



Mission Accomplished?

Looking Back at the IRA

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The full implementation, on a progressive and irreversible basis by the two governments, especially the British government, of what they have agreed will provide a political context, in an enduring political process, with the potential to remove the causes of conflict and in which Irish republicans and unionists can, as equals, pursue our respective political objectives peacefully. In that new context the IRA leadership will initiate a process that will completely and verifiably put IRA arms beyond use. We will do it in such a way as to avoid risk to the public and misappropriation by others and ensure maximum public confidence. From IRA Statement, 6 May 2000

1 For one detailed analysis of the Agreement see Brendan O’Leary, ‘The Nature of the British-Irish Agreement’, *New Left Review*, 233 (1999), 66–96.

People voluntarily kill, or die, for collective causes expressed in words that register their group’s esteem, dignity and honour. Actions that provoke and rekindle resentment are catalysts of violence. Group-honour often provokes more violence than considerations of material self-interest, or material group-interest. These propositions govern what follows. Flatly stated, the IRA of 2005 has fulfilled its original volunteers’ pledges, and since its mission is accomplished, consistent with its constitution, it may, should, and likely will disband. This internally valid constitutional dissolution should occur because the governments of Ireland between 1922 and 1949, and subsequently the governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland have jointly removed the constitutional resentment which created, and maintained, the IRA’s reason for being.

The IRA’s existence after 1922 expressed

two forms of constitutional resentment:

- at the Treaty of 1921 between Great Britain and Ireland, which provocatively required the Irish Free State to imbibe the relics of British constitutionality, particularly the oath of allegiance to the Crown by members of Dáil Éireann, and
- at the denial of the people of Ireland as a whole of their right of self-determination, usurped by the unilateral decision of the Government of Great Britain to partition Ireland in 1920.

These related resentments have now been substantively redressed. The final implementation of the comprehensive Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998 can be seen as the culmination of the IRA’s mission, though it is not just that.¹

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H-Block 5, B-Wing
9/25, 2003. ©
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Óglaigh na hÉireann

Analysis of the IRA must begin with its first name, Óglaigh na hÉireann, its title in Ireland's official national language, and its self-description in its official communiqués signed by 'P. O'Neill' on behalf of the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau.² IRA activists sometimes refer to the organization as 'ONH', the acronym of its Gaelic name. The etymology of Óglaigh na hÉireann is significant: *laoch* means 'hero, champion, warrior, soldier'; and *óg* means 'young', and so *óglaigh* came to mean 'vassals', 'youths of military age', or 'soldiers', and finally 'volunteers'.³ Óglaigh na hÉireann therefore comprises the 'Volunteers of Ireland', or 'The Irish Volunteers'. The Volunteers had been founded as Óglaigh na hÉireann in 1913, in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, a militia loyal to the Ulster Unionist Party and determined to oppose the granting of home rule to Ireland by the Westminster parliament. Óglaigh na hÉireann was the idea of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), otherwise known as the Fenians, who tried to run it as a front organization, although it was formally created by a broad coalition of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and Gaelic League revivalists, i.e. by the major cultural bodies of the Irish nationalist revival. The Volunteers divided shortly after the start of the Great War. The National Volunteers, following John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, took the majority into the British army — on the understanding that Great Britain would honour its commitment to implement home rule when the war was over. The minority retained the founding organization's title deeds, and rejected service in another English war, not least because home rule had been postponed because of the resistance of the Ulster Unionists. Óglaigh na hÉireann organized military training. Its members were subsequently partly mobilized, through an IRB conspiracy, in the launching of the insurrection of Easter

1916 — in which a Republic was proclaimed in arms, but put down by forces of the British Crown. At the start of the insurrection Óglaigh na hÉireann was renamed (in English), together with the Irish Citizen Army, as the Irish Republican Army, and it was as Commandant General of that army that Pádraig Pearse surrendered.⁴ It was 'Irish' because of its national identification; 'Republican' because militant Irish nationalists since the late eighteenth century have opposed British Crown authority; and an 'Army' because only such an organization is the legitimate defender of a state or nation.

The Volunteers remained known by their original English title for a while; and ever since rank-and-file IRA members have been known as 'volunteers'. In October 1917 Sinn Féin, the political party which had originally stood for a separate Irish parliament under the British Crown, was revitalized by an influx of Volunteers, who elected Eamon de Valera, the surviving leader of the 1916 insurrection, as the party's president. Then '[u]nder the cover of the meeting, 250 delegates met in an Army Convention in the GAA grounds, Croke Park. De Valera was elected President, and Cathal Brugha Chief of Staff, but the IRB was prominently represented in the Staff: [Michael] Collins was Director of Organization'.⁵ The IRA was now, in principle, subordinated to political control by a party — which claimed the right to speak for the nation, although it was in practice significantly controlled by Collins, now the President of the Supreme Council of the IRB. While subordinated to civilian authority the IRA had established its internal democracy — a general convention, and the election of the senior officers. The IRA subsequently spearheaded Ireland's War of Independence between 1919 and 1921, in conjunction with Sinn Féin, which was victorious in Ireland in the Westminster general elections held in 1918 — the first held under full male suffrage and the franchise for women over thirty. Sinn Féin won on an explicit platform of

- 2 Selections of recent IRA statements may be found on Sinn Féin's web-site: http://sinnfein.ie/peace/ira_statements. The BBC has a collection of the IRA's statements 1998–2003: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1144568.stm. The University of Ulster's CAIN web-site has a collection of statements from 1994: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/statements.htm>
- 3 Patrick Dineen, ed., *An Irish-English Dictionary: Being a Thesaurus of the Words, Phrases and Idioms of the Modern Irish Language* (Dublin, 1927), 631, 807, 808
- 4 The name had an antecedent: J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA* (New Brunswick, NJ, rev. 3rd edn. 1997), 15n.3, notes that 'As early as the abortive Fenian invasion of Canada in 1866, a green flag was used with the letters IRA.'
- 5 Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 17

- 6 For fuller analyses of this election see John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 1, and Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London, 2nd edn. 1996), ch. 2.
- 7 Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (New York, 4th edn. 2002), 30–31
- 8 Constitution of *Óglaigh na hÉireann* as Amended by General Army Convention, 14–15 Nov. 1925, Blythe Papers ADUCD P24/165 (10), cited in Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford and New York, 2003), 42–43, 394n.3. The word ‘race’ was used the way people today use ‘ethnic’, so it is anachronistic — and false — to interpret the IRA’s mission as racist; nationalism and racism are not equivalents.

‘abstentionism’.⁶ Its MPs would not take their seats at Westminster but instead would constitute the deputies of the Irish parliament.

Two significant entities today call themselves *Óglaigh na hÉireann* because both claim to be the army of Ireland. Ireland’s Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, in October 2004 pointedly said, ‘our Constitution states there can be [only] one *Óglaigh na hÉireann*. At the moment there are two’. One is the official name of the army of the sovereign, independent and democratic republic of Ireland that comprises twenty-six counties of the island, and is a member-state of the European Union and the United Nations. This *Óglaigh na hÉireann* has never fought a foreign or defensive war; it serves a state that is not (yet) a member of NATO; and is typical of the resource-starved military of a small European ‘Venus’, best known for participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Under the Irish Free State (1922–37) it was known only as *Óglaigh na hÉireann*, and had no official English name. The other *Óglaigh na hÉireann* is the secret army, *the IRA*. The two ‘*Óglaigh na hÉireann*’, official and unofficial, sprang from the winners and losers, respectively, of the Irish Civil War (1922–23). That war was precipitated by the implementation of the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, which led to a division within the ranks of the IRA, then over 100,000 strong. After April 1922, there were two armies, one loyal to the Free State’s provisional government, the other to the IRA Executive. Pro-Treaty volunteers joined the army of the Irish Free State; anti-Treaty volunteers insisted they constituted the true IRA.

Initial Constitutional Objectives

The reformed anti-Treaty IRA’s initial constitution, drafted in the spring of 1922, before the onslaught of the Civil War, stated that

The Army shall be known as the Irish Republican Army. It shall be ... a purely volunteer Army ... Its objects shall be:

1. To safeguard the honour and maintain the independence of the Irish Republic.
2. To protect the rights and liberties common to the people of Ireland.
3. To place its services at the disposal of an established Republican Government which faithfully upholds the above objects.⁷

Having ‘dumped arms’ — acknowledging defeat in the Civil War in May 1923 — the IRA amended its constitution in November 1925 to specify four objectives: guarding the Republic’s honour and upholding its sovereignty and unity; establishing and upholding a legitimate Irish government with total control over the Republic; securing and defending citizens’ civil and religious liberties and their equal rights and opportunities; and, lastly (a new item), reviving the Irish language and ‘promoting the best characteristics of the Irish race’. Aside from this addition of an ethno-national agenda, the content was the same as that of spring 1922.⁸

It is vital to understand the original three quoted ‘objects’. The IRA was reformed by those republicans, a majority of the Volunteers, who regarded the Treaty signed by Sinn Féin’s delegates in 1921 as a fundamental betrayal of ‘the honour and independence of the Irish Republic’. This was, among other things, because the Treaty acknowledged a continuing role for the British king and his successors as the (constitutional) monarch of Ireland, gave Great Britain a right of ratification over the permanent constitution of the Irish Free State by requiring that the latter comply with the Treaty, restricted Ireland’s international sovereignty, and required the Free State to make its key naval ports available to the forces of the Crown. The failure of the Treaty immediately to reverse

the partition of Ireland into two entities, ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’, which the Westminster parliament had authorized in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 without the consent of a single Irish MP, was regarded by some, but not all, opponents of the Treaty as an equally fundamental betrayal of Ireland’s national honour, rights, liberties and independence.

‘To protect the rights and liberties common to the people of Ireland’, meant that the IRA’s mission was to defend the right of the people of Ireland to what today we would call their human rights. It was also a statement of inclusive civic republican nationalism for Irish citizens, whatever their origins, and of their collective right to national self-determination.

The third object of the IRA, ‘to place its services at the disposal of an established Republican Government which faithfully upholds the above objects’, warrants detailed parsing. The IRA endorsed republican — and democratic — government, and, in principle, the subordination of the army to an ‘established Republican Government’, *provided* that government faithfully upheld the honour and independence and the rights and liberties of the people of Ireland. ‘Established Republican Government’ was code for the government created by ‘Dáil Éireann’ — the Assembly of Ireland — formed by the Sinn Féin members elected to the Westminster parliament of 1918 who had then proclaimed Ireland’s own parliament. Its successor, the Second Dáil, elected in 1921, had ‘established’ and sworn its members’ loyalty to the Irish Republic proclaimed in the rebellion of 1916.

In 1919, Cathal Brugha, Minister of Defence in the Government created by Dáil Éireann, had insisted that the IRA take an oath of loyalty to Dáil Éireann — thereby formally establishing civilian control of the military in the new and emergent state, and

attempting to reduce the influence of the IRB (and Collins) within the IRA. The Treaty precisely required members of Dáil Éireann to swear an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, thereby repudiating the establishment of the Republic. The provocative British insistence on this new oath, requiring deputies to foreswear their solemn commitments, stuck in the throat of republicans, many of whom were otherwise prepared for political compromise, e.g. Eamon de Valera, the then President of Dáil Éireann, who had sought for Ireland to have ‘external association’ with, but not membership of, the British Commonwealth, and was willing to recognize the British king as the head of the Commonwealth. In the perspective of the new IRA’s constitution, the deputies of Dáil Éireann who obliged the Treaty by taking the oath, had done what they had no right to do, namely disestablish the Republic at British insistence, and thereby dishonoured the independence, rights, and liberties of the people of Ireland.

The Treaty, made under the duress of David Lloyd George’s threat of ‘immediate and terrible war’, had been accepted by a bare majority (3 to 2) of Ireland’s negotiators (who had then signed *en bloc*), and by a bare majority of the cabinet of Dáil Éireann (4 to 3). The deputies who accepted the Treaty included the majority of the second Dáil Éireann, led by Michael Collins (then President of the IRB), and Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Féin, who had endorsed the Treaty as members of the negotiating team and the cabinet. The deputies of Dáil Éireann later dissolved themselves into the new parliament (also called Dáil Éireann) of the Irish Free State, which had ‘dominion status’ within the British Empire, with the British king as head of state. The defeated minority of deputies became, in the vision of the new anti-Treaty IRA, the upholders of Ireland’s honourable independence, the ‘established’ Republic — and they, as the rump ‘Second Dáil’, provided the legitimate

9 The most comprehensive and elegant treatment of the early Sinn Féin is provided by Michael Laffan, *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party, 1916–1923* (Cambridge, 1999). Brian Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin, 2002), 161–210, provides an accurate, intelligent and witty dissection of its development between 1923 and 1969 (and after).

- 10 The Irish title of the new party, ‘Soldiers of Destiny’, had been the slogan of the Irish Volunteers, and had been embroidered in their cap bands: see Feeney, *Sinn Féin*, 159.
- 11 English, *Armed Struggle*, 43
- 12 See Coogan, *IRA*, Part I; Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London, 1987), 1–88; Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (London, revised and updated edn. 1998), 1–20; Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*; English, *Armed Struggle*, Part I; Brian Hanley, *The IRA, 1926–1936* (Dublin, 2002); Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 1998) and *The I.R.A. at War, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 2003); Uinseann Mac Eoin, *The IRA in the Twilight Years: 1923–1948, History and Politics* (Dublin, 1997). Argenta, the name of Mac Eoin’s publisher, signals the author’s sympathies: it recalls the ship on which IRA members were interned without trial in Northern Ireland in 1922, on which see Denise Kleinricht, *Republican Internment and the Prison Ship Argenta, 1922* (Dublin, 2001).
- 13 From 1933, volunteers were prohibited from belonging to the Communist Party by General Army Order No. 4: see Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 246.

democratic authority for the IRA to oppose the Treaty. After losing the Civil War, the IRA did not disband, but endured as a significant organization of trained soldiers opposed to the Treaty and its consequences, including the partition of Ireland. The split within the IRA was mirrored at party level. Sinn Féin divided: the majority forming Cumann na nGaedheal (and the first government of the Irish Free State), while the minority maintained the title deeds to Sinn Féin.⁹ Most of the members of Cumann na nGaedheal would later become, in the 1930s, members of Fine Gael, the party that was most committed to the Treaty.

