Informers, Agents, the IRA and British Counter-Insurgency Strategy during the Northern Ireland Troubles, 1969 to 1998

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of informers and agents upon Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) military strategy, and British counter-insurgency strategy in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998. The importance of this topic was highlighted by revelations in 2003 and 2005 concerning two senior republicans who had both been working for British intelligence for decades. The uncovering of these two senior spies created intense debate within the media and Irish republican community as to whether the IRA ended its military campaign largely because of significant infiltration. Yet, surprisingly, there has been no dedicated academic study of the impact of informers and agents upon the IRA. A few academics have briefly considered this topic in recent monographs and journal articles. Whilst acknowledging other important factors, they argue that intelligence successes against the IRA played a crucial role in influencing that organization to end its military campaign in 1998. This first in-depth study of the influence of informers and agents on IRA and British strategies during the Troubles cross-references new extensive interview material alongside memoirs from various Troubles participants. Its central argument is that the elusive nature of many rural IRA units, its cellular structure in Belfast, and the isolation of the IRA leadership prevented the organization from being damaged to any considerable extent by spies. In fact, the IRA's resilience was a key factor encouraging the British government to try to include republicans in political settlements in 1972, 1975 and the 1990s. The IRA's military strength also points towards the prominence of political factors in persuading republicans to call a ceasefire by 1994. The role of spies in Northern Ireland and the circumstances in which the state permitted negotiations with the IRA are key considerations for those interested in other small-scale conflicts.

Contents

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations:

CAIN – Conflict Archive Northern Ireland.

CLF – Commander of Land Forces (British Army).

DCI – Director and Coordinator of Intelligence (British state).

FRU – Force Research Unit.

Gardai – Irish police force.

GHQ – IRA General Headquarters Staff.

GOC – General Officer Commanding (British Army).

INLA – Irish National Liberation Army.

Loyalists – Paramilitary groups that support the British union.

MI5 – Military Intelligence Section Five, the UK's internal counter-intelligence agency.

MI6 – Secret Intelligence Service, the UK's external counter-intelligence agency.

MILO – Military Intelligence Liaison Officer.

MRF – Military Reaction Force.

Old IRA – old Irish Republican Army.

Provisional IRA – Provisional Irish Republican Army.

PSNI – Police Service Northern Ireland.

RUC – Royal Ulster Constabulary, the old Northern Irish police force.

RUCR – Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve.

SAS – Special Air Service.

SDLP - Social Democratic Labour Party.

Sinn Féin – The political-wing of the Provisional IRA.

Special Branch – Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch.

UDR – Ulster Defence Regiment, locally recruited force supporting the RUC. Incorporated into the Royal Irish Rangers regiment (RIR) in the 1990s.

14th Intelligence Company – Undercover surveillance unit for the British Army.

Introduction

Informers and agents have been a constant feature of modern British counter-insurgency strategy. Some obvious examples are the 'small wars' that marked the demise of British colonial rule during the 1950s. Christopher Andrew's recent history of MI5 reveals that, during the British campaign in Cyprus in the late 1950s, some captured Greek-Cypriot EOKA[1] insurgents and local Turkish-Cypriot civilians worked for British intelligence. Their information enabled British security forces to capture and kill a number of leading EOKA rebels. Amongst other factors, Andrew believes that this 'intelligence-led' effort against EOKA enabled the British government to avoid capitulating to EOKA demands for unity with Greece, and to create a political compromise between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Earlier, during the Malayan Emergency between 1948 and 1960, Andrew believes a coordinated intelligence effort between the local Special Branch and MI5 helped ensure that the communist insurgents did not win.[2] Elsewhere, in his detailed and insightful study of British counter-insurgency efforts in Kenya during the 1950s, Huw Bennett describes how a combination of techniques, including 'screening' villages where the Mau Mau were believed to be hiding and amnesties for some Mau Mau prisoners, enabled British intelligence to gain informers within the movement. Bennett's account contains numerous examples of informers damaging the Mau Mau insurgency.[3]

By the time that British troops arrived in Northern Ireland in 1969, it can be no surprise that informers and agents again formed a crucial part of an intelligence-led strategy against the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA). Like EOKA, the IRA was an underground organization hiding within specific host communities. British forces once more required insiders either from within the paramilitary group, or the community where the paramilitaries operated, in order to disrupt the insurgency. The IRA were fully aware of the threat posed by informers and agents. '[T]he greatest weapon England has', they declared in their newspaper *An Phoblacht* in 1974, 'is that of the informer. Without [them] it is possible that the people of Ireland would have had full control over their country a long time ago'.[4] A brief survey of previous conflicts between Irish republicans and the British state shows that there is some truth in this claim. For instance, informers hindered the United Irishmen rebellion under Wolfe Tone

