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Northern Ireland; a British Military Success or a Purely Political Outcome?

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ABSTRACT

The British Military study of COIN operations has for too long been focused on the post-colonial era of Malaya, Borneo and Dhofar at the expense of analysis closer to home. The Northern Ireland Campaign, 1969 to the present day, provides more contemporary and relevant lessons and examples. It is a campaign that spans the major international events and trends of the 20th and 21st Centuries and unlike the post-colonial examples it was conducted under the full glare of modern media. The paper examines the military contribution to a peaceful end-state in the Province and places this contribution in context with political, economic and international influences. The paper also examines the role of 'Ulsterisation' as a force multiplier and a political tool. Careful attention is given to the crucial shifts within Republican strategy in response to British political and military pressure and a coincident increase in Loyalist violence. Findings are tested by comparison with global examples including the political transformation in South Africa, the Basque conflict in Spain and the Russian approach in Chechnya. The analysis concludes that the British Military contribution was vital in setting the scene for political engagement but its overall significance remained entirely subordinate to political factors.

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The British Military and British Army in particular, are no strangers to counter insurgency (COIN) and their experiences form much of the current bedrock of international understanding surrounding the challenges posed by such operations. To an extent, a favourable British reputation is historical, based on the collective experiences of withdrawal from Empire and is, as such, both selective and outdated. The failures of Palestine, Cyprus and arguably India are largely overlooked, while the more successful examples of Malaya, Borneo and Dhofar became bywords on the subject. Certainly, these successful campaigns have generated analysis that has benefited the evolution of the doctrine and strategy attached to COIN. They are, however, also surrounded by a degree of mythology that has perpetuated the use of methods that were inextricably linked and limited to specific geographical and social contexts. The campaigns are significantly all pre-Vietnam, the product of a simpler age, less constrained by liberal democratic principles and omnipresent media interest. There is an understandable temptation for military actors to fall back on tactics and doctrine that appeared to succeed where others foundered but this fails to recognise that they are outmoded, highly formulaic and unsuited to the nuanced approach demanded in the post-modern age.

Frustration with such historical fixation is magnified by the glaring presence of a more instructional campaign closer at hand, a campaign that spans the post-colonial era through the end of the Cold War into the age of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). It is of course Northern Ireland, 1969 to the present day. It is a military and political struggle that has been conducted in the full glare of the international media. It offers many contemporary observations and lessons on COIN operations, not least that the destruction of the enemy may not be possible or ultimately necessary. The Northern Ireland campaign suggests that containment, attrition, shaping and channelling, rather than the direct defeat and destruction of the enemy, may be the new yard sticks for military success in this complex arena. Ultimately, the final resolution of the conflict lies with other actors. The campaign holds lessons of great import for our strategy and tactics in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The British Military campaign in Northern Ireland has been a high profile one and intense debate continues over the role and utility of the Security Forces in the progression towards a lasting settlement. The aim of this paper will be to assess the impact and success of the military campaign and place it within the wider context of concurrent political, diplomatic, economic and social activity. This paper will consider in turn; the British Military campaign, the process of 'Ulsterisation', the political dimensions with specific reference to the impact of successive British and Irish Governments, socio-economic influences, the international context, 'physical force' Republican strategy and the effect of the Loyalist terror campaign. There are limitations within this study. The conflict in Northern Ireland has been highly politicised and the divisions between the two communities is reflected in the polarity of academic debate on the subject. The campaign on both sides was Intelligence led and deeply intertwined with political machinations. The record is therefore incomplete and has become tainted with hearsay, speculation and conspiracy theory. Many areas of interest currently lack clarity. While such areas may be a topic for discussion at a

later date when official documentation is made public, there is little academic merit in indulging in the highly speculative arguments that proliferate around certain topics. This paper will stick to the fundamentals of the conflict and avoid those areas that lack reliable reference and evidence.

The paper will demonstrate the interdependence of military operations with the full gamut of state functions in achieving a favourable end-state based on democratic principles. Above all, the Northern Ireland conflict underlines that military operations conducted within a democracy have immense potential to be counter-productive. Only where they are coordinated and sequenced with political, economic and social leverage do they prove to be beneficial and progressive. The paper reinforces these points through short comparisons with other contemporary counter-insurgency examples from around the World.

The Military Campaign in Northern Ireland, in its current form, (Operation BANNER) dates from 1969. Now spanning 38 years, it is arguably the longest running operational commitment experienced by the British Military since Napoleonic times. Characterised by frequent periods of political deadlock and military impasse, the conflict nonetheless appears to have reached a successful conclusion. The PIRA ceasefire of November 1994 and the referendum backed Good Friday Agreement of 1998 represent significant achievements. As this paper is written, Sinn Fein has given a commitment to support the Northern Ireland Policing Boards, and the restoration of the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly will deliver power sharing across all communities.

The long road to this successful juncture has been bloody. Current theory suggests that democracies ultimately tend to win wars against other states. This is perhaps overly simplistic and optimistic and the outcome appears less clear cut against sub-sovereign terrorist groupings.¹ Indeed, the British Military in Northern Ireland have faced, in turn, both a full blown insurgency and one of the most sophisticated and deadly terrorist campaigns in history. The planned culmination of Operation BANNER in mid 1997 indicates that the Military task now nears completion and in this sense, the British Army has prevailed against militant Republicanism and Loyalism, preventing the much feared descent into civil war. The presence and actions in Northern Ireland of the Armed Forces and the Army in particular, over the last 38 years has provided the time and space for subtle but incremental socio-economic and political change to take root. The current end-state is primarily a product of these domestic forces rather than one of grand military design. Nonetheless, these forces would have remained stifled had the British Army been unable to first contain and then suppress the level of violence, allowing the normal State functions to gradually reassert themselves.

As David Sharrock of 'The Times' observes we must look carefully and have an eye to the longer term:

¹ Stevenson, Jonathan, 'Exploiting Democracy: The IRA's Tactical Ceasefire' in Inbar, Efraim (ed.), *Democracies and Small Wars* (London: Frank Cass and Company 2003), p. 159.

Given the glacial pace of the Ulster peace process, it is possible on occasion to miss the earth-shaking moments, leaving to the historians the task of planting academic markers at the turns in its long and winding road.²

This paper will identify the military and political milestones on both sides that mark points of progress or enablement. This hints at the subtlety of the military gains involved, a campaign where success should not be assessed purely in terms of body count, arrests and tons of weapons and explosives seized but takes account of shifts in political perception and advances in social reform.

Mistakes were made; the heavy handed colonial approach of the 1970s that utilized internment, hard interrogation, curfews and area searches was massively counter-productive and generated deep sympathy for the IRA. Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the Armed Forces was the ability to evolve and fall more closely into step with political progress, becoming a vital but always subordinate part in the overall campaign. Cunningham, in his observation of political spokesmen on Northern Ireland notes a common refrain:

Political progress, aspects of social reform, the defeat of terrorism and economic progress are mutually reinforcing and advances (or regressions) in one area can have a knock on effect in others.³

Despite the military setbacks, 'Bloody Sunday' and the 1970 Falls Curfew being obvious examples, the military contribution developed into a positive and supporting one. Perhaps more importantly, it was one of the manifestations of state power that was easiest to control. Responsive and disciplined, the British Military's posture and actions could be reduced or heightened at will according to direction from Westminster and the Secretary of State. Successive Military commanders became increasingly attuned to the nuances of political direction.

The Military was able to absorb the damage inflicted by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and in turn gradually increase the levels of attrition experienced by the enemy whilst, at the same time, remaining broadly in step with British Government policy. The level and duration of military commitment demonstrated was entirely consistent with that displayed in the political and diplomatic spheres. Together, they embodied a resolve to uphold the rule of law and protect the principle of democratic consent. This steadfast but increasingly consistent and balanced approach, even in the face of the worst PIRA atrocities, played a major part in forcing the PIRA and Sinn Fein leadership to accept that violence could not achieve their goals. This created the essential climate for political engagement.

² Sharrock, David, 'Sinn Fein Backs the Ulster Police', *The Times*, January 29 2007.

³ Cunningham, Michael, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969 -2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 161.

The British Military can take great credit for helping to shape and maintain the conditions for political progress but must be extremely wary of confusing this with a victory in the field. PIRA have not been defeated, disarmament is probably only partial and the organisation is unlikely to disband. Significance must also be measured in terms of effect on intent rather than just on capability. Denied the achievement of critical mass, heavily penetrated by Army and Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Intelligence, facing mounting casualties on operations and the widespread imprisonment of volunteers through increasingly successful criminal prosecutions, militant Republicanism was channelled and persuaded towards another path, one of engagement and of non-violence.

In this way, the Military has acted in tandem with political initiatives and the commanders on the ground have often been best placed to provide feedback and insight into prevalent opinions in both communities. It can be argued that the prevailing concept within Defence today, that of the Comprehensive Approach (CA) had its origins in the complex political/military campaign that evolved, albeit painfully, in the Province. The success of CA is reliant on understanding the nature of the tools available and the effect that they can bring to bear on a problem or opponent. Recognising contextual proportionality is critical. Methods must be suited to the local situation if they are to succeed. Over reaction, again as evidenced by Internment and 'Bloody Sunday', is in many cases more damaging than complete inaction.

This paper will make the case for the Military's involvement in a holistic approach that recognised and facilitated the complimentary efforts of social, economic, political and international actors. The paper will look at each area in turn to identify and assess their impact and highlight the linkages between them. While not part of the British campaign, the paper will also consider the impact of the Loyalist terrorist campaign on Republican strategy. The paper maintains that while there is no evidence of systemic collusion, a case can be made for Loyalist Paramilitary actions multiplying the pressures faced by a PIRA that was increasingly on the back foot, both politically and militarily.