The majority of the deputies of Sinn Féin left its ranks in 1926 to join the new Fianna Fáil party, which was prepared to work the dominion system while being committed to removing every obnoxious vestige of the Treaty from the constitution of independent Ireland.¹⁰ In the meantime the IRA was pledged, by its revised 1925 constitution, provided the Republic was fully established, to acknowledge the authority of such an emergent entity: ‘The Army Council shall have the power to delegate its powers to a government which is actively endeavouring to function as the *de facto* government of the republic ... When a government is [thus] functioning ... a General Army Convention shall be convened to give the allegiance of Óglaigh na hÉireann to such a government’.¹¹

The IRA Between Two Wars in Ireland

The volatile, labyrinthine, public and secret history of the IRA (or, as some would have it, of the many IRAs) between 1923 and 1969 cannot be thoroughly traced here. It is chronicled in a range of journalists’ narratives (Tim Pat Coogan, Peter Taylor, Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie), in the memoirs of former IRA volunteers, and sympathizers (notably Uinseann Mac Eoin),

and in more systematic appraisals by contemporary historians (J. Bowyer Bell, Richard English, Brian Hanley and Peter Hart).¹² The story in the standard accounts, of course, is not one of complete coherence. Contradictory dispositions in and actions by the IRA abounded in the fifty years between the onset of Ireland’s War of Independence and the extensive ‘return’ of British troops to Northern Ireland in 1969. The IRA apparently did not believe that a majority, even an Irish majority in *the Dáil*, had the right to be wrong on the constitutional status of Ireland — evidence of ‘vanguardism’ and ‘elitism’. Yet its successive leaders genuinely sought to lead (or assist) a popular revolution against three régimes (in Belfast, Dublin and London). In the 1920s and 1930s, the IRA commended parliamentary abstentionism, which for many became an article of faith as opposed to a tactic, but one of its Army Council members was elected to the Northern Ireland parliament in 1933, and the organization actively canvassed for Fianna Fáil (which described itself as ‘The Republican Party’ in English) in two critical general elections in 1932 and 1933 — both of which saw the anti-Treaty party returned to power. The IRA’s membership was mostly Catholic in its origins, but the Catholic clergy and bishops of Ireland regularly condemned it. The IRA proclaimed a civic Irish republicanism, true to the heritage of the eighteenth-century revolutionaries, the United Irishmen, in which Protestants and other minorities would have full citizenship rights. Yet its leaders and members were often regarded as ‘sectarian’ in practice. The IRA was described as comprised of highly localized sectarian militias, defenders of Northern Irish Catholics, but also as centralized internationalist left-wing revolutionaries. In one decade, the 1930s, the leadership of the IRA went from being the Comintern’s closest ally in Ireland to conspiring with Nazi Germany, under Sean Russell, several years later, before returning in the 1960s to an accommodation with

Marxists.¹³ In the early and mid-1930s, the IRA ‘denounced partition, yet remained very much an organization focused on the overthrow of the southern rather than the northern state. It trained for warfare, yet often tried to prevent its members involving themselves in confrontation with their enemies’.¹⁴

Yet despite multiple zigzags, not least in orientation toward socialist politics in this fifty-year interval, one can observe a unifying theme across the IRA’s history before 1969, namely, the comprehensive constitutional rejection of British determination of Ireland’s constitutional arrangements. Here is a sketch of five partially overlapping phases, which correspond to the received history learned by IRA volunteers.

First, after the glorious defeat and surrender of 1916, came sudden and surprising success in guerrilla warfare against the British. The IRA refers to this moment as the ‘Tan War’ — after its engagements with the Black and Tans (uniformed in black and khaki), emergency reserve police recruited from Great Britain. Success affirmed for many the merits of armed struggle, particularly guerrilla warfare, which had done more to create a self-governing Ireland than fifty years of parliamentary pursuit of home rule.¹⁵

The second phase, 1923–48, opened after the equally sudden defeat of the bulk of the IRA in the Civil War over the Treaty. The IRA was decisively defeated militarily: significant numbers of volunteers were killed, injured, or incarcerated. Of those subsequently released many left the organization. The IRA’s explicit or tacit electoral supporters became a minority in the South.¹⁶ It became an anti-system oppositionist underground army organization in the Irish Free State — and was weaker still in Northern Ireland.¹⁷ There was a progressive diminution both in

the strength of and the support for the IRA, even though its membership in the 1930s has been estimated as high as 30,000.¹⁸ Volunteers were intermittently repressed, subjected to extensive surveillance, interned without trial, and gradually marginalized, even though the veterans of the Tan War retained public admiration in the South. This loss of support was largely because the IRA progressively lost its rationale in the South. Successive political leaders of political parties in independent Ireland, under Cumann na nGaedheal, Fianna Fáil, and later Clann na Poblachta, were to prove Michael Collins’s perception of the Treaty to be true: it could be used as a ‘stepping stone’ to establish Ireland’s formal — and republican — independence from Great Britain.¹⁹ A Cumann na nGaedheal-led government confirmed the equality and independence of all the British dominions in the Statute of Westminster of 1931. From 1932 Fianna Fáil governments, under the leadership of de Valera, who had led most active republicans away from the abstentionist policies of Sinn Féin and the IRA, progressively dismantled most of the objectionable features of the Treaty. They removed the oath, abolished the post of governor general, recovered the Treaty ports, and established Ireland’s external sovereignty — to the extent that it was able to remain neutral in World War II (formally in protest at the maintenance of partition). The removal of the requirement that deputies take an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, according to de Valera, removed the case for abstentionism in the South: deputies were now free to argue for the republican platform without British-imposed impediments. Ireland freely established its popularly endorsed constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) in 1937 without British interference and created an elected president as head of state, and external association with the British Commonwealth, i.e. a republic in all but name. Later, a Fine Gael- and Clann na Poblachta-led coalition government

14 Hanley, *IRA*, 26–27

15 Peter Hart’s *The I.R.A. and Its Enemies* and *The I.R.A. at War* provide the most social scientific treatment of the IRA in these years. I cannot discuss my reservations about this excellent work here.

16 Drawing extensively on the papers of Maurice (Moss) Twomey, Hanley’s *The IRA, 1926–1936* provides an analysis of the organization in this period; the idea that Ireland experienced a counter-revolution after 1921 is spiritedly advanced by John Regan, *The Irish Counter-Revolution, 1921–36: Treatyite Politics and Settlement in Independent Ireland* (Dublin, 1999).

17 Comprehensive historical treatments of the IRA in Northern Ireland between 1916 and 1969 are yet to be written: Jim McDermott, *Northern Divisions: The Old IRA and the Belfast Pogroms 1920–22* (Belfast, 2001) provides a pioneering account of divisions between the pro- and anti-Treaty IRA in Belfast.

18 This figure is ‘safely assumed’ by Coogan, *IRA*, 79, but Hanley, *IRA*, ch. 1, provides good reasons for thinking that the IRA numbered between 10,000 and 12,000 volunteers in 1932, before declining after a significant breakaway by the politically minded founders of the Republican Congress, and being reduced to fewer than 4,000 members by 1936.

- 19 Seán MacBride, the leader of Clann na Poblachta, was a former Chief of Staff of the IRA, who achieved a unique historical status as a winner of both the Lenin and Nobel peace prizes.
- 20 The defeat of the IRA in Northern Ireland in the 1940s was exemplified in the execution of Tom Williams, whom the Northern Ireland court identified as the key figure in a unit that killed an RUC officer. One of his reprieved comrades, Joe Cahill, later became the first Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA: see Jim McVeigh, *Executed: Tom Williams and the IRA* (Belfast, 1999) and Brendan Anderson, *Joe Cahill: A Life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2002).
- 21 Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 252n.1, observes that ‘The situation was so bad that the IRA Intelligence had got access to a copy of a secret [Irish] government publication, *Notes on the IRA*, and used the names to make their early contacts [for reconstruction] under the assumption that if Special Branch thought a man was a troublemaker he would be a good man.’
- 22 Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, ch. 14–16; Seán Cronin, *Irish Nationalism: A History of its Roots and Ideology* (London, 1980), ch. 5

proclaimed Ireland a Republic in 1949. The 1937 constitution vested sovereignty in the people of Ireland, made it plain that the institutions established were a product of Irish will, and (implicitly) repudiated the Government of Ireland Act (1920), which had partitioned Ireland. In Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution, it affirmed that the whole island of Ireland was ‘national territory’, and reserved to the Irish parliament the right to govern all of Ireland, including the lost six counties. The 1949 declaration that independent Ireland was a Republic — it then left the British Commonwealth because that organization did not then accept republics — meant that the IRA was left with no meaningful grievance against Ireland’s constitutional status. In short, the constitutional resentment at the Treaty in sovereign Ireland had been substantively resolved by 1937, in the view of one former IRA anti-Treaty man, who had become Prime Minister, de Valera, and by 1949, by another former anti-Treaty IRA man, Seán MacBride, who had become Minister for External Affairs.

The third phase, 1939–56, saw a strong re-orientation of the rump IRA, abandoned by many of its southern leftists, toward achieving Irish unification. Reversing partition was the last extant objectionable feature of the Treaty of 1921, arguably after 1937, and certainly after 1949. This re-orientation began with a bombing campaign in England, after a formal declaration of notice and war, in 1939–40. The campaign was a failure and the upshot was the imprisonment and the near-extinction of the IRA’s volunteers in both parts of Ireland as well as of its activists in England.²⁰ The IRA had to be rebuilt almost from scratch after World War II.²¹ The logical corollary of the orientation toward ending partition was seen in an Army Convention resolution of 1948 that there would be no military action by the IRA in the twenty-six counties — which should in retrospect be read as the IRA’s first step toward formal recognition of

what it called the ‘Leinster House Parliament’. It was followed, shortly, by General Army Order No. 8, which forbade volunteers from defending their arms in the South, or from any defensive actions in the South. In short, the IRA was no longer at war with independent Ireland. That armed struggle had been abandoned.

The fourth phase, the IRA campaign of 1956 to 1962, within Northern Ireland, launched from both the North and the South, was intended to liberate the six counties, and to reunify Ireland using guerrilla warfare and armed propaganda. It was preceded by significant evidence of Northern Irish nationalist discontent with the Belfast régime, expressed in successive elections of Sinn Féin candidates. But it was a small-scale conflict, quickly repressed on both sides of the border, and ended in a thorough defeat, publicly acknowledged by the IRA’s Army Council.²²

The comprehensive failure of the IRA’s armed struggle to liberate the North led to a fifth phase, between 1962 and 1969, when an emergent left-wing oriented leadership tried to take the IRA, South and North, strongly in the direction of communist politics, to make ‘reds’ out of ‘greens’. They were ready to abandon militarism, and to shift toward recognition of Ireland’s parliament and the abandonment of principled abstentionism.

This capsule history is, at first glance, one of comprehensive military, political, and strategic failure for the IRA. It went to war against the government of the Irish Free State (1922–23), against the government of Great Britain in 1939, and against the Northern Ireland government in 1956. It was defeated in all three instances, and had acknowledged each defeat, and by the early 1960s appeared to have a rendezvous with a coroner. Politically most of its members had been moral conservatives, Jeffersonian republicans rather than hard-line socialists

— although socialists had been consistently the most ideologically-driven of them, believing their position had been legitimated by the incorporation of Marxist James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army into the IRA in 1916. By the late 1960s in both parts of Ireland, and within the Irish diaspora, the IRA appeared to be a relic, a group of obsessives disconnected from contemporary politics. It had never repeated its successful symbiosis with Sinn Féin of 1919–21, when a military and democratic political movement had combined and forced the UK government to negotiate with Irish republicans.

But failure was not the whole story. The IRA's founding agenda had been substantively realized in the South.²³ All southern governments from 1922 had former senior IRA men in their ministerial ranks. With the notable exception of Kevin O'Higgins, most were republicans with kindred beliefs to those of the IRA.²⁴ They progressively addressed its constitutional agenda, which was neither insane nor unprincipled, even if it was dogmatic, and even if it refused the right of a majority to be wrong on the constitutional status of the state. However, resentment did lead the IRA into increasingly bizarre ideological deductions. The deputies of the rump Second Dáil who had taken the anti-Treaty side, and who had withdrawn from participation in the 'partitionist' Dáil Éireann, continued to meet until the late 1930s as if they were the valid parliament of Ireland. This, in turn, meant that the IRA's mandate stemmed from the last all-Ireland parliament — one that was increasingly, as time passed, demographically as well as chronologically removed from the current preferences of the people of Ireland, North and South. The *demos* from which the IRA derived its authority was frozen in time, increasingly virtual. Eventually, the ageing deputies, the rump Second Dáil, authorized the IRA Army Council to be the government of

Ireland until the Republic could be re-established — although in the IRA's theory it had never been validly *de jure* 'dis-established'. It was, for example, in its capacity as the alleged government of the Irish Republic that the IRA declared war on Great Britain in January 1939.²⁵ Ideological derivations of arcane and progressively dated mandates did not stop with the view that the IRA was the Government of Ireland pending (the re-establishment of) the Republic and a validly constituted Dáil. The last surviving member of the rump Dáil, General Tom Maguire, was to live long enough to be twice asked to decide which section of the republican movement was the true inheritor of the mandate of the last valid Dáil (and thereby the valid government of the Republic of Ireland). In 1969, he decided that the mandate belonged with the Provisional IRA, and in 1986 that it belonged with those who rejected the decision of Sinn Féin to recognize the legitimacy of the Dublin parliament. On his death Maguire handed the baton on to Michael Flannery.²⁶

This excursus into the repercussions of republican constitutional ideology might occasion laughter if the stakes were not so serious. In considering policy responses to political violence, it is too customary for analysts and policy-makers to treat ideology and normative constitutional doctrine as masks for other interests or grievances, or as easily moulded plasticine that can be rapidly reshaped as and when a movement requires. Policy-makers tend to focus on either the incentives or opportunities that encourage or discourage the use of political violence, or on the material grievances held to underpin insurrectionary movements. These are not pointless dispositions. But ideologically barricaded organizations may be best induced to withdraw from violence if an internally principled path can be found for their members to abandon their use of violence. Governments that directly engage the ideological propositions, and the

23 The most incisive analysis of de Valera's long-term legitimizing of independent Ireland through constitutional republicanism is Bill Kissane's *Explaining Irish Democracy* (Dublin, 2002), 165ff.