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[1] Greek acronym meaning the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters.
[2] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (London, 2010), 447-451, 454-458, 462-466.
[3] Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (New York, 2013), 29-46, 135-146, 230-245, 265.
[4] *An Phoblacht,* 'Loose talk can be fatal', 25 January 1974, 4.

in 1798, by setting-up the arrests and executions of many rebel leaders.[5] One particular informer, Leonard McNally, a United Irishman and Dublin barrister at the time, was still claimed by *An Phoblacht* in February 1997 to be: '[u]ndoubtely one of the most treacherous informers of Irish history'. Whilst ostensibly defending fellow United Irishmen in court in the mid-1790s, McNally was actually telling their secrets to the British authorities to secure convictions.[6] The fact that *An Phoblacht* still brooded over McNally in 1997 demonstrates their awareness of the damage that spies had inflicted on republican insurgencies. Pádraig Ó Concubhair's recent study of the Fenian rising also reveals a number of informers and agents. For example, Pierce Nagle, a former teacher and Fenian associate, began informing for the British authorities sometime between 1850 and 1865, setting-up the arrests of leading Fenians.[7]

The original Irish Republican Army's (old IRA) campaign against British rule between 1919 and 1921, though, does not appear to have been restrained by British intelligence to any great extent. The old IRA's ability to force the British government to the negotiating table in 1921, and to achieve the secession of twenty-six out of thirty-two counties from the United Kingdom, demonstrates the failure of British intelligence. One reason for republican success during the War of Independence was their ability to launch counter-intelligence operations. Michael Collins gathered intelligence from insiders within Dublin Castle. Eventually, the IRA struck in Dublin against British intelligence handlers and informers on 21 November 1920. Tom Barry, a leading IRA volunteer in west Cork, also recalls that the Cork Brigade killed at least sixteen informers in 1921, which, he believes, strengthened the West Cork Brigade's campaign.[8] Supporting Barry's account is the recent work by John Borgonovo on IRA and British intelligence efforts in west Cork between 1920 and 1921. For Borgonovo, signs that IRA counter-intelligence methods were successful were that leading IRA members were not arrested, and the ability of Florence O'Donoghue, the IRA's intelligence officer in Cork, to set-up a network of spies that collected information from British forces. Borgonovo therefore concludes that the counter-intelligence efforts in Cork, similar to those run by Collins in Dublin, ensured that the Cork IRA survived by the truce in 1921.[9] Borgonovo believes that

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[5] Thomas Bartlett, 'Informers, Informants and Information: The Secret History of the 1790s Reconsidered', *in* Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh, Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798: A Bicentenary Perspective* (Dublin, 2003), 406-421.

[6] *An Phoblacht,* 'Remembering the Past: Leonard McNally arch-informer', 13 February 1997.

[7] See further examples in Pádraig Ó Concubhair, *'The Fenians Were Dreadful Men': The 1867 Rising* (Cork, 2011), 29, 40, 46, 76-85.

[8] Tom Barry, *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), 104-115.

[9] John Borgonovo, *Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Féin Society': The Intelligence War in Cork City 1920-1921* (Dublin, 2007), 1-181.

IRA counter-intelligence measures, alongside substantial support levels for republicans, both helped force the British government into negotiations in 1921.[10] The brevity of the Independence War undoubtedly made significant infiltration difficult for the British to achieve too. History therefore warned the Provisional IRA that the battle against the British state was going to be both overt and covert.

How far the Provisional IRA had lost the intelligence war by the 1990s has become the subject of fierce debate. The main catalyst for this debate is Freddie Scappaticci from Belfast. Allegedly, a row with other IRA members led to him working for the British Army's intelligence gathering agency from the late 1970s, the Force Research Unit (FRU), whilst simultaneously operating as a chief spy-hunter within the IRA's internal security unit.[11] Whilst Scappaticci denied being the top IRA informer codenamed 'Stakeknife' in 2003,[12] Martin Ingram, a former FRU officer, like various Irish republicans, journalists and academics believes that the allegations are true.[13]

Further revelations of high-level infiltration of the republican movement (by which I mean the IRA and Sinn Féin) arose in late 2005. Denis Donaldson from Belfast went on Irish television to announce that he had been an informer since the 1980s.[14] Donaldson had been in the IRA since 1969, and was interned alongside senior republicans during the 1970s.[15] After his release, he stood for Sinn Féin in the Westminster elections in 1983, and, despite failing to be elected, became an important 'cog' within Sinn Féin until 2005.[16] Acquiring this man as a long-term informer was a major coup for British intelligence. Further details on the Stakeknife and Donaldson cases will be revealed.

