

**Forum:** Historic Security Council

**Issue:** 1972, Solving the current situation in Northern Ireland

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## Introduction

Northern Ireland has been stricken by prolonged conflict since the late 1960s. On the one hand, the loyalists to the British crown, who are largely Protestant, demand that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom. On the other hand, largely Catholic Irish nationalists are fighting for a united Ireland, of which Northern Ireland is a part.

The conflict quickly developed into a full-scale armed clash between the two factions, with terrorism and violence against civilians being integral parts of the former. Eventually, the British army was deployed. Until now, many Irish civilians have lost their lives or were interned without trial, leading to the creation of the provisional IRA, a paramilitary group focussing on armed struggles against the British regime.

Until 1972, the UK had only been indirectly involved, however, as the situation worsened so quickly, the British Parliament decided to suspend the Parliament of Northern Ireland and impose British rule directly from London (BBC,2017). This was seen as a clear violation of Northern Irish sovereignty, and will certainly only escalate this conflict in the future.

With human rights violations and ethnic conflict at the center of the issue, this has been one of the most violent events in Europe in recent history. Days such as Bloody Sunday are sure to be remembered decades in the future for their severe brutality.

## Definition of Key Terms

**Sovereignty** = the ultimate overseer, or authority, in the decision-making process of the state and in the maintenance of order (Dictionary.com, 2017). In other words, a nation state's right to govern itself and possess a monopoly of power within its territory.

**The Troubles** = nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland during the late 20th century. Also known internationally as the Northern Ireland conflict (McKittrick, 1999).

**Nationalism** = loyalty and devotion to a nation (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

**Bloody Sunday** = an incident on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland, when British soldiers shot 28 unarmed civilians during a peaceful protest march against internment, of which 13 died (Geraghty, 2000).

**Civil Rights** = the nonpolitical rights of a citizen (Merriam-Webster, 2017)

**Irish Republican Army** = Irish republican paramilitary organization that sought to remove Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom and to bring about an independent socialist (Alexander, 1992). Later split up into two factions, the largely peaceful Official IRA and the more violent Provisional IRA.

**The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)** = The British police force in Northern Ireland. It was criticised for police brutality.

## History

### Origins of the conflict

After its creation in 1920, Northern Ireland functioned as a self-governing region of the United Kingdom. However, problems started arising quickly. Firstly, there was a severe lack of recognition of Irish nationality in Northern Ireland. Secondly, the Catholic party grew quickly, leading them to have more and more influence in fields such as housing and employment.

In the mid-1960s, civil rights groups such as the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) started a non-violent civil rights campaign. The campaign uncovered evidence that Irish Catholics nationalists were less likely to be hired for government jobs and were otherwise disadvantaged by the government. Further, the campaign made it their goal to establish voting rights for all adults, which was already the case in the rest of the UK, while in Northern Ireland only homeowners could vote.

In response to this, both nationalist and loyalist organisations grew increasingly violent. On 8 March 1966, a group of Irish republicans destroyed Nelson's pillar in Dublin, a monument to a British admiral. At the same time, a loyalist group called the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) emerged in Belfast, and later petrol bombed a number of Catholic homes, killing several civilians.

Until 1969, there were several events that further inflamed tensions, ranging from terrorist activities to unequal treatment of nationalists and loyalists by police forces. On 19th of April 1969, violent clashes between NICRA and the RUC occurred in the Bogside, a district of Derry, Northern Ireland. These continued on a smaller scale until the 12th of August, when

the loyalist group Apprentice Boys of Derry marched along the edge of that district. What started as exchanges of taunts escalated into an exchange of projectiles ranging from stones to petrol bombs. In response, the RUC attempted to storm the Bogside, but was hindered by an unexpectedly large number of nationalists. The riots ended when British troops were deployed on the 14th-15th of August, since they did not attempt to enter the district. This later became known as the Battle of the Bogside. During the riots, Irish Head of Government Jack Lynch condemned the RUC and its actions, and called for a United Nations Peacekeeping force to be sent to Derry.

From 1970-1972, political violence exploded in numbers. It was during this time that the Irish Republican Army split into the more traditional, non-violent Official IRA, and the the new Provisional IRA, determined to wage an armed struggle against the perceived oppressors. One important event of this period was the 1971 introduction of internment without trial. 350 people were initially detained, all of which were Irish Catholics, and, due to poor planning, very few of which were actual nationalist activists. However, the time in internment radicalised many.

## Bloody Sunday

On 30th of January 1972, British soldiers opened fire at a crowd, killing 13 unarmed male protesters, with a 14th protester dying of his injuries months later. This is the highest death toll of any single event in this conflict so far, earning that day the title "Bloody Sunday". It led to an uproar among Catholics, and with it to increased support for the Provisional IRA, such as higher recruiting numbers.