24 O'Higgins, the strongman of the Cumann na nGaedheal government, seriously sought to have George V separately crowned as King of Ireland, following thereby the original 'dual monarchy' proposal made by Arthur Griffith earlier in the century, and claimed that 'republicanism' was a foreign ideal. Griffith died in 1922 so we do not know whether he would have supported this reasoning.

25 Its ultimatum addressed to Lord Halifax is reproduced in Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, Appendix XIV.

26 For a ninety-page statement of calcified orthodoxy, see Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, *Dílseacht: The Story of Comdt. General Tom Maguire and the Second (All-Ireland) Dáil* (Dublin, 1997).

27 In the 1950s and 1960s, judging by their publications and statements, Irish nationalists did not consider that Ireland's progressive unwinding of the Treaty had entrenched Ulster unionists' wish to remain part of the United Kingdom. Denis Kennedy, in an analysis of unionist newspapers 1919–49, argues that it in fact widened the gulf between both parts of Ireland (by which he means the gulf between Ulster unionists and Irish nationalists): see *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State, 1919–1949* (Belfast, 1988).

28 Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, 104; Paul Arthur, 'Republican Violence in Northern Ireland: The Rationale', in John Darby, Nicholas Dodge and A. C. Hepburn, eds., *Political Violence: Ireland in a Comparative Perspective* (Belfast, 1990), 48–63 (49)

constitutional norms of such movements, may have greater success in promoting their internal transformations. That is one lesson one can extract from the progressive termination of the IRA as a serious subversive threat to the government of the Irish Free State, and its successor, the government of the Republic of Ireland. By progressively eliminating the obnoxious features of the Treaty, by transforming Ireland's constitutional status and laws, successive Irish governments rendered outmoded the IRA's constitutional objections to the 'actually existing' Republic of Ireland. This assisted in the demobilization and constitutionalization of the IRA's members in the South, and their withdrawal from the politics of armed struggle. There is a forgotten logical counterfactual to this proposition. Had Irish governments not followed this path, and had not British governments reconciled themselves to it, whether by accident or design, independent Ireland's Civil War over the Treaty would have been renewed, and the IRA would have had greater support for attempting a *coup d'état* in the South.

Normative constitutional engagement with insurgents is not sufficient for making political settlements and peace, nor is what might be termed 'constitutional appeasement' always appropriate or sufficient. The long-run success of Irish governments in marginalizing the IRA in the South owed a great deal to the regularly renewed democratic and majority mandates of such governments, their successful use of civil policing, extensive surveillance, intermittently severe repression under the rule of law, and the imposition of multiple hardships which induced many IRA veterans to leave the organization or to emigrate. One must not forget that the institutionalization of the Irish state, supported externally by Winston Churchill, was preceded by the thoroughly brutal — and frequently lawless — suppression of the majority of the IRA in the Civil War,

including executive-authorized executions. Nevertheless, where military nationalist movements have constitutions that guide their conduct, and are organized around coherent constitutional resentment, constitutional engagement may be a necessary condition for conflict-resolution. Having shown how the argument applies to the IRA in the South, I will later attempt to show that a similar argument can be used to interpret the IRA's willingness to sustain ceasefires in the 1990s and presently to consider its own disbandment.

Provisional IRA: Objectives and Nature

The IRA could, and did, object to the failure of Irish governments to achieve Irish unification, but its volunteers knew that the major obstacle to Irish unification lay not with what they persisted in calling the Free State. After all, governments of Ireland had diplomatically campaigned for Irish unification after 1937. Rather the obstacles lay with the UK government, and with the wishes of Ulster unionists, the strongest beneficiaries and supporters of the Treaty settlement.²⁷ The Provisional IRA was created in December 1969 in full knowledge of these facts, its twin-sister, Provisional Sinn Féin, shortly afterwards. The new IRA's first declaration affirmed its allegiance to 'the Thirty-two County Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by Dáil Éireann in 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922 and suppressed to this day by the British-imposed Six County and Twenty-six County partitionist states', a re-statement of the IRA's traditional stance.²⁸ The 'Provisional' title served three functions. It echoed the 'Provisional Government of the Irish Republic' proclaimed in 1916; and, secondly, it repudiated the 'Official' IRA's leaders, who had just sought to manoeuvre the IRA to end political abstentionism, and had, it was thought, used unconstitutional means to do so. Thirdly, 'Provisional' suggested a temporary designation, pending

the reorganization of the IRA. This mission was proclaimed accomplished in September 1970, but the name ‘Provisional IRA’, and its derivatives ‘Provos’, ‘Proviess’, stuck.

The split between the Provisionals and the Officials is generally attributed to three cleavages. The Officials were Marxist, or on the verge of becoming so; the Provisionals were more nationalist; and the Officials preferred to build a political liberation front to military struggle.²⁹ There is truth in this characterization. The historian Roy Foster further maintains that the Officials were ‘woolly radicals dreaming of a national liberation front’, whereas the Provisionals are typecast as ‘Defenderists’ and as ‘fundamentalists’.³⁰ The Defenderist motif is commonplace in accounts of the Provisional IRA.³¹ It suggests a lineage from the clandestine eighteenth-century agrarian Catholic nativist militia of Ulster who defended their co-religionists from Protestant settler vigilantes, the ‘Peep o’ Day Boys’, organized killers and expellers of Catholics. It insinuates that the Provisionals are more sectarian than ideological, and less committed to the civic citizenship agenda of Ireland’s first eighteenth-century republicans, the United Irishmen (who fused the Defenders into their organization before the 1798 insurrection). It treats the Provisionals as atavistic.

The Defenderist motif appears to make sense because the impetus for the formation of the Provisional IRA was the unpreparedness of the IRA, North or South, for the assaults on Catholics, especially Belfast Catholics, by Protestant mobs, in collusion with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its auxiliaries, the B Specials, in August 1969. These assaults, which led to deaths, injuries, and expulsions, and the burning out of Bombay Street, are standardly described as ‘pogroms’ in the memories of post-1969 Provisional IRA volunteers.³² These assaults were responses to the then peaceful civil rights movement, which republicans had helped

organize from 1966 to mobilize against deep injustices within Northern Ireland, modelling the protests on the US civil rights movement.³³ The Provisionals were organized in immediate response to urban defencelessness, and to remonstrative graffiti on Belfast walls that declared ‘IRA = I Ran Away’. But the post-1969 Provisionals were not atavistic throwbacks. Their new members were, mostly, urban working-class activists who saw themselves, initially, as defenders of their communities against contemporary loyalists, partisan police and partisan British troops. Their founding leaders soon persuaded them that active offence against the British state was the only or at least the best way to address the unreformable polity of Northern Ireland. To typecast the Provisionals as religious ‘fundamentalists’ is as misleading as reading them as throwbacks. Their early and their later members included many self-styled socialists; and although the Provisionals have been overwhelmingly Catholic in social origin they have not, generally, been pious believers, have not followed the political advice of their Church’s bishops — or the Pope — and are less overtly and traditionally Catholic than the volunteers of 1916 or of the 1920s. There has never been a serving priest, let alone a bishop, in the IRA’s Army Council, or, to my knowledge, among its volunteers.³⁴ The IRA’s symbolism may be suffused with a Catholic heritage, as some maintain, but it is the Irish nation rather than the Roman Catholic Church which they affirm, and to which they pledge allegiance. That said, the Provisionals were founded by ‘republican’ fundamentalists, men who had fought in the failed 1956–62 campaign, such as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Dáithí Ó Conaill, Seán Mac Stiofáin, and Joe Cahill, and who believed in the republican traditions, i.e. in rejecting the Treaty’s institutions, and undoing partition by force.³⁵

The Provisionals soon declared themselves at war with the British army, which had been deployed in Northern Ireland in 1969

- 29 Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, 89–105; Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 355–72; Coogan, *IRA*, 365–84; English, *Armed Struggle*, 81–147; Henry Patterson, *The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland* (London, 1989), ch. 4–6 and James M. Glover, ‘Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends’, Ministry of Defence [United Kingdom], D/DINI/2003 MOD Form 102: s25/II/82, 2 Nov. 1978, reprinted in Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 339–57
- 30 R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600–1972* (London, 1988), 589
- 31 Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts: Journeys Within the IRA’s Soul* (London, 1995), 28ff. Toolis writes of the IRA through investigative and personalized studies of ‘defenders’, ‘brothers’ [the Finucanes], ‘informers’, ‘volunteers’, ‘chieftains’ [McGuinness], and ‘martyrs’. In its story-telling and prose *Rebel Hearts* is the best journalistic foray into the IRA. It is, however, a social science-free zone, and its policy proposals are shallow. But it has the quality of enduring literature, and many of its stories read like realist film or drama scripts.
- 32 See the interviews in Robert White, *Provisional Irish Republicans* (Westport, Ct., 1993), ch. 4.
- 33 Bob Purdie, ‘Was the Civil Rights Movement a Republican/Communist Conspiracy?’, *Irish Political Studies*, 3 (1988), 33–41; *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1990)
- 34 Fr Michael Flanagan was Vice-President of Sinn Féin (1917–21), and its President in 1934. He was disciplined by the Roman Catholic Church and was the sole priest in Ireland to support the Spanish Republic against General Franco (Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 279n.140). Fr. Patrick Ryan, whose extradition to the UK was refused by the Irish Courts in 1988, was accused of being a member of the IRA.

- 35 Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, the Provisional IRA will be treated as *the* IRA, and Provisional Sinn Féin as Sinn Féin because that is how the volunteers and members describe their organizations, and because, officially, the Official IRA no longer exists, having been disbanded by its party, the Workers Party, the heir of the defunct Official Sinn Féin.
- 36 James Kelly, *Orders for the Captain?* (Dublin, 1971); *The Thimble Riggers: The Dublin Arms Trials of 1970* (Dublin, 1999)
- 37 O'Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism*, ch. 3–4
- 38 She almost certainly authorized indirect negotiations during the first batch of hunger strikes in 1980: see David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike* (London, 1987), 40, 292–93. After the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 Thatcher and Secretaries of State Tom King and Peter Brooke were aware, and approved of, a 'pipeline' to and from Gerry Adams via priest Alex Reid: see Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (New York, 2002), 246–60, *passim*.
- 39 For example, see the information in Moloney, *Secret History*, *passim*.
- 40 See Coogan, *IRA*; Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin from Armed Struggle to Peace Talks* (Dublin, updated paperback edn. 1995); Taylor, *Provos*; White, *Provisional Irish Republicans*.
- 41 O'Brien, *Long War*, Appendix 1; Martin Dillon, *Twenty Five Years of Terror* (London, 1996), 353–84; and see the commentary in Coogan, *IRA*, 544–71.

in 'support of the civil power', apparently in a peacekeeping role, and to head off a potential intervention by the Irish government — which had arranged at least one clandestine supply of arms to protect Northern Catholics.³⁶ The new IRA, which some, wrongly, maintain was brought into being through the active planning of the Irish government, argued that only a British disengagement would resolve the conflicts on the island, but focused its initial attention on removing the Stormont parliament — through which the Ulster Unionist Party had organized a systematic system of discrimination for nearly fifty years.³⁷ In 1970–71, the Provisionals rapidly surpassed the Officials in militancy and recruitment amongst Catholic youths; and from 1969 until 1997, with breaks in 1972, 1974–75, and between 1994 and 1996, this new IRA organized a sustained insurrection. It has not succeeded in unifying Ireland, but regards itself as having removed the majoritarian and tyrannous Stormont parliament in 1972. It was not militarily defeated by what is widely acknowledged as the most capable European army, nor, after 1976, by an extremely large, armed, reorganized, and well-funded police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Operating mostly within a territory with just over one million and a half people, and for most of that time within a support base of a minority of the minority cultural Catholic population of approximately 650,000, the IRA's organizational endurance was impressive. It survived the efforts of five UK prime ministers to crush it — Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, and John Major. The IRA's leaders negotiated, directly or indirectly, with all these prime ministers. The leader of the UK's opposition, Harold Wilson, who was to be prime minister again between 1974 and 1976, met the IRA in Dublin in 1971. In 1972, an IRA negotiating team, including the young Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, met with

Heath's Deputy Prime Minister, William Whitelaw, in London. The IRA would later indirectly negotiate with Wilson's government in 1974–75, and with Major's between 1990 and 1996. Thatcher must have authorized Peter Brooke, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to open negotiations about negotiations by proxy with the IRA in 1989.³⁸ And since 1997 the IRA has been indirectly — directly on some interpretations — negotiating with another British prime minister, Tony Blair. In the same period it has negotiated, indirectly or directly, with four Irish prime ministers — Charles Haughey, Albert Reynolds, John Bruton and Bertie Ahern. In short, 'talking to terrorists' has been considered a necessary risk by six British premiers, and at least four recent Irish premiers.

