

Abstract

After briefly recounting the centuries-old dispute between Great Britain and Ireland, the current conflict over Northern Ireland between Britain and Sinn Féin/Irish Republican Army (IRA) is analyzed as a 2 x 2 game. The unique Nash equilibrium in this game is shown not to predict the recent behavior of Sinn Féin/IRA, which declared a cease-fire in September 1994, resumed its bombing campaign in February 1996, and reinstated a cease-fire in July 1997. However, these moves are consistent with Sinn Féin/IRA's asserting its "threat power," according to the theory of moves (TOM).

The mutually beneficial resolution of this conflict seems to lie in the farsighted strategic calculations of leaders who, recognizing that a reversion to conflict is likely to occur if conciliatory behavior is not reciprocated, reward such behavior — even if it proves temporarily costly. The effective use of threat power in the 2 x 2 game indicates a possible path toward a resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict. An Appendix explores the relationship between this game and the well-known games of Chicken and Prisoners' Dilemma, based on both standard game theory and TOM.

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