Troubles commentators have always been aware that the IRA suffered infiltration prior to the Stakeknife revelations in 2003.[17] Indeed, this thesis details other alleged IRA informers and agents named during the Troubles. But it was the exposure of 'high-level' spies such as

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[10] Barry, *Guerrilla Days,* 106-227; Borgonovo, *Spies,* 73, 123-158.

[11] Greg Harkin and Martin Ingram, *Stakeknife: Britain's Secret Agents in Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), 60-69.

[12] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife*, 242-254.

[13] Harkin and Ingram*, Stakeknife*; for republicans, see Gerry Bradley with Brian Feeney, *Insider: Gerry Bradley's Life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2009), 220-221, 234; Tommy McKearney, *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament* (London, 2011), 242-43; Anthony McIntyre, 'How Stakeknife paved the way to defeat the IRA', 11 May 2013, at The Blanket: at http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/paved.html, <accessed 5 September 2014>; for academics, see below.

[14] Martyn Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes: Britain's ''Dirty War'' in Northern Ireland', in Samy Cohen (ed.), *Democracies at War Against Terrorism* (New York, 2008), 77-96, at 77-78.

[15] Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London, 2007)*,* 580.

[16] *The Independent,* 'The Spy's Tale', 6 April 2006: at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-spys-tale-the-life-and-death-of-denis-donaldson-472992.html, <accessed 07 January 2013>.

[17] For instance, see Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London, 1998), 160-162, 256-265.

Stakeknife and Donaldson that prompted commentators and some republicans to reconsider why the IRA ended its military campaign during the 1990s.[18] The media concluded, after rather limited analysis, that the senior position of Stakeknife meant that he significantly disrupted the IRA's military campaign, and played a vital role in bringing republicans to the negotiating table during the 1990s.[19] A growing debate has also emerged within the republican community on this theme, which will be fully detailed throughout this thesis. Some former Provisionals such as Anthony McIntyre argue that Stakeknife and Donaldson helped guide the IRA towards peace and facilitated the 'defeat' of the IRA.[20] On the other hand, leading republican supporters of the peace process including Danny Morrison reject this view.[21]

Despite this intense debate within the republican community, there is no substantial account of the influence of informers and agents on the IRA. Nonetheless, Martyn Frampton, has produced various works that provide at least some brief analysis. He believes that senior IRA spies such as Donaldson and Stakeknife assisted the British forces in preventing various republican military operations from the 1980s.[22] Frampton goes on to conclude in his article 'Agents and Ambushes' that 'the republican capacity for 'war' was greatly curtailed', and, '[i]t was ultimately for this reason…that the IRA opted for peace', since 'the security services had won the intelligence war' by 1994.[23] *Talking to Terrorists*, co-written by Frampton and Bew, focuses on British policy during the Troubles. They say that 'extensive' high-level infiltration was one factor helping to ensure that: 'the IRA's operational capacity had been steadily undermined. The result of this was that it was the IRA who came to the British seeking negotiations, not *vice versa*' by the 1990s.[24]

This is not to argue that Frampton and Bew provide a mono-causal account for the IRA's decision to end its campaign; on the contrary, the authors explicitly dismiss the 'primacy of military 'solutions''. They cite multiple reasons to explain the Provisionals' peace strategy in the 1990s, including the declining political momentum of Sinn Féin and the increasing

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[18] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 77-78.

[19] For example, see *The Telegraph,* 'Stakeknife leaves the IRA 'in shock'', 13 May 2003: at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1429902/Stakeknife-leaves-the-IRA-in-shock.html, <accessed 20 June 2015>.

[20] McIntyre, 'Stakeknife'; Anthony McIntyre in *Irish News,* 'Serving the agenda of two masters', 17 December 2005: at http://www.nuzhound.com/articles/irish_news/arts2005/dec17_serving_two_masters__AMcIntyre.php, <accessed 01 March 2015>.

[21] Danny Morrison, *Rebel Columns* (Belfast, 2004), 131-134.

