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Dan Loris
College of DuPage

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Ethno Nationalist Terror

by Dan Loris

(History 2237)

Terrorism has several variations and motivations, however, there are two main groups of ethno-nationalist terrorism. The first group are the ones fighting to end their colonial status, and the second are the organizations that fight for independence within a larger state's borders.¹ The National Liberation Front (FLN) is a prime example of an organization fighting to end their colonial status from the French. On the other hand, the Irish Republic Army (IRA) would fall under both categories of ethno-nationalist terrorism, because of their revolution to end the colonial status of the British, and their fight for independence from the British Empire. This essay will address the very few differences between Irish National Terror and Algerian Terror, while examining how similar these two groups of terrorist's motivations, general conditions, and responses are.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century, there was a political divide between Ireland and England. There were staggering differences in how the Irish and English people were treated. At that time the English forced the Irish to convert to the Church of England, deprived them of economic gain, denied them social and political rights, and stole their land. Understandably, restricting religious practice and language was a major issue. England was considered an empire, and the Irish were seen as subjects rather than citizens in the eyes of the English empire. In most circumstances, when a country is taken over by an empire, they are brainwashed by their history and beliefs. It was in the 1850's that political divisions were beginning to separate Northern and Southern Ireland. In the Northern part of Ireland was a segment of the population known as Unionists; their religious affiliation was Protestant and as such, they wanted to stay loyal to the Protestant British Empire.² On the contrary, the southerners and northern Catholics of Ireland were known as Catholic Republicans, free of British Control.³ The south wanted to gain economic independence from the British Empire. According to Randall Law, "This created two overlapping conflicts: one between Irish republicans and the British, and one between Irish unionists and Irish republicans."⁴ The aforementioned conflicts which arose because of this political divide were known as Whiteboy violence. By 1882, the Irish National Invincibles, a group of Fenians, assassinated the third-ranking British Official in Ireland, Thomas Burke. This event sparked the formation of the the London Metropolitan Police Service by British forces to defend against the Fenians.

By the time of the First World War (WW1), England became exhausted by the violence because it was hitting too close to home. The British had to decide what to do with the Irish; so in the late spring of 1914 they passed home rule. Home rule meant that England's political control would be reduced in Ireland, but it would not make the Irish completely free of British control. However, because WW1 had just begun the British revoked this decision. In 1916, two years into the war, the Easter Uprising was led by the Fenian Empire. The Easter Uprising was one of the first acts of the

¹ Randall D. Law, *Terrorism: A History* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 178-179.

² Law, *Terrorism*, 142-143.

³ Law, *Terrorism*, 142-143.

⁴ Law, *Terrorism*, 143.

terror movement in ethno-nationalist terrorism, and it occurred because the Fenians were afraid that home rule would destroy the Irish public's interest in independence.⁵ The Fenian's would later convert into what we know now as the Irish Republic Army (IRA). According to IRA member Liam Deasy, "In consequence of the events that occurred in the decisive week of the Easter Rising of 1916, and more particularly of the events that followed it, thousands of young men all over Ireland... turned irrevocably against the English government and became uncompromisingly dedicated to the cause of obliterating the last vestiges of British rule in Ireland."⁶ This would come to be a double negative for the British, because they simultaneously had to fight in the largest military conflict in history at that time, as well as respond to attacks from the IRA within their own borders.

The IRA, consisting of about 15,000 total members, was led by Michael Collins. He understood that he and the IRA could not defeat the British in open battle; so guerilla warfare became an effective tactic for the IRA.⁷ However, Collins knew he would eventually need something more effective than guerrilla war tactics to achieve liberation; so he developed the following goal, "To paralyze the British machine it was necessary to strike at individuals. Without her spies England was helpless."⁸ Collins had other motives to kill British police and criminal agents in the capital, and he wanted to disrupt the Irish government, as well. According to Richard English, "Then on 21 November 1920 – the original Irish 'Bloody Sunday' – the IRA in Dublin struck at the British Intelligence network, killing over a dozen people and wounding six (some of these victims not, in fact, being intelligence agents.)"⁹ This original 'Bloody Sunday' incident would lead to many more acts of terror from the IRA in the 1960's and 1970's. After all, this turned into an ethnic colonial fight between Ireland and Britain. In 1921, after reciprocal accusations of terrorism, the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, thought it was pointless to continue fighting; a compromise was made so that the Southern part of Ireland would become a free state, however, the northern part of Ireland remained as a territory for the United Kingdom.