What is known about the contemporary IRA? Transparency cannot be the dominant trait of an underground army. The names of the IRA's Army Council and Executive leaders, although widely guessed, reported, and denied, are organizational secrets, which Ed Moloney claims to know. Presently many of its serving volunteers freely supply journalists with extensive information about intra-IRA debates, apparently in violation of IRA General Army Order No. 3, 'No member ... shall make any statement either verbally or in writing to the press or mass media without General Headquarters permission'.³⁹

Most studies of the IRA are dependent upon authorized interviews.⁴⁰ There are, of course, some documentary materials. The IRA, since its first effective organizer Michael Collins, has been textual. Its 1979 'Green Book' is a manual of lectures on constitutional commitments and rules for recruits, and guidance for volunteers facing interrogation.⁴¹ The IRA tries to keep fastidious records in notebooks and electronic media. This trait has, of course, often compromised secrecy. Peter Taylor's remarkable account of an interview with

Ruairí Ó Brádaigh shows that the IRA's leaders keep extensive minutes, and that these minutes are authoritative.⁴² It is equally clear that no journalist, let alone historian, has had access to full copies of such records, and whether they will eventually become available, or revelatory, cannot be known. They are, however, more likely to be reliable than some of today's literature and pulp fiction that goes into successive editions for the denizens of airport lounges and the generally male consumers of books on war and conflict. For source materials on the IRA serious analysts are dependent upon the organization's formal communiqués; transcripts of its authorized interviews with journalists and academics; public police and court records of volunteers and prisoners; stolen, lost or leaked British or Irish army, police, MI5, MI6, and Ministry of Defence intelligence reports; accounts of conflictual incidents and victims of incidents; and what can be gleaned from the memoirs, autobiographies, and authorized and unauthorized biographies of the IRA's leaders and volunteers, or from the National Graves Association, which provides a roll call of the republican war dead.⁴³ There are also the suspect but potentially informative accounts of volunteers turned spies or who have abandoned the cause.⁴⁴ What follows is a provisional summary of what is known about the IRA from a critical but impartial appraisal of these sources.

Structure: Division of Labour, Recruits, and Numbers

Until 1977 the IRA was organized, as it had been since the Irish Civil War of 1922–23, as a shadow or underground version of the British army, complete with officers, staff and line, and territorial brigades, battalions, and companies. From 1976–77 it was reorganized in smaller cellular structures, active service units (ASUs), each intended to be specialized (e.g. in sniping, executions, bombings, robberies), and to comprise a

small number of volunteers. The idea was to intensify the division of labour, and to create a more compact organization, less vulnerable both to volunteers' surrendering information and to intelligence losses through informants.⁴⁵ In this reformation, several hundred volunteers, especially many ex-prisoners, were excluded from the ASUs as security risks, either because they were easily monitored security-risks, or because they were otherwise regarded as unreliable. Nevertheless, after the change some of the old nomenclature of battalions and brigades was preserved — and in Crossmaglen and Tyrone lip-service was paid to the change.⁴⁶

Presented in a formal organizational chart the top tier of the IRA consists of the Executive (12 members), elected by the General Army Convention, which did not meet between 1970 and 1986, because of the danger of mass arrests. As the agency responsible for the IRA's constitution, the Convention is its sovereign. The Executive elects and, nominally, holds to account the Army Council (7 members), the operational executive chaired by the Chief of Staff. The General Headquarters of the IRA staff is organized functionally into 'offices': Quarter Master General, Operations, Engineering, Intelligence, Finance, Training, Security, Publicity and Political Education. Operations are organized by area: England, Europe, and, since reorganization, two Irish Commands, 'Southern' and 'Northern'.⁴⁷ The role of Southern Command is to act as the supplier and stockist for Northern Command — and for many operations in England. Judging by arms, guns, ammunition, explosive devices, and bomb-making equipment found by the Garda Síochána (the Irish police) in the decade preceding the ceasefires of the 1990s, most matériel was kept in the border counties, or in the Greater Dublin region, which makes logistical sense, although extrapolating from the location of 'finds' may be misleading because matériel may be more successfully hidden elsewhere in rural Ireland. Before and after reorganization the IRA

42 Taylor, *Provos*, 181

43 For police and court records, see Kieran McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management and Release* (Oxford, 2001); for a key intelligence report, see Glover, 'Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends'. For accounts of victims, see David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh, 2001); Malcolm Sutton, *Bear in Mind the Dead: An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland, 1969–1993* (Belfast, 1994). For autobiographical and biographical accounts of republican figures, see Gerry Adams, *Falls Memories* (Dingle, 1983); *Cage Eleven* (Dingle, 1990); *Before the Dawn* (London, 1996); *An Irish Voice* (Dingle, 1997); *An Irish Journal* (Dingle, 2001); *A Farther Shore: Ireland's Long Road to Peace* (New York, 2003); Anderson, *Joe Cabill*; Liam Clarke and Kathryn Johnston, *Martin McGuinness: From Guns to Government* (Edinburgh, 2003); Seán Mac Stiofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (London, 1975); Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners, Long Kesh 1972–2000* (Belfast, 2001); Shane Paul O'Doherty, *The Volunteer: A Former IRA Man's True Story* (London, 1993); Bobby Sands, *The Diary of Bobby Sands* (Dublin, 1981); *Prison Poems* (Dublin, 1981); *One Day in My Life* (Cork, 1982); David Sharrock and Mark Devenport, *Man of War, Man of Peace? The Unauthorised Biography of Gerry Adams* (London, 1997). There is also Danny Morrison's prison journal, *Then the Walls Came Down: A Prison Journal* (Cork, 1999), which I have not read.

44 Martin McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (London, 1997) and *Dead Man Running: The True Story of a Secret Agent's Escape from the IRA and MIS* (Edinburgh, 1998); Eamon Collins (with McGovern), *Killing Rage* (London, 1997); Sean O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London, 1998). Collins's book seems to me the most interesting, honest, revealing and least self-serving of the apostate accounts.

45 John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'The Provisional Irish Republican Army: Command and Functional Structure', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9 (1997), 1–32. Details of the reorganization, spelled out in a 'Staff Report', allegedly thought through by Gerry Adams and others when interned in Long Kesh, became known when IRA Chief of Staff Seamus Twomey was arrested in December 1977. The changes may have been implemented when Martin McGuinness was Chief of Staff (1978–82): see O'Brien, *Long War*, 107ff; see also Coogan, *IRA*, 464–74.

46 Collins, *Killing Rage*, 83

47 According to Moloney, *Secret History*, 573, the operational units in Northern Command are formally organized around Belfast and six other areas (Derry, Donegal/Fermanagh, Tyrone and Monaghan, Armagh (North and South), and Down), and each has ASUs operating under Brigades; in slight contrast, O'Brien, *Long War*, 105, 110, maintains the Northern Command is organized over all of the six counties of Northern Ireland and the five adjacent border counties of the Republic (Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim and Donegal), and has Belfast, Derry, Donegal, Tyrone/Monaghan and Armagh as the Brigade areas.

48 Bowyer Bell, *Secret Army*, 468–69

sought to establish a pyramidal command and control organization, like a functioning army. But, of necessity, the IRA has been extensively decentralized, reliant on the initiatives and flair of its semi-autonomous units:

The Army Council and the GHQ were engaged in oversight, not command. Operational matters were often controlled by those close to the target. Intelligence was apt to arrive rather than be sought. GHQ spent a great deal of time balancing demands and seeking resources rather than in directing a war. All the strategic decisions had been made. Most tactical decisions were shaped by opportunity and vulnerabilities. Initiative was seldom punished ... in reality the IRA ran on a consensus achieved largely unconsciously ... Operational freedom often meant blunders, innocent people killed, incompetents sent in harm's way, bombs detonated when quiet was needed; but there was every indication that tight control from the centre would hardly have changed matters.⁴⁸

Two more elements of IRA organization require comment: its security and its finances. The IRA has its own internal security, colloquially known as the 'nutting squad', whose mission is to interrogate, court martial, and, where deemed necessary, to execute suspected spies or informants.⁴⁹ It also organizes vigilante justice through punishment squads of auxiliaries, a lower tier of generally lower calibre volunteers, who are not members of the ASUs, although they can graduate to them.⁵⁰ The administration of 'punishment beatings', what I call policing without prisons, may take the form of brutal beatings of limbs with baseball bats or iron bars, or of 'knee-cappings' with gunshots. This is one of the most politically and morally sensitive subjects for the IRA's supporters and apologists. It is clear from interviews that republican leaders would be delighted to be

divested of any association with the system — even though one standard analysis is that the IRA's leaders support punishment beatings to entrench their local power. The punishment-beating system, which has its counterpart among loyalists, has been both a demand and a supply problem for the IRA. Rough justice is demanded for alleged offenders and petty criminals within nationalist working-class communities, especially where the IRA is dominant, and where calling on the services of the police, especially the unreformed RUC, has been unimaginable — not least because police officers have often been unwilling to provide standard security where they fear that they might be set-up and shot. IRA leaders in Belfast felt it necessary to meet some of this demand — and at least some of its auxiliaries have performed punishment beatings with sadistic enthusiasm. The supply problem has been occasioned when the IRA has a surplus of potential volunteers who might otherwise either join other republican organizations, or dilute the calibre of the core organization. Organizing the surplus in auxiliaries and punishment squads solves some of this problem. The system is one of the grisliest by-products of the absence of legitimate state institutions.⁵¹

The last item in considering organization is the IRA's finances. These are, of course, not 'known', but are subject to extensive speculation. Journalists regularly report Irish police and RUC estimates as authoritative, but they cannot be, at least not without confirmation from the IRA's internal 'accountants' and 'auditors'.⁵² Albeit dated, the most interesting evaluation, precisely because it was not intended for publication, remains that of the stolen report of Brigadier James Glover of 1978.⁵³ It estimated IRA annual income at UK£950,000, and expenditure at £780,000, i.e. with an annual surplus of £170,000, 17.9 per cent, available for arms, ammunition and explosives.⁵⁴ Glover estimated expenditure as devoted, in descending order of importance, to four

items: volunteers' pay, travel and transport costs, propaganda, and prisoner support. He considered the IRA had four principal sources of income, in descending order of importance: theft and robbery in Ireland, racketeering in Ireland, overseas donations, and the Green Cross (a prisoners' aid organization). 'Overseas donations' were estimated at £120,000, i.e. 12.7 per cent of revenues, and were not expected to rise.⁵⁵ Glover assumed that the IRA's commercial undertakings were marred by 'dishonesty and incompetence', and poor sources of revenue, other than its black taxi service. He listed no domestic Irish donations at all, which seems incredible. His estimated outlay per volunteer assumed that a £20 per week supplement was paid to 250 volunteers drawing UK unemployment benefit, and that a further 60 were paid £40 per week (implying a part- or fully- paid cadre of just over 300 volunteers). More recent estimates of the IRA's annual income range from US\$10 million to the figure of £10 million usually cited by contemporary police sources to journalists.⁵⁶ These figures imply a significant growth of revenues since the mid-1970s, even allowing for inflation. Sources of income, contra Glover's expectations, have included commercial undertakings — social clubs, service and hospitality centres also serving as money-laundering operations — as well as extortion, armed robberies, and, no doubt, domestic donations. Kidnapping, as Glover makes clear, has been regarded as counter-productive, and unauthorized, although it took place in the 1970s. If one compares Glover's report with subsequent estimates of the IRA's income and expenditures, in my view three judgements cannot be avoided. First, running the IRA is a relatively cheap operation, primarily dependent upon the donated time and sacrifices of its volunteers.⁵⁷ Secondly, the IRA demonstrates the power of the weak. It does not need large expenditures to have dramatic and powerful impacts. Small numbers of determined militants can build and use relatively cheap 'home-made' or

improvised explosives (fertilizers and mortar bombs), install bespoke sleeper-devices with devastating effects, and own, maintain and use relatively cheap guns. Thirdly, the low estimates of the IRA's financial surplus, and of resources available per volunteer, strongly suggest that 'rent-seeking' or 'greed-based' accounts of its maintenance lack empirical foundation — Glover acknowledged that 'we cannot accurately judge the extent to which they line their own pockets'.⁵⁸ In short, the focus of policy-makers on closing down or squeezing the IRA's finances, while a necessary and predictable response, was never likely to be pivotal in affecting its performance.

Who volunteered to join the IRA? Here there is fair degree of consensus. First of all, most volunteers have been young males, although there are female members, and there is a long-standing women's republican organization, Cumann na mBan. Secondly, the founding membership of the Provisionals was from families with long ties to the IRA, dating back to the 1920s, and in some cases back to the Fenians of the 1860s.⁵⁹ This core provided the nucleus around which the IRA had survived after the 1940s. (Familial socialization, of course, is not pervasive: many males with such relatives did not become volunteers.) Thirdly, IRA recruits are nearly all young males, of Catholic origin, who are mostly from working class, small farmer or lower middle-class occupations. The list of the occupations of ninety-five IRA prisoners, imprisoned for more than three years in Belfast Prison between 1956 and 1960, is revealing.⁶⁰ It included just one businessman. Construction workers, farmers, clerks, and industrial apprentices predominated. They were neither prosperous professionals, nor 'lumpen-proletarians'. Twenty years later the Glover Report (1978) stated: 'Our evidence of the calibre of rank and file [IRA] terrorists does not support the view that they are mindless hooligans drawn from the unemployed and the unemployable.'⁶¹ Two surveys of

49 The IRA's internal rules of court martial procedure are documented in Coogan, *IRA*, Appendix II. Collins's *Killing Rage* describes his participation in these internal courts.

50 Collins, *Killing Rage*, 84

51 A clear-headed appraisal of vigilantism and punishment-beatings is found in Andrew Silke, 'Rebel's Dilemma: The Changing Relationship between the IRA, Sinn Féin and Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 11, 1 (Spring 1999), 55–93. Unlike standard critics he shows how much it is a response to local demands. Silke correctly argued that only with major police reform will the IRA and Sinn Féin be able to terminate their involvement in the system, but in my view was too pessimistic in assuming that both organizations are 'irretrievably' committed to vigilantism.

52 Many of these are summarized in Horgan and Taylor, 'The Provisional Irish Republican Army,' Table 1.

53 Glover, 'Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends', published in *Republican News* and reprinted in Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 339–57

54 Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 344. Hereafter, unless otherwise indicated, all references to pounds are to pounds sterling.

55 Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 590, writes of the Provisionals that 'American money, local support and the army's record in house-to-house searches established them firmly in the urban ghettos'. This implicit order of ranking is not consistent with the evidence. It would have been more accurate to write that local support for defence against loyalist and police attacks, the British army's record of repression, and donations from Ireland and America, firmly established the Provisional IRA in many nationalist dominated areas.