It is hard to identify one decisive moment which proved to be the ultimate turning point in the bloody affairs of Northern Ireland but some events stand out above others. They include; the pervasiveness of the Army presence from the mid- 1970s onwards, the return to Police Primacy and the process of 'Ulsterisation', the international environment post the Cold War, the encouraging example of South Africa, the political courage of the leaders on all sides, the creation of a prosperous and diverse middle class and more darkly, the nihilistic paramilitary tit for tat killings of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

THE MILITARY CONTRIBUTION

The interaction between political events and British Military strategy is evident throughout the campaign in Northern Ireland. This relationship has been responsible both for some of the best

and some of the worst approaches and initiatives. Edward Heath's election in 1970 is widely regarded by many as being responsible for a nadir in political/military operations. Newsinger in particular, while accepting that war with the IRA was inevitable, lays responsibility for the 'scale, intensity and duration' of the war with Heath's Conservative Government and the notion of a 'crack down' that was translated into aggressive military action.⁴ He quotes James Callaghan as describing Heath's general election victory as:

...a disaster for Northern Ireland...the break in continuity came at the very worst time for the success of the struggle to prevent the provisional IRA from capturing the sympathy of the majority.⁵

The new Conservative Government was not inclined towards the social and political reform required to address Nationalist grievances. Instead, a tougher line focused on regaining control over the Catholic working class heartlands was pursued. The Military reflection of this policy was the 34 hour long Falls Road curfew in July of 1970. The operation resulted in five Catholics dead, many injured and homes wrecked and reeking of CS gas. Journalists of the day were quick to draw comparisons with brutal Army actions in Aden and other colonial trouble spots.⁶ The Army, perhaps pressurised by the politicians, failed to adapt to a new and complex situation. This was not a colonial war and most certainly did not fit the category of 'out of sight out of mind'. Bowyer Bell succinctly summarises the short sightedness of the British approach when he states, 'The Army tended to see an insurrection and so responded in such a manner as to assure one.'⁷

Indeed, the Army attempt to seize control of Catholic areas had a dramatic and adverse effect. Soldiers were now in direct conflict with the Catholic working class and were no longer seen as impartial. A neutral and at times even sympathetic community had been alienated and radicalised. As Michael Dewar, a former Army officer observed:

It can be argued that the failure to ban the Orange parades, and the massive arms searches and curfew in the Lower Falls area which followed, was the last chance to avoid the catastrophe that has since engulfed Ulster.⁸

⁴ Newsinger, John, *British Counter-Insurgency, From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002), p. 160.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 160.

⁷ Bowyer Bell, J, 'An Irish War: The IRA's Armed Struggle, 1969 – 1990: Strategy as History Rules OK', in *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol 1, No. 3 (Dec 1990), p. 246.

⁸ Dewar, Michael, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London: Arms and Armour Press 1997), p. 39.

A study of most insurgencies suggests that there is a narrow window at the beginning of any operation when the military and politicians can combine to address underlying security and social tensions and prevent militancy taking root. Full use of any 'honeymoon' period must be made to gain the advantage and win back confidence. In Ulster this had come and gone by the end of 1970 and the British and their IRA foes were now committed to a long war.

The rejection of the British Army by the Nationalist Community set the scene for pitched battles and continued tragedy but did force a gradual reappraisal on both sides. Most importantly for the Army, this saw a slow move away from the colonial methods developed in less sophisticated theatres. Unfortunately, this move was not fast enough, a fact evidenced by the reverses of Internment in 1971 and 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972. Both events handed the IRA significant propaganda and recruitment advantages and the adverse impact on public opinion in Europe and the US was significant. PIRA seized the opportunity and intensified its attacks in order to demonstrate British inability to impose order. The moral high ground and military advantage was slipping away and it was probably at this point that the British Administration finally realised that it could no longer continue to conduct a colonial policing campaign.

The first sign of a far reaching reappraisal came with Operation MOTORMAN, a rapid Army reinforcement which saturated the Province with troops and reasserted control over 'no go' areas. The operation was a major success and combined military tasks with a coordinated Information Operations (IO) campaign. By broadcasting its intentions prior to the operation the Army was able to achieve the aim and avoid civilian casualties.⁹ Lessons were being learnt, the British were able to demonstrate focused military and political will without further alienating the population. Operation MOTORMAN is perhaps one of the most significant military contributions in the campaign as the removal of the 'no go' areas effectively redefined the conflict from an insurgency to a terrorist confrontation. This was still a difficult task but an easier one that allowed the involvement of wider and more conventional state resources.

The Security Forces began to get the measure of their opponent and develop effective counter measures. By the end of the 1970s the PIRA campaign was running out of momentum.¹⁰ Intelligence operations contributed to a greater degree of accuracy and selectivity within military and police activities. The intelligence campaign was both overt and covert in its nature. The overt activities were extremely widespread involving information gathered by foot patrols, checks at Vehicle Check Points (VCPs) and sightings from observation posts (OPs). Given the troop numbers available and the complete control of the air and the major waterways, the overt intelligence foot print was extensive and delivered an accurate and comprehensive appreciation of patterns of life within the Province. Soldiers on foot patrol became increasingly proficient at

⁹ *ibid*, p. 66.

¹⁰ Dingley, James, 'Constructive Ambiguity and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland', in *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Vol 13, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 6.

spotting subtle changes in activity that suggested terrorist planning or imminent attack. This overt intelligence gathering often acted as the trigger for applying covert methods to an area of interest. The investment in covert methods of intelligence collection was equally extensive and became extremely effective, particularly when closely coordinated with Special Forces operations. Within a broad array of intelligence capabilities, surveillance was probably the most important element. It directly reduced PIRA's freedom of movement and greatly increased Security Force capability to disrupt and intercept Active Service Unit (ASU) operations. Taylor suggests that the advances in military surveillance in the late 1980s brought the IRA to a virtual standstill.¹¹

The large numbers of Regular Army, UDR/R IRISH Home Service (HS) soldiers and police officers available to patrol Nationalist and Loyalist areas played a pivotal role in the development of the campaign. The pervasive military presence restricted targeting activities and ASU movements of personnel, weapons and explosives thus injecting a high degree of uncertainty and risk into PIRA planning. Such was the extent of the Security Force presence that wanted members of PIRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) were forced to go 'on the run' (OTR) and flee to the Irish Republic or abroad. While many such volunteers remained active in the Republic or in a cross-border capacity, their effectiveness was greatly reduced and the PIRA leadership increasingly had to rely on fresh recruits who had yet to attract Security Force attention. These so called 'clean skins' may have had greater freedom of movement but lacked the experience and skills of the senior volunteers who were either dead, in prison or OTR. As a result, PIRA faced a slow but steady reduction in operational effectiveness. This was the real essence of 'dominating the ground' in the Northern Ireland campaign, the ability of the Army through covert and overt presence to achieve effective containment, disruption and attrition.

Containment crops up as a key military task throughout the Campaign. Indeed, the successful military containment of militant Republicanism directly secured the reduction in enemy tempo and mass that redefined a popular insurgency to a terrorist campaign. Containment allowed the State to apply a threshold to the Campaign and the concept of an 'acceptable level of violence' was born.¹² The State was signalling that it could tolerate and absorb PIRA violence almost indefinitely. Containment encouraged a 'business as usual' approach, British resolve was unshaken and a degree of psychological distance from the violence was maintained. The same could not be said for those living in staunch Nationalist or Loyalist communities. It was here, where local streets, public houses and even schools had effectively become the battleground that the violence touched lives on a daily basis. Containment as a strategy brought the State many benefits and posed a serious challenge to 'physical force' Republicanism but it is also important to

¹¹ Taylor, Peter, *Brits, The War Against The IRA* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2001), p. 302.

¹² Munck, Ronaldo and Purnaka, L, de Silva (eds.), *Postmodern Insurgencies, Political Violence, Identity Formation and Peacemaking in Comparative Perspective* (London: Macmillan Press 2000), p. 78.

emphasise its limitations. While it implied prolonged attrition it did not in itself confer victory or in any way break, or seek to break, the cycle of violence. Other dynamics would be required for this.

THE WIDER SECURITY FORCE CONTRIBUTION AND THE PROCESS OF 'ULSTERISATION'

The Regular British Army is clearly just one element of the Security Force deployed in Northern Ireland. The ranks of the RUC and the UDR and their respective successors, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and R IRISH (HS) have made an immense contribution. A study of this contribution is fundamental in further understanding the impact of the military on the conflict. Operations invariably included the participation of all three elements. Moreover, with the advent of Police Primacy in 1982, the Army was subordinated to the civil body and their actions coordinated and direct by the Chief Constable.

The use of locally recruited forces in reducing British casualty fatigue was significant and the availability of indigenous forces directly increased Security Force stamina during the 'Long War'. There was no shortage of recruits to join both the RUC and UDR. Indeed, by 1972 the UDR had reached a strength of 8,476, exceeding the recruiting ceiling of the day by 3,500.¹³ This availability of manpower allowed the Army to absorb the damage inflicted by PIRA and effectively outlast the terrorist campaign. The Republicans were unable to match this level of recruitment. Attrition, through military action or imprisonment, took a heavy toll on PIRA volunteers. In the 1980s, PIRA could ill afford the loss of its experienced men to long prison sentences. The statistics between 1983 and 1987 for Special Forces operations reflect the pressure being placed on the ASUs. The average age of the PIRA Volunteers killed in the field during this period was just 23; five of those shot by the Security Forces were in their teens.¹⁴

The advent of Police Primacy was particularly significant and may even mark the turning point for the Security Forces in their campaign against the terrorists. Certainly, the change in primacy marked a dramatic shift towards normality and the promotion of civil bodies. It also recognised the progress made in professionalising the Northern Ireland Police Force and equipping them to confront the challenges of PIRA violence. The reassertion of Police control at the forefront of the campaign can be credited as one of the major factors in containing the level of violence in the Province. If the 1970s had taught one lesson, it was that 'armed troops in contact with sections of the public incite further violence'.¹⁵ The gradual reduction of the Army presence enabled by a more effective and confident RUC prevented an escalation of the conflict and eroded PIRA's legitimacy within the Nationalist Community. At the height of The Troubles in 1972 a total of 43,000 Regular troops were deployed. In contrast, by 1996 this had been reduced to 18,500

¹³ Neumann, Peter, 'The Myth of Ulsterization in British Security Policy in Northern Ireland', in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 26 (September 2003), p. 368.

