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William Beattie Smith. *The British State and Northern Ireland Crisis, 1969-73: From Violence to Power-Sharing.* Washington DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2011. 374 pp. $22.50 (paper), ISBN 978-1-60127-067-2.

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"We Shall Be as Blind Men Leading the Blind"

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement that effectively ended nearly three decades of mass political and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, a copious amount of analysis and revisionist theory has been applied to this particular conflict, scrutinizing what was done correctly and what was not, and the lessons for future citizens and policymakers involved in the ongoing peace process. More recently, research on contentious policies and events such as internment and what transpired on "Bloody Sunday" in Derry in 1972 has produced fresh perspectives that correct previous flawed analyses. In *The British State and the Northern Ireland Crisis, 1969-1973: From Violence to Power Sharing*, William Beattie Smith, a senior research fellow with the Queen's University Belfast School of Politics, fills a gap in the revisionist historiography of The Troubles by contending that the action and reaction of the British government during the initial stages of involvement in Northern Ireland must also be reassessed in order to comprehend what strategies the British government employed and it's response to the success or failure of policies enacted. Such attention is key to understanding this complex situation from an outsider's perspective.

Smith first presents key theories on political violence from noted academics such as Charles Tilly and Daniel L. Byman and their respective influential works.[1] Synthesizing the strengths from these leading texts, Smith postulates that the manner in which the British government chose certain policies was "not simply one of rational decision-making," but was influenced by "policymakers' patterns of understanding, which may be more or less accurate; by political and diplomatic pressures; and by the structures, doctrines, and procedures of the bureaucratic organizations that act on the government's behalf" (p. 14). Each individual model of analysis Smith utilizes–rational, cognitive process, political, and organizational–does not entirely explain the British rationale for policies they enacted, but collectively they are imperative for explaining the transformation of British policy in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1973. The subsequent chapters are broken down by year into case studies, with each of the four models of explanation included, to facilitate the reader's understanding of the "factors contributing to policymakers' choices and actions, to relate policy failures to deficiencies in policymaking processes, and hence to enable governments to improve those processes" (p. 21).

Starting with a brief overview of Anglo-Irish relations, Smith outlines the background leading up to the demonstrations in 1968 and 1969 that ultimately led the British government to intervene in Northern Ireland. He argues there were several underlying conditions that dovetailed into the outbreak of violence in 1969 and the implementation of reform measures, although this did not necessarily mean reform would happen. The U.K. government did not consider national identity, the role of religious organizations, and the deep cultural divisions within the Northern Irish community when becoming involved in 1969.

Over the subsequent four chapters, Smith delves separately into the early years of British involvement in Northern Ireland, treating each year as a case study, starting with the initial British response to the crackdown by the Northern Ireland government on civil rights demonstrations in August 1969. This is followed by the discussion of internment, and how it was meant as a coercive tactic to quell growing paramilitary violence. Smith contends that by 1972, given violent reaction to internment, increasing Nationalist discontent, failing Unionist leadership in Stormont, and an I.R.A. bombing campaign in England, the implementation of direct rule became the only viable option of restoring order in Northern Ireland. In his last case study, Smith examines the issues and events that led to the creation of a power-sharing exec-

utive in Northern Ireland, composed of moderates from both sides, and including an Irish dimension. Smith asserts that by negotiating with moderate Nationalist and Unionist leaders, "[William] Whitelaw's efforts between March 1972 and December 1973 … were influential in creating the organizational structures and patterns of understanding that underpinned British strategy in Northern Ireland for the next thirty years" (p. 249). The last two chapters evaluate how the policies enacted in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1973 influenced later policies, with mixed results, and how this framework may be applied, with caution, to other countries experiencing similar problems.

In historiographical terms, Smith does not confine his arguments within the bounds of the ethnic conflict model, which has recently been criticized when applied to the Northern Ireland conflict.[2] To an extent, he perpetuates the discourse set by Michael J. Cunningham and continued by Paul Dixon that British policy since 1972 was one of "continuity," particularly when successive Conservative governments pursued the idea of a devolved power-sharing government with an Irish dimension, yet would likely disagree that policies came about through "tactical adjustments."[3] The critical errors made by U.K. ministers and upper-echelon military personnel during the initial stages of the British army's deployment in Northern Ireland, specifically that military commanders did not understand the extent to which paramilitary groups were influential amongst the general communities, confirms some of the contemporary accusations made by Rod Thornton.[4]

There are several critical arguments in this text that both conform to and detract from the historiography of British implication in "the Troubles." For instance, the failure of moderate reforms after clashes between protestors and police in 1968 and 1969 convinced U.K. ministers that direct intervention was necessary to end the violence on the streets. It is here that the power of the media and public opinion is introduced. While internment was meant to end paramilitary insurgency, particularly amongst the I.R.A., and create an atmosphere for eventual British withdrawal, the policy ultimately proved disastrous. Such security operations performed on the streets of Northern Irish communities during internment were based on previous colonial experiences. Direct rule from Westminster was understood to be a drastic final option if all other efforts failed to end the disruption of government in Northern Ireland. Once imposed, direct rule spurred violent reactions from both republicans, who saw direct rule as the legitimate failure of Unionist rule, and from loyalists, who feared alienation from the British government.