Similar to the ethno-nationalist terrorism taking place in Ireland and England, was a conflict between Algeria and France. In 1450, the Ottoman Empire, a Muslim Empire, invaded North Africa. The inhabitants of the northern cosmopolitan area in Algeria were religiously diverse. Centuries later, around 1710, Algerians began their fight for independence from the Ottoman Empire. When Napoleon ruled France, he wanted to conquer every country. However, by 1815 Napoleon's reign was over after the battle of Waterloo, which led to the end of France's domination in Europe. Algeria, however was still at war with almost every nation in Europe, along with many of the other Barbary States, which were states that supported piracy in northern Algeria. Then on July 5, 1830, the French invasion took place in a series of murderous campaigns.¹⁰ The French colonized the northern hemisphere of Algeria and created a cosmopolitan region. On the other hand, the south and middle parts of Algeria were very deserted and mainly populated by Muslims.

In 1848, the French moved into southern Algeria. As a result, a rebellion occurred. There were a number of problems that resulted from the French invasion of southern Algeria. The first problem was born from religious differences as the French were non-Muslim rulers. The French did

⁵ Law, *Terrorism*, 144.

⁶ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

⁷ Law, *Terrorism*, 145.

⁸ Michael Collins, "Collapse of the Terror," 3.

⁹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 19.

¹⁰ Michael Burleigh, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 111.

not believe in Sharia Law, which was problematic to the devout Muslims. The second problem came about from Algerian Muslims losing their land to the French, and the French sometimes gave that land away to other countries. The French taking away the Algerians land meant they were taking away their power. The third problem arose from traditional leaders being gone. The next problem resulted from the French educational system that was enforced. Algerian students were forced to learn French history. The French education system was the fastest way to brainwash the Algerians. The final problem was that a new social structure had developed. The French refused to liberate the Algerians in 1942, and by 1945 tensions came to a boiling point. At that time, the Arabs became so frustrated they killed 103 Europeans throughout a week of murderous rioting.¹¹ Similar to the London Metropolitan Police Service protecting England from the IRA; the French, in 1947, installed the Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Democratiques (MTLD) as a form of voter suppression and arrest Muslim Nationalists. However, if the Algerians cooperated with French authorities, they were treated well. Similarly, the Northern Irish Unionists were given fair treatment on the condition of siding and conforming to British rule. It is important to note that the British did indeed discuss the prospect of giving the Irish citizenship; whereas the French never gave much consideration to granting citizenship to the Algerians. Why was this the case? The reason is likely because Algerians were brown skinned, whereas, the Irish were white skinned, and they lived close to the British. The Irish were seen as similar beings to the British while the Algerians were stereotyped as second class citizens or subjects. Racism was the major difference between Irish National Terror and Algerian terror.

After looking at many of the general conditions leading up to the National Liberation Front's (FLN) establishment in 1954, there were a number of similarities to the IRA's rise to power. Both groups of people were being colonized by dominant global powers. Algeria and Ireland were both stripped from their religion, language, as well as social and political rights. Considering both organizations' main purpose was fighting for freedom begs the question, are the FLN and IRA terrorists or freedom fighters? It seems as if many of their motivations were related to gaining independence from a colonial status. The IRA killed several Irish citizens that supported the British in order to send a message of fear to the public. Correspondingly, the FLN focused on elaborating a network of institutions to refocus loyalties of the Arab and Berber people away from the colonial power, while still killing anyone working for the French administration.¹² Also, both groups operated in very small assemblies, because they were overpowered by the larger armies that they were fighting against. Operating in these small assemblies allowed these groups to spread out and attack specific targets and strike fear amongst their enemies. Is there really a difference between these ethno-nationalist terrorist and the armies they are combatting? According to an FLN chief, "I see hardly any difference between the girl who places a bomb in the Milk-Bar and the French aviator who bombards a mechta or who drops napalm in a zone interdite."¹³ It is not possible for either side to understand their own motives without, first, understanding their opponents.

In conclusion, it is understood that there are two main types of ethno-nationalist terrorism. It can be inferred that Irish National Terror and Algerian Terror can be constituted under the classification of freedom fighters, because they see terrorism as the only war tactic that is successful for them to gain independence. Considering how impoverished Ireland and Algeria were during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, small revolutionary attacks on important figures was the only way they could damage their opponents. Outside of extremism, many see terrorism as a step too far; they

¹¹ Burleigh, *Blood and Rage*, 112.

¹² Burleigh, *Blood and Rage*, 116.

¹³ Burleigh, *Blood and Rage*, 122.

want independence but they are not willing to commit acts of terror to gain autonomy. Then again, the empires that invaded these countries, and killed thousands of innocent civilians by stripping them of their land and liberty are not logically different from the so-called terrorists themselves. Terrorism is just a perspective; it is simply another tactic of war. The motives of these two different terrorist groups, Irish Nationalist and Algerian terrorist, were not all that different; however, the reactions of their opponents were. Racism is what prevented the French from considering the idea to liberate the Algerians. Whereas, the British saw the Irish somewhat equal to them because they looked similarly; so they considered to liberate them. The IRA and FLN wanted independence and to avoid religious persecution, and these organizations were willing to go to extreme measures to achieve their goals. In summary, many groups see the Algerians and the Irish nationalists as a model for how to take action, because these organizations were successful in their rebellion for independence.