¹⁴ Urban, Mark, *Big Boys' Rules* (London: Faber and Faber 1992), p. 242.

¹⁵ Neumann, op. cit., p. 377.

and by 1999 to 15,000.¹⁶ At the same time the RUC continued to improve its effectiveness and by 1999, 85% of the Force was made up of full-time members.

The assertion of Police Primacy also represented a step towards closer coordination of Security Force effort although it still fell well short of the single command focus that is the glaring omission in the British campaign to date. This may also explain the failure to create corresponding Police and Military boundaries on the ground. Bizarrely, the Army operated to brigade and battalion based Area of Operations (AORs) that overlapped and ignored RUC Divisional boundaries.

One of the most important anti-terrorist structures to develop under the RUC lead was the Tasking and Co-ordination Groups (TCGs) manned by members of the CID, Special Branch and Army. As the title implies, these Groups were responsible for co-ordinating the most sensitive and effective operations against the Northern Irish terrorist groupings. The TCGs greatly improved the gathering of information, the targeting of suspects and the de-confliction of operations. They significantly reduced the duplication of effort by the Army and RUC.¹⁷ The creation of a credible and professional Police Force paved the way for the criminalisation of the IRA. The use of arrest, trial and imprisonment robbed the IRA of the propaganda and prisoner of war cachet it had gained from internment and the heavy handed colonial tactics of the Army during the 1970s. Advances in Police methods of detection and forensic follow-up after attacks increased the pressure on the ASUs. The extensive Security Force presence already constrained PIRA operations but now escape was even more problematic.

The increased emphasis on the RUC and UDR has been referred to as the process of 'Ulsterisation'. It is seen as a conscious programme to devolve security within the Province to the RUC and the UDR and reduce the British Military footprint. In many ways it can be seen as a practical process that addressed a variety of issues including; casualty figures, public perception, international criticism and military overstretch. Certainly by the end of the 1970s, there was a real need to return the civil police to the leading role.¹⁸ Increasingly, the heavy Army presence was deflecting attention away from the IRA and negated British claims of impartiality. In terms of wider global commitments, the British Government could not afford to retain 43,000 soldiers in Northern Ireland and at the same time fulfil its obligations to NATO and the Commonwealth. In this way, the process of 'Ulsterisation' can be seen as a highly pragmatic one but also as a strategy that was firmly bedded in the principle of returning the Province to accepted democratic norms supporting the wider political aim.

¹⁶ Smyth, Marie, 'The Process of Demilitarization and the Reversibility of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland' in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol 16, No. 3 (Autumn 2004), p. 545.

¹⁷ Urban, op. cit, p. 94.

¹⁸ Bourke, Richard, *Peace in Ireland, the War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico 2003), p. 234.

The increasing importance of the RUC and UDR under 'Ulsterisation' had a number of other, perhaps unforeseen, benefits. Most of the RUC and UDR were recruited locally and therefore already knew the ground and the communities where they would operate. They had a greater appreciation of local nuance and were able to draw on a wealth of corporate experience. They provided a vital element of continuity in the campaign that was matched only by the Regular Army Intelligence and Special Forces elements who served multiple and often extended tours in Province. Internally within Northern Ireland they freed up Regular Army forces to concentrate on the real problem areas such as West Belfast, Londonderry, South Armagh, Fermanagh and East Tyrone. As locally recruited forces drawn predominantly but not exclusively from the Protestant Community, they also helped to reassure the Unionist section of Northern Irish society that they were not being abandoned. There is an obvious flip side to this argument as they were readily seen as a partisan and sectarian force by the Nationalist Community, a fact that merely reinforced alienation and suspicion. On balance, however, the reassurance of the Protestant Community probably outweighed the adverse view created within Nationalist areas as it served as a subtle but effective foil to greater Loyalist militancy.

THE BRITISH POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION

The British Government's approach in Northern Ireland since 1969 has been the subject of great debate and analysis has, predictably, been skewed by vested interests and ideological bias. A particular criticism levelled at the British Establishment by Republicans, Nationalists and Irish political observers has been one of inconsistency. Given the nature of the democratic process and regular changes in Government and Administration this should not be seen as a unique prospect. An objective review of the Westminster record on Northern Ireland over the last 38 years, admittedly assisted by a degree of hindsight, paints a surprisingly different picture. Rather than an erratic series of disconnected policies and initiatives associated with successive administrations that reflect changing Labour or Conservative values, the British political approach demonstrates a remarkable degree of consistency and continuity.

Inevitably, there were some contradictory elements, not least in maintaining a very public stance of never dealing with terrorists while at the same time authorising discrete contacts and dialogue with PIRA. It can also be assumed that Irish Governments must have been confused by the robust British assertions of sovereignty over all issues pertaining to Northern Ireland whilst, at the same time, actively seeking Irish engagement and involvement.¹⁹ Such criticisms are perhaps naive and care must be taken to separate public statements from actual actions. As with so many aspects of national politics, ambiguity is often beneficial and allows for manoeuvre and compromise. Indeed, ambiguity is a common criticism of the wording within both the Anglo-Irish

¹⁹ O'Leary, B, 'The Conservative Stewardship of Northern Ireland 1979-97: sound-bottomed contradictions or slow learning?' in *Political Studies* 45 (4), (1997), p. 17.

and Good Friday Agreements. As a deliberate strategy this would make sense, vagueness allowing each party or grouping to apply different interpretations to suit their agendas. This would, in turn, make it easier for them to support the broader thrust of the initiative and maintain forward momentum.²⁰ Surely, in this regard, the Northern Ireland Peace Process is no different from any other political line of activity.

Personality undoubtedly played a part both in tactics and priority and it is perhaps unsurprising that little engagement was achieved during the Thatcher years. The political tempo over Northern Ireland did however speed up under John Major and this new drive was carried on under the 'New Labour' landslide administration of 1997. The new Blair Government was invested with immense energy, optimism and a fresh approach that was, courtesy of nearly 15 years of opposition, largely free of political baggage relating to Northern Ireland. This was a new dimension that did not go unnoticed within Republican circles.²¹ This in turn allowed Blair to play a more forthright and authoritative role in demanding PIRA action on a settlement.²² There were clear differences in Prime Ministerial style and approach; however, it cannot be denied that all successive governments have been committed to the creation of a devolved assembly and that only a democratic solution was acceptable.²³ This reflects a strategic continuity that allowed a step by step process to evolve within the Province that eloquently underscored the futility of PIRA violence.

Such political focus and agreement is remarkable and possibly unique in British politics and it requires further explanation. The key to this consensus is, ironically, one of political distance. 'The Troubles' represented a major conflict within the geographical boundaries of the United Kingdom yet the issue never occupied the political centre stage at Westminster. Despite the viciousness of the PIRA campaign, including attacks on the Mainland, Northern Ireland has never been a significant part of any British election manifesto. The process of 'Ulsterisation', promoting the role of the RUC and UDR served largely to distance Britain from the day to day battle and diluted the effect of Security Force casualties on public and political opinion. Unlike so many other campaigns across the globe at the time, the British remained untouched by casualty fatigue.²⁴ A 1987 MORI Poll for the Daily Express recorded that only 3% of respondents placed Northern

²⁰ Dingley, James, op. cit., p 3.

²¹ In an interview with *The Guardian*, Martin McGuinness points to the fact that unlike John Major who was 'handicapped' by political baggage, Blair was refreshingly free from this. *The Guardian* 'Northern Ireland: Blair's Legacy', 14 March 2007, p. 13.

²² Senator George Mitchell reports that on his first visit to Belfast on 16 May 1997, Blair presented Sinn Fein with the following ultimatum, "The settlement train is leaving. I want you on that train. But it is leaving anyway and I will not allow it to wait for you. You cannot hold the process to ransom any longer. So end the violence now". Mitchell, George, *Making Peace, the Inside Story of the Making of the Good Friday Agreement* (London: William Heinemann 1999), p. 101.

²³ Cunningham, Michael, op. cit., p. 153.

²⁴ Neumann, Peter, op. cit., p. 366.

Ireland on their assessed list of priorities.²⁵ PIRA clearly had an appreciation of this factor and translated it as apathy and contempt. Its response was greater activity on the Mainland and a number of 'spectacular' attacks were carried out. The Brighton attack struck at the heart of the government but still failed to engender the sought after political debate while the political and psychological impacts of the Canary Wharf bombing and the Downing Street mortar attack were reduced by US outrage and international condemnation. The politics of violence was increasingly discredited and was finally placed in stark contrast by the events of 9/11.

A dispassionate British political view has developed in relation to Northern Ireland that in turn has assured even-handedness and the ability to balance the demands of the two communities. Policy makers are able to function without the normal party political pressures. Again, Northern Ireland may be unique in the level and duration of political bipartisanship achieved. As Dixon observes, the key is in the 'general agreement between the two main political parties on the principles of their constitutional approach towards the conflict in Northern Ireland'.²⁶ This guarantee that all major constitutional initiatives in relation to Northern Ireland would be endorsed by the parliamentary opposition has been a major strength. It has granted significant political freedom of action and has allowed the successive administrations to be responsive and decisive. As large scale initiatives and attempts at engagement were, by their very nature often protracted, this factor is best reflected in the speedy coordination of new legislation related to the campaign such as the frequent revision of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) or the banning of Sinn Fein from spoken media in 1988.²⁷ The inability of PIRA and Sinn Fein to drive a wedge between the British political parties and exploit discord represents a significant strategic failure greater even than its failure to inflict military defeat on the Security Forces.

If we accept that there was remarkable strategic political consistency and continuity we must also accept that there were crises along the way and that criticisms that the process was long and drawn out are certainly valid. Indeed, the former Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald appears to have held the view that the British indulged in crisis management rather than pursuing a campaign plan.²⁸ It is possible that this view reflects a snap shot in the process when he was at odds with the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, over progress towards the 1985 Anglo-Irish

²⁵ Smith, M.L.R, *Fighting for Ireland, the Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London: Routledge 1995), p. 187.

²⁶ Dixon, P, 'A House Divided...', in *Contemporary Record*, 9 (1) (1995), p. 148.