Perhaps one of Smith's greatest arguments is that the U.K. government continuously viewed the Northern Ireland crisis within a British context. The British hoped to achieve a stable power-sharing executive composed of moderate officials from the various political camps, with the goal of eventual "normal" political divides and government processes (p. 81). However, U.K. officials failed to assess the divisive nature of both the Nationalist and Unionist political parties, as well as to realize the significance of paramilitary organizations and their popularity with Northern Irish communities, and the persistent differentiation of "rational," i.e., those accepting British norms of government, and "irrational," or those who fought British political traditions, by the British government (p. 382). Little attention was given to the fears of some Unionists of a power-sharing government, perceived as part of a process of unification with the Irish republic, or the hostility amongst Nationalists over the mere existence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Ulster Special Branch. However, despite the significant contribution of *The British State and the Northern Ireland Crisis*, the sources employed in this analysis must be scrutinized.

Smith relies extensively on the memoirs of significant political leaders from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom in analyzing the process of decision making. While critical to understanding the mindset of politicians as they reacted to evolving policies implemented between 1969 and 1973, one must ultimately be wary of relying too much on such sources for information, and be particularly cognizant of the ulterior motives that plague some of them. For example, U.K. Home Secretary James Callaghan argued that the Irish *Taoiseach* Jack Lynch initiated the breakdown of law and order in Northern Ireland when Lynch announced in a televised broadcast that Stormont had lost the ability to govern Northern Ireland properly. Defence Minister Denis Healy dismissed Prime Minister Harold Wilson's expeditious intervention in Northern Ireland as a "crazy desire" to avert a further escalation of violence (p. 92). Such accusations are counterproductive in producing an evenhanded study. Additionally, despite the fact that Smith includes the media and public opinion, little more than a page is devoted to either. Unfortunately, this text reduces the voice of the electorate in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain to poll numbers and statistics.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of a separate case study on 1970. If included, this would prove advantageous in understanding the first year of the Ulster De-

fense Regiment, the rise of influential loyalist and republican paramilitary organizations such as the Official and Provisional factions of the Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Volunteer Force, as well as the elections of 1970 that saw the Conservatives come to power in Westminster. To his credit, Smith blends with some success the events of 1970 with his analysis of internment in 1971.

The Northern Ireland crisis is incredibly complex, as evinced in the profusion of academic papers and monographs devoted to this contentious topic. The thorough treatment of the formative years of British involvement in "the Troubles" presented in *The British State and the Northern Ireland Crisis* successfully navigates the labyrinth of antagonistic issues and policies that were involved. Smith's desire to not employ traditional historical analysis may offend some readers, but there is method to his madness. He contends that the initial responses of the British government to the Northern Ireland crisis cannot properly be studied from a purely historical perspective, but with the "appropriate transformation of historical events into analytic episodes" (p. 21). Smith acknowledges that his analysis may not necessarily conform to a proper, controlled study, with small samples and numerous variables that change throughout the 1969-73 period under examination. He does provide guidance for future research, including a call for a similar study on the Republic of Ireland utilizing the framework Smith devised. Likewise, one may envision case studies that acknowledge the agency of the British and Northern Irish electorates, as opposed to reducing them to mere statistics. Nevertheless, this text presents a viable thesis to scholars and analysts with an interest not only in Northern Ireland, but in conflict resolution as applied to other troubled areas.

Notes

[1]. Charles Tilly, "Revolutions and Collective Violence," in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. F. Greenstein and N. Polsby (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975); and Daniel L. Byman, *Keeping the Peace: Lasting Solutions to Ethnic Conflicts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[2]. Cillian McGrattan, "Explaining Northern Ireland? The Limitations of the Ethnic Conflict Model," *National Identities* 12, no. 2 (2010): 181-197.

[3]. Michael J. Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969-89: Its Nature and Execution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Paul Dixon, "British Policy Towards Northern Ireland 1969-2000: Continuity, Tactical Adjustment and Consistent 'Inconsistencies," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3, no. 3 (October 2001): 340-368.

[4]. Rod Thornton, "Getting it Wrong: The Crucial Mistakes Made in the Early Stages of the British Army's Deployment to Northern Ireland (August 1969 to March 1972)," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 1 (February 2007): 73-107.

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