ANGLO-IRISH RELATIONS FROM A HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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RESUMO

The British Isles are an archipelago formed mainly by the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. For over eight centuries, disputes and conflicts between the English and the Irish people have been intense, revealing certain continuity and structural tension. This study aimed to analyze Anglo-Irish relations from a historical and geographical perspective. To do so, it begins with the geographic specificities that characterize the British Isles, to understand how they have shaped the relations between the people of these islands.
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INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that, in 1909, the British Empire encompassed about one-fourth of the world's population, with about 440 million subjects – more than ten times the population of England itself – and, in territorial terms, an area of 32.5 million kilometers, about 25% of the land in the world. In comparative terms, the territory of the British Empire was three times and ten times larger than the French and the German Empires, respectively[1]. From an economic point of view, "In 1914, the nominal gross value of the stock of British capital invested abroad was (...) between two-fifths and half of all resources belonging to foreigners." (Ferguson, 2010: 256).

Very early on, England attributed substantial strategic relevance to Ireland, because of their proximity and for both being part of the British Isles, thus defining it as priority target for domination and occupation. It is interesting how geography has conditioned the history of Anglo-Irish relations, which is marked by intense and recurring conflicts derived from mutual antagonisms that are difficult to overcome.

In this history, due to the power asymmetry, it is surprising that, at the height of the British Empire in territorial terms, Ireland became an independent country in 1921, born from a quite old resistance process, focused on the emancipation of the local people against the domination practiced by its close neighbor. Because of this, throughout the year of 2016, the Republic of Ireland promoted several celebrations related to the centennial of the Easter Rising, a rebellion that, although unsuccessful, created the process that would later result in the Irish War of Independence of 1919-1921.

This study aimed to analyze, in general, Anglo-Irish relations from a historical and geographical perspective. To this end, in addition to this introduction and a conclusion at the end, this article is organized based on other four sections: the next one discusses the importance of geography to international relations; and the other sections approach three different stages of the history of Anglo-Irish relations.

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[1] For more details, see Ferguson (2003, p. 256) and Parsons (1999, p. 6).

GEOGRAPHICAL COERCION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The history of humanity can be thought from its relationships with the environment that surrounds it. The latter is not a frame in the background, but a reality that imposes itself and constrains societies and their paths over time. Historian Fernand Braudel approached this when he coined the term "geographical coercion," when addressing the structural temporalities that determine human history [2].

For the international system, nothing very different. Geography has greatly affected international relations. It is an imperative that, if neglected, compromises part of the analyses regarding national trajectories in general. This is because "the most stable factor on which the power of a nation depends is obviously geography[3] ."

Furthermore, the Hobbesian perception that each political-territorial unit of the international system was a potential threat to the others makes the perspective of confrontation and wars themselves a chronic result of the history of this system, marked by a persistent competitive pressure "amongst men[4]."

Since the exercise of conquest (or defense) and the development of economic activities required for the war effort always involve a territorial dimension, geography acquires a nature of strategic knowledge in international relations. Because of this, the great powers tend to think about the close and interesting external space to outline their strategies (especially political, military, and economic) in the face of external threats and international antagonisms, to take advantage of benefits and/or

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[2] "Certain structures, by living too long, become stable elements of a multitude of generations: they obstruct history, disturb it, so they command its flow. Others are readier to crumble. But all are, at the same time, supports and obstacles. Obstacles are as limits from which humanity and its experiences cannot break free. (...) The most accessible example still seems that of geographic coercion. For centuries, humanity is prisoner of climates, vegetation, animal populations, cultures, of a slowly built balance, from which it cannot deviate without the risk of putting everything at stake again." Braudel (2007, p. 49-50).

[3] Morgenthau (2003, p. 215).

[4] Because of this distrust amongst men, the most reasonable way for any man to make himself safe is to strike first, that is, by force or cunning subdue other men – as many of them as he can, until he sees no other power great enough to endanger him. This is no more than what he needs for his own survival, and is generally allowed. (...) This makes it obvious that for as long as men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in the condition known as 'war'; and it is a war of every man against every man. For war doesn't consist just in battle or the act of fighting, but in a period of time during which it is well enough known that people are willing to join in battle." (Hobbes, 1651, p. 75)..

mitigate vulnerabilities. Ultimately, geopolitics appears: a bridge between geography and international relations as conceived within the realist tradition. In summary, "(...) the virtue of nations is inexorably subjected to the fortune of geographical facts." (Mello, 2011, p. 34).

