

In January 2004 I offered a presentation at ISODARCO on the conflict in Northern Ireland since around 1969 from the perspective of the Government in the UK. I stressed that there had been much inconsistency concerning tactics and even overall objectives.

In 2005 I intend to say more about this conflict but to focus less on the UK Government and more on the Provisional IRA and its political ally Sinn Fein. Have they also been inconsistent? In particular, has their principal aim been to achieve a united Ireland or to improve the lot of the minority Catholic community within the separated Six Counties and has this changed over time?

I will also consider tactical inconsistencies. What has been the balance between the ballot and the bullet? What has led to the numerous unilateral ceasefires being declared? What has been the balance between the use of violence in the Six Counties and the UK mainland? What has been the balance between targeting civilians and army/police?

Finally, I ask whether the so-called Peace Process launched in earnest after the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is leading towards a definitive conclusion. What has contributed most towards apparent progress towards this end: the termination of the Cold War; the involvement of Governments in Washington, Dublin and the EU; or 9/11? And I end by asking whether the so-called real IRA will flourish if Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA settle for permanent power-sharing with the Protestant majority under UK sovereignty.

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