56 Scott Anderson, 'Making a Killing: The High Cost of Peace in Northern Ireland', *Harpers Magazine*, 288, 1725 (Feb. 1994), 45–54

- 57 See also Robert White, 'Commitment, Efficacy and Personal Sacrifice among Irish Republicans', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 16 (1988), 77–90.
- 58 Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 343
- 59 White, *Provisional Irish Republicans*, *passim*
- 60 Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, Appendix XVI; the list was compiled by Eamon Timoney, one of the prisoners.
- 61 Cronin, *Irish Nationalism*, 342; Coogan, *IRA*, 468
- 62 Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden, and Paddy Hillyard, *Ten Years on in Northern Ireland* (London, 1980), 19; see also Kevin Boyle, R. Chesney, and Tom Hadden, 'Who Are the Terrorists?', in *Fortnight*, 7 May 1976 and *New Society*, 6 May 1976. Ex-IRA Volunteers Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Dingle, 1986), 67–68, and Patrick Magee, *Gangsters or Guerrillas? Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction'* (Belfast, 2001), 16, both approvingly cite the Glover Report, and the Boyle, Hadden and Hillyard (1980) appraisal, as independent assessments of the non-criminal nature of IRA recruits.
- 63 Magee, *Gangsters or Guerrillas?*, *passim*. The 1984 bombing of the Grand Hotel Brighton, the site of a Conservative Party conference, killed five people, injured senior Conservative Norman Tebbit, seriously disabled his wife, and came close to killing Margaret Thatcher. Magee received five life sentences for the bombing. He served fourteen years before being released under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.
- 64 Anderson, 'Making a Killing'
- 65 Michael Ignatieff, 'The Temptations of Nihilism', in *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Princeton, 2003), 122

republican offenders coming before the courts found that the data 'beyond reasonable doubt' established that the bulk of them were young men and women 'without criminal records in the ordinary sense, though some have been involved in public disorders [but] in this respect and in their records of employment and unemployment they are reasonably representative of the working class community of which they form a substantial part [and] do not fit the stereotype of criminality which the authorities have from time to time attempted to attach to them'.⁶²

IRA recruits are therefore not criminals, gangsters or mafiosi, despite the aforementioned auxiliaries involved in punishment squads. The gangster motif, as the former IRA volunteer Patrick Magee, known as 'the Brighton bomber', shows in an intelligent published doctoral thesis is the most stale cliché in the popular or pulp fiction generated by the conflict.⁶³ It is also a theme highlighted in British press and broadcasting reportage, and cartoons. Journalist Scott Anderson wrote under the heading 'Making a Killing' to popularize the gangster idea in the US.⁶⁴ It is more startling to find the contention reproduced by a thoughtful liberal intellectual, my friend, Michael Ignatieff, who has lived in the UK and reported on Northern Ireland. His *The Lesser Evil* maintains 'there will always be a gap between those who take the political goals of a terrorist campaign seriously and those who are drawn to the cause because it offers glamour, violence, money and power. It is anyone's guess how many actual believers in the dream of a united Ireland there are in the ranks of the IRA. But it is a fair bet to suppose that many recruits join up because they want to benefit from the IRA's profitable protection rackets'. He footnotes Taylor's *Provos* and Coogan's *The IRA*, without pagination, before continuing, 'The IRA bears as much relation to the Mafia as it does to an insurrectionary cell or a radical political party and the motivations that draw young

people into the movement are often as criminal as they are political ... The criminal allure of terrorist groups and the cynicism of those who join them are additional reasons why it is a mistake to conciliate or appease a group like the IRA with political concessions'.⁶⁵

There is no serious empirical warrant for these views, certainly not in the books of Coogan and Taylor. 'Believing in the dream of a united Ireland' is not an impartial characterization, and while this belief may not be the primary motivation for all members to join, affirmation of the goal is a condition of membership. Ignatieff's assumed knowledge of volunteers' private inner desires is just speculation, and he appears unaware that experience of state repression or of attacks by loyalists is the most widespread shared feature of post-1969 IRA recruits.⁶⁶ These considerations undermine the 'criminal' characterization of the IRA's volunteers. Robert White's interviews, and statements by republican leaders, show convincingly that surges in applications to join the IRA are directly linked to political events, rather than to 'rent-seeking' opportunities. Attacks on the civil rights movement, loyalist mobs burning-out Catholics from their homes in Belfast, the Falls Road curfew by the British army, internment without trial, Bloody Sunday, and the British government's response to the hunger strikes of 1980–81, were more potent sources of recruitment than the meagre material 'rewards' facing volunteers. The evidence is in fact strongly against the criminal motivation thesis.⁶⁷ IRA 'surpluses' do not enrich its leaders, and if they did, this would be a major UK media theme. Gerry Adams has doubtless become prosperous, after the peace process, but from his published writings. There is no evidence that he was enriched through his IRA or Sinn Féin roles. IRA members do not personally profit from takings; if they do, they are excluded from the organization, punished or suffer moral disapproval. This can be seen in the critical accounts of

McGartland (1997) and Collins (1997). Volunteers in ASUs rely on minimal support, as do those ‘on the run’; and the auxiliaries’ role is to punish petty criminals, not to lead them — though, of course, some may behave contrary to the organization’s norms. Earning respect from local peers rather than profits is a better explanation of membership of vigilante and punishment squads.⁶⁸ The IRA’s resources, however dubiously or criminally obtained, are overwhelmingly channelled back into mission-related activities. The IRA recruited those willing to risk their lives or long jail sentences for what they warned would likely be a dangerous and short career. In short, group-oriented, non-pecuniary and non-egoistic motivations have been key, both to recruitment and retention. The costs of membership have been high: the risks of death or of long-run imprisonment plain, and the costs have also been borne by family and loved ones, even if support is provided to the families of imprisoned volunteers. Famously, IRA volunteers have been resistant to prison management techniques that ‘ordinary criminals’ generally accept without organized protest or rancour.⁶⁹ This is not to say that all IRA recruits epitomize austere republican virtue, merely to affirm that personal criminal opportunism amongst volunteers is punished. The IRA, famously, does not ‘do drugs’, and has attempted to ‘close down’ a rival republican organization, the INLA, when it started this mode of ‘self-financing’. Northern Ireland, by contrast with the rest of the UK and Ireland, as many have observed, has been politically rather than criminally violent.⁷⁰

Ignatieff and others have the direction of causality wrong. Defeated violent nationalist organizations may become mafias, but they do not originate as such, nor will they have extensive legitimacy if they become such. One priority of the Irish peace process is to ensure the rehabilitation of former republican paramilitaries — and, to date, rates of recidivism, political or criminal,

among ex-IRA prisoners have been strikingly low, and further evidence against the criminal motivation thesis. The IRA, the INLA and the Continuity and the Real IRAs may come to resemble mafias in the course of their respective dissolutions, but this will constitute the corruption of their missions, not their starting motivations. Indeed one may argue that the policy implications of the criminality thesis have been tested to destruction in Northern Ireland.⁷¹ The hunger strikes of 1980–81, which led to the revitalization of support for both the IRA and Sinn Féin, were a demand for recognition as political prisoners and not as criminals. The authorities faced the obvious problem that most of those incarcerated were incarcerated under ‘scheduled offences’, i.e. under special procedures for politically motivated special offences. Precisely because the IRA was a political agency, it needed to be treated politically as well as legally (though plainly any politically violent agency in a liberal democratic state violates the criminal law). Had Ignatieff’s counsel been followed — i.e. not to conciliate or appease the IRA with political concessions — then there would never have been a Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and perhaps another 1,000 people would have died since 1994 because of a false theory of motivation.

Fourthly, there is no sustained evidence that the IRA’s recruits are psychologically abnormal. Studies have been made comparing the murderers committing political as opposed to non-political killings in Northern Ireland. They confirm this appraisal (e.g. Lyons and Harbinson 1986), and thereby support the general finding in research on political violence and terrorism that ethno-national terrorists are ‘normal’, i.e. representative of their social bases.⁷² Yeatsian-tinged psychological portraits of Irish republicans nevertheless abound in the literature. Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie title the Prologue to their *The Provisional IRA*, ‘Fanatic Hearts’, after Yeats’s lines, ‘Out of Ireland have we come /

66 Robert White, ‘From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War — Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 (1989), 1277–302; White, *Provisional Irish Republicans, passim*. Collins’s *Killing Rage* provides the fullest narrative of his movement into the IRA — it includes the mistreatment of his mother and the beating up and false arrest of his father, his brother and himself by British paratroopers, knowledge of left-wing ideology and exposure to a left-wing (English) academic, disillusionment with the prospects of reform and power-sharing, and the impact of the campaign for political status by republican prisoners. ‘I was full of a heady mixture of anti-imperialism, anger, sympathy and self-importance’ (23); greed played no role, and he despised volunteers and auxiliaries who engaged in petty theft.

67 Reviewed further in McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, ch. 6–7.

68 Frank Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy: Struggles in a Belfast Community* (London, 1979); Silke, ‘Rebel’s Dilemma’.

69 See McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*.

70 Ken Heskin, ‘Societal Disintegration in Northern Ireland — A Five Year Update’, *Economic and Social Review*, 16, 3 (1985), 187–99

- 71 See also Brendan O’Leary, ‘The Labour Government and Northern Ireland, 1974–79’ in John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements* (Oxford, 2004), 194–216.
- 72 H. Lyons and H. Harbinson, ‘A Comparison of Political and Non-Political Murderers in Northern Ireland, 1974–84’, *Medicine, Science and the Law*, 26 (1986) 193–98; Clark R. McCauley, ‘Terrorism Research and Public Policy: An Overview’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 3, 1 (1991), 126–44; Andrew P. Silke, ‘Cheshire-Cat Logic: The Recurring Theme of Terrorist Abnormality in Psychological Research’, *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 4 (1998), 51–69; Andrew P. Silke, ed., *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences* (London, 2003), ch. 1–2
- 73 Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, 5
- 74 For example, see Moloney, *Secret History*.
- 75 Bishop and Mallie, *Provisional IRA*, 1; Mallie is identified as the interviewer and Bishop as the author.

Great hatred, little room / Maimed us at the start / I carry from my mother’s womb / A fanatic heart.’ It is good poetry; it is not social psychology. Kevin Toolis claims to have journeyed ‘within the IRA’s soul’ — fine words, but not convincing science. Bishop and Mallie see IRA violence as an inevitable psychological product of partition: ‘Even if the leadership were to abandon violence, another violent organization would spring up in its place. As long as Ireland is divided, violent republicanism will be an ineradicable tradition.’⁷³ This is an extreme psychopolitical claim that will be tested when the IRA disbands.

Fifthly, there is agreement that the spatial origin of IRA recruits has changed. In the 1956–62 campaign significant numbers of southerners were involved. Today it is agreed that, except, of course, in Southern Command, northerners predominate, at all ranks — although there are still significant numbers of volunteers from or living in the southern border counties. The IRA’s evolution is, in part, the story of it being taken over by northerners, i.e. those with most to complain about the long-term repercussions of the Treaty of 1921.

Sixthly, IRA volunteers are Irish nationalist, in identity, and as a result of experience. They did not all grow up in Irish nationalist households, and, indeed, there have been a small number of Irish Protestant and English-born volunteers, but most are Irish nationalists, by birth, or culture and learning. They believe that Great Britain denied the Irish people its right to self-determination when it partitioned Ireland, and that Northern Ireland is an artificial entity which cannot function as a democracy, and, until recently, have believed it is unreformable, i.e. Catholics or nationalists cannot be treated as the equals of Protestants and unionists within the UK. The IRA’s nationalist character bears emphasis because it is so often portrayed in international media as religiously motivated.

It is vital to preserve the distinction between nationalist agents who use political violence (whether in democratic or undemocratic settings) and the salvationist violence of apocalyptic religious fundamentalists (like Al-Qaeda). The distinction is not just important for analytical accuracy. Nationalists prepared to use force may be repressed (but rarely fully), or negotiated with (successfully or otherwise), or both. By contrast, cosmopolitan religious fundamentalists can be thoroughly repressed in some circumstances, because they are likely to be territorially infrequent and isolated, but they cannot be negotiated with as long as they retain their beliefs. It is an error, into which Ignatieff slips, to conflate liberal opposition to nationalist violence with liberal opposition to apocalyptic religious fundamentalism.

A last word about the IRA’s recruits since 1969 is required on numbers. We do not have the IRA’s personnel records. Widespread uncertainty is suggested by the fact that in the major books on the IRA *none* has ‘numbers’ in its index — some do not have indexes.⁷⁴ It is standard to estimate between 300 and 500 volunteers in ASUs, a measure of the ‘stock’ of militant activists that probably derives from leaks of the IRA’s own organizational planning changes of 1976–77, which informed the Glover Report. It seems reasonable to assume approximately an equivalent number of ‘cadets’ in training, and in the auxiliaries, at any one time, suggesting an annual stock of ASUs and reserves and auxiliaries of about 900. As for total flow, Martin McGuinness, a former Chief of Staff, is widely cited as having suggested that over 10,000 people have been in and through the IRA’s ranks since 1969. One journalist, Eamonn Mallie, reports that the IRA told him that between ‘eight and ten thousand’ of its personnel had been imprisoned before 1987.⁷⁵ The gap between estimates of current stock and total flow make sense when one recognizes the high attrition rate of volunteers, through death,

injury, incarceration, flight — or resignation. The IRA is not like ‘Hotel California’ — one can leave. Most volunteers are expected to retire after having served a sentence. A formal check on the 10,000 estimate of the total flow is the stock and flow of the prison population. The average daily number of prisoners in Northern Ireland’s jails in 1969 was approximately 600; by 1979 it had reached nearly 3,000 — a figure that excluded IRA volunteers in jails in Great Britain and Ireland, but included loyalist prisoners. From 1985 until 1997 the Northern Ireland prison population stabilized at around 2,000 as a daily average.⁷⁶ The cited estimate of a total flow of IRA volunteers of 10,000 is therefore credible (especially given that a significant number may never have been incarcerated). It suggests that an extraordinarily high proportion of Northern Irish working-class Catholic males who matured after 1969 have been through IRA ranks.