In this perspective of geographical coercion on national trajectories and international relations, it would not be absurd to suppose that the disputes between the central authorities in the international system since the middle ages involved geopolitical issues, although they were not clearly and explicitly formulated several times. This is an almost millennial highlight of the relations between Ireland and England, as will be seen below.

FROM MUTUAL THREAT TO SOCIAL ENGINEERING IN ULSTER

Located on the Northwest coast of continental Europe, the British Isles are an archipelago with more than 315,000 km², mainly composed by the islands of Great Britain (territory of present-day England, Scotland, and Wales) and Ireland (territory of present-day Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland), as well as by other islets (see Figure 1). From the spatial point of view, the islands of Ireland and Great Britain are very close, only separated by the Irish Sea, which has two exits to the Atlantic Ocean: the North Channel and St. George's Channel (South).

The proximity between the two islands and the insularity of all the British Isles regarding the Continent have affected for centuries the relations between the people of both islands, as well as their interactions and insertions in the international system.

In historiography, there is certain consensus about the beginning of English invasions in Ireland: the consolidation of the House of Plantagenet in England, with the accession of Henry II (1154-1189)[5]. In those days, the relations between the people of the two islands was already based on the notion of mutual threat, something characteristic of Western Europe during the High (11th-13th centuries) and Late (14th-15th centuries) Middle Ages[6].

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[5] See Duffy (1997. Part II).

[6] "Precisely because the relationship between property owners in this [medieval] society was analogous to what today exists between States, the acquisition of new land by an
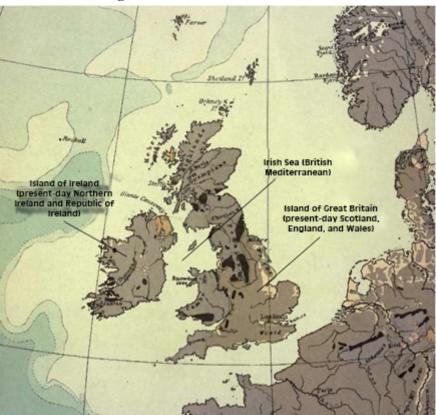
Figure 1 – British Isles and its Seas

Source: From Mackinder, H. (1902, back cover).

Henry II took advantage of the fierce rivalries between the five dynasties that ruled the island of Ireland, and not only orchestrated the invasions of Wexford in 1169, Waterford in 1170, and Dublin in 1171, but also took control of rich lands, safeguarding the provision of material resources required to defend his land and occupy taken territories. Thus, some historians defined these invasions as effective colonizatio initiatives.

individual represented a direct or indirect threat to others. It implied, as today, a change of balance in what was generally a very unstable system of balance of power, in which rulers were always potential allies or enemies to each other. This was, therefore, a simple mechanism that, at that stage [12th-15th centuries] of internal and external expansion, kept both the richest and most powerful knights and the poorest ones in constant motion, all of them always on guard against the expansion of the others, and invariably trying to increase their possessions." (Elias, 1993, p. 47).

> The Conquerors found it relatively easy at first to defeat the Irish in battle. What made their involvement in Irish history so crucial, however, was not their military success, but rather what they chose to do with the lands they had won. It was colonization rather than conquest which changed the course of Irish history after 1171. (Duffy, 2012, p. 38).

It was clear that the Irish Sea, British Mediterranean, was not properly a barrier, a moat, but a channel of communication and integration of the islands, and war was an integrative force of territories in this phase of the medieval period[7].

The reactions and struggles of the Irish against the invasions did not stop, as well as the English will in repressing them[8] . From then until the end of the 20th century, because the main source of threat had always come from the other side of the Sea, the insularity of Ireland became the guiding element of its relations with the rest of the world, even defining its own identity, cultural, and (geo)politic perceptions. Indeed, the structuring notion of an island, a people arose very early[9] .

After the defeat to France in the Hundred Years' War, in 1453, England was expelled from the European continent and "(...) unaware of it at the time, became an island, that is, an autonomous space, distinct from

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[7] According to Fiori, for that period of European history, "(...) war also fulfilled the role of approximating territories and unifying people, eliminating competitors and centralizing power." (Fiori, 2004, p. 22).