²⁷ On 19 October 1988, the Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd announced a ban on the broadcasting of direct statements by representatives of Sinn Fein, Republican Sinn Fein and the UDA to counter the perceived sustenance that these organisations derive from the media. The ban had some effect but also excited ridicule when footage of well known Republicans was dubbed by actors and a speech by Eamon de Valera was removed from a school history programme. Bew, Paul and Gillespie, Gordon, *Northern Ireland, a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* (London: Gill & Macmillan 1999), p. 220.

²⁸ Cunningham, Michael, op. cit., p. 154.

Agreement.²⁹ However, there were many problems and this is evidenced by the stop start nature of many of the political initiatives. While it is clear that current achievements represent the culmination of a political cycle started in the 1960s, the process is open to a degree of criticism. Indeed Gilligan and Tonge describe a process of 'entropy rather than dynamism'.³⁰ This should perhaps not be considered as unsurprising when viewed against a backdrop of deeply entrenched Unionist and Republican opinions and a cycle of violence that proved extremely hard to break. Most importantly, despite long periods of stagnation, the aim of a democratic solution based on consent remained constant.

In assessing the impact of political advances in the conflict it is important to analyse other types of political or state intervention. In this, the British held a great advantage in terms of resources and means over PIRA and Sinn Fein. These means included economic, social, and legal activities. All were directly at the disposal of the British Government. In an economic sense, the British State could spend whatever was needed in its struggle against its opponents and at critical points this has been the case. For example, Dingley observed that in support of the Good Friday Referendum, the British Government 'threw its full weight behind a 'Yes' vote...opponents had to raise funds themselves'.³¹

Not all state activities have been seen as positive. Gilligan and Tonge stress that in reaction to paramilitary violence 'the State has intervened....by introducing no-jury courts, providing massive economic subsidies and by moulding the human geography of the province'.³² The 'no jury courts' refers to the Diplock system of trial by Judge implemented to negate jury intimidation while the 'moulding of human geography' refers to voluntary or involuntary housing segregation. All are arguably legitimate areas in which a state can act in the interests of security, the rule of law and the defence of civilians. While straying from the norm, they should not be viewed as sinister but rather as the embodiment of a nascent comprehensive approach that sought to address or at least stabilize root causes. Hard choices have to be made during insurgencies and when confronting terrorism. Emergency methods will be required.

The most important interventions were clearly those that sought directly to address the underlying grievances of the Nationalist Community and the shibboleths of militant Republicanism, namely British Imperialism and the disenfranchisement and discrimination of Northern Irish Catholics. The criticism of imperialism was skilfully dealt with by Peter Brooke in his 1990 Whitbread speech where he stated:

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 48.

³⁰ Gilligan, Chris and Tonge, Jon, *Peace or War? Understanding the Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing 1997), p. 32.

³¹ Dingley, James, *op cit.*, p 3.

³² Gilligan, Chris and Tonge, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

The British Government has no selfish or strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland: our role is to help, enable and encourage. Britain's purpose...is not to occupy, oppress or exploit but to ensure democratic debate and free democratic choice. Partition is an acknowledgement of reality, not an assertion of national self-interest.³³

This was a significant clarification of the British position and a clear signal of a willingness to pursue an inclusive dialogue.

The Good Friday Agreement represents the culmination of decades of political investment. It has a strong chance of overall success as, in the eyes of many observers, it is fair. George Mitchell astutely summarises its strengths when he says:

It is based on the principle that the future of Northern Ireland should be decided by the people of Northern Ireland, and it seeks to promote tolerance and mutual respect. It includes constitutional change in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom. It creates new democratic institutions to provide self-governance in the north and to encourage cooperation between north and south.... It explicitly repudiates the use or threat of violence for any political purpose...³⁴

The greatest British political success has been the subtle drawing in of once intractable opponents, thereby, achieving the gradual inclusion of Republicans in political dialogue. Dissenters within Republican ranks view this as entrapment and in many ways they are right. British Governments have enticed, cajoled and coerced Republicans with exactly this aim in mind. There has been a measured and effective approach to get the Northern Irish population and leaders so involved in the 'nitty gritty' of politics and government that old enmities and entrenched viewpoints are slowly but steadily forgotten.³⁵ Once this journey has been started it gathers its own momentum. It is probable that Sinn Fein now realises that political engagement offers real advantages both North and South. It has demonstrated that it can be a real party with genuine prospects of power.³⁶ Again, dissenters may argue that the leadership have been seduced by the trappings of power such as offices at Westminster, Ministerial cars and prestige. However, it is also clear that this route will deliver real results for Republicans and the Nationalist community in a way that the armed struggle has so miserably failed to do.

³³ O'Kane, Eamonn, 'Anglo-Irish Relations and the Northern Ireland Peace Process: From Exclusion to Inclusion', in *Contemporary British History*, 18, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 84.

³⁴ Mitchell, George, op. cit., p. 187.

³⁵ Dingley, James, op. cit., p 4.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 4.

THE ECONOMIC ARENA

All strands of the British campaign in Northern Ireland have a financial aspect and the British subvention in support of the Province is a critical factor. Financial subsidy, like military intervention, served as a declaration of intent to support the rule of law and to endure until a solution based on consent was achieved. The direct importance of economic support is well demonstrated within the areas of Law and Order and Social Welfare. As with the posture of the Security Forces, it was one of the resources that Westminster could alter at short notice, spending to avert crisis. Hence, we see in 1985 in the midst of the 'long war' a Conservative Government commit £440 Million to security measures while the overall subvention from London to Belfast (not including the £120 Million cost of the Army) rose to £1500 Million.³⁷ Smyth places the overall 1993 British subvention, just prior to the PIRA ceasefire, at £4 Billion.³⁸ While the defeat of terrorism has been at the top of the public spending priorities in Northern Ireland, funds have also been ploughed into new housing and job training. Ironically, the spending on job creation and training will now have to increase to counterbalance the loss of employment through the reduction of indigenous Security Forces in line with the Good Friday Agreement.

The significance of the non security related section of this subvention was two fold. First, it assisted the creation and strengthening of an affluent middle class. A grouping not just of middle class Protestants but of Catholics as well who were able to move away from the constraints of traditional occupations within their own community.³⁹ This was a new and influential middle class with a vested interest in stability as a safeguard of continued financial prosperity and opportunity. With a common interest in betterment, this aspirational class was also endowed with a greater respect for diversity, merit being more important than background.⁴⁰ Second, the Province had become reliant on the British subvention, an economic reality that was recognised by all sides. Sinn Fein's Mitchel McLaughlin addressed this factor in his 1992 Ard Fheis review, noting a 'nightmare scenario' of Protestant backlash and economic hardship if the British were to withdraw. Republicans were forced to accept that 'when the British went they were most unlikely to leave their subvention behind'.⁴¹ Moreover, some 40% of the work force was employed within the public sector.⁴² This did not mean that Republicans changed their views on removing the British

³⁷ Hamill, Desmond, *Pig in the Middle* (London: Methuen 1985), p. 294.

³⁸ Smyth, Marie, op. cit., p. 551.

³⁹ Ruane, Joseph and Todd, Jennifer, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland, Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p. 169.

⁴⁰ Church, Cheyanne, Visser, Anna and Johnson, Laurie, 'Single Identity Work: An Approach to Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland', in *International Conflict Research*, INCORE Working Paper (August 2002), p. 11.

⁴¹ Patterson, Henry, *A Political History of the IRA* (London: Serif 1997), p. 238.

⁴² *An Phoblacht* (APRN), 'Economic Slum Behind the Façade', 9 January 1992.

presence in the North and uniting Ireland, rather it stressed the need for negotiation and the concept of a phased withdrawal.

Despite the centrality of ideological and sectarian differences within the conflict it is clear that economic issues were never far away. It is interesting to note Senator Mitchell's surprise on his first visit to Belfast in 1995 as Chairman of the Peace Negotiations that both Republicans and Loyalists were so similarly preoccupied with the link between unemployment and violence.⁴³ With economic reality came the requirement for a more flexible Republican approach, one that could no longer be conducted without direct engagement and dialogue with the British. Economic imperatives have become more and more prominent as the peace process has progressed, culminating in the unusual but welcome situation whereby Northern Ireland's tenth election, the 2007 polls, had a distinct economic theme. This election marks a coming of age where party manifestos were dominated by mundane domestic issues. The requirement for the election may have centred on a revived Northern Irish Assembly but the issues being discussed in public focused on water charges, housing rates, public services and the local economy.⁴⁴

THE IRISH DIMENSION

The British State has often been forced to intervene at short notice in reaction to terrorist attacks or dramatic shifts in political balances within Northern Ireland. Common threads can be seen to run through most of these actions no matter how expedient. A completely rigid strategy would have been doomed to failure. Instead, a set of broad aims allowed the political and diplomatic manoeuvring that persuaded and informed the process. If the democratic principle is seen as the bedrock of the political approach then inclusion must be seen as the mechanism by which this was advanced. A key part of inclusion was the involvement of the Irish Government at pivotal moments.

The 1920 Government of Ireland Act and subsequently, the Ireland Act of 1949 had affirmed the absolute separation of Northern Ireland affairs from the State of Ireland and subordinated any Northern Irish Parliament to Westminster.⁴⁵ This paved the way for Direct Rule in 1972 and largely limited discussions with the Irish to issues surrounding cross-border security and extradition. The 1970s as a whole proved to be a time of stalemate and retrenchment with little prospect of devolution or expanding the involvement of the Irish State. The 1980s, on the other hand, ushered in a period of gradual, sometimes faltering progress whereby the notion of bilateralism between Britain and Ireland over Northern Ireland became accepted.⁴⁶ This frequently

⁴³ Mitchell, George, op. cit., p. 11.