[22] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes'*,* 77-78, 86-93; John Bew, Martyn Frampton, Inigo Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country* (London, 2009) 110-111.

[23] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 93-94; see also Martyn Frampton, *The Long March: The Political Strategy of Sinn Fein 1981-2007* (London, 2009), 79-85.

[24] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga*., Talking to Terrorists,* 110, 246-47.

success of loyalists in targeting republicans. They also admit that the evidence concerning infiltration of the IRA remains 'incomplete'. But based on recent revelations and current evidence, Bew and Frampton maintain that informers and agents helped push the IRA's campaign into a trajectory of decline by the 1990s; and that the intelligence war 'had a decisive impact' in influencing the republicans to opt for peace.[25]

Bew and Frampton's work also raises crucial questions about the importance of the intelligence efforts in counter-insurgencies, and whether governments should 'talk to terrorists'. These questions are useful to consider for researchers studying conflict resolution elsewhere too, although they remind us that we cannot produce a template for other unique situations. Bew and Frampton suggest that political negotiations worked in Northern Ireland by the 1990s partly because the intelligence war and security efforts against the IRA forced republicans to rethink their objectives.[26] The question of how talking to the IRA in Northern Ireland eventually produced peace will be reviewed in the conclusion, following the first in-depth examination of the relationship between the intelligence conflict and the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Similar arguments to Bew and Frampton's have been made by other authors following the exposure of Stakeknife and Donaldson. Journalist Ed Moloney believes that the IRA was 'thoroughly compromised' by spies in the 1990s;[27] and Thomas Hennessey suggests that informers and agents contributed to a 'strategic defeat' for the Provisionals by the 1990s.[28] Bew and Frampton agree with Hennessey that the IRA was 'strategically defeated'. This term suggests that the IRA's military efforts were being successfully 'contained' by the British forces, to the extent that the IRA could not influence British policy through violence by the 1990s. Following this line of argument, the Provisionals subsequently ended their military campaign and made substantial political concessions by 1998.[29]

Their view differs from the consensus that existed in the early years of the peace process, which can be summarized as follows: in the 1990s, the IRA, the British government and the constitutional parties *all* realized that they could not decisively defeat each other, either

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[25] Bew *et al.*, *Talking to Terrorists,* 107-114, 242-251; Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 93-95; Frampton, *Long March,* 16, 45-46, 79-93; John Bew & Martyn Frampton, 'Don't mention the war!' Debating Notion of a 'Stalemate' in Northern Ireland', in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:2 (2012), 287-301, at 296.
[26] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 1-17, 108-121, 239-259.
[27] Ed Moloney, *Secret History,* 336, 574-582.
[28] Thomas Hennessey, 'The Dirty War: M15 and the Troubles', in Thomas Hennessey and Claire Thomas, *Spooks: The Unofficial History of MI5* (Gloucestershire, 2009), 577-596, at 593-596.
[29] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 93-94; Bew *et al.*, *Talking to Terrorists, 72,* 107, 246-247.

politically nor militarily. *Everyone* compromised in 1998.[30] Writing in the late 1990s, Brendan O'Brien, for example, argued: 'The IRA were being offered [in the 1990s] a path to political negotiations … [because] the IRA had become an insurmountable obstacle, a force that could neither win nor be defeated'.[31] Peter Taylor, writing in 1997, concurs. 'By the end of the 1980s', Taylor concludes, 'a stalemate of sorts had been reached with both sides recognizing the stark choices before them: to carry on shedding more blood or talk'.[32]

Of course Taylor and O'Brien were writing *before* the recent revelations of senior IRA and Sinn Féin informers and agents. Frampton is quite right to argue that we must review previous arguments in light of these new developments to check whether the 'stalemate' argument remains accurate.[33] In addition, whilst O'Brien's and Taylor's work does consider multiple reasons for the peace process, their accounts represent informed journalism rather than academic analysis. There is little discussion, for instance, of how the IRA successfully prevented damaging infiltration in their work. The recent limited academic analysis on this topic was produced after 2003, meaning that it has replaced journalistic accounts as the dominant view.