[8] "In Ireland the situation is very different: in the 12th century, the English settled in Pale [region in which is located the city of Dublin], as later in their American colonies. The Irish people are their enemy, the natives both despised and feared at the same time. Hence the incomprehension, abuse, and horrors that no one could take stock: British historians have done so with clarity and honesty. It is true, as one of them says, that "the Irish were, along with the black people sold as slaves, the main victims of the system that assured Great Britain its world hegemony." (Braudel, 1998, p. 344-345).

[9] In the words of Michael Collins, "For 700 years the untied effort has been to get the English out of Ireland. (…) Through those centuries – through hopes and through disappointments – the Irish people have struggled to get rid of a foreign Power which was preventing them from exercising their simple right to live and to govern themselves as they pleased – which tried to destroy our nationality, our institutions, which tried to abolish our customs and blot out our civilization, – all that made us Irish, all that united us as a nation. (…) The Irish struggle has always been for freedom – freedom from English occupation, from English interference, from English domination – not for freedom with any particular label attached to it." (Collins, 1922, p. 9-10).

the continent" (Braudel, 1998, p. 326). It was then confined to the other side of the English Channel and in the face of new threats from the Continent: the Habsburg Empire of Charles V (1516-1556) and Philip II (1556-1598) and the France of Francis I (1515-1547) and Henry IV (1572-1610). It turns out that the Russian expansion in Europe and Asia from 1462[10].

and the overseas expansion led by the Iberians, particularly since 1488[11] , created the most important geographic revolution of the international system, both by the conquest and increasing Russian presence in what would become the Heartland that H. Mackinder[12] mentioned and by the discovery of the New World and the new routes to the Indian Ocean and the Far East[13].

Before the defeat in the Hundred Years' War, the strengthening of rivals on the Continent, and the geographical revolution of the system, the English progressively changed their geostrategy: they were no longer guided by disputes for territorial positions on the Continent, but by the maintenance of power balance in Europe, while its expanding borders shifted to the conquest of colonial domains and privileged positions overseas (trade routes, markets, and exploration areas abroad – New World, Africa, India, and Far East). That is why Mackinder divided the history of England in before and after Christopher Columbus.

> Seen thus in relation to earlier and to later history, Britain is possessed of two geographical qualities, complementary rather than antagonistic: insularity and universality. Before Columbus, the insularity was more evident than the universality. (…) After Columbus, value began to attach to the ocean- highway, which is in its nature universal. Even the great continents are only vast islands and discontinuous; but every part of the ocean is accessible from every other part. (Mackinder, 1902, p. 11).

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[10] See Times (1993, p. 158-159).

[11] See Times (1993, p. 152-153).

[12] For more details, see Mackinder (1904) or Mello (2011).

[13] "The challenge represented by the invasions from the East had as opposition the double European reaction to the pressure of the Central Asian hordes: the Russian territorial expansion and the Iberian ocean expansion. The Russian expansion represented a direct and frontal counterattack, which made the Mongol go back and be in defensive position; the Portuguese expansion took the form of an indirect approach strategy, overflowing by the side and pressing from behind the central position of the Asian invaders." (Mello, 2011, p. 43).

Indeed, England also gradually changed the nature of its relationship with the people of the British Isles (Wales, Scotland, and Ireland): from direct threats and spaces of colonization to constitutive parts of the English defense geostrategy, whose controls and frameworks became a must. An antagonism of difficult conciliation was born from this. On the one hand, before the external threats in general, the English "safety perimeter" was no longer only its national territory of origin. It notably incorporated the set of all British Isles before the continental giants, which meant the framing and submission of the other local people. On the other hand, the Irish geopolitical perception was still based *on the idea of an island, a people.*

> To North and East, England was confined by mountainous regions difficult to access, especially grazing, which were poor for a long time and sparsely populated by Celts who were almost always resistant to the English culture. Dominating these neighbors was the crucial process of the internal history of the British Isles, a venture that only admitted bad solutions, those of force. (Braudel, 1986, p. 342).

However, there was still another complicated Anglo-Irish antagonism in gestation. With the Reformation of 1534, England broke with the Catholic Church of Rome and created its own religion, Anglicanism, establishing the British monarch as its supreme leader, to the detriment of the pope.