⁴⁴ Peterkin, Tom, 'No Surrender on Water Rates', *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 2007, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Cunningham, Michael, op. cit., p. 13.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 74.

represented a balancing act, the involvement had to be sufficient to reassure Nationalists but not so intrusive that it alarmed Unionists.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 initially appeared to fail on both accounts. Nationalists were unconvinced and Unionists and Loyalists were outraged. However, it was a bold move and underlined the British belief that the Irish Government and Ireland as a whole must play a part in the solution. The import of the Agreement was to enhance the role of the Irish Government in representing the aspirations of Nationalists across the entire Irish political spectrum. Assured a prestigious although still guarded role in Northern Irish affairs, the Irish Government was now able to act as an honest broker and (to borrow, somewhat ironically, from Adams' demands on the British Government concerning Unionists and a united Ireland) act as a 'persuader' of militant Republicans.⁴⁷ This they appear to have achieved to good effect, undoubtedly influencing the initial 1994 PIRA Ceasefire. It is possible that the Irish Government's involvement at this stage allowed leading Republicans to backtrack on some of their more belligerent positions without undue loss of face within the Nationalist Community. Bew and Gillespie draw this factor into sharp relief by comparing the conciliatory 1994 PIRA Ceasefire stance with Martin McGuinness' hard line speech to the 1986 Sinn Fein Ardfeis: 'Our position is clear and it will never, never, never, change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved'.⁴⁸

'Physical force' Republicanism was mutating into something more subtle and pragmatic and clearly such a shift generated a great deal of nervousness within the movement. Reassurance from outside actors such as the Irish Government was timely and important. Albert Reynolds, the Irish Prime Minister led the way after the cessation of violence by swiftly inviting Adams to the Irish Parliament, an act that marked Sinn Fein's tentative return to mainstream Irish politics.⁴⁹ In many ways the US and British Governments were left to follow this early lead.

Irish involvement did raise a number of serious issues, not least sensitivity over sovereignty. In terms of addressing Unionist issues it could have been counter-productive. The timing of Irish statements was often less than perfect. Garret Fitzgerald's praise for the RUC in 1985 for preventing Loyalists from marching through a Nationalist area came at a time when Loyalist and Unionist feelings were running high over the Anglo-Irish agreement.⁵⁰ However, to dwell on these specific instances of tension does little justice to the overall importance of Irish involvement.

The joint role of the British and Irish Governments in facilitating a political settlement must be recognised for a number of reasons. First, outside observers regarded it as key and it is a

⁴⁷ Bew, Paul and Gillespie, Gordon, *Northern Ireland, a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* (London: Gill & Macmillan 1999), p. 294.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 294.

⁴⁹ Byrne, Sean and Irvin, Cynthia, L (eds.), *Reconcilable Differences, Turning points in Ethnopolitical Conflict* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2000), p. 194.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, Monday 15 July 1985.

frequent feature of US Congressional reports.⁵¹ This, to a certain extent, limited international criticism of British actions, particularly over the continued use of overt and covert force in the Province. Second, the inclusion of the neighbouring state underlined the serious intentions of the British Government and helped to internationalise the search for solutions and dilute some of the Republican criticisms of British intransigence. Third, the relationship denied PIRA any sense of legitimacy by seeking to act on behalf of the wider Irish people. Finally, playing on powerful Republican traditions and a shared identity in the broadest of terms, the Irish Government was able to influence militant Republicans in a way the British Government simply could not.

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES

The international context has a marked but at times oblique bearing on developments in the Province. The influence of world events is always difficult to quantify and international influences and trends often only become apparent after the event. Moreover, few politicians or leaders wish to admit that they were swayed by foreign initiatives or ideas. Perhaps this is why O’Kane argues that:

‘...the international dimension has rarely had a defining impact upon the Northern Ireland conflict, and explanations for the movement towards inclusion and the development of the peace process are more profitably sought at the ‘domestic’ rather than international level’.⁵²

While this may be true of the limited European Union influence on the conflict, it ignores the significance of international affairs in the Northern Ireland peace process in two key areas: The first was the global trend towards reconciliation and the rejection of terrorism. The second was the involvement and encouragement provided by the US. As Zartman points out, ‘Internal conflicts are marked by intensity [that] ...so lock the parties into opposition’ that it needs an outside influence to break the impasse.⁵³ The US Administration, together with the Irish Government, fulfilled this role.

The first aspect was manifested by the two major events in the 1990s, the largely peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites and the remarkably smooth transition of South Africa from apartheid state to a ‘rainbow nation’ under Nelson Mandela. Both events held enormous significance for the Republican movement. PIRA and Sinn Fein shared a socialist ideology.⁵⁴ Both were also at pains to associate themselves with other ‘freedom movements’ such

⁵¹ Archick, Kristin, ‘Northern Ireland: The 2003 Election’, in *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, RS211692* (December 19, 2003), p. 1.

⁵² O’Kane, Eamonn, op. cit., p. 86.

⁵³ Zartman, W (ed.), *Elusive Peace: Negotiations and End to Civil Wars* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution 1995).

⁵⁴ Smith, M.L.R, op. cit., p. 149.

as the Basque Euzkadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the African National Congress (ANC) in order to engender a sense of 'global righteousness' and legitimacy. While PIRA and Sinn Fein often downplayed their socialist heritage and ducked Marxist labels to avoid friction with mainstream Catholicism, it was a cornerstone of strategy that spoke directly to an 'agitational struggle in the twenty-six counties'.⁵⁵ Moreover, Unionism and Loyalism were regarded as bastions of privilege and neo-fascist philosophy that had no place in a socialist republic.⁵⁶ The abject collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe required a reassessment of strategy and goals and the subtle abandonment of discredited rhetoric and rejectionism. It could be argued that one upshot of this was a new flexibility and a reinforced recognition that the accommodation of Unionism would eventually have to be explored.

The South African example had even greater impact. Having politically and morally equated itself with the ANC struggle against apartheid, Republicans were now faced with a dilemma. The South African transition was largely non-violent and was based on negotiation and consent. Despite enormous differences, arguably greater than those separating Irish Republicans and the British State, terrorism and military force appeared to have been repudiated within South Africa in favour of dialogue and democratic reform. The utility of armed struggle and the methodology of terrorism now appeared anachronistic, unnecessary and increasingly irrational. A clear example had been set and a failure to explore similar possibilities invited external and, more importantly, internal criticism and dissent. The international mood, combined with the military and political pressures already outlined, forced a period of intense Republican debate and reappraisal.

The second area of critical influence, that of US involvement is the subject of greater and more transparent documentation. For the purposes of this paper, the key US initiatives can be divided into the following areas; the nurturing and encouragement of moderate nationalism, the application of the Mitchell principles, financial support and the political coercion/persuasion of mainstream Republicanism. All should be seen against the backdrop of the importance of American connections to Sinn Fein, not least in terms of funding. Indeed, following the 1994 cease-fire, the legal US charity, 'Friends of Sinn Fein' raised in excess of \$1 million for the Republican movement.⁵⁷ The importance of American public opinion to Sinn Fein and PIRA should not be underestimated and the leverage it provides is well understood by US politicians.

The relationship between John Hume, the SDLP leader and influential US Senators was the starting point for much of the US engagement. Hume should take most of the credit for this genesis as his steady cultivation of US policy makers can be traced over two decades.⁵⁸ However,

⁵⁵ Adams, Gerry, Bodenstown Speech, *APRN*, 26 June 1979.

⁵⁶ Smith, M.L.R, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁵⁷ Stevenson, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁵⁸ Gormley-Heenan, Cathy, 'Abdicated and Assumed Responsibilities? The Multiple Roles of Political Leadership during the Northern Ireland Peace Process', in *Civil Wars*, Vol 7, No. 3 (Autumn 2005), p 203.

the support of the so called 'four horsemen', Senators Edward Kennedy, Hugh Carey, Tip O'Neill and Daniel Patrick Moynihan was vital. Their influence with President Clinton secured greater US involvement in the peace process and increased pressure on Sinn Fein to 'come in from the cold'.⁵⁹

The US contribution to the Good Friday Agreement was significant in that all participants had to subscribe formally to the principles set down by the former US Senator, George Mitchell. Amongst other things, the principles bound the parties to:

Resolve political issues by democratic and exclusively peaceful means;

Disarm totally all paramilitary organisations;

Agree that such disarmament must be verifiable to the satisfaction of an independent commission;

Renounce for themselves, and oppose any efforts by others, to use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the course or the outcome of all party negotiations.⁶⁰

When the Republicans finally arrived at the negotiating table, Sinn Fein was, at a stroke, committed to a non-violent, democratic process based on consent, a position not dissimilar to the desired British end-state.

It is hard to imagine such stipulations being accepted by Republicans if they were purely preconditions set by Westminster. It is clear that the process owed much to US leverage, real or at least perceived, over political parties jockeying for legitimacy and favour. This advantage was built upon by the tireless and patient approach of Mitchell. A lesser man would have given up on the peace talks many times over.⁶¹ Mitchell and his colleagues, the Canadian, John de Chastelain and the Finn, Harri Holkeri were also influential in weaning the British off an unrealistic timescale for PIRA decommissioning. As impartial observers, they were able to represent RUC assessments that Adams was unable to deliver decommissioning prior to negotiations to a sceptical British Prime Minister, John Major. Up to this point Major had ignored the best advice of the Security

⁵⁹ Dunn, Seamus, 'Northern Ireland: A Promising or Partisan Peace?', in *Journal of International Affairs*, 52, no 2 (Spring 1999), p. 731.

⁶⁰ Various, 'Monitoring the Northern Ireland Ceasefires: Lessons from the Balkans' in *International Crisis Group Europe Briefing*, (23 January 2004), p. 1.

⁶¹ Mitchell endured opposition to his appointment from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP), frequent walk outs by delegates, numerous ultimatums and a suspected smear campaign in the press. He demonstrated remarkable tenacity, patience and balance throughout.