**\* Note: as the debate will be set in 1972 this is a very current issue and therefore happening right now. When conducting your research always remember what year the debate is set in in order to avoid referring to "future" events". \***

## Key Issues

### Violation of Human Rights

The first key issue that occurs is the clear violation of human rights taking place in this conflict. It's very cause is the different treatment of inhabitants of Northern Ireland based on their ethnicity. Moreover, since 1971, the right to trial and thus the right to security of the person are being strongly violated, with arbitrary arrests and detention without trial being a component of the issue at hand.

### Principle of Sovereignty

The principle of sovereignty is compromised in more ways than one. On the one hand, the British government suspended the Northern Irish parliament, and thus eliminated the latter's limited yet previously continuous sovereignty. On the other hand, this very conflict was

started by civil organisations seeking to remove British control from Northern Ireland and unite it with the South, which in itself is a severe infringement on British sovereignty.

## Human Cost

The several killings and injuries caused during armed conflicts, protests and demonstrations are obviously an issue, as according to the United Nations every human deserves the right to life, liberty, and security of the person.

## Major Parties Involved

### The Republic of Ireland

Ireland is of course very much involved in this conflict. The nationalist faction in Northern Ireland seeks to reunify the entire island, by means of taking Northern Ireland from the British. Thus, the Irish government is caught in a diplomatic dilemma: Do they side with their countrymen, potentially angering the UK, or do they side with the latter, risking to lose the support of their own people?

### UK

The United Kingdom has sovereignty over Northern Ireland. And while Northern Ireland has always enjoyed a large portion of sovereignty for itself, recently the British government decided to suspend the Northern Irish parliament and rule the region directly from London. This was seen by many as an end to that limited sovereignty. Today, the UK seeks to stabilise its claims to Northern Ireland, and end the violent clashes between protesters, police and army.

## Timeline

1964 → Beginning of Civil Rights Activist Protests against mistreatment of Catholics and Irish Nationalists

1966 → Loyalists found the Ulster Constitution Defense Committee to oppose the Civil Rights Movement

1966 → UVF carried out three attacks on Catholics in Belfast

1967 → Formation of Civil Rights Movement

1968 → Civil Rights March

1968 → Students from Queen's University Belfast tried to march to Belfast City Hall in protest against police brutality on 5 October in Derry

1969 → People's Democracy march between Belfast and Derry was repeatedly attacked by loyalists

1969 → Loyalists try to bring down Ulster Union Party and Prime Minister of Northern Ireland

1970 → Provisionals split from the official IRA

1971 → Internment without trial of perceived political opponents of British rule

1972 → IRA secret talks with the UK collapsed

1972 → Bloody Sunday

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts

Little effective action has been taken to resolve the issue. During the Battle of the Bogside, the British government somewhat stabilised the situation by deploying troops, who then did not directly confront the “defenders” of the Bogside. Moreover, after these riots, the Hunt Committee was formed, with the purpose of investigating and judging the work of the RUC. Their report recommended that the RUC should become an unarmed force.

However, little has been done to cool tensions diplomatically. Some talks between the Provisional IRA and the British government were held, but no conclusion was reached.

## Possible Solutions

Possible solutions to tackle this issue include the promotion of better cooperation between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. This should be based on increased dialogue to be moderated by external entities. Furthermore, the United Kingdom should be held accountable for their actions and violations through means which could possibly be economic sanctions for example. Generally, the intervention of the United Nations is key in order to solve this dispute which arose from lack of communication.

To solve this issue, delegates must first recognise that a solution must be found that pleases all parties to some extent, since otherwise the continuation of violence will be merely delayed. External entities should be assigned to bring all parties to the table and find a compromise.

Moreover, all abuse of human rights must be met with consequences, regardless of what side it originated from. It is quite possibly preferential if this too is done by an external entity, for the sake of understanding that all parties are to be treated equally and should feel treated as such.

Lastly, while these long-term solutions would certainly be productive, delegates must find effective ways to tackle the issue in the short term and end the violence while possible negotiations are held. This could include the deployment of peacekeeping staff or

humanitarian aid, or another way to care for the wounded while keeping violence from both sides in check.

## Bibliography

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## Appendices

- I. Timeline of Northern Ireland Conflict  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Northern\\_Ireland\\_Troubles\\_and\\_peace\\_process](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Northern_Ireland_Troubles_and_peace_process)
- II. The Troubles <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/troubles>
- III. Northern Irish Conflict <https://www.infoplease.com/northern-irish-conflict-chronology>