Therefore, either by geopolitical antagonisms (reciprocal threats derived from two different understandings about the insertion of the island of Ireland in the European board) or by religious rivalries (derived from two postulants opposed to the heritage of Western Christianity), there was a deep opposition between British Protestants and Irish Catholics, in addition to a natural convergence of interests between the latter and the continental enemies of England, especially the Catholics France and Spain.

> As relations with France, the Empire and Spain deteriorated, English concern about the fragility of Ireland's defenses against continental invasion grew. The Reformation reached Ireland as part of Henry VIII's program of breaking with the papacy and chaining Church and state institutions more tightly to the monarchy (Duffy, 2012, p. 50).

That is why, after the Irish Nine Years' War (1594-1603), English authorities started to think that the Catholic Ireland represented an irreparable opposition to basic interests of England and, therefore, was one of the main threats to be faced. It was in this framework that King James I (1603-1625) undertook a radical initiative of "social engineering" on a large scale, with religious and geopolitical meaning: the establishment of Protestant settlers in the lands of Northern Gaelic lords exiled after the defeat of Hugh O'Neill's troops in the already mentioned Nine Years' War [14]. They took and divided the lands of Ulster (roughly present-day Northern Ireland) in blocks, only a leaving a small part of the region to the Irish Catholics.

Thus, a deep socio-political-religious fracture was born in the island of Ireland, which remains to this day: a division between the Protestant North and the Catholic Center-South. From the English point of view, allied forces were brought within the island of Ireland to directly confront the initiatives that could threaten the English positions and domains. In Ireland, the parties and groups that occupied the island were in a permanent state of tension, which resulted in confrontations, conflicts, and violence from time to time.

In the reign of Charles I (1625-1649), the English Crown expanded the policy of plantations and settlements in Ireland. The same occurred during the Republic. Cromwell's troops besieged and massacred the towns of Drogheda and Wexford in 1649, where English monarchists and Irish Catholic rebels had fled to. Despite returning to England in 1651, Cromwell deepened the policy of uprooting Irish Catholic populations. The Parliament of England passed the Law of Succession in 1652, decreeing that the rebellious Catholic nobility would lose its properties and be exiled to the poorer regions in the West of River Shannon. As a result, in the late 1650s, few lands still belonged to the Irish Catholics, except for Galway, which meant the rise of a new ruling class, now Protestant.

> After the confiscations and plantations of the previous century, the preponderance of Irish land was now owned by the new Protestant élite which presided over rapid economic growth in agriculture and

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[14] "The succeeding Stuart administration seized the opportunity for further colonization in Ulster after the pivotal event of the flight of the Earls in 1607. The central institutions of the state were in theory now effective throughout the land. The new English community comprising recently-arrived protestant officials, planters and ecclesiastics asserted its rights to be considered the ruling class in place the Old English élite" (Duffy, 2012, p. 53).

manufacturing. In town and country, the old elites
had been ousted from political and economic power
and distanced by Reformation from Crown.

The Restoration represented the triumph of new
Protestant colonial class which aspired to political,
social and economic ascendancy in 18th century
Ireland. (Duffy, 2012, p. 53).

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the defeat of King James II
(Catholic) secured the Protestant domination in the British Isles, which
was reflected throughout the 18th century. Before the fear of new riots,
the statute in defense of English Protestant power was created, aiming to
ensure that the Irish Catholics would not reconquer positions of power
with which they could regain control of the island. To do so, they were
banned from the Parliament and from public office, and prevented from
voting, presiding schools, and buying land. Most Irish Catholics became
tenants or employees of Anglo-Irish Protestant owners. Despite these
actions, the Catholic Church and the Irish population continued growing
throughout the 18th century[15] .

In 1791, the first organization dedicated to break the bond between
Ireland and England, named Society of United Irishmen, was created
based on ideals of a secular and republican Ireland. The outbreak of the
war between England and France in 1793 caused an approach, feared
by the English, between the United Irishmen movement and the French
revolutionaries, even awakening the unlikely support of Irish Catholics
sectors to the secular and republican revolutionary ideals. With the
existence of a common enemy, the English enabled such convergence of
disparate interests. This alliance achieved some victories. However, in the
decisive moment of confrontation, the French soldiers did not arrive and,
as a result, England managed to suppress the insurgents and undertook
a new wave of terror. The revolutionary leader Wolfe Tone was sentenced