During the course of my PhD, however, there have been signs of a shift in interpretation towards my contrasting view outlined in this thesis.[34] Further research has emerged questioning parts of the Bew-Frampton argument, although in relation to the course of negotiations between the IRA and the British government and not specifically on the outcome of the intelligence conflict. The prime example is Niall Ó Dochartaigh's work on negotiations and the relationship between republican and British strategy between 1975 and 1998, which contains new archival and interview material with British civil servants. He persuasively argues that the British government rejected further talks with republicans between 1976 and 1989, because they saw a republican willingness to negotiate in 1975 as a sign of military weakness, and did not want to provoke loyalist resistance. But Ó Dochartaigh suggests that high security costs, political support for Sinn Féin, and the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to significantly reduce IRA

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[30] Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (London, 2003), 303-315.
[31] Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1999), 13,159-168, 195-200, 238-240, 283-285, 301-302, 319-322.
[32] Taylor, *Provos,* 277-327; Peter Taylor, *Brits: The War Against the IRA* (London, 2002), 306-309.
[33] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 77-79.
[34] It is important to note the recent heated exchange between Paul Dixon against Bew and Frampton. However, the debate primarily involved Dixon claiming that Bew and Frampton produce politically motivated history to support neo-conservative ideology, and Dixon's concerns surrounding semantics in defining the word defeat. The debate did not provide any further analysis or original material concerning the intelligence conflict. Paul Dixon, 'Was the IRA Defeated? Neo-Conservative Propaganda as History', *in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, (2012), 40:2, 303-320.

activity encouraged a reassessment of British policy on talks with republicans.[35] It is all the more important to establish the outcome of the intelligence conflict as there is a growing shift towards re-evaluating the debate on the causes of the peace process. A dedicated analysis of the intelligence war using spies against the IRA is crucial if we are to further the debate on the causes of the peace process, and to help us acquire a much greater understanding of the course of conflict.

This thesis provides the first detailed attempt to measure how far the IRA's military campaign was disrupted by informers and agents. By innovatively evaluating the impact of various suspected informers and agents on IRA units across Northern Ireland and England, I attempt to demonstrate that the IRA's military capacity remained formidable by the ceasefire in 1994. There is no doubt that the gathering of human intelligence became a central part of British security strategy against the republican movement, particularly after 1976.[36] Yet the IRA's cellular-structure in Belfast, the elusive nature of many of its rural and English units, and the isolation of its leadership, meant that informers and agents did not contain the IRA to any significant extent by the 1990s.

The lack of success for the British state in their intelligence battle against the IRA was crucial. The British state aimed between 1976 and 1989 to reduce IRA activity, at the very least, to a level at which it caused little disruption to political, social and economic life in Northern Ireland. It sought a political compromise with constitutional parties, which, alongside the military and intelligence pressure on the IRA, it envisaged would bring relative peace and 'normality' to Northern Ireland.[37] I suggest that the inability of the intelligence campaign to significantly reduce disruptive republican military activity by 1989, was a key reason for a change in British policy towards the Provisionals. The British government began instead trying to entice the Provisionals towards a political compromise in the 1990s.

The evidence provided suggests that the IRA leadership after 1983 sought a return to negotiations with the British government and a political compromise. In the meantime, they aimed to pressurize the British state to return to talks, partly by persisting with IRA activity at a reduced, but 'unacceptable' level, and by increasing Sinn Féin's electoral mandate.[38] The

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[35] Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement', *Political Studies,* (published online 24 November 2013), 1-19.
[36] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 83-87.
[37] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 62-64, 72; Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6-8; *Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland* (London, 2006), chapter 8, point 809.
[38] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6-7.

IRA's military strength by 1994 shows that its leadership fulfilled their military aim of survival and persistence. For this reason, this thesis argues that infiltration of the IRA had minimal impact on the republican leadership's decision to search for peace. Instead, the Provisional movement opted for major political compromises by 1994 primarily because of the inability of Sinn Féin to win considerable electoral support across Ireland.[39] But the republican leadership only agreed to a ceasefire in 1994 because of the political limitations and opportunities at that time showed that there was no more to be gained through IRA activity.[40] When placed in the context of the IRA's formidable military capacity by the 1994, the centrality of political factors in producing the peace process compared to the intelligence-war becomes more apparent. In this way, this thesis provides greater insight into the primary factors producing the peace process. This counter-argument matters because, as Bew and Frampton note, various external commentators and even governments look to Northern Ireland to understand what factors helped peace emerge.[41]

Most chapters commence with a lengthy discussion of British military and political strategy against the IRA in a given time period. The second part of each chapter investigates whether informers and agents helped the British state achieve its security objectives against the IRA within the specific time span. Finally, each chapter evaluates how far alterations in republican or British military and political strategies in that time were influenced by the intelligence conflict. The only slight variation to this structure is in chapters three and four, where the latter considers what motivated the British and IRA peace process strategies in a separate chapter because of the sheer volume of material to discuss. This chronological structure ensures that the reader sees how developments in the intelligence conflict involving informers and agents over the years affected British and IRA military and political strategies. It also gives the reader numerous examples of suspected spies and their effect on various IRA units. Currently, no other study produces this level of detail.