Tactics, Strategy, Costs of Conflict

Between 1919 and 1921 the IRA improvised to create a standard template in modern violent politics, inventing contemporary guerrilla warfare, flying columns that avoided facing the imperial power in the field of formal war, and modes of resistance and rejection which attacked the state’s sovereignty and its core functionaries, especially its police and intelligence agencies, but in conjunction with a wider democratic movement, of which the most important component was a political party, Sinn Féin. This party’s name, standardly translated as ‘Our Selves’, can also be translated as ‘Ourselves Alone’, or even as ‘Self-Determination’, according to Bill Kissane. Sinn Féin, backed by the IRA’s cutting edge, established a parallel state, creating what is nowadays known, after Trotsky, as a situation of ‘dual power’. The forte of the IRA, orchestrated by Collins, was killing policemen and intelligence officers — which broke the imperial state’s

surveillance and control capabilities. It ensured that the IRA was far more effective than all previous Irish insurrectionary movements; it showed how a war of the flea could confound an imperial elephant, provided that the elephant felt restrained from destroying the habitat of the flea.

The contemporary IRA also innovated. It invented new modes of urban guerrilla warfare, donating the ‘car-bomb’ to the known repertoires of political violence. Political murders, assassinations, tit-for-tat shootings, and ‘human bombs’ made the IRA infamous, as did ‘tarring-and-feathering’ and kneecappings. It was arguably less effective in killing senior military, police and intelligence officers than the old IRA. It failed to assist its party in creating dual power or a parallel state — unless one counts the vigilante system. It also showed greater political and moral weakness than its predecessor by its expanded conception of legitimate targets — including non-uniformed off-duty police and soldiers, retired police and soldiers, and workers in organizations supplying non-military services to the army and the police. (But, as Glover noted, it generally has not attacked the families of police and soldiers.)

The IRA is not proud of its techniques of disciplining its own membership and its community, but it has undoubtedly been resourceful. The IRA’s campaign has been conducted in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and in places as far apart as Gibraltar and British military bases in Germany, leading to the deaths of approximately 200 people outside the main ‘war theatre’. Fund-raising and weapons running were organized in places as distinct as Carter’s and Reagan’s USA and Colonel Gaddafi’s Libya.⁷⁷ It tied down tens of thousands of UK soldiers for three decades, imposed immense economic damage on the region, and on the UK exchequer, assassinated key members of the British political élite, including Lord Louis Mountbatten, a member of the royal family,

⁷⁶ McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment*, 16

⁷⁷ Jack Holland, *The American Connection: US Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), 27–113; Moloney, *Secret History*, 1–33

78 See Figure 1, and O’Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism*, ch. 1, and Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (London, 3rd edn. forthcoming).

79 English, *Armed Struggle*, 380

80 E. Zimmermann, ‘Political Unrest in Western Europe’, *Western European Politics*, 12 (1989), 179–96, cited in O’Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism*, ch. 1

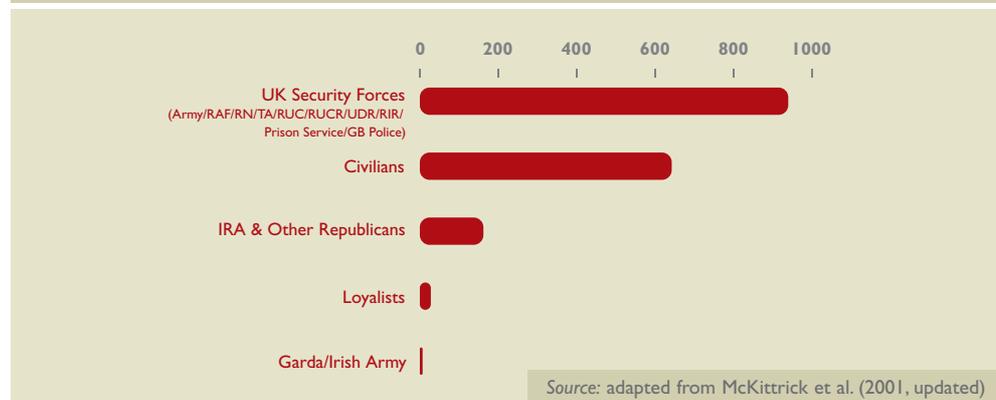
and twice came within a whisker of blowing up the UK Prime Minister and Cabinet. The bulk of the IRA’s violence, of course, was organized within Northern Ireland, where it was spatially concentrated, notably in Belfast. Allowing for the ceasefires, the IRA’s thirty-year campaign is one of the longest nationalist insurgencies in the post-war world, certainly the most enduring in the established liberal democracies.

The Provisional IRA developed a fearsome capability and reputation. Between 1969 and 1994 it was responsible for more deaths, over 1,750, than any other agency in the conflict.⁷⁸ It out-killed all other republican organizations; all ‘loyalist’ (i.e. pro-régime) paramilitaries combined; and all loyalist *and* all other republican paramilitaries combined. It significantly out-killed the individual and combined official forces of the UK: the British army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the B Specials — and their successors, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment. According to *Lost Lives*, by David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and Chris Thornton, the (Provisional) IRA was responsible for 48.5 per cent of the over 3,600 deaths arising from the conflict between 1966 and 2001. By contrast, the IRA lost nearly 300 of its volunteers, 8 per cent of the total victims. Richard English, using the same data-source, maintains that

civilians formed the largest single category of IRA victims (642), followed by the British forces (456), the RUC (273), the Ulster Defence Regiment or Royal Irish Regiment (182), republicans (162), loyalists (28), prison officers (23) and others (12).⁷⁹ His conclusion depends upon disaggregating the security forces and aggregating civilians. A different way to frame the same data, as I have done in Figure 1, is to observe that 967 of the IRA’s victims were military, police, prison officers, or loyalist paramilitaries — i.e. the IRA killed more of its self-defined targets than civilians. But that still means only just over 54 per cent of its victims fell within its official legitimate targets, roughly one in two. In any military appraisal of its war, this must constitute the strongest indictment.

The IRA’s violence made Northern Ireland the most politically violent region in the European Community (later the Union). The numbers killed between 1969 and 1990 exceeded those killed as a result of political violence in *all* other EC countries put together. In 1973–82 violence in Northern Ireland alone placed the UK at the top of a league table of nineteen western European states in deaths from political violence and political assassinations.⁸⁰ The absolute death toll naturally pales in contrast with the major civil, colonial, and ethnic wars of the post-war authoritarian world. The

FIGURE 1. KILLINGS FOR WHICH THE IRA WAS RESPONSIBLE 1969–2001



British authorities have not suppressed the population which explicitly or tacitly supports the IRA in the manner experienced by Algerian Muslims, the Kurds of Iraq, Kashmiri Muslims, Palestinian Muslims and Christians, South African blacks, or Sri Lankan Tamils. The British authorities treated incarcerated IRA prisoners relatively mildly by contrast with what was meted out in Latin American, African, or South Asian jails. Yet these observations can mislead. Nearly all wars and civil wars between 1945 and 1990 were exacerbated by superpower rivalries, or by regional powers and neighbouring states. These factors did not operate in Northern Ireland — which proves how deep ethno-national conflict can become in geopolitically isolated regions. The US government deplored violence in Northern Ireland and sought to prevent unofficial support from Irish-Americans, in the form of guns and money, from reaching the IRA. The ‘special relationship’ with the UK consistently proved more important for American geopolitical interests during the Cold War than the ethnic sentiments of some Irish-Americans. The Soviet Union, by contrast, used the Northern Ireland experience to embarrass the UK, e.g. in reference to the jailing of innocent Irish people in Great Britain, like the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, and the Maguire Seven, but played no role in fomenting the conflict. The two states with most at stake, the UK and Ireland, despite multiple disagreements, generally sought to co-operate to contain the conflict. The IRA did not champion and were not championed by Ireland — although the British regarded Ireland as the IRA’s ‘safe haven’. Loyalist paramilitaries embarrassed British politicians — and such support as they received from the security forces (so far) appears to have been unauthorized by ministers. The sole third-party state that sought to inflame the conflict, Libya, was neither a regional power nor a neighbour. Its supplying of arms in 1974–75, and again in 1988, was retaliation for American and British actions against the régime of Colonel

Gaddafi. The conflict of the last thirty years has therefore been extremely intense given that it took place in a small region, in the presence of moderately amicable relations between the relevant neighbouring states, and regional powers, and in the absence of operational superpower rivalries. In duration, the present conflict easily outranks all others in twentieth-century Ireland, and only the Irish Civil War exceeds it in intensity.

How did people die? In assassinations (a plurality of all deaths); in gun-battles, crossfire, through snipers’ bullets, and in ambushes; in explosions or from anti-personnel devices; and a small proportion died in riots or affrays. Over half of republican killings, mostly by the IRA, took place during gun-battles/crossfire, sniping incidents, ambushes, or through explosives and anti-personnel devices; by contrast most loyalist killings were assassinations.⁸¹ But a third of deaths caused by republicans were assassinations. There were, in effect, two wars. First, a war of national, ethnic, and communal assassination, executed by IRA volunteers, loyalist paramilitaries and by some UK security personnel. There was also a guerrilla and counterinsurgency war, with riots and affrays, especially in the early years, enhancing the numbers killed. In aggregate, paramilitary killings of civilians outnumbered those killed in the guerrilla war between republican paramilitaries and the security forces. The number of civilians killed through targeting, or through ‘collateral damage’, by republicans, loyalists, and the UK security forces amounted to approximately half of the total number killed. The paramilitary ‘defenders’ of the two major communities had dramatically fewer casualties than the civilians they claimed to be defending. The IRA failed to make and present the war as a clean fight between Irish republicans and the British state; the British state failed to make and present the conflict as just a dispute between two unreasonable communities, but had some success in doing

81 See O’Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism* (3rd edn.).

so; loyalists helped veto a British disengagement.

The annual death tolls and responsibilities for them are in Figures 2 and 3. The high death toll in the early years is explained by three factors. The first was the ‘loyalist backlash’, both proactive and retaliatory, against civil rights demonstrations in the late 1960s, *and* then against the IRA’s war. The British government’s decision to abolish the Northern Ireland parliament in 1972, and its efforts between 1973 and 1976 to establish a power-sharing government with all-Ireland institutions increased loyalist fears. Very high numbers of Catholic civilians were victims of sectarian assassinations by loyalists between 1971 and 1975. The intention was to deter Catholics from supporting the IRA, but because loyalists did not have reliable information on IRA volunteers, ‘representative’ killing of randomly selected Catholic civilians, identified by their first names, surnames, or residences, predominated. The second factor was the decision by the IRA to launch its war, employing classical guerrilla techniques against UK army and police personnel. But it also extensively engaged in large-scale bombings of commercial targets, such as

factories and shopping centres. Guerrilla warfare produced large numbers of casualties among inexperienced police and soldiers, while commercial bombings led to significant numbers of civilian deaths, especially in Belfast; Martin McGuinness, by repute, organized the urban bombing of Derry with far less collateral damage. The third factor was the repressive — and counter-productive — policy of internment without trial of suspected terrorists, which lasted between 1971 and 1975. Initially targeted (inaccurately) exclusively at republicans the policy produced widespread resentment throughout the Catholic population, acted as a recruiting agency for the IRA, and added fuel to the fire. Explanations for the fall-off in deaths after 1976 complement this analysis. Loyalists reduced their killings of Catholics, both absolutely and as a share of the total death toll, because their fears of a British withdrawal had diminished — and were not revived until the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Loyalists were arrested and jailed, and their organizations became more factionalized, corrupt, and directionless. The IRA changed its organization, and strategy, in ways that reduced the annual death toll.

FIGURE 2. CIVILIAN CASUALTIES FROM CONFLICT 1966–2003

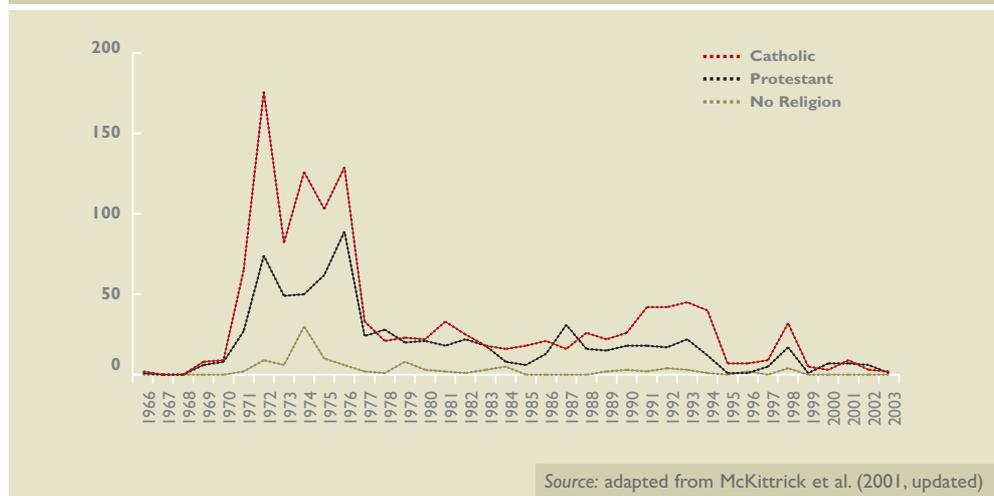


FIGURE 3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR KILLING BY YEAR 1966–2003

Many of its volunteers had been jailed; and in response the ASUs were developed. After 1976 the IRA primarily aimed to attack ‘military’ and ‘police’ targets, and until the early 1990s reduced its urban commercial bombing which had threatened to undermine its support. The IRA became responsible for a lower annual death toll, but a higher share of the total death toll. Furthermore, more effective surveillance and intelligence among the security forces reduced the levels of violence. The authorities abandoned internment in 1975–76. A battery of new containment techniques was employed. Up to 30,000 personnel patrolled the countryside and city-streets, establishing armed ‘check-points’. Forts and observation posts with the latest surveillance technologies were established in the heart of nationalist districts, including in school premises. House searching and civilian screening took place on a massive scale, backed up by computerized databases on over one quarter of the population. Armoured vehicles, bomb-disposal robots, and ‘jelly-sniffers’ were used to protect security force personnel. Entire ‘town-centres’ were cordoned off, and everybody entering such areas subjected to rigorous searching. Emergency legislation weakened civil liberties and facilitated the apprehension and sentencing of suspected paramilitaries. Finally, all experienced

‘learning curves’. In 1970, the IRA had to make an average of 191 attacks to kill a single member of the security forces; by 1984, 18 were sufficient.⁸² The security forces became more vigilant to defend themselves. They also, formally, became more restrained: in the early 1970s they were permitted to shoot at identified petrol-bombers but now are supposed to use ‘minimum force’ weaponry, like plastic bullets. The return to ‘police primacy’ in 1977 was associated with a reduced level of killings. Armed police are more restrained than soldiers trained to kill in combat. Personal and collective surveillance and security management by ordinary citizens also increased. They travelled warily in ‘shatter-zones’ or ‘frontiers’, or avoided them altogether; and migration from ‘mixed areas’ to ethnically segregated residences in the 1970s reduced the opportunities for ‘soft’ or ‘easy’ killings. The time-series show a dramatic falling-off in the number of deaths sustained by the British army — excluding the locally recruited regiments. The local security forces (UDR, RIR, RUC and RUC Reserve) suffered an increasing proportion of the deaths sustained by the security forces. This was the predictable product of ‘Ulsterization’, the UK’s post 1975 policy-preference for local security forces — which reduced the UK’s vulnerability to the loss of British-recruited

82 W. D. Flackes and Sidney Elliott, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory, 1968–88* (Belfast, 1989), 394

83 Compare the evaluations of Brendan O'Duffy, 'Violence in Northern Ireland: Sectarian or Ethno-National?', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 18, 4 (1995), 740–72, and Robert White, 'The Irish Republican Army: An Assessment of Sectarianism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9, 1 (1997), 20–55, with those of Steve Bruce, 'Victim Selection in Ethnic Conflict: Motives and Attitudes in Irish Republicanism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 9, 1 (1997), 56–71.