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[15] "(...) it is the Irish subjection to the English market, the total subjection that made the
trade with Ireland be 'throughout the 18th century [...] the most important branch of
English overseas traffic.' The exploitation was organized from the domains of Protestant
Anglo-Irish people, who confiscated for themselves three quarters of Irish land. On an
income of four million pounds, rural Ireland paid missing owners an annual contribution of
about 800,000 pounds; before the end of the 18th century, it reached a million. Under these
conditions, the Irish peasantry is reduced to misery, as it is hit by a growing demography."
(Braudel, 1998: 345).

to death, becoming a martyr of an independent and secular Ireland[16] . Fernand Braudel summarized such events, and also pointed out the central question that pervades the secular Anglo-Irish relationship: geography.

> Certainly, a great opportunity was lost, because shortly after, with the French Revolution and the military landings that were organized on the island, the drama was again located in Ireland. In a way, everything was repeated. Indeed, according to Vidal de La Blache, Ireland, too close of England to escape, too big to be assimilated, has always been a victim of its geographical location (Braudel, 1998, p. 346-347).

THE BRITISH GEOSTRATEGY AND THE IRISH INDEPENDENCE

The English geostrategy for the British Isles acquired a full formulation with the publication of the book "Britain and the British Seas," by Halford Mackinder, in 1902. The author proposed to analyze the physical geography of the islands as a whole to think about the strategic context suitable to the exercise of the English military power.

> The aim of each is to present a picture of the physical features and condition of a great natural region, and to trace their influence upon human societies. (…) Britain is the smallest, and is known in such detail that it has been possible to attempt a complete geographical synthesis. (Mackinder, 1902, p. vii).

To the author, although the British lands are not on the continent, being protected by their insularity, they do not cease to be part of Europe and, more importantly, they receive its stimuli. Geographically, Mackinder mentioned other four main aspects about the British Isles. The first refers to the differences between the Southeast and Northwest coasts of the islands. On the Northwest side, there is a rugged coastline, formed

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[16] In the words of Theobald Wolfe Tone, leader of the Irish Rebellion of 1798: "To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country – these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman, in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter – these were my means." (Ranelagh, 1999, p. 83).

by promontories and numerous islets, which is unfavorable to foreign invasion[17] (see Figure 2).

The second aspect are the maritime channels of access to the Irish Sea, i.e., the North Channel and St. George's Channel[18] . They are the entrance doors of the British inland sea, the Irish Sea, defined by the author as the third aspect. The Sea, in turn, is more like a contact and communication route than a barrier between the islands of Ireland and Great Britain[19]. Finally, the fourth and most important of the geographical aspects described refers to the sea area to the Southwest of the British Isles, known as the Celtic Sea, bordered in the Northeast by a set of promontories. They, in fact, extend in somewhat convergent lines to the West and South from the British Isles toward the center of this sea area. From the Celtic Sea is possible to access and penetrate: the English Channel and, also, the North Sea (Northeast Europe); the Bristol Channel; the St. George's Channel and, also, the Irish Sea; and the oceanic routes around the world, from its direct projection to the North Atlantic. The antechamber of the Royal Navy is located there, in the Celtic Sea, to the South of Ireland, Southwest of England, and West of Brittany (France)[20] (see Figure 2).

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[17] "The clue to many contrasts in British geography is to be found in the opposition of the south-eastern and north-western the inner and outer faces of the land. (…) Beyond, on the oceanic side, between the Scilly Isles and the Orkneys, is a great curve of jagged coastline, broken into promontories and islands. More than five thousand out of the five thousand five hundred islets said to be contained in the British archipelago are set along its northwestern border. (…) The south-eastern coasts of Britain are relatively flat, and the occasional cliffs are for the most part merely the cut edges of low table-lands, such as constitute the chalk Wolds and Downs." (Mackinder, 1902, p. 14).

[18] "Two of the larger channels which penetrate the oceanic edge of Britain bend inward and join, detaching the great fragment of land which constitutes Ireland." (Mackinder, 1902: 15).

[19] "The seas which divide Ireland from Great Britain are truly inland waters (Fig. 13). They penetrate through the mountainous oceanic border of Britain to the plains of the interior, and in certain parts present long stretches of flat shore, as in Lancashire and to the north of Dublin. The Irish Sea is a British Mediterranean, a land-girt quadrilateral, wholly British, whose four sides are England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales." (Mackinder, 1902, p. 20).