Chapters one and two provide a unique analysis of the impact that various informers and agents had on IRA military strategy and British counter-insurgency strategy before 1975. Chapter one begins by outlining British policy towards the Provisionals between 1969 and June 1972. The British and Stormont governments believed that they could crush the IRA, primarily through overt security operations using the conventional armed forces. One reason for this

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[39] O'Brien, *Long War*, 196-199.
[40] O'Brien, *Long War*, 319-324.
[41] Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 1-16, 239-259.

tactic was that the British Army was new to the situation in 1969, and violent clashes between the RUC and nationalists in Belfast and Derry city meant that Special Branch struggled to get behind nationalist barricades. Hence gathering intelligence on the emerging Provisional IRA proved very difficult. But increasing IRA attacks firmly indicated that British forces were not defeating the IRA. Thus the British state began talking about an 'acceptable level of violence', whilst trying to win over constitutional nationalists. But violence increased, eventually convincing the British government to negotiate with republicans in June 1972. The second section of chapter one reveals suspected cases of infiltration of the IRA prior to June 1972 in Belfast and Derry city, and the rural areas where the IRA primarily operated such as Tyrone, Fermanagh and South Armagh. I argue that the IRA remained difficult to infiltrate for various reasons by June 1972. I also explain why the IRA's campaign had not yet spread to the countryside. The chapter concludes by suggesting that the IRA engaged in the June 1972 ceasefire from a position of military strength.

Chapter two considers in depth the influence of IRA informers and agents on republican strategy between July 1972 and December 1975. In the course of doing so, it is able to evaluate Bew and Frampton's claim that the intelligence effort against the IRA was a primary reason for the organization engaging in a prolonged ceasefire in 1975.[42] The first part of the chapter outlines how the British state wanted to rapidly reduce IRA activity, partly via informers and agents, between June 1972 and mid-1974, in order to help a political agreement between constitutional parties succeed. When the constitutional party settlement collapsed following a loyalist strike and continuing IRA activity in May 1974, British strategy shifted. They turned back towards using back-channel conversations with the IRA, whilst also continuing military and intelligence pressure, to get republicans to accept a political compromise. Moreover, chapter two promotes the view that the British government seriously considered making Northern Ireland semi-or-completely independent in 1975, provided loyalists and republicans gave their consent.[43] Thereafter, the chapter argues that whilst the IRA in Belfast did experience disruptive infiltration by 1975, the rest of the organization did not. The unique properties of rural and English IRA units enabled them to escape significant infiltration. More importantly, alongside the Derry city Brigade, these other units became a leading part of the IRA's geographically expanding campaign. Thus chapter two contradicts the argument that if the IRA in Belfast was temporarily struggling with infiltration, the entire organization faced

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[42] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 50-54.
[43] Michael Kerr, *The Destructors: The Story of Northern Ireland's Lost Peace Process* (Essex, 2011), 13-15, 249-326.

military decline.[44] Furthermore, the chapter details how the Belfast IRA adapted to difficulties with infiltration by beginning to restructure itself *before* the 1975 ceasefire. The final part of the chapter argues that the main factor encouraging an IRA cessation from late 1974 were ambiguous messages from British intermediaries to republican leaders suggesting that the British state wanted to withdraw gradually from Northern Ireland.

Chapter three argues that informers and agents were not a key factor influencing republicans to ceasefire by 1994. The chapter commences by explaining how IRA reluctance to accept British terms for a political settlement in 1975 saw the British state seek to produce, at the minimum, an 'acceptable level of violence' between 1976 and 1989. The British state wanted to make the IRA campaign increasingly ineffective and unable to disrupt any constitutional party settlement that might emerge.[45] Intelligence gathered from informers and agents was crucial to reducing IRA capacity, whilst avoiding alienating constitutional nationalists in indiscriminate operations.[46] By 1989, this strategy altered and the British government re-engaged in negotiations with the IRA, for reasons explored in chapter four. Nonetheless, in order to bring the Troubles to a prompt conclusion, the British state still tried to erode the IRA's military options after 1989 via a sustained intelligence effort. The majority of chapter three is therefore dedicated to evaluating whether British strategy against the IRA in this period using informers and agents was successful. The chapter relates suspected IRA infiltration to republican military activities in many parts of Northern Ireland and in England between 1976 and 1994. The main argument presented is that outside a few areas such as east Tyrone and Newry, the IRA's campaign was not facing terminal decline by 1994 as a result of informers and agents.

