



Alan MacLeod. *International Politics and the Northern Ireland Conflict: The USA, Diplomacy and the Troubles.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2016. 320 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-78453-538-4.

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While most histories and analyses of the Troubles of Northern Ireland often focus on the internal political and historical developments within the region or more broadly within the context of Northern Ireland and United Kingdom politics, fewer have attempted to tackle the internationalization of the conflict, which would eventually include the direct diplomatic role of the United States. Even in this narrow range of literature, most analyses begin with the efforts of the United States during the Bill Clinton administration and the period coinciding with the appointment of Special Envoy George Mitchell. Alan MacLeod's recent book is a notable effort in pushing the timeline of US involvement back into the height of the Troubles during the Richard Nixon presidency and arguing that the eventual high-level US involvement was being incubated at this much earlier stage. While some authors' past works have explored some of the nascent US diplomatic and political engagement with the Troubles in this era, many lack the scale of this text or documentation that was once unavailable.[1] MacLeod is able to take advantage of the recent disclosures and declassifications of numerous documents from the early 1970s that previous texts and analyses could not have likely accessed. In this manner, MacLeod is able to draw out a fairly impressive diplomatic and political historical account of the events and

actors that shaped developments of the era. Further, the work draws on official and unofficial documentation from numerous agencies, executives, and personal papers from the United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland, and United States, along with his own findings and conclusions, to provide a fairly novel argument that not only sets US engagement with the Troubles much earlier than most accounts but also identifies the early development of specific diplomatic and political roles of the United States that would be used in the run-up to the Good Friday Accords of 1998.

MacLeod provides a fairly straightforward diplomatic and interests-based account of British, Irish, Northern Irish, and American leaders, diplomats, and policymakers. From a theoretical perspective, the text offers a straightforward institutional policymaking and diplomatic historical approach. Such actors as the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland are collections of interests seeking their own preferences within the state and interstate systems of negotiation, bargaining, and policymaking. The writing is clear, concise, well evidenced, and detailed. While one previous reviewer, James Sheridan, complained of "clumsy writing" and "disjointed sentences," I found the writing clear, informative, and direct.[2] Diplomatic history is rarely highly entertaining or compelling, yet

MacLeod fares well and writes with a directness that conveys authoritativeness and understanding of the many facets of the developments of the diplomatic and political positions of the era.

While the same reviewer criticized MacLeod's effort as far too narrow and excluding of social, economic, and other political and historical developments as well as important events and developments prior to and after the 1971-74 range of his study, I argue that the text is a valuable addition to understanding this critical era in not only the Troubles but also the political developments and diplomacy between Belfast, London, Dublin, and Washington.[3] MacLeod's primary thesis is that it is this specific era between interment and the collapse of Sunningdale that gives birth to the specific nature and position that the United States would ultimately undertake by the late 1980s and 1990s in the peace process. Hence, the criticism by Sheridan that this book is not "a conclusive account of the period in question" seems to be unnecessary given that this is not the intent of the text.[4]

The strengths of the text are its integration of primary source materials from British, Irish, Northern Irish, and American ministries and agencies and executives, and the personal papers of key actors, which give an extra dimension to the argument, the analysis, and MacLeod's conclusions. Strongest is his interpretation not only of the conflicts between the British and Irish governments during this period but also of how these governments cultivated and lobbied Washington in pursuit of their often divergent interests. MacLeod does a nice job of identifying the critical actors in Washington (the White House, State Department, and congressional factions) and the differential interests and positions among the American foreign policymaking elites. Most notable is the development, during this crucial period, of a position by the Nixon administration that had to adapt from non-intervention to one of limited diplomatic and political engagement. Further

strengths include the analysis of the changes in the Congressional Irish Caucus, led notably by Senator Ted Kennedy, which moved from a strictly Republican (in the Irish nationalist sense not in the US congressional sense) mouthpiece to one that became more positively involved in pushing the peace process.

One deficit of the text is that the development of the primary thesis regarding US engagement and its specific role is rolled out rather piecemeal and chronologically along with the developments between 1971 and 1974. It would have been preferable to lay out a fuller encapsulation of the thesis and specific findings at the onset to provide the reader with a better bird's-eye view, which only comes at the conclusion of the text. An additional point is that while the primary thesis is about the involvement of the United States and the internationalization of the Troubles, in many chapters this appears underdeveloped and the focus is almost exclusively on diplomatic and political developments in London, Belfast, and Dublin rather than the reshaping of Washington's role. However, eventually these strings are loosely bound back together to make a coherent argument regarding the importance of this era in shaping the US role in the Troubles for the future. Other weaknesses include omission of some of the critical sectarian, social, and economic developments that paralleled the political and diplomatic machinations of the times. However, given the specificity of this text, its thesis, and the enormity of the preexisting literature that already covers these topics, I find this to be a rather minor and forgivable omission. This text does not seem intended for the introductory researcher or student delving into the Troubles. However, as a tool for researchers and scholars already well acquainted with the Troubles and the peace-building process that encompassed the Good Friday Agreement, this text provides a novel analysis of US involvement in the Troubles much earlier than is generally understood and in a way that shows a model of engagement that was created at the height of

the Troubles in the early 1970s that conditioned the role and expectations of US foreign policy-makers through the Good Friday Agreement.

Notes

[1]. For others covering this subject, see Joseph E. Thompson, *American Policy and Northern Ireland: A Saga of Peacebuilding* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001); Daniel C. Williamson, "Taking the Troubles across the Atlantic: Ireland's UN Initiatives and Irish-US Diplomatic Relations in the Early Years of the Conflict in Northern Ireland, 1969-72," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 18 (2007): 175-189; and John Dumbrell, "The United States and the Northern Irish Conflict 1969-1994: From Indifference to Intervention," *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 6 (1995): 107-125.

[2]. James Sheridan, "A Spotlight on US Role in Early Years of Troubles," review of *International Politics and the Northern Ireland Conflict*, by Alan MacLeod, *The Irish Times*, February 20, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/a-spotlight-on-us-role-in-early-years-of-troubles-1.2982136> (accessed March 19, 2017).

[3]. Ibid.

[4]. Ibid.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

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