[20] "Brittany, Cornwall, the south of Ireland, the southern peninsula of Wales, even the northern and smaller Welsh peninsula, form a group of promontories thrust oceanward – westward and southward – along some what convergent lines (Fig. 12). Between them the ocean penetrates on the one hand through the English Channel into the Narrow Seas, on the other hand, in rear of Ireland, through the St. George's Channel into the Irish Sea. Just as the Thames estuary branches from the nameless arm of the North Sea, giving to it a bifurcate character and defining Kent, so the Bristol Channel branches from the St. George's Channel, dividing Wales from Cornwall, or, as it used to be called, West Wales. The ocean-ways from all the world, except North-eastern Europe, converge from west and south upon the sea-area off the mouths of the Channels. Here, therefore, to south of Ireland and to west of Cornwall and Brittany, is the marine antechamber of Britain. (Mackinder, 1902, p. 19-20).

In short, according to this conception, Ireland is on the edges of the central core of British maritime power; it is constitutive and integral part of the British geostrategy regarding Europe and the world; and it is, therefore, in the center of strategies of defense and projection of the English naval power, as formulated at the height of the British hegemony and of its imperial power of global presence[21] .

However, the growth of Irish nationalism from 1870 on took place in the height of the British power, followed by intensified militarization and tension between Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist regions in the island of Ireland. It was a process that, years later, resulted in the effective political division of the island of Ireland and in the independence of its Center-South portion after World War I.

The Easter Uprising of 1916, despite its fast failure, triggered the events that caused the war of Irish War of Independence of 1919-1921. The execution and massacre of the insurgents, the imposition of martial law, and mass arrests caused the formation, mobilization, and radicalization of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and also provided the political conditions for the success of Sinn Féin in the parliamentary elections of 1918, led by survivors of the Easter Rising movement. Instead of going to Westminster, in January 1919, the party created a government of rupture and founded the self-proclaimed Republican Assembly, whose leader was Éamon de Valera and whose finance minister was Michael Collins. On the other hand, the IRA, organized by Collins and other historic characters, began a guerrilla against the British forces, which led to the independence of Ireland. This was a result that was sought for seven centuries. It was a significant defeat for England, given the asymmetry of power between the parties and its geopolitical significance.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 6, 1921 determined, in its first clause, that Ireland would have the same constitutional status as Canada in the British Commonwealth of Nations, that is, an autonomous State within the British Empire, known as the Irish Free State, with a Parliament with powers to legislate and an executive responsible to the Parliament. Also, the British military forces would be withdrawn from the new State. However, as part of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the Irish Free State should take an oath of loyalty to the Crown (Oath of Allegiance), besides having to accept the presence of an English representative in its

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[21] For more details, see also Sloan (2007).

territory (Office of Governor-Central).

Figure 2 – The Antechamber of the Royal Navy

Source: From Mackinder, H. (1902, back cover).

From the military and geopolitical point of view, the sixth clause of the Treaty established that, despite the Irish Free State assuming its own coast defense, imperial forces of His Majesty would continue taking control of the seas of the British Isles. To do so, they would ensure the domination of strategic ports of Ireland: Lough Swilly to North and Bantry Bay and Cobh to South. Still, in its eighth clause, the Treaty tried to impose limits for the Irish armament. It should be noted that the terms of the Treaty would have a superior status to subsequent Irish law, even in relation to

the new Constitution to be drawn up.

In its most controversial clause, the Treaty also defined that Northern Ireland, created just before by the Government of Ireland Act 1920, would have the option to secede from the Irish Free State within one month after the implementation of the Treaty, remaining under the direct control of the United Kingdom, besides being attended by the British military. Indeed, an effective territorial division took place in the island of Ireland, which was previously guided by the idea of an island, a people. From the point of view of the long history of Anglo-Irish relations, the social engineering started in the 17th century by King James I had generated deep marks.

For the Irish, the so longed-for independence or, at least, its most significant first step – with the effective departure of British troops from the territory of the newly created Irish Free State –, took place based on heavy setbacks regarding the loss of part of its territory, in addition to the submission of the new State to the British monarchy, although with a different political status.