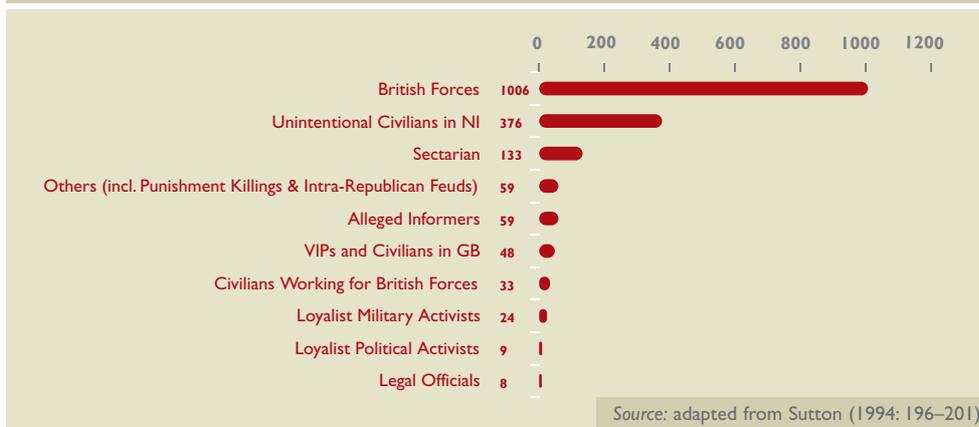
84 For example, see Bruce, 'Victim Selection'.

troops, but increased its dependency upon local Protestants who were less likely to be impartial. It also occasioned a switch in the targets chosen by the IRA: it was easier to kill local security force members, at their homes, or off-duty, than to kill soldiers in fortified barracks or in armoured vehicles.

Who suffered most in the conflict? Who was most sectarian among the paramilitaries? These questions are not amenable to easy empirical treatment. Estimates of numbers of victims are available, under various labels. Since each choice of label affects numbers, all appraisals are contested.⁸³ It is extremely difficult to code motivations, or even the primary motivations of the killers. Taking civilians alone, the largest single category of victims has been Catholic, and since Protestant civilians outnumber Catholic civilians by approximately 3 to 2, Catholic civilians suffered more deaths, absolutely and relatively, than Protestant civilians. Appraisal cannot rest there. Catholic civilians were the primary targets of loyalist paramilitaries, and the security forces were the primary targets of the IRA, but these facts obscure an important consideration. The local security forces were recruited primarily from Protestants. A simple comparison of Catholic and Protestant civilian death-rates therefore obscures the victims suffered by the Protestant community. That said, the nearly 300 dead mostly Catholic IRA volunteers almost directly match the over 300 mostly Protestant dead police in the RUC and its reserves. The dead in the B Specials, UDR and RIR also nearly match the other republican dead. The data and interpretation of Sutton (1994), presented in Figure 4, with slight adjustments, suggest that IRA violence has been primarily strategic, aimed at its official legitimate targets, rather than sectarian, i.e. the deliberate killing of Protestant civilians: he classifies 12.4 per cent of IRA killings as sectarian, and a very high proportion of these occurred in 1975–76. This viewpoint is supported in the sophisticated analyses of

O'Duffy (1995) and White (1997). The IRA killed far more members of the security forces than Protestant civilians, partially fulfilling its mission of fighting 'a war of national liberation'. But, that does not definitively settle the question of IRA 'sectarianism' — even if one codes the IRA as less sectarian than loyalists, as the death-evidence warrants. Protestants interpret and will interpret the targeting and killings of Protestant members of the local security forces as sectarian. White points out that the small proportions of Catholic members of the security forces killed matched their numbers in these forces (which suggests no special effort on the part of the IRA to target Protestant members of the security forces), but such killings are simply coded as sectarian by unionists, loyalists and their sympathizers.⁸⁴ The IRA unquestionably carried out some overt and intended killings of uninvolved Protestant civilians — as opposed to killing such persons through 'collateral damage'. These actions were defended by IRA volunteers as necessary acts of deterrence against loyalist killings of Catholic civilians, especially in south Armagh, or shamefacedly acknowledged — or simply denied.

Violence extended far beyond killings. Data on injuries sustained as well as the annual number of explosions, the number of bombs neutralized, the scale of findings of explosives and firearms, the number of shooting incidents, the use of rubber and plastic bullets, the number of armed robberies, and the money taken in armed robberies are available. They show the same patterns as the death toll data: very high levels of violent activity in the years 1971–76 with subsequent 'normalization'. Close to one in fifty of the population suffered serious injuries. Available data do not include the mental injuries suffered by those kidnapped; held hostage in their homes during 'stake-outs'; arrested when guilty of no crime; or otherwise maltreated. Nor do they measure the distress caused by intimidation, being the friend or relative of

FIGURE 4. KILLINGS BY THE IRA 1969–93 (TOTAL: 1755)

a victim or being a witness to violent deaths, injuries, and other episodes.

The IRA's campaign, as intended, resulted in heavy financial burdens on the UK exchequer. It also placed costs on Ireland's exchequer: the extra security costs ensuing from the crisis between the years 1969 and 1982 were estimated at over IR£1,050 million. For the same period additional expenditure on security incurred by the UK government was estimated at UK£4,150 million. One 1985 audit estimated that the annual direct costs of violence of the conflict incurred ran at £1,194 million — a figure that excluded the indirect economic costs of lost output and employment arising from the political crisis.⁸⁵ Providing security in Northern Ireland in the fiscal year 1990–91 cost just under £1 billion — more than three times the per capita UK average, and certain costs were not apparently calculated, e.g. those entailed in tightening security at military bases in Great Britain and Germany, intelligence-gathering and surveillance in Great Britain, and protecting the political and civil establishments. Other economic costs included the stress on and infrastructural damage to the public services: health and welfare and housing administration, public utilities, and the penal services. Telephone exchanges, post offices, railway networks, bus garages, gas depots, power stations and reservoirs were

bombed or robbed and their staffs intimidated. Frauds against public-sector organizations ran into millions of pounds. Compensation payments to victims of violence or owners of destroyed properties ran much higher. Claims for compensation exceeded 13,000 cases per annum. Protection rackets affected the profitability of many private-sector organizations; as did the requirements imposed by insurance companies upon shops and offices. The insurance costs of private transport rose to reflect the high numbers of vehicle thefts, hijackings, and car-bombings. The incredibly high proportion of the population involved in security led economist Bob Rowthorn to describe the Northern Ireland economy as a 'workhouse', in which most were employed in controlling or servicing one another.⁸⁶ The most obvious economic costs are the least measurable: the 'opportunity-costs' of three decades of conflict, in lost investment, output, and productive employment.

The human-rights costs and the impact on liberal democratic institutions must also be counted. The legal authorities of Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and Ireland were granted formidable emergency powers. The ratios of arrests to charges, and of charges to convictions, were relatively high, suggesting large-scale screening, and systematic deprivation of many innocent

85 Irish Information Partnership data, cited in O'Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism*, ch. 1

86 Bob Rowthorn and Naomi Wayne, *Northern Ireland: The Political Economy of Conflict* (Oxford, 1988), *passim*

- 87 Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (New York, 1987) and Paul Foot, *Who Framed Colin Wallace?* (London, 1989)
- 88 Michael L. R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London, 1995) is an unusual Clausewitzian treatment, which I examined as a PhD dissertation.
- 89 On the blanket protest and hunger strikes, see Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The H Block Story* (Dublin, 1980), Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* and Liam Clarke, *Broadening the Battlefield: The H-Blocks and the Rise of Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1987).

citizens of their liberty. Departures from traditional legal procedures become normal: no-jury courts were used because jury-trials were not safe from perverse verdicts or the intimidation of jurors and witnesses. Confessions became admissible as the sole basis for conviction on charges of having committed scheduled offences — including confessions subsequently retracted. In 1988 the UK government abandoned the traditional common law ‘right of silence’ — courts and prosecutors were entitled to draw inferences from the silence of suspects. Delays of several years became routine in holding inquests on persons killed by the security forces. Belief in the impartiality of British justice was severely damaged. The most notorious cases of wrongful imprisonment demonstrated police-fabrication of evidence against innocent Irish people; incompetent or malevolent forensic practices; judicial wishful thinking and partisanship; and ethnic bias in media reporting. The conflict impaired other key institutions. Certain sections of the British intelligence services ran amok in the 1970s. Believing that the authorities were ‘giving in to terrorism’, they plotted directly against the elected Labour government, and spread false rumours.⁸⁷ Collusion with loyalist paramilitaries also occurred on a significant scale from the late 1980s. The media were censored in both jurisdictions.

What was the IRA’s strategy, and how could it justify such costs? Appraisals of its strategy are rare.⁸⁸ The simplest answer is that had no single strategy, but multiple strategies. In the first phase of conflict, 1970–75, the IRA expected a short war, a replication of what had happened in 1919–21, in which the British government would be forced to negotiate its withdrawal from the remainder of Ireland. It overestimated its capacity to hurt the UK state, underestimated the costs that loyalists and the security forces could impose on its volunteers, neglected the rooted determination of the majority unionist population within Northern Ireland to

oppose a compulsory united Ireland, and overvalued southern support for an offensive — as opposed to a defensive — IRA. The IRA played a role in the overthrow of Stormont, but over-reached in thinking it could produce a quick British disengagement, and lacked any overt evidence of a popular mandate. It was also completely unsuccessful in negotiations — and out-manoeuvred in 1975. In the second phase of conflict the IRA’s leadership foresaw and organized for a long war of attrition. It was capable of maintaining itself, but underestimated the extent to which it could be contained within Northern Ireland. Taking the war to Great Britain and Europe involved spectacular activities, but these could not be as logistically sustained as those in Northern Ireland. The IRA initially lacked a convincing political strategy to match its military activities. A new and apparently more effective strategy emerged almost by accident, in 1980–81, when the impact of the republican hunger strikes on public opinion created opportunities for Sinn Féin to emerge as an electorally significant political party in the North.⁸⁹ To continue the novel electoral momentum and search for broader allies the republican movement was obliged to reconsider abstentionism, first within local government in the North, and then toward Leinster House in the South. It endorsed change, and modified its constitution. That led to the first significant split in the movement — though not within the IRA. Older pre-1969 southerners in protest formed Republican Sinn Féin. The strategy of combining the ballot box and the Armalite, as Danny Morrison described it, superficially resembled the Sinn Féin and IRA alliance of 1918–21, but with a major difference: the lack of a majority mandate within the North, not even among the Northern nationalist population, or among the nationalist population in Ireland as a whole. The IRA was persuaded to accept the end of abstentionism by Sinn Féin in the belief that the army would not be run down — and hard-liners were temporarily

sweetened by the prospect of major arms supplies from Libya. Sinn Féin, the IRA's party, because originally it was little more than that, then placed limits on the IRA. It gained greater autonomy, and sometimes its needs had to be placed first. Bobby Sands and his colleagues had died on hunger strike 'to broaden the battlefield', and had succeeded beyond their expectations. Sands's hunger strike, his victory in a parliamentary by-election, and his death, followed by the deaths of nine other prisoners, cemented the political status of the IRA, but would end up limiting its military actions, and subjecting it to electoral discipline.⁹⁰ The party gathered one in three northern nationalist votes on a platform of supporting its army, the IRA, but to grow later on, it had to distance itself, or place constraints on its army. In the interests of electoral gains, reinforced by their materialization, Sinn Féin has, therefore, slowly displaced the IRA as republicans' preferred organizational means of struggle, and not without dissent within the ranks of the volunteers — and the creation of two small break-away organizations, the Continuity and Real IRAs.⁹¹ The party now has many members, probably an overwhelming majority, with no record of service as volunteers; and many of these are now prominent parliamentarians. Combining the ballot box and the Armalite, contrary to what Morrison thought at the time, proved unsustainable. Success with one undermined use of the other. From being the inspirer of the party, the army became a constraint. The IRA's decision to organize a ceasefire in 1994, and later to renew it, had one primary beneficiary: Sinn Féin. The party doubled its vote share in the North within a decade, recently winning four seats in the Westminster parliament, five in Dáil Éireann, and becoming, just, the largest nationalist party in the (suspended) Northern Ireland Assembly — and it has had one of its former Chiefs of Staff serve as a Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive.