Forces. It required outsiders of Mitchell's calibre to remind the British Administration that what was important at this delicate stage was PIRA intent not capability.⁶²

The US administration's influence on the Sinn Fein leadership has developed through many phases. The lure of US visas and the freedom to raise funds have been powerful tools. US tolerance, or at least ambivalence, has been crucial to both PIRA and Sinn Fein activities. The US response has also ebbed and flowed with world events and the political climate. A hardening of posture was evident after both 9/11 and the arrest of IRA suspects assisting FARC rebels in Colombia. In effect, a new, more robust and realistic US attitude to terrorist activities coincided with the political, military and international pressures already being felt by PIRA. There is little doubt that the arrest of the FARC suspects in Aug 2001 contributed to the PIRA decision two months later to move on decommissioning and place a quantity of weapons beyond use.⁶³ President Bush has taken this hard approach further, stating that his administration regards the Good Friday Agreement as being the best framework for a lasting peace in Ireland and that 'Paramilitaries should go out of business'.⁶⁴

US influence permeates the diplomatic and political arena surrounding Northern Ireland and is heavily backed by finance. All US administrations have been careful to reinforce legality and avoid funding that favours a particular interest group. The input has been significant. Examples include direct grants in 2006 and 2007 to support new structures such as \$100,000 for training members of the office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Here, the sum may be relatively low but the implication is clear, the US Government supports the Patten Reforms and a regenerated policing system. Larger sums have been provided to the International Fund for Ireland, some \$20 million in FY 2006-2007. Again the fund has been encouraged to support programmes related to policing reform.⁶⁵

REPUBLICAN STRATEGY AND IMPACTS

History suggests that democracies are particularly vulnerable to terrorism and when faced by internal attack, the freedoms enjoyed by citizens and the 'pluralism and transparency' of the State translate directly into weakness and vulnerability.⁶⁶

It is possible that PIRA and Sinn Fein have exploited such weakness and will only follow the peaceful path as long as it suits them. IRA campaigns have come and gone and it is fair to say

⁶² Mitchell in his memoirs, op. cit., p. 30, records that the RUC Chief Constable, Hugh Annesley, his senior staff, the Irish Police and Irish Security Staff were all adamant that Adams, at this juncture, lacked the influence or mandate to instigate PIRA decommissioning prior to the start of negotiations.

⁶³ Archick, Kristin, 'Northern Ireland: The Peace Process', in *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, RS21333 (May 30), p. 2.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Stevenson, Jonathan, op. cit., p. 159.

that the latent threat of violence remains. Who is to say that PIRA will not return to armed force if they perceive an advantage? IRA violence is a generational concept and the currently agreed processes could be rejected at any point in the future in favour of force. The Republican movement is the ultimate political chameleon that reinvents itself through splits and reorganisations. Thus, historically we have seen the old IRA separate into 'Free State' forces and Rejectionists and the 1960s IRA split between 'Officials' and 'Provos'. More recently, PIRA dissidents have given rise to the Continuity IRA (CIRA) and the Real IRA (RIRA). It appears to be an unalienable right that dissatisfied Republicans should be able to set up new military and political organisations. For now, however, it would appear that the majority of Republicans are genuinely committed to a political process.

Irish Republicanism is, if nothing else, extremely volatile. This volatility is of course a central consideration in the development of PIRA and Sinn Fein strategy. Regardless of any given posture against the British Government and the Security Forces, the evolving strategy always has an eye to maintaining the cohesion of the movement and the ability to carry the Volunteers and the community with the leadership. This is both a guiding influence and a constraint on the PIRA leadership and may account for the hesitancy towards change. On the other hand, as a widely accepted factor it may also have aided PIRA and Sinn Fein during the political negotiation phase. It is probable that the British Government has recognised the critical relationship between the leadership and the wider movement for some time. In recognising the need for a more flexible Republican leadership to consult, influence and persuade its membership it is not unreasonable to suggest that the British would adapt their approach accordingly. This may have been reflected in a more patient and measured approach and could explain why convictions against senior Republican figures were not secured at a time when a leading Loyalist was convicted under the wider charge of directing terrorism.⁶⁷

To assess the effect of British influence and its impact on Republican thinking it is important to map and understand PIRA strategy. Bowyer Bell has identified the PIRA strategy of the 1970s as:

...(1) the IRA would immediately assume the role of nationalist defender, replacing the British Army and pre-empting any Dublin effort; (2) the IRA would shift the nationalist focus to the British Army-as-the enemy, thus benefiting from their own provocations and the nature of the military to begin retaliatory operations; (3) these would engender a cycle of provocation-and-response that would support an offensive IRA campaign.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ On 6 September 1995, prominent UFF member Johnny Adair was sentenced to sixteen years imprisonment for directing Loyalist terrorism. Bew, Paul and Gillespie, Gordon, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process 1993-1996, A Chronology* (London: Serif 1996), p. 118.

⁶⁸ Bowyer Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 244, 245.

While the ill-judged British colonial style military response played out there was little reason for the IRA to change this strategy. Indeed, as Newsinger points out, the early security policy was, '...repressive enough to alienate the working class Catholics but not repressive enough to actually defeat the Provisional IRA.'⁶⁹

The IRA strategy and the failure of the British authorities to address the root causes of Nationalist unrest led to a period of stalemate with both sides focused on military attrition. Despite significant security force pressure throughout the 1970s and 1980s and the political landmark of the Anglo-Irish agreement, the IRA remained focused on the armed struggle. It was only towards the late 1980s that any change in approach can be detected. An article in the Republican An Phoblacht newspaper from 1989 hints at mounting pressures:

The IRA strategy is very clear. At some point in the future, due to the pressure of the continuing and sustained armed struggle, the will of the British government to remain in this country will be broken. That is the object of the armed struggle.⁷⁰

The content of the statement in itself was nothing new but the significance lay in the actual need to repeat the message for the benefit of all. The period marks a time of drift for the Republican movement. The Ballot Box and Armalite approach had brought some dividends, largely on the back of Nationalist emotion over the hunger strikes, but there was a growing sense of waste and futility. Attacks such as the 1987 Enniskillen Remembrance Day parade bombing damaged Sinn Fein's ability to appeal to a wider political base.⁷¹ The election fortunes of Sinn Fein were approaching a plateau. Gerry Adams recognised the danger when he stated, 'Our plans for expansion have been dealt a body blow'.⁷² Losses were mounting with two ASUs alone wiped out at Loughgall in 1988. Loyalist pressure on the Nationalist community was also increasing. An impasse had been reached and given the greater resources available to the British, there was a real risk for PIRA that this stalemate would start to slide towards defeat. PIRA, led by the pragmatic and far-sighted Adams, contemplated a move away from violence.⁷³

The dangers to the movement remaining locked in a long and futile military struggle were hammered home by the electoral performance of Sinn Fein in the Westminster election of 1992. Contested against the back drop of continued atrocities such as Teebane and dramatic rise in sectarian Loyalist attacks, nationalist sympathies were seen to shift away from Sinn Fein towards

⁶⁹ Newsinger, John, 'From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security: Northern Ireland 1969-1992', in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol VI No 1 (Spring 95), p. 93.

⁷⁰ Bowyer Bell, op. cit., p. 255.

⁷¹ O'Kane, Eamonn, op. cit., p. 82.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 83.

the SDLP.⁷⁴ Sinn Fein's vote dropped by 1.4% reducing it to less than 10% of the total. The SDLP on the other hand secured 23.5% of the total vote. The loss of Adam's West Belfast seat was a particularly harsh blow and a key driver in the search for a 'new realism'. The abandonment of armed struggle was not immediate as evidenced by the Baltic Exchange attack but as a cornerstone of strategy it was starting to be viewed as counter-productive.⁷⁵

Jim Gibney's speech to the Wolfe Tone commemoration, where he accused the Republican movement of being 'deafened by the deadly sound of their own gunfire' and being trapped inside a 'complex web of struggle' and ignoring 'the more recent changes sweeping across the globe' almost certainly marked a turning point.⁷⁶ This was a stage at which a ceasefire and active engagement with the British was being signalled. The Republican movement, although still firmly rooted in a paramilitary structure, was emerging from isolation. No one factor can be credited with this sea change, it was an evolutionary process driven by a complex mix of influences; a genuine reappraisal of ideology in an international context, military fatigue, socio-economic pressures and a real fear of stagnation and defeat. Depressingly in terms of the lives that could have been spared, the Republican movement has now turned full circle back to the wisdom of the 1960s Official IRA or 'Stickies' who advocated politics over violence as the main dynamic.⁷⁷ Ironically, this was the very concept that split the movement in the first place and gave birth to the Provisional IRA.

In many ways this evolution should have been predicted. The events in Ireland post the Easter Rising chart the focus of influential Republicans away from conflict. The political quest for power became much more important than war. In understanding this mechanism, the example of De Valera's switch to a social and political campaign should have been obvious to Republican students of their own history.⁷⁸ The future of Republicanism in Northern Ireland now seems to be firmly wedded to the political process. Issues remain, although the acceptance of policing marks a real watershed. The possibility of a further split cannot be discounted and this 'amoebic' tendency should be recognised as a feature of the Republican movement. Stevenson is right to urge a degree of caution when assessing the final outcome: 'Democracy has not defeated terrorism, nor has terrorism defeated democracy; rather, each has manipulated the other in equal measure'.⁷⁹

The role of Gerry Adams in the evolution of PIRA and Sinn Fein strategy is critical. He is arguably the most influential voice in Republican affairs since Michael Collins and Eamon De Valera. His direct authorship of Republican strategy is for obvious reasons hard to pin down and his memoirs to date avoid a great deal of essential detail, perhaps understandably, for fear of prosecution. There is, however, sufficient evidence in the public domain to suggest that he was

⁷⁴ In 1992, eight Protestant builders employed on construction at a security base were killed by a bomb at Teebane Cross in County Tyrone.

⁷⁵ Two bombs killed two people and caused £800 Million damage at the Baltic Exchange in London.

⁷⁶ Patterson, Henry, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 286.

⁷⁸ The decline of IRA influence post the Civil War in Ireland is explored further by Patterson *op. cit.*, in his Chapter on the Origins of Social Republicanism.