For the English, the Treaty represented an effective and even successful effort to reduce the effects of its military defeat for the IRA army, under the leadership of Michael Collins, with the loss of direct control over a large part of the island of Ireland. To mitigate potential effects arising from such a defeat, the English negotiated and managed to maintain a bridgehead of the Empire on the island, Northern Ireland; the navigation command of the British seas for at least another 16 years; the control of its straits, and, above all, of the Celtic Sea, the antechamber of its Navy. Moreover, they preserved some degree of influence (veto power) on the foreign policy of the Irish Free State, by keeping it as an integral part of the United Kingdom.

IRISH PRAGMATISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

After the Treaty of 1921, the Irish Free State adopted pragmatism as guidance for its foreign policy, as advocated from the beginning by Michael Collins. Although it had not been the ideal for which he had fought, in his opinion:

> Under the Treaty Ireland is about to become a fully constituted nation. The whole of Ireland, as one nation,

> is to compose the Irish Free State, whose parliament will have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Ireland, with an executive responsible to that parliament. This is the whole basis of the Treaty. (Collins, 1922, p. 37).

As feared by revolutionary leaders, the Treaty divided the Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Army. The Irish Civil War (1922-1923) was then triggered, along which Michael Collins was killed. When Éamon de Valera, objector to the Treaty and promoter of the civil war, won the elections and took power in 1932, he eventually adopted the pragmatism defended by Collins a decade earlier.

In Northern Ireland, shortly after the territorial division, electoral rules were created to ensure the domination of the Unionists on local Catholics, even in areas where the latter were a large majority. In addition, they promoted retaliation to Catholics by layoffs and killings. The definition of the borders between the two Irelands was negotiated and sanctioned in the Tripartite Agreement of 1925. (Duffy, 2012, p. 116).

The Ulster Protestant communities came to live under the specter of influence and threat of the newly independent contiguous neighbor. As the defensive strategy was guided by fear, the ongoing search for safety resulted in intensified repression of minorities. The more Northern Ireland sought to strengthen itself, the more it pressed the inland Catholic and nationalistic populations[22] .

However, the government of the Irish Free State chose the consolidation of its stability at the expense of the confrontation with its Northern neighbor. It realized unification would not happen for the time being, and internal political forces focused on the wishes for peace of a population exhausted from secular wars and conflicts.

> In the main the government's programme was characterized by cautions continuity rather than daring innovation. (…) The government also pursed a cautions line in its foreign policy, building up a small diplomatic corps in Europe and America but concentrating on the crucial relationship with Great Britain. (Duffy, 2010, p. 116).

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[22] "It seems clear that the political aspirations of the general Catholic community were regard with hostility at the highest level of the Northern state." (Duffy, 2012, p. 122).

Éamon de Valera's rise to power in 1932 consolidated advances in the process of independence of the Center-South portion of Ireland from England. At first, de Valera suspended the annuities paid by Irish farmers to the British Government, but the retaliations put the country into a war economy. The beginning of World War II, however, ended up changing this situation, by creating a new opportunity for Ireland to move forward in the review of some clauses of the Treaty of 1921. The following clauses stand out from the Agreements of 1938 with Great Britain: the end of the oath of loyalty from the Government of the Republic of Ireland to the English monarchy; the end of the presence of a representative of the British Crown in Ireland; the suspension of retaliations responsible for the war economy in Ireland; and the delivery to the Irish control of ports until then under the responsibility of the Royal Navy (Lough Swilly, Bantry Bay, and Cobh).

During World War II, de Valera followed firmly his determination of keeping Ireland away from conflicts. He sought the status of neutrality in the country to safeguard stability and avoid, at all costs, new conflicts, rejecting international appeals and pressures.

It is interesting to note that, during World War II, an important part of the Nazi strategy to attack England aimed at conquering the antechamber of the Royal Navy, the Celtic Sea. England failed to defend it properly and changed the routes for shipping supplies to the war effort to the North Channel[23] .

Different from what had been designed by different Irish revolutionary leaders, the 20th century resulted in the consolidation of two separate Nations within the island of Ireland and in the determination of religion as an element of identity and mutual opposition. Although the Constitution of 1937 promoted by de Valera prevented the establishment of Catholicism as the State religion, it gained a prominent position, especially in the educational system within the new Republic of Ireland, also called Éire since then.

