

CLINTON AND NORTHERN IRELAND: A RECONSIDERATION

Our paper will begin by noting the widespread neglect of Northern Ireland in American accounts of the policies of the Clinton administration. Such neglect extends to critics and supporters of Clinton, and is evident even in accounts and memoirs written by some former members of the administration. This neglect contrasts sharply not only with British and Irish perspectives, but also with Clinton's own account of his foreign policy priorities in *My Life*.

The purpose of the paper is twofold: firstly, to assess the case for viewing Northern Ireland policy as a central aspect of the wider Clinton foreign policy; and, secondly, to consider in some historical perspective the impact of U.S. intervention on Northern Ireland's political development. The paper will comprise two sections:

1. NORTHERN IRELAND AND CLINTON ADMINISTRATION PEACEMAKING

This section will review debates about the rationale, background and motivation of Clinton's policy. It will draw out the various perspectives and disputes within the administration over Northern Ireland. More centrally, it will set the policy within wider administration concerns and priorities, notably the pursuance of post-Cold War conflict resolution and democratic enlargement, with its attendant calculus of risks and benefits. It will compare and contrast the Irish initiatives with other Clinton policies towards regional conflicts, notably in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East. Various questions will be raised. How high a priority was given to Northern Ireland? Was this priority appropriate, given the more general aims of Clinton's foreign policy?

2. THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH

This section will assess the role played by American pressure in achieving agreement in 1998. The U.S. role will be weighed against other factors, notably internal war weariness and the diplomacy of Dublin and London. This section will raise various questions, to be answered from the perspective of 2005. Did the Clinton administration achieve a balance between the various Northern Ireland parties and interests, unionist and nationalist? How successful was the Good Friday Agreement in reconciling these various interests and in providing a secure political future for the province? How has the onset of the War on Terror affected our judgement of Clinton's policies towards Northern Ireland?

The conclusion to the paper will assess likely future historical verdicts on the policy.

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