⁷⁹ Stevenson, Jonathan, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

central to the shift away from the armed struggle towards a political process. An examination of his actions and views offers a unique and highly specific insight into the significance of the British strategy in shaping Republican responses. Indeed Adams' autobiography, 'Before the Dawn' offers some illuminating views on the development of his political philosophy. His passion for political debate is clear throughout his involvement in the Republican movement. He is scathing of those who abandoned political activism in the 1960s in favour of an exclusively violent strategy and failed the needs of an emerging Catholic middle class; 'Republicans had, in the preceding decades, surrendered the ground of political representation in favour of conspiratorial and military activity.'⁸⁰

In his autobiography, Adams charts a process of reflection, one that was strongly influenced by the intense emotions surrounding the 1981 hunger strikes. While the autobiography of any politician should be approached with a degree of caution, Adams' grief and sorrow for lost comrades appears both genuine and deeply rooted. From this point, the need to move away from human tragedy and give tangible meaning to Republican sacrifice appears to have been the key to his political goals:

Many of my childhood friends had died. Too many. For every section of our people there was so much pain. We wanted equality and justice. We wanted freedom. We demanded peace. For all the people of our island.⁸¹

It could be argued, therefore, that the attrition of PIRA forces achieved by the British State had a direct effect on the views of the leadership. Mounting losses for little gain forced a re-evaluation and a change in strategy away from violence towards political engagement. This should not be seen as surprising as in many ways it reflects a model observed in many protracted conflicts. Initial euphoria is eroded by the realities of casualties and imprisonment which, in turn, leads to a gradual maturing of views and a greater focus on cost/benefit analysis. Many militant movements become introspective as a social conscience develops and activists become pre-occupied by the more mundane everyday struggles of life – poverty, health and unemployment. Time and the encouragement of enlightened leadership are the critical ingredients in this transformation. British political and military stamina guaranteed the timescale for such a transformation. Moreover, the 'preservation' of the Republican leadership despite years of intensive and highly effective military/police operations may suggest a deliberate ploy on behalf of the British to encourage political progress.

What cannot be denied is the political distance that PIRA and Sinn Fein have travelled. 20 years ago, Gerry Adams stated that if his party ever abandoned armed struggle then he would leave the movement. While Unionists may have their doubts, impartial observers such as George

⁸⁰ Adams, Gerry, *Gerry Adams, Before the Dawn, an Autobiography* (London: Heinemann 1996), p. 77.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 316.

Mitchell are convinced that Adams is sincere in his desire to bring the IRA into the 'grand tent of democracy'⁸². Indeed, his party has accepted a British police force, British courts in Northern Ireland and is now sharing government with the Unionists. As a Cork delegate to Sinn Fein's policing conference was recorded as saying; 'History shows us that acceptance of the state which was meant to be a tactic has the habit of becoming permanent'.⁸³

Adams and Sinn Fein now have broader horizons and look to consolidate power sharing in the Northern Ireland Assembly and gaining as many as 12 members elected to the Dail.⁸⁴ Sinn Fein may well end up in a coalition government in the South within the next five years. They will be in a strong position to influence the political agenda both North and South and inch closer to a united Ireland. The real change is of course that all of this will have to be achieved democratically.

THE LOYALIST CAMPAIGN

The Loyalist terror campaign in Northern Ireland is the topic of often heated debate that usually revolves around the accusation of state sponsored terrorism and systemic Security Force collusion. The quality of debate is often poor and is laced with preconceived notions. Sporadic, low level collusion did occur between junior ranking members of the Security Forces and Loyalists. Those concerned were arrested and prosecuted. The subject is unlikely to diminish in importance as the Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman report following a three year investigation into allegations of the involvement of Police agents in murder is digested. 'The Belfast Telegraph' reports that the investigation centred on the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) unit in Mount Vernon, Belfast.⁸⁵ Liam Clarke in 'The Sunday Times' states that the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has ruled that there is insufficient evidence to mount a prosecution against any serving or retired Police Officers who were involved in running the agents concerned.⁸⁶

There remains no compelling case for state involvement or an organised covert campaign of collusion on behalf of the Army or Police Force. Indeed, 'The Sunday Times' article quotes a former head of CID as observing that the registration of an individual as an informant did not imply complete control of the individual.⁸⁷ In later articles, Clarke goes further, placing the allegations in a wider context. He argues that despite the allegations, the statistics perhaps show the Police in a different light. They were 'far more successful at putting loyalists behind bars than republicans'.⁸⁸

⁸² Mitchell, George, op. cit., p. 113.

⁸³ Sharrock, David, 'Sinn Fein Backs the Ulster Police', *The Times*, January 29 2007.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Rowan, Brian, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 19 January 2007, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Clarke, Liam, *The Sunday Times*, 21 January 2007, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, *The Sunday Times*, 14 January 2007, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, *The Sunday Times*, 21 January 2007, p. 16.

Most sources that go beyond those cases already referred to are anecdotal and thrive on conspiracy theory. A much more interesting question would be why, given the rifts in the community and the level of violence directed at the Security Forces and their families, there was not a greater willingness to assist the Loyalist terror groupings?

That is not to say that the Loyalist campaign, in all its guises and directed by its numerous factions, can be ignored. As with PIRA and INLA violence, Loyalist terrorism had a profound impact on political and military developments in the Province. It is probable that Loyalism, as a political force, reached its 'high water mark' in 1974 achieving the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement through the Loyalist Workers Strike. Subsequent confrontations such as the Third Force or Drumcree have failed to provoke enduring political crisis. Loyalism's political influence has waned rapidly as socio-economic demographics changed, blurring sectarian divides in the development of a new, wider and more affluent middle class. It is a middle class of Nationalists and Protestants motivated by aspiration rather than tribalism. It is a middle class that is prepared to share the benefits.

Loyalist terrorism has not followed suit. This perhaps results from the alienation felt by a Protestant 'under class' who feel that they have been abandoned by the British state and no longer have a significant voice. Loyalist terrorism has ebbed and flowed but has never been far from the streets of Northern Ireland. At times it appeared to be preoccupied with criminality and was riven by feuds and turf wars. At other times it emerged from its self interest and lashed out in a cold and calculating manner. Due to the numerous factions and lack of cohesion it is difficult to assess Loyalist aims and campaign plans in the same way as for PIRA and to a lesser extent INLA. Loyalist terrorism does however have one broad theme and that is it is largely reactive. Most significant Loyalist attacks against Republicans and Nationalists have been as a result of perceived PIRA pressure. This factor may have its roots in a lack of professionalism and centralised control but is also perhaps a sign of an organisation on the defensive.

It was on those occasions when Loyalist groupings moved from the defensive and purely criminal in reaction to PIRA attacks that they exerted the greatest influence on public opinion and Republican attitudes and planning. The timing of such activities was invariably determined by the relative pressure of PIRA activity where Loyalists felt compelled to retaliate and stake their claim. The late 1980s and early 1990s proved to be just such points as the Province descended into a cycle of 'tit for tat' killings. Both the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) reached a level of activity not normally associated with Loyalist terror cells. The chronology of events marks a change in Loyalist targeting and 'out of area operations' whereby murder squads moved beyond the traditional hunting grounds of sectarian interfaces and reached into Nationalist heartlands to carry out savage and highly indiscriminate attacks.

Claims have been made that the Loyalist teams were acting on hard intelligence, actively seeking PIRA members. The example often cited is the Boyles Bar shooting in Cappagh where it

is alleged that three PIRA men were killed.⁸⁹ These claims have fuelled suspicions of collusion. However, subsequent attacks at Greysteel in 1993 and Loughinisland in 1994 graphically demonstrate the level of targeting for what it was - the selection of a soft target that guaranteed the presence of Nationalists. Whether this reflected a specific strategy or was a manifestation of Loyalist frustration at the inability to reach their principal tormenters, mainly the PIRA leadership and ASU members, is unclear. It may have simply been a blind desire to hit out at the Nationalist Community as a whole in revenge for PIRA attacks. On the other hand, in public statements or claims of responsibility after such attacks it was common for reference to be made to intent to carry the war to the IRA. Mallie and McKittrick quote Johnny Adair, after an attack in which five Catholics were killed as saying 'that was just a message to tell the Republicans, that do this to us and we'll do this to youse – that's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'.⁹⁰

Clearly there was an element of revenge in these actions but there is also some evidence of a developing trend. This may be too loose to describe as a strategy but through the statements of Loyalist leaders and the nature of the attacks it is possible to discern that Loyalist terror groups were seeking to damage the resolve of the Nationalist Community to support PIRA. PIRA members were difficult to target and kill but Nationalists or Catholics were easy targets. By killing and terrorising this broad grouping the Loyalists felt they were making progress. Some leaders even felt that they were now winning the War. To an extent this was true, the targeting of innocent Nationalists either by mistake or design was having an effect. There was unrest in the Nationalist Community and a feeling that bystanders were suffering as a result of PIRA violence. The PIRA leadership and membership remained safe while the people around them were subject to unpredictable and deadly attacks. Great pressure was being placed on Adams and others. Loyalists were increasingly bold and David Ervine maintained that Republicans were so concerned about the casualty rate that they considered a truce; 'We won't kill you if you don't kill us'. Ervine is recorded by Maillie and McKittrick as stating that the Loyalist response was negative – 'We were getting to the bastards, and the answer to the Provos at the time was fuck off, no way'.⁹¹

By 1992, Loyalist groupings had killed 37 people to the IRA's 33. By 1993 the Loyalist murder rate had risen to 46 as opposed to the IRA's 36.⁹² Cold statistics that mask misery and immense grief, the very emotions that had the most significant impact in the communities concerned. In the eyes of many, the Loyalists were starting to outgun the IRA and there was no end in sight to the random killing of Nationalists. The Province was staring into the abyss. In retaliation for the killing of a UVF Battalion Commander, UVF gunmen entered the Heights Bar in Loughinisland and shot six Catholics, including an 87 year old.⁹³ The selection of the Bar in a quiet

⁸⁹ Taylor, Peter, *Loyalists* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 1999), p. 214.

⁹⁰ Mallie, Eamonn and McKittrick, David, *Endgame in Ireland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 2001), p. 75.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁹² Taylor, Peter, *Loyalists*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p. 228.

rural County Down village sent a very clear message. In reaction to PIRA violence the Loyalists would continue to slaughter innocent Catholics without restraint.