Even after World War II, the dialogues between the two Irelands were frozen for a long time. They were only resumed in the 1960s, but lasted little, from 1965 to 1968. Their end coincided with the awakening of the Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, for equal political

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[23] "This evaluation demonstrated what could be called geopolitical prescience, in that 38 years after this comment was made in July 1940, the Admiralty was forced to abandon the Marine Antechamber of Britain as a route for Atlantic convoys." (Sloan, 2007, p. 170).

rights, and with the demonstrations and protests that occurred in the rest of the world. The disproportionate reaction of the authorities in Northern Ireland caused an intensification of violence and even the resurgence of IRA. Thus began a movement that victimized mainly civilian populations.

After numerous attacks, retaliations, and failed negotiations over the decades of 1970 and 1980, more significant advances towards decreasing tensions within the island of Ireland took place in the 1990s. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 stands out, establishing, among other things: deposition of weapons; suspension of territorial claims; use of peaceful means for resolving disputes. (Duffy, 1997, p. 130).

This period coincided with the end of the Cold War, with the spread of economic globalization, and with the project of European integration. Over the years, many believed that the hard feelings and nationalisms had lost ground, giving way to the dream of integration of peoples, end of wars and of international disputes. However, what takes place in reality is: (i) the growth of tensions between the major global powers in this new century;[24] (ii) the economic crisis of 2008; (iii) the withdrawal of England from the European Union (Brexit) in 2016; and (iv) the growth of nationalist movements throughout Europe and the world. All this seems to have put the international system back to its old dynamics marked by international competition and conflict, where geopolitics and geography exert their weights and forces.

The recent statements against Russia by the Defense Minister of Great Britain, Michael Fallon, in an interview to BBC, sound as a warning that the old geostrategic orientations of H. Mackinder concerning the Heartland remain valid.[25] "That can't be treating Russia as an equal. Russia is a strategic competitor to us in the West and we have to understand that." (Reuters, 11/12/2016)[26].

Therefore, it will not be surprising if, to some degree, this new international context put the British Islands or, more specifically, England and both Irelands in new dynamics, based on nationalisms and geopolitical orientations, when compared to a very recent past, but old when considered in the light of historical and geographical processes of longer duration.

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[24] This mainly involves, directly or indirectly, the United States of America, Russia, and China, especially in the regions of Central Europe, Middle East, and South China Sea.

[25] See Mackinder (1904) or Mello (2011).

[26] <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-west-cannot-treat-russia-as-an-equal-partner-oversyria---michael-fallon-2016-12>. Accessed on: Dec. 16, 2016.

CONCLUSION

In the 12th century, England invaded Ireland and took control of some strategic positions. Since then, it never ceased to occupy and dominate some territorial portions of the island. At first, as in all of Western Europe, the relations between the people of the two islands was guided by the notion of mutual threat. Conquest was an answer to the security dilemmas of the time.

For the Irish, as the source of threat came from the other side of the British Mediterranean, the insularity of their island became the guiding element of its relations with the rest of the world, i.e., the notion of an island, a people. For the English, because of the defeat in the Hundred Years' War and the geographical revolution of the international system at the end of the 15th century, the relations with the Irish were transformed from direct threat and colonization space to a constitutive part of the defense geostrategy of England, whose control became necessary.

From there, two antagonisms have emerged: geopolitical oppositions (reciprocal threats derived from two different understandings about the insertion of the island of Ireland in the European Board); religious differences (derived from two postulants to the heritage of Western Christianity). Therefore, there was a natural convergence of interests between the people of the island of Ireland and the continental enemies of England.

Before that, throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, England undertook a large-scale geopolitical and religious social engineering, by promoting a policy of establishment of Protestant settlers in the lands of Gaelic lords.

However, the growth of Irish nationalism took place during the height of British power, in a process that later resulted in the effective independence of its Center-South portion after World War I. For the Irish, independence was achieved based on heavy setbacks, especially regarding the loss of part of its territory with the creation of Northern Ireland.

For the British, it was a significant defeat, given the asymmetry of power and its geopolitical significance, since Ireland is at the edges of the antechamber of its maritime power and is a constitutive part of its geostrategy regarding Europe and the world, as formulated at the height of its hegemony and of its imperial power of global presence.

Since then, the focus of the tensions shifted to the relations

between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. More significant advances occurred with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, a period marked by the end of the Cold War, the spread of economic globalization, and the project of European integration. However, the global geopolitical tensions of the beginning of this century, the economic crisis of 2008, among other things, seem to have pushed the international system back into its old dynamics, marked by international competition and conflict.

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