and South develops

Rioting 1965 to 1969

1966 UVF

1969 Provisional IRA forms



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1956 to 1962 saw an especially violent period referred to as the Border Campaign, which would lead to the rise of Marxists in the leadership of the IRA. Their goal was to force the reintegration of the industrialized northern protestant counties into precisely to cause the South to become destabilized, causing the traditional, clerical system and society to collapse, leaving them in charge.

Meanwhile, in the north, the 2 to 1 protestant majority gave them control of elections, and by maintain a high degree of prejudicial favor to the protestant working class in terms of giving them the good jobs and good houses, the Catholics were kept in a state of political and economic deprivation.

1965 saw an effort on the part of the Irish PM Lemass and the Stormont PM O'Neil to open up commercial ties between all the Irish counties and to eliminate discrimination against Catholics in the North. Naturally, radical Protestants got upset, and the Marxist IRA saw a chance to stir the pot as well. A Northern Ireland Civil

Right Association was set up which organized predominantly Catholic civil rights marches. Militant protestants blocked these marches, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary did nothing to stop the protestants.

1966 saw a new Ulster Volunteer Force emerge to organize assassinations and bombings as part of the Protestant "self defense".

1969 saw tensions continue to mount and in one protest march 87 marchers went to the hospital after protestants attacked them. Marches were met even more violently as the year progressed, and the RUC became both overextended and perceived to be on the side of the Protestants (which was relatively true).

Meanwhile, the Marxist IRA stayed out of it since they did not want to fight anybody's working class, leaving the Catholics even more isolated. The IRA became jeered as I Ran Away, and the Provisional IRA broke off that year, building strength and weapons until 1971.

The Ulster Volunteer Force

UVF (1966-2007?)

- Protestant
- Organized to oppose Catholic rights marches
- Theoretically to counter the IRA
- 451 victims, mostly civilian
- Mostly fringe elements remain after 2007



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The Provisional IRA

1969-1971 formation

- Urban Guerillas
- Bombings and assassinations

Segregated Communities

- De facto Police force for Catholic Neighborhoods

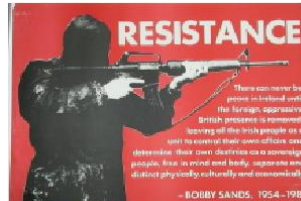
British Troops deployed

- Collapse of Stormont Government
- Bloody Sunday

Politicized prisons

- Blankets and Bobby Sands

Increased cooperation between Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland



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1969 also saw British troops arrive, as the Stormont government recognized it could not control the situation, and asked for the troops (leading to the end of Northern Ireland's home rule 2 and a half years later). The Battle of Bogside on August 12 required 1,000 RUC officers and was the tipping point for the Stormont government .

Segregation in Northern Ireland was very strong and deep. Catholics went to Church schools, Protestants went to Public Schools. Youths organized into separate street gangs, and neighborhoods in poor areas were either catholic or protestant. Ongoing violence would reduce the integration in any neighborhood, causing the orange and green divisions to get worse.

The urban poor, segregated and angry, were ideal for the Provisional IRA and the ideal place to launch the Urban Guerilla strategy that was to dominate the next three decades.

August 9, 1971 saw the British implement to policy of internment, which was basically the right of the police and troops to arrest and inter someone without charges. 342 people were arrested the first night (mostly Catholics), and at least 12 were subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques that the US used to label torture. Violence escalated.

100 bombings in August rose to 146 in January 1972

59 people died in the 2 years from August 1969 to August 1971. In the following 6 months 231 were killed.

1972 saw 467 killed, of which 321 were civilians.

January 30, 1972 Bloody Sunday saw 13 civilians killed by elite British paratrooper troops when a riot they were sent to control allegedly escalated into a shoot out with the IRA. This was very bad press for the British, and there was debate as to whether the IRA was there in 1972

July 21, 1972 was the IRA's blood Friday, where 19 bombs went off between 2PM and 3PM in public places, killing 9 and wounding 130. This was bad press for the IRA.

March 1972 saw the Stormont Government collapse, and direct rule from Westminster replaced it, ending 50 years of Protestant Unionist rule in Northern Ireland, a huge victory for the Provisional IRA.

1974 The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provision) Act of 1973 is amended making the Ulster Volunteer Force and Sinn Fein legal organizations.

1974 to 1975 saw a cease fire as the IRA and the British Security forces. The IRA believed the forces would soon withdraw. On December 5th, the British ended the reviled practice of internment.

1976 saw the criminalization of terrorist activities. Previously, IRA men had been in a special category. Now they were treated as common criminals and expected to dress in standard convict clothing, which they refused to do, instead wearing only blankets.

1978 saw 300 IRA prisoners wearing blankets and protesting in a very rude way at Maze Prison,

In August of 1979 Lord Mountbatten was assassinated by a bomb on his yacht. He was a well respected and influential British leader, and close to the Royal family.

1980 saw a new strategy emerge with IRA prisoners going on hunger strikes.

In 1981, Bobby Sands started a hunger strike while in prison, and was elected to Parliament. He died on strike about a month later, and this set off riots as 100,000 attended his funeral. It also gave the IRA a big boost in recruitment and brought a lot of international attention to the issues in Northern Ireland. I would add that it helped repudiate claims at the time that the Provisional IRA was more of a gang than a revolutionary organization. 10 other IRA members followed Sands' example and starved to death.

November 15, 1985 saw an Anglo-Irish agreement to establish a committee to deal with cross border problems.

In 1987, a huge shipment of Libyan arms was intercepted. It is believed three earlier shipments got through.

For the next ten years, bombings in both Ireland and England are the main tactic, but we also see an increase in political discussions following the legalization of UVF and Sinn Fein, and increased recognition of the groups as legitimate political entities. In 1997 all political organizations, including Sinn Fein and the UVF, sit down for negotiations. Bombings still continue.

