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Definition: **Irish Republican Army** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 a militant organization of Irish nationalists founded with the aim of striving for a united independent Ireland by means of guerrilla warfare. Abbreviation: **IRA**



Image from: [The Tower of London prison, on the River Thames,... in Encyclopedia of Intelligence & Counterintelligence](#)

Summary Article: **Irish Republican Army**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Militant Irish nationalist organization formed in 1919, the paramilitary wing of Sinn Fein. Its aim is to create a united Irish socialist republic including Ulster. To this end, the IRA has frequently carried out bombings and shootings. Despite its close association with Sinn Fein, it is not certain that the politicians have direct control of the military, the IRA usually speaking as a separate, independent organization. The chief common factor shared by Sinn Fein and the IRA is the aim of a united Ireland.

IRA splinter groups In 1969 the IRA split into two wings, one 'official' and the other 'provisional'. The official wing sought reunification by political means, while the Provisional IRA, or Provos as they became known, carried on with terrorist activities, their objective being the expulsion of the British from Northern Ireland. It is this wing, of younger, strongly sectarian, Ulster Catholics, who are now generally regarded and spoken of as the IRA. The left-wing Irish Republican Socialist Party, with its paramilitary wing, the Irish National Liberation Army, split from the IRA in 1974, as did the extremist Real IRA in 1997.

Early history of the IRA The IRA was founded in 1919 by Michael Collins as the successor to the Irish Volunteers, a militant nationalist body dating from 1913. The IRA strategy was to make British rule ineffective by the use of armed force, the belief being that political activity alone would not achieve this end. Although the IRA and Sinn Fein share a common goal, and there is overlapping membership, the IRA has always operated independently and in times of crisis has appeared to be free from political control. During the Anglo-Irish War, or War of Independence, 1919–21, employing guerrilla tactics, it forced the British government to negotiate a political settlement which involved the creation of the Irish Free State in the south, with dominion status within the British Commonwealth. This settlement proved unacceptable to some IRA members and the organization split into two groups. The larger, which supported the settlement, became the nucleus of the Irish Free State army, and the rest, styled 'the Irregulars', began a campaign of violence against the new independent government in the south. The Irish Civil War erupted 1922–23 which, after heavy fighting, ended with the defeat of the Irregulars. The IRA did not disband or surrender its arms but remained a clandestine organization, turning its efforts towards achieving the unification of Ireland. It was declared illegal in 1936, but came to the fore again in 1939 with a bombing campaign in Britain. Its activities intensified from 1968 onwards, as the civil-rights disorders ('the Troubles') in Northern Ireland increased.

IRA campaigns The IRA has carried out bombings and shootings in Northern Ireland as well as

bombings in mainland Britain and in British military bases in continental Europe. In 1979 it murdered Louis Mountbatten, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth II, with a bomb in his boat. In 1984 a bomb was planted in the Grand Hotel in Brighton, Sussex, in an attempt to kill members of the UK government during the Conservative Party conference. The bomb came close to killing many members of the British cabinet. By attacking the British government so successfully, the IRA made Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher more active in the search for dialogue in Ireland. In 1987 the IRA planted a bomb that exploded during the Remembrance Day parade in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, killing 13 people. In 1988 a team of three IRA terrorists sent to Gibraltar were shot dead by the British Special Air Service (SAS) before they could bomb a parade of soldiers. The IRA increased its attacks on the British mainland in the 1990s, and started to bomb economic targets. The Bishopsgate Bomb in the City of London in 1993 caused over £1 billion of damage. Bombs were either left, or claimed to have been left, on railway lines and on motorways. In addition, in 1993, a bomb was left in a fish and chip shop on the Shankill Road in Belfast, the loyalist heartland. It killed ten people.

The IRA announced a cessation of its military activities in August 1994, in response to an Anglo–Irish peace initiative. However, the insistence by the government in London that Sinn Fein could enter into all-party negotiations about the future of Ireland only after the IRA had decommissioned its weaponry was seen as unacceptable by the more militant members of the organization, who broke the ceasefire in February 1996. Subsequent bombing cast doubt over the whole peace process and raised the question of how much influence Sinn Fein has over its military allies, and how much control the leadership of the IRA has over its active members. UK–Unionist plans for elections to select representatives to the talks also met with opposition from Sinn Fein. In October 1996, two IRA car bombs exploded at the British army's headquarters in Lisburn, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, killing a British soldier (the first to die since the August 1994 ceasefire was announced) and injuring 30 people. In July 1997 the IRA announced another ceasefire but doubts about its validity were expressed by Unionist politicians. Continuity IRA, a republican splinter group opposed to the ceasefire, carried out a number of bomb attacks during 1997–98. An extremist splinter group, Real IRA, was believed to have been behind a brutal car bombing attack in Omagh, County Tyrone, in August 1998, which claimed more than 26 lives. The IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, unreservedly condemned the atrocity.

Decommissioning of the IRA In the summer of 1999, the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam came close to expelling Sinn Fein from the Northern Ireland Assembly following a review of the IRA ceasefire. Although there was evidence of IRA involvement in criminal activities, such as gunrunning and so-called 'punishment' beatings, she decided that these did not represent a real breakdown in the IRA ceasefire. Consequently Sinn Fein remained in the Assembly and Northern Ireland peace process, and was able to join the Northern Ireland executive committee in 2000. Arguments continued over the failure of the IRA to begin the arms decommissioning that was required under the Good Friday Agreement. The deadline for weapons to be handed over was May 2000 but by April it was clear that this would not be met, as the process had not even begun. The IRA was accused of dodging the issue and Sinn Fein politicians were unable to force the issue. A compromise was agreed in May 2000 with the setting up of an independent team, led by former African National Congress (ANC) secretary general Cyril Ramaphosa and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, to inspect and verify that the IRA's weapons were securely stored and not being used. After protracted delays, limited decommissioning began on 23 October 2001, although no details or numbers were given.

Arrests in Colombia and allegations of IRA spying Three suspected members of the IRA were

arrested in Bogotá, Colombia, in August 2001, and were formally charged with training guerrillas from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC; Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and carrying false passports.

In October 2002, allegations of IRA spying at the Northern Ireland Office led to suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly executive, the reimposition of direct rule from London, and the IRA cutting its links with the weapons decommissioning body. The charges of spying were dropped in January 2006.

The Northern Ireland police claimed that the IRA was behind a 20 December 2004 robbery of £26 million from the headquarters of the Northern Bank, in Belfast, but the IRA denied any involvement.

In July 2005, the IRA announced that its armed campaign had ended and it stated, in September 2005, that it had 'put beyond use' its final stocks of weapons. This was confirmed by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), chaired by General John de Chastelain. It provided the basis for the Northern Ireland Assembly to meet again, in May 2006, and a transitional assembly to be established in November 2006.

Sinn Fein and the DUP share power in a devolved administration In May 2007, Sinn Fein agreed to share power with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), to bring an end to direct rule from London.

Two British soldiers were shot dead on 7 March 2009 and two more injured in a gun attack on the Masserene British Army Base, with the Real IRA claiming responsibility. Also, on 22 February 2010, there was a car bombing outside a courthouse in Newry. But otherwise the peace held.

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