Northern Ireland -The Troubles begin (sic)

In 1969 Catholic civil rights marches and counter-protests by Protestant loyalists (as in "loyal" to the British Crown) spiraled into violent unrest.

British troops were sent in but soon came into conflict with the Provisional IRA (Irish Republican Army) (sic).

Loyalist paramilitary groups responded with a campaign of sectarian violence against the Catholic community.

As the situation worsened, Northern Ireland's parliament was suspended and direct rule imposed from London.

Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s paramilitary groups waged violent campaigns to pursue their goals.

The IRA carried out deadly bomb and gun attacks in Britain and Northern Ireland that targeted police, soldiers, politicians and civilians.

Loyalist paramilitaries targeted Catholics in "tit-for-tat" killings.

Police and British forces tried to keep order, sometimes amid controversy, such as the alleged co-operation of some undercover units with loyalist groups.

In the early 1990s negotiations took place between political parties and the British and Irish governments (sic) and America.

After several years of talks IRA and loyalist ceasefires held and in 1998 the "Good Friday" agreement was signed.

It set up a power-sharing executive, with ministerial posts distributed by party strength, and elected assembly.

The deal was backed by voters in referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic, which scrapped its constitutional claim to the north.

Problems remain as devolution has been suspended several times since it began.

Unionists want the IRA to verifiably scrap its weapons and end activity such as so-called punishment beatings.

With the IRA claiming it will do both, Republicans say Unionist demands for pictures of weapons decommissioning are an excuse to avoid power-sharing.

Northern Ireland society has hurdles to overcome too, with views still divided over issues like policing, and a sharply rising crime rate.

The Peace Agreement and the Three Strands

The Agreement sought to build relationships within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and between Britain and Ireland.

It is divided into three strands:

- Strand One set up the power-sharing Assembly and Executive. It also set up a **Civic Forum** which no longer exists.
- Strand Two established an Irish dimension to the governing arrangements for Northern Ireland. The North–South institutions (the **North–South Ministerial Council (NSMC)** and the **North–South Implementation Bodies** encourage co-operation that benefits both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This is important for nationalists; and
- Strand Three established 'East–West' institutions (the **British–Irish Council** and the **British–Irish Intergovernmental Conference**) to encourage co-operation and develop good relations between Britain and Ireland. These are forums where the two Governments discuss **Reserved Matters** which are not the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/quick_guides/04/uk_northern_ireland_conflict/html/3.stm