Towards Peace

Effective Police work and the widespread use of informers

Less repressive police methods

Improve economic conditions and rights for Catholics

Cooperation between Irish Republic and Britain

Referendum on the Good Friday Agreement

The IRA and UVF both opposed the referendums

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The UVF quits the peace talks when it is obvious it has continued its terror campaign, and then Sinn Fein gets tossed out for its own actions.

April 10, 1998 the British and Irish governments produce the Good Friday Agreement

-Any change to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland had to be approved by a majority vote in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

-Commitment of all parties to use peaceful and democratic means only.

-Establishment of a Northern Ireland Assembly with devolved powers.

-A British troop draw down

-Police reform

-End of discriminatory actions and policies by the government

-Agreement that those born in Northern Ireland could be British, Irish, or citizens of both states.

-The United Kingdom would be known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

When voted on, 94% of the Irish Republic voted yes, and 71% of Northern Ireland voted yes. From Wikipedia the following rationale for no votes was used

“On the republican side, the "No" campaign seemed to concentrate on the purity of the republican ideal of complete and absolute independence from Britain. In this view any compromise, however temporary, on the goal of [Irish unity](#) (or the right to pursue the armed struggle) was depicted as a betrayal of those who had fought and died for Ireland. Decommissioning of weapons and an end to paramilitary activity was portrayed as surrender to the British. The principle of consent was represented as a unionist veto, as it meant political progress would be almost impossible without unionist participation. It was pointed out that the agreement accepted [partition](#). The state and its institutions would remain hostile to the republican community, claimed the critics. Despite these misgivings, the vast majority of republicans voted yes, with only some tiny unrepresentative parties (such as [Republican Sinn Féin](#)) on the nationalist side advocating a No vote.

On the unionist side, the "No" campaign was much stronger and stressed what were represented as concessions to [republicanism](#) and [terrorism](#), particularly the release of convicted paramilitaries from prison (often those who had killed friends and relatives of unionist politicians and were serving "life" sentences), the presence of "terrorists" (by which they meant Sinn Féin) in government, the lack of guarantees on decommissioning, the perceived one-way nature of the process in moving towards a united Ireland, the lack of trust in all those who would be implementing the agreement, the erosion of British identity, the destruction of the [Royal Ulster Constabulary](#), the vague language of the agreement, and the rushed nature in which the agreement was written.”

From 1997 on the Provisional IRA was basically in cease fire mode, and by 2005 they were completely de-militarized turning in their weapons. Some splinter groups remained active, but not terribly so

Bloody Sunday Revisited

Official Army Position

- The Paratroopers reacted to gun and bomb attacks from the IRA

Witness Accounts (residents, British and Irish journalists)

- The troops fired at unarmed protestors and those who tried to help

Facts

- 13 civilians died (12 at the site), 13 wounded
- No guns or bombs were found
- No troops were injured



Saville Inquiry Findings:

- "The firing by soldiers of 1 PARA on Bloody Sunday caused the deaths of 13 people and injury to a similar number, none of whom was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury."
- No Stones or petrol bombs were used by civilians
- The Soldiers did not warn the civilians before shooting
- The soldiers lost control and shot civilians and those who tried to help them

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Named after Lord Saville who chaired it the committee was called by Tony Blair to investigate the events of Bloody Sunday

900 people interviewed over 6 years from 1998 to 2004. The report was published in 2010. See below for address to the PDF

<http://report.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org/>

Appendix

Songs to sing while bombing the British

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The Patriots Game

- Come all you young rebels
And list' while I sing
For the love of one's country
Is a terrible thing.
It banishes fear
With the speed of a flame,
And makes us all part of
The Patriot Game. Mu name is O'Hanlon
And I've just gone sixteen
My home is Monaghan
And there I was weened.
I was taught all my life
Cruel England to blame.
And so I'm a part of
The Patriot Game.
- 'Tis barely two years
Sincel wandered away
With the local battalion
Of the bold I.R.A.
I've read of our heroes
And wanted the same
To play out my part in
The Patriot Game.
- They told me how Connolly
Was shot in the chair
His wounds from the battle
All bleeding and bare,
His fine body twisted
All battered and lame,
They soon made him part of
The Patriot Game.
- This Ireland of mine
Has for long been half free,
Six counties are under
John Bull's tyranny.
And still deValera
Is greatly to blame,
For shirking his part in
The Patriot Game.
I don't mind a bit if
I shoot down the police,
They're lackies for war
Never guardians of peace.
But yet at deserters
I'm never let aim
Those rebels who sold out
The Patriot Game.
- And now as I lie with
My body all holes,
I think of those traitors
Who bargained and sold.
I'm sorry my rifle
Has not done the same,
For those quisslings who sold out
The Patriot Game.

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Note Quislings are a reference to traitors, usually fascist ones who betrayed their countries to Nazis, named after Vidkun Quisling who helped Germany conquer Norway so he could rule it. Later it was any traitor to the nation

Songs

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ira/poetry/song1.html>

- [...] sent the feelers out
To shoot the people down.
He thought the I.R.A. were dead
In dear Old Belfast town,
But when he got to Belfast
He was seriously delayed
By the Fighting First Battalion
Of the Belfast Brigade. Chorus
- Glory! Glory! to Old Ireland,
Glory! Glory! to this island,
Glory to the memory of the men who fought and fell,
"No Surrender" is the war cry
Of the Belfast Brigade.
We have no costly tenders
Nor no unsecures to show,
We're at need to defend ourselves
No matter where we go,
We're out for our Republic,
To hell with every State!
"No Surrender" is the war cry
Of the Belfast Brigade.

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