

Security: Missing from the Northern Ireland Model

William Roy Matchett

Social Sciences, University of Ulster, United Kingdom

The Northern Ireland model is best defined as the framing of the political endgame of Northern Ireland's conflict culminating in the 1998 Belfast Agreement, otherwise known as the Good Friday Agreement. The Northern Ireland model is popularly portrayed as a negotiated settlement. It focuses primarily on the bargain reached by Northern Irish political parties, assisted by British and Irish governments and mediated by US senator George Mitchell. Academics and officials alike use it to explain how the "Troubles" ended and peace was achieved. Conspicuously absent from this model is security. It also grossly understates the difficulty in dealing with a modern insurgency (the Provisionals) and leans too heavily toward skewed post-conflict thinking that views insurgents as "peacemakers" prevented from making peace because of a manifestly poor security response, particularly that of the police force and its intelligence agency (Special Branch). The perspective of politicians and diplomats who brokered the peace settlement prioritizes political negotiations at the expense of the security response; in so doing, the role of security is undermined and overlooked. Most contemporary academic works promote this outlook. Excluding security, however, thwarts a comprehensive analysis of the Northern Ireland conflict and renders any examination partial and unrepresentative. There is therefore a significant intellectual gap in our understanding of how peace was achieved, which this article redresses. Ultimately, it questions the Northern Ireland model's capacity to assist in other relevant conflict contexts in any practical sense by arguing that a strategy where security pushed as politics pulled brought about peace. In other words, security played a crucial part because it forced the main protagonists into a situation out of which the Belfast Agreement emerged.

Keywords: Conflict, Insurgency, Intelligence, Provisionals, Police, Special Branch, Security, Terrorism

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at Northern Ireland's conflict (1969–1998) as an irregular war, studying the main threat as an insurgency and the response of the state as a counterinsurgency. It is a critical examination of the extant literature and

Address correspondence to William Roy Matchett, University of Ulster, Social Sciences, Shore Road, Newtownabbey, Northern Ireland, BT37 0QB United Kingdom. E-mail: pujol1944@yahoo.co.uk