If the intelligence war did not have a significant effect on IRA military capacity, why did the British state and IRA agree to search for a political compromise from the late 1980s? The final chapter argues that three principal factors convinced the British state to include the Provisionals in a political settlement in the 1990s: the IRA's ability to sustain its campaign, Sinn Féin's small but consistent electoral mandate in Northern Ireland, and the decision of the constitutional nationalists - the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) and the Dublin

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[44] Cf. Moloney, *Secret History,* 133-142.

[45] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 5-13; Bew et al., *Talking to Terrorists*, 62-64, 72; *Operation Banner*, 809.

[46] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 83, 86-87.

government – to talk to the Provisionals from the late 1980s.[47] Chapter four goes on to reassess why the republican leadership called a ceasefire in 1994, despite the organization remaining strong militarily. The argument provided above about the importance of electoral results for Sinn Féin will be developed. This chapter also counters the recent suggestion by some republicans that Sinn Féin informers and agents, such as Donaldson, manipulated the Provisionals towards the peace process.

There are a number of features of this thesis that make it innovative. It is currently the only systematic examination of the influence of informers and agents on IRA and British strategies during the conflict. Its methodology also produces a unique comparison between suspected and actual infiltration, and levels of republican military activity across various IRA units throughout the conflict. This particular part of the thesis significantly develops our understanding of the regional nature of the conflict. John Whyte's *Interpreting Northern Ireland* in the 1990s called for greater research on the regional features of the Troubles. With a few notable exceptions, this area remains underdeveloped. It is a vital area to study because it enhances our understanding of the conflict and peace process. As Whyte argued: '[a]reas only a few miles from each other can differ enormously … This means that the nature and intensity of the conflict can vary widely. That in turns means that the nature of a settlement likely to bring peace can vary widely too'.[48] My research contributes to our knowledge of the regional nature of the conflict and the peace process. Other innovative aspects of this thesis include the new perspectives on the reasons for the IRA cessations in 1975 and 1994, and its critique of the tendency among researchers to rely primarily on killing statistics to evaluate the strength of republican military units. This thesis also makes an important contribution to the small, but growing literature on the impact of informers and agents in modern small-scale conflicts.[49] More importantly, as will be shortly discussed, the breadth of original oral historical

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[47] Although not in relation to the intelligence war, similar points are made by Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation', 4-13; and Catherine O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil, Irish Republicanism, and the Northern Ireland Troubles 1968-2005* (Dublin, 2007), 52-71.

[48] Notable exceptions include journalistic accounts about South Armagh by Toby Harnden and Darach MacDonald, and the scholarly work of Henry Patterson about the border areas. By looking these areas separately, however, their accounts do not evaluate the level of input that rural republican units had in the IRA's overall campaign. Darach MacDonald, *The Chosen Fews: Exploding Myths in South Armagh* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 2000); Toby Harnden, *'Bandit Country': The IRA and South Armagh* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000); Henry Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier: The Border and Anglo-Irish Relations During the Troubles* (London: Palgrace MacMillan, 2013); See also John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), 258-259.

[49] For example, see Hillel Cohen (translated by Haim Watzman), *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* (California, 2008).

material provided in this thesis provides much greater insight into this topic and the current debates within republicanism.

Of course, the IRA was not the sole focus of British intelligence during the Troubles. Various primary and secondary sources now detail British and RUC intelligence efforts against the loyalist paramilitaries, and smaller republican paramilitaries such as the INLA.[50] Nonetheless, the threat posed by the IRA to the British state was far greater. Hence the intelligence campaign in Northern Ireland was primarily aimed at damaging the Provisional IRA.[51]

The author is also aware from his research of the increasing role that technology played in intelligence efforts against the IRA.[52] This dissertation does include a few examples of how electronic surveillance affected the conflict. Bugging and tracking devices, however, were of little use if the intelligence services were unsure who needed to be monitored. As George Clarke, a former Special Branch officer, writes: 'even mechanical gathering has to have a starting point, and that brings me to the informant. Surveillance teams needed to know where to go. What houses to target. What vehicles to follow.' Clarke's observation explains why informers and agents remained a primary source of intelligence.[53]