While rejecting the accusations of collusion, it is important that the Loyalist campaign, as a source of pressure on Republican strategy, be placed in context with the efforts of the British Government and Security Forces. The rise in mainstream Loyalism would appear to have been a direct response to Republican aggression. It is reasonable to postulate that had PIRA limited its activities to attacks on the Security Forces and avoided disastrous actions such as the 1993 Shankill bomb, they may have forestalled the advent of a new breed of Loyalist gunmen willing to lash out at innocent Catholics. In effect, PIRA opened a second front that they could ill-afford. Facing steady attrition and containment by the Security Forces the movement now faced attacks from Loyalists that threatened to erode the influence and consent, no matter how tacit, that sustained it within the Nationalist Community.

It is possible that this Loyalist upsurge was the 'straw' that effectively 'broke the IRA camels back'. This is not to imply that the violence was orchestrated or condoned by the British. While, the Loyalists were careful to select target areas such as Loughinisland that did not normally attract a significant Security Force presence, great efforts were made to apprehend the culprits. Nevertheless, the lesser charges that the Government and Security Forces pursued a differential approach in the face of Republican and Loyalist violence requires examination. Gilligan and Tonge suggest that – 'The military operations usually identified as part of a 'shoot to kill' policy by the Special Air Services and the Royal Ulster Constabulary were targeted exclusively at Republican paramilitaries'.⁹⁴ This does not stand up to analysis. It should be accepted that the British State would apply greater resources to areas perceived as the greatest threat to state security and that at the time this was undeniably PIRA.

PIRA operations in turn were often closer in scale and armament to conventional military actions, as illustrated by the attack on the Derryard Vehicle Check Point (VCP) near Rosslea in County Fermanagh in December 1989. In this sustained assault, PIRA employed an armoured lorry, machine guns, a flame thrower and multiple RPGs.⁹⁵ Again it is not unreasonable to expect such force to be countered with Special Forces elements rather than uniformed RUC or UDR personnel. On the other hand, the Loyalist paramilitaries were often effectively contained through regular police work as their extensive connections with criminality made them more vulnerable than their PIRA counterparts. If this qualifies as a differential approach then it is one derived from the assessment of threat. This assessment then governed the application of the most appropriate capability, albeit subject to time sensitivity and availability. It merely represents the natural result of

⁹⁴ Gilligan, Chris and Tonge, Jon, op. cit., p. 23.

⁹⁵ Bew, Paul and Gillespie, Gordon, *Northern Ireland, a Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999*, op. cit., p. 229.

a process to direct and prioritise scarce and valuable assets rather than any notion of bias based on alleged allegiances and sympathies.

COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

In examining the evolution of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, this paper identifies a possible broad model that could be applied to the process in which popular insurgencies develop and change between inception and resolution. In the early days, the insurgency was buoyed by dissent and a groundswell of grievance. The reaction of the authorities, in the first instance, in defence of the rule of law was formulaic and set piece. Strategy and tactics took time (years rather than months) to adjust to the local situation and context. The inevitable mismatch in situation and response fuelled unrest and acted as a justification for heightened insurgent activity. The conflict entered a vicious cycle of escalation to a point where the insurgency became self sustaining. Slowly however, over a number of years the security forces adapted and found the measure of their opponents and methods become more selective and effective. Both sides of the conflict settled into a prolonged period of attrition whereby the State, with a greater call on resources gradually achieved an advantage. How this advantage was exploited then became critical (it is at this point that the campaign could flow in either direction). At this point the security forces maintained sufficient selective pressure to allow social, economic and political incentives to be applied, eroding the support base of the insurgency. The campaign was then reduced to one of containment and counter-terrorism. Continued attrition in terms of arrests, deaths and disruption had a marked effect on opposition elements and reality was elevated above ideology and rhetoric. A maturation process began (encouraged by the fact that the opposition leadership was not completely disrupted). A political settlement became more desirable than deadlock or slow defeat. The scene was set for engagement, negotiation and resolution.

While this Northern Ireland model for the life cycle of an insurgency cannot fit all situations, it does perhaps serve as a useful yardstick against which to measure other actions and strategies around the globe. Certainly, aspects of this model are evident in the South African example, particularly the importance of military attrition and the political maturation process. However, as with Northern Ireland this must be viewed against the backdrop of 'modernisation' – that is to say, economic growth, improved educational standards and greater class mobility.⁹⁶ In concept, if not necessarily in exact action and deed, there are also parallels in the importance of a 'preserved' opposition leadership. The South African success, despite aggressive Security Force assassination operations, owed much to the fact that the leadership of the ANC had survived largely intact either through incarceration or exile.

⁹⁶ Munck, Ronaldo and Purnaka, L, de Silva (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Similar forces may be at work in Russia's approach to Chechnya. After an initially disastrous conventional conflict, the Russian leadership have been able to reduce the insurgency to a counter-terrorist campaign by switching to a more selective and focused approach and engaging with former rebel leaders.⁹⁷ By November 2005, the Russian Foreign Ministry were able to state that, 'over the past three to four years the overall number of troops in Chechnya has fallen by 50 per cent'.⁹⁸ Under the acting Chechen Prime Minister, Ramzan Khadyrov, they have found an influential section of Chechen society with which they can negotiate.⁹⁹ The Russian President, Vladimir Putin has skilfully secured Chechen cooperation by promising a return to legitimate political representation and the revival of social and economic life.¹⁰⁰ While it is accepted that the Russian definition of legitimate political representation may differ from ours, it should be accepted that in tackling the causes of unrest and including former opponents within the political settlement they are following many of the mechanisms for success identified in the Northern Irish model. The Russians may even be pursuing their very own process of 'Ulsterisation'. Since May 2006, conscripts for the Russian Army recruited in the Chechen Republic are now being sent back to units currently operating in Chechnyan AOR.¹⁰¹

Conversely, despite clear evidence that both the Basque insurgent group, ETA and the Spanish Government wish to end the violence, progress in this arena has fallen far short of the Northern Irish example. Despite ETA nearing a point of exhaustion, the Spanish have failed to resolve the ETA terrorist campaign.¹⁰² Arguments have been made that the Basque conflict is more complex than the Northern Irish example with at least two dozen separate groupings holding a stake in any subsequent negotiations.¹⁰³ This is certainly a complication and ETA lacks an Adams figure as a focal point but the complexity does in fact have a strong parallel with the myriad Loyalist and Republican groupings that were involved in the Northern Irish peace process. The failure of the Spanish authorities should perhaps be seen in starker terms. The lack of progress is largely due to an inability to erode the underlying ETA support base and at the same time engage in meaningful political dialogue.¹⁰⁴ The apparent deadlock between both sides would benefit from

⁹⁷ In June 2005 parts of the operation in Chechnya were transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the more specialised Interior Troops. Smith, A, A Russian Chronology April – June 2005, in *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Chronology Series 05/34*, p. 21.

⁹⁸ Smith, A, A Russian Chronology February 2006, in *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Chronology Series 06/05*, p. 11.

⁹⁹ Blandy, C, W, "Whither Ingushetia", in *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Caucasus Series 06/03* (January 2006), p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, A, A Russian Chronology February 2006, op. cit., 13.

¹⁰¹ Smith, A, A Russian Chronology July 2006, in *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Chronology Series 06/34*, p. 20.

¹⁰² Clark reports that by April 1989, most of the key ETA leaders were either in French jails or in exile. Some 500 rank and file members were in Spanish prisons. Clark, Robert, P, 'Negotiating with Insurgents: Obstacles to Peace in the Basque Country', in *Terrorism and Political Violence Vol 2, No 4* (Winter 1990), p. 490.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 492.

¹⁰⁴ In 1998 ETA's political proxies secured 18% of the vote in the Basque region. *The Economist*, 'A Basque Shift?' June 10th – 16th 2000, p. 56.

international involvement similar to the United States and Irish Government contribution to the Northern Irish process. Unfortunately, previous proposals to involve foreign guarantors have been rejected, with the Government maintaining that the issue is an internal Spanish matter.¹⁰⁵ In this example, the lack of conflict resolution is due to inertia and an absence of political and international initiative. This tends to reinforce, rather than weaken the importance of key aspects of the Northern Ireland model.

CONCLUSION

The British Military played a central role in the resolution of the Northern Irish conflict. While in the early 1970s its actions, based on colonial experience, were often counter productive it was able to adapt and gradually contain the insurgency. The Army on the streets did not in any sense win the campaign. They did however, secure the time required to evolve military, policing, political and economic strategies that began to address the causes of violence. The Military proved to be a highly flexible tool of the State. Responsive, highly capable and robust, the Armed Forces and the Army in particular, underscored the British resolve to endure the worst terrorist atrocities in the pursuit of a lasting peace based on consent. In this sense, the Military represented the ultimate statement of intent, investment and determination. Moreover, Military containment and attrition was critical in reducing a broad insurgency to a narrower terrorist campaign thus allowing a return to police primacy and a degree of normality under which State functions could be re-imposed. The Military has remained in step with State sponsored initiatives. It has served to protect early beginnings, a crucial guardian and at times, an essential crutch to the fledgling peace process. It has always remained subordinate to the political agenda.

The British Army did not win in Northern Ireland nor did PIRA lose but it could be argued that by breaking the cycle of violence from within, PIRA was the first to 'blink'. Having made that first move under intense pressure, credit must now be given to the political courage and maturity of the Sinn Fein leadership in dragging an entrenched Republican tradition away from violence. That the increasingly subtle and attuned British Military operation set the scenes for this political engagement is worthy of note. This nuanced and effective approach should rightly form a cornerstone of any military case study on contemporary COIN operations. In the wider more public realm it is perhaps appropriate that the importance of the Army in the Northern Irish process is increasingly overlooked. This is healthy sign and one that the Military should welcome. On the other hand, Politics, both domestic and international, justly remain on centre stage. Political dialogue is, after all, the key to enduring peace in Northern Ireland:

¹⁰⁵ Clark, Robert, P, op. cit., p 501.

Politics as the art of the possible is understood and democratic compromise is not automatically translated as cowardly betrayal. The democratic terrain, procedures and discourse are the privileged planes for full settlement, including the subjective aspects of the situations which gave rise to insurgency or civil war in the first place.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Munck, Ronaldo and Purnaka, L, de Silva (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

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