

**Smith, M.L.R., Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.**

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**Smith, M.L.R.,** *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement.* London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Most of those involved in negotiating or supporting Northern Ireland's Good Friday Agreement were replete with rhetoric of "historic days" and "new beginnings." Momentum toward this "new" beginning has continued with the election of the Assembly, the establishment of an international commission on policing and the promulgation of legislation to allow early release of prisoners. Given all these "history making" events, one might expect a book that ends essentially in 1992 to have limited contemporary value. However, that is not the case here. The questions raised by this book remain both unanswered and central to the future of Northern Ireland.

This is a slightly updated version of a well-received hardback that first appeared in 1995. The author claims that the book's distinctive feature is its "strategic" approach rather than its source material or, one might add, its conclusions. This strategic approach is defined as simply tracing "the line of thinking of a particular political entity in order to comprehend how it proposes to achieve its objectives; and also to look at the ideological assumptions and values that underlie that entity's thinking and how this informs the way it formulates its strategy." (p. 4) This also defines the book's chronological framework.

The first chapter is an excellent tour of the assumptions and analyses that have guided republican thinking since 1798. By the time of the failed 1916 Easter rebellion, the republican movement was essentially a conspiratorial elite convinced of the invincibility of its own colonial analysis of Ireland and that it was the vanguard of the Irish nation. It also believed in the necessity for physical force regardless of public support. This led to violence being viewed as an end rather than a means. Challenges to this view, such as those by Collins, de Valera or the 1960s radicals, ultimately produced splits in the republican movement - something that the present leadership continues to fear.

But according to Smith, dedication to physical force has cost the republican movement far more than cohesion. It meant that the movement lacked the political and analytical sophistication to take advantage of any short-term tactical advantage, such as the 1972 fall of Stormont. The focus on physical force also made it easier for the movement's enemies to keep it isolated, and it was largely fear of isolation that led to a republican review of strategy in 1977.

However, while this review of strategy produced a more sophisticated approach, including electoral politics, it did not mean any down-grading of physical force, as Smith makes clear in Chapter 7. But by the end of the 1980s, a series of military "mistakes" and heavy losses left the military instrument looking uncontrolled and counter-productive. So began Sinn Fein's long march toward greater involvement in constitutional politics beginning with the Hume-Adams talks and culminating in Sinn Fein's creditable performance in the Assembly elections and the possibility of a cabinet position for Gerry Adams.

While this latter event happened after the publication of Smith's book, the questions he raises remain pertinent. Is the current ceasefire permanent and does the political leadership have control of the military instrument? But perhaps most importantly, we are still to be convinced that the desire to advance republican goals is now at a higher premium than the desire to preserve a distinct ideo-military entity. Like Smith, this reviewer has reservations.

Overall, this is a work that is well deserving of a place on the bookshelves of researchers on Northern Ireland. Teachers of courses on limited or irregular warfare will also find it a useful addition to their reading lists.

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