Definitions and Terminology

In 2002, Dermot Feenan produced an excellent article on his experience of researching paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. He observed how the: '[u]se of politically insensitive language could have restricted access' to interviewees. For this reason, Feenan 'avoided…using the terms 'terrorism/terrorists' in relation to paramilitaries'.[54] In the same way, this research does not use the term 'terrorist' or 'terrorism'. To do so could have restricted access to former paramilitary testimonies that are so crucial to this thesis. Brannan *et al.* also point out that the term terrorist is used so frequently to cover a wide variety of groups with different aims and methods, from Al Qaeda to the IRA, that it has become a somewhat

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[50] For British intelligence efforts against loyalists see Johnston Brown, *Into The Dark: 30 Years in the RUC* (Dublin, 2005); Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 160-227; Colin Crawford, *Inside the UDA: Volunteers and Violence* (London 2003) 100-118; for the INLA, see Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, *INLA: Deadly Divisions* (Dublin 1994), 193-210.

[51] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 79.

[52] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 202-207.

[53] George Clarke, *Border Crossing: True Stories of the RUC Special Branch, the Garda Special Branch and the IRA moles* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2009), 217-218; see also Jack Holland and Susan Phoenix, *Phoenix: Policing the Shadows* (London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 113.

[54] Dermot Feenan, 'Researching paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland', in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 5:2, (2002), 147-163, at 156-157.

meaningless politicised label.[55] Paramilitary is a more useful term because it does not carry political baggage, and it does not imply that the only activity of groups such as the IRA was violence. For similar reasons, this research uses the term counter-insurgency to describe the British state response to IRA activity. Insurgency refers to 'an internal struggle in which a disaffected group seeks to gain control of a nation'. Counter-insurgency refers to 'the constitutional, military, political or economic measures that represent the state's response to this challenge'.[56]

Turning next to the terms 'informer' and 'agent', Alan Barker, a former Special Branch agent-handler who worked in Derry city from the late 1970s, recalls: 'First, there was the 'turned' agent … [who was] already…a member of that particular organization'. 'Then there was the 'clean' agent', Barker explains, 'who was not a member of…the terrorist groups … [who] had to be carefully manoeuvred along a path whereby he or she could eventually approach or be approached by a particular organization and accepted into it'.[57] A further distinction is needed between 'civilian-agent' and 'army-agent'. A civilian agent is a civilian who infiltrates a paramilitary group for the British Army or Special Branch, but who was not previously a member of that paramilitary group, such as Special Branch agent Martin McGartland.[58] A British Army agent is a member of the British armed forces who infiltrates a paramilitary group, but who was not a paramilitary member beforehand, such as the agent with the pseudonym Kevin Fulton, who infiltrated the IRA in the early 1980s.[59] Furthermore, this thesis uses the widely accepted term informer to describe an IRA member who provides information to British or RUC intelligence.

Motives

The motives of IRA informers and agents are important to consider briefly to help us understand why a small number of people from communities that the IRA claimed to protect turned against them. But whilst memoirs have been released by self-confessed IRA spies, such as Sean O'Callaghan who informed for the Garda in the late 1970s and 1980s, it is impossible to verify primary motives without accounts being released by agent-handlers.[60] For those killed

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[55] David W. Brannan , Philip F. Esler & N. T. Anders Strindberg: Talking to "Terrorists": Towards an Independent Analytical Framework for the Study of Violent Substate Activism', in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (2001), 24:1, 3-24, at 3-4, 11-12, 18.

[56] Peter R Neumann, *Britain's Long War: British Strategy in the Northern Ireland Conflict 1969-98* (Hampshire, 2003), 3.

[57] Alan Barker, *Shadows: Inside Northern Ireland's Special Branch* (Edinburgh, 2007), 138-139.

[58] Martin McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (London, 2009), 70-81.

[59] Kevin Fulton with Jim Nally and Ian Gallagher, *Unsung Hero* (London, 2008) 1-22.

[60] Sean O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London, 1998).

by the IRA as alleged spies, we will never know their true motivations. Based on current evidence, the only available conclusion is that people informed for various reasons. The case of Raymond Gilmour, a former Special Branch agent in Derry city in the late 1970s and early 1980s, supports this view. It is possible to elaborate on his motivations to some extent because his activities are verified by Alan Barker, his former Special Branch handler. Gilmour apparently began informing after facing the prospect of prison for criminal activities. But Gilmour also says that other motivations included: distaste for the IRA after they kneecapped his friends for anti