How did this transformation happen? One: the IRA was not winning its long war to

compel the UK state to disengage, even if it was not losing, and even if it could plant devastating bombs in the City of London. No victory on the 'battlefield' meant that there could be no victory at the negotiating table. Two: demographic transformations pointed to the possibility of a Northern nationalist majority that could create a constitutional path to end partition — and to a currently large enough nationalist bloc to leverage a power-sharing settlement given existing UK policy commitments to the Irish government. Three: republicans began properly to assess the full recalcitrance of unionists and loyalists toward the idea of a unitary Ireland, and the possible development of indifference toward reunification in the newly prosperous Ireland. Four: political agents inside and outside the republican movement persuaded sufficient IRA leaders, volunteers and prisoners that a peace process, building up a wider alliance of nationalists, was the best way to advance the IRA's objectives, even if that meant the IRA's disbandment before the attainment of a unitary Ireland. Key sections of the IRA leadership eventually determined on a peace process without express assurances that their declared war-objectives would be met through negotiations, and called a 'complete cessation' of military operations in August 1994, after a careful and protracted process of negotiation among Irish nationalists, and then between the UK and Irish governments, had produced the Joint Declaration for Peace of December 1993. The divided IRA resumed military operations by a majority vote of its Army Council in February 1996 in protest at the Conservative government's unwillingness to engage with Sinn Féin, but formally declared a ceasefire again in 1997. The full complexity of this transformation, its necessary ambiguities, and consequences, is beginning to emerge in a range of studies and publications, and we will likely not know the full details of intra-IRA manoeuvres and disputes for some time.⁹²

Given space constraints I will use just two texts to complement my earlier argument on

90 See the discussion of the hunger strikes in Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast, 1990), critically reviewed in Brendan O'Leary, 'Review [of O'Malley 1990]' *Irish Political Studies*, 6 (1991), 118–22.

91 See Feeney, *Sinn Féin*.

92 Important here are Feeney, *Sinn Féin*; English, *Armed Struggle*; Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process* (London, 1996); McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, ch. 10; McGarry and O'Leary, *Northern Ireland Conflict*; Anthony McIntyre, 'Modern Irish Republicanism: The Product of British State Strategies', *Irish Political Studies*, 10 (1995), 97–122; Moloney, *Secret History*; Brian Rowan, *Behind the Lines: The Story of the IRA and Loyalist Ceasefires* (Belfast, 1995).

the old IRA, those of Richard English and Ed Moloney. English, a unionist with roots in Northern Ireland, and a professor at Queen's University, Belfast, has written a dispassionate evaluation in *Armed Struggle*. In his concluding chapter, he identifies seven arguments that motivated the IRA. First, its resurgence 'began primarily in response to defensive need', providing 'muscular defence' in 1969–70 for oppressed nationalists in Belfast and Derry against a partisan RUC and loyalist sectarian mobs. Second, there was deep-rooted unfairness toward the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, where the Ulster Unionist Party ruled without interruption from the formation of the régime until 1972, and which created, thereby, the social base of the IRA. Third, and relatedly, there was the cause of Irish national self-determination — to which he arguably pays insufficient attention. Fourth, the IRA regarded Northern Ireland as 'unreformable'. The treatment of the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s confirmed this belief, as had the introduction of internment without trial between 1971 and 1975, and events such as the Falls Road curfew of 1970 and Bloody Sunday in 1972. Fifth, IRA volunteers defined the conflict as a national liberation struggle, and for over two decades stressed socialist as well as republican commitments. Sixth, they saw unionists as 'a residue of British colonialism in Ireland'. Lastly, they regarded themselves as, and often succeeded in behaving as, non-sectarian republicans committed to creating a common democratic state for all of Ireland. One of the many merits of English's book is that he evaluates these arguments seriously, and shows that these convictions were sincerely held, and were sane.

Naturally, he addresses the deficiencies and disputable elements in the IRA's arguments, dealing *seriatim* with the IRA's frequently offensive role, and its contribution to serious injustice in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, both through actions and provocations. He adds minor (unionist)

qualifications to the picture of a discriminatory unionist régime before 1972; observes that Ulster Unionists have a case for self-determination and regarding Northern Ireland as legitimate; argues for the empirical (and normative) importance of the autonomous dispositions of unionists and loyalists, who often resisted the policies of Westminster and Whitehall; and stresses the counterproductive nature of the IRA's violence in stiffening unionist resistance to Irish reunification, and in inhibiting a political settlement; and, not least, emphasizes the IRA's intermittent descent into sectarian killings. But, English scrupulously acquits the IRA of sole responsibility for the conflict of the past thirty years, distributing blame across a range of political groups, and on British and unionist policies and dispositions without which the IRA's actions or persistence would have made little sense. None of his writing avoids the elemental emotions and tragedies involved in IRA actions and their repercussions for both the organization's target-victims and its members. He forgets neither the 'Fanonist rage' of some volunteers, nor the local status and petty power sometimes achieved through being in 'the 'RA', but refuses to overemphasize the tabloid components of the IRA, which he treats as neither corrupt nor as ruthlessly efficient as it would have liked to have been. From this measured study we may conclude that the IRA has failed militarily to drive the British state out of Ireland, and to achieve a united Ireland in the immediate future. If Ireland is to be reunified in future, it will be through ballot boxes and institutionalized negotiations.

But what English misses is the constitutional path through which the IRA must disband itself, if it is to dissolve itself in good order. That requires its volunteers not only to believe that military means cannot win their objectives, and are therefore best replaced through democratic — and consociational — politics, but to do so consistent with their own constitution, to which they are

pledged, or else face the danger of further splits and the departure of their matériel into the hands of irreconcilables. Thanks to Ed Moloney's *A Secret History of the IRA*, the current IRA constitution, as amended in 1986, and again in 1996, is a matter of public record. It has five objects, recognizable successors to the founding aims, namely, 'to guard the honour and uphold the sovereignty and unity of the Irish Republic as declared by the First Dáil'; 'to support the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation'; 'to support the establishment of, and uphold, a lawful government in sole and absolute control of the Thirty-two County Irish Republic as constituted by the First Dáil'; 'to secure and defend civil and religious liberties and equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens'; and 'to promote the revival of the Irish language as the everyday language of the people' (Art. 3. 1–5). Until these objects are achieved the organizational integrity and cohesion of the IRA, and its military capabilities must be maintained (Art. 8. 5.1–2); and 'until a settlement has been agreed, leading to a united Ireland' the IRA must retain its arms (Art. 8. 5.5).⁹³ So, the question presently before all is this: how may the IRA constitutionally disband itself if the sovereignty and unity of the Irish Republic, 'as declared by the First Dáil', has not been achieved?

Before answering this question let me sweep aside some side-issues. Let us assume that socialism on the basis of the 1916 proclamation, civil and religious liberties, equal rights and opportunities for all, and promoting the Irish language, do not require the existence or use of the IRA's arms — a proposition with which the current Irish prime minister, who has declared himself a socialist, would certainly affirm. Note, secondly, that it is now the First — not the Second — Dáil's mandate (for an autonomous Ireland that would exercise its self-determination) that is defended by the

IRA. It is this constitutional change that has enabled the IRA not to oppose Sinn Féin's participation in elections to and membership of Leinster House.

One way the IRA's constitutional self-transformation may go in future would be to argue that since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998, endorsed by the people of Ireland, North and South, and now on the verge of full implementation, the partition of Ireland presently rests on a decision of the people of Ireland, as do the power-sharing institutions, agencies and policies embedded in that Agreement. In short, the Agreement is the necessary act of Irish national self-determination that repairs the constitutional wound of 1920. That was certainly how constitutional nationalists, North and South, defended the Agreement, and in instructing its voters to endorse it in the two referendums, Sinn Féin became complicit with that argument. The Agreement recognizes (present) partition as an Irish, not a British decision, and recognizes Ireland's right to achieve (re-)unification through consent in both jurisdictions. It also, of course, establishes consociational institutions within Northern Ireland and cross-border all-Ireland arrangements that may legitimately be construed as harbingers of a federal Ireland.⁹⁴ Once the Agreement is on the verge of being fully implemented, notably with the withdrawal of British troops to barracks, comprehensive police reform, major changes in the administration of justice, and with the Northern Ireland (Suspension) Act of 2000 removed from the UK's statute book, then it becomes possible to argue two things. One is to say that 'a settlement leading to a united Ireland', without any British external interference over Irish self-determination, has already been accomplished. A united Ireland has been achieved through the Agreement, but not a unitary Ireland, rather an Ireland united by the institutions of the Agreement. The people of Ireland, North and South,

⁹³ Moloney, *Secret History*, Appendix 3

⁹⁴ See O'Leary, 'The Nature of the British-Irish Agreement'.

have the right of national self-determination, but also the right to choose how to exercise national self-determination, and if that involves having one territorial unit with revisable linkages to the United Kingdom, that need not be a denial of the underlying principle. This would probably be too much for most republicans to stomach — it may seem lawyerly, or specious, although it has its attractions. Secondly, and probably more persuasive to most republicans, it is possible to argue that ‘a settlement has been agreed [and implemented] leading to a united Ireland’, even though the latter has not (yet) occurred — ‘leading to a united Ireland’ is not the same as the ‘attainment of a united Ireland’. Either of these arguments permit republican volunteers in good conscience to amend the IRA’s constitution to say that the object of the First Dáil has been met — which would then authorize the ratification of decommissioning by an Army Convention (required by Art. 8. 5.5), and the subsequent disbanding of an organization which had met its constitutional mission.

A united Ireland need not necessarily be a unitary Ireland; and a sovereign Ireland may take many forms, including a divided form, through a federation or confederation, or through two units within a European confederation. Moreover, a Northern Ireland Assembly — and legal system, and even UK parliament — which does not require oaths of allegiance to the Crown on the part of ministers is surely in some respects like a Dáil Éireann which has no such requirement. The new Northern Assembly and North-South Ministerial Council create forums in which all the objects of the IRA may be pursued without recourse to arms, and with some prospects of success (although the chances of the Irish language must be less than those of a unitary state). Arguments of this nature may have occurred — or be anticipated — if the IRA is, as is clear, willing comprehensively to decommission its weapons. We shall find out.

If such an internal constitutional transformation occurs the IRA will not have failed politically to the degree that it failed militarily. The IRA, in action or on ceasefire, made it necessary for a political settlement to address the denial of Ireland’s right to self-determination in 1920 — and, for that matter, to undertake the radical police reform that has been negotiated since 1998, as well as range of other anti-discrimination measures that might not otherwise have materialized. The IRA did not fight for power-sharing in a Stormont parliament, nor did it design those institutions, nor did it initially endorse the Good Friday Agreement. But its existence, and the skilled trading of its capacities for constitutional and political concessions, obliged others to create comprehensive power-sharing institutions in and across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain all of which are consistent with the core idea of Irish national self-determination. In that idea the ‘Irish’ include both Irish nationalists and Irish unionists who identify with Great Britain. In that idea self-determination may take a concurrent as well as a unitary form. The IRA may in good faith amend its constitution to accomplish its own dissolution in a manner that the majority of the ghosts of the First Dáil would approve, although the vote might be too close to call among the ghosts of the rump Second Dáil. ■

Postscript

This essay was completed toward the end of 2004. Three events since have led readers of my draft to ask whether I wish to modify or update my views. They are, first, the failure of the two governments to oversee a renewal of the Agreement of 1998 with the active consent of the DUP and Sinn Féin. The second is a major bank robbery in Belfast which the Police Service of Northern Ireland rapidly blamed on the IRA. It persisted in this claim, despite vehement denials by both Sinn Féin and the IRA, and was joined in its accusation by the two governments and the Independent Monitoring Commission, which additionally alleged Sinn Féin's involvement. The accusations prompted the IRA to withdraw all past offers it has put on the negotiating table, but not its cease-fire. The story of the robbery has, to date, climaxed with the arrest in the South of Sinn Féin members, 'suspected' IRA members, and one suspected 'dissident republican' according to the head of Ireland's police. The third event is the murder of Robert McCartney in the North, which eventually led the IRA to deny its involvement, to describe such murders as contrary to its principles, and to encourage those with knowledge to do as the victim's family wants, which means informing the police.

These events do not require any revision of the analysis given above. They are reminders that history records few tidy end-games to conflicts. It is worth emphasizing that Sinn Féin and the DUP had reached an astonishing level of agreement. The gap separating them was narrow — the precise form of publicity to accompany the verification of decommissioning. It was also huge because it involved group-honour, emphasized above. The IRA and Sinn Féin sought to avoid humiliation; they believed that was precisely

the DUP's price-tag on the prospective bargain. As matters have unfolded different humiliations awaited republicans. The interpretation of the bank robbery still requires some caution. It is not yet known whether it was the action of unauthorized IRA operatives, or of conspirators within the IRA opposed to the peace process. It seems incredible that it would have been authorized by the IRA's Army Council. At the very least the unfolding evidence suggests a loss of control within the IRA that has damaged and embarrassed Sinn Féin's leaders. Neither the IRA nor Sinn Féin is a monolith, and it would be no surprise to find some Sinn Féin figures handling the IRA's finances. The argument presented above was that the IRA has been an instrumentally rational nationalist paramilitary organization, politically rather than criminally motivated, and, with the right political management, on the verge of dissolution. That argument withstands scrutiny despite these events. Group-honour is essential both to understanding the IRA's longevity, and how it must be managed, and the bank robbery and the murder have magnified its importance. One can and should condemn crimes without rushing to brand an organization's leaders as guilty without a trial. To step on a group's honour may arouse anger rather than reason. The IRA's dissolution should be sought, but with sufficient care to prevent the type of fragmentation associated with ETA in the Basque country. Sinn Féin will need to cleanse itself, both because that is right and to avoid electoral damage, but it is always more difficult to reform when shamed. These events have rendered resolution far more awkward, coming as they do in the run-up to elections in both parts of Ireland and in Britain. They have postponed the resolution which this essay foresaw; they have not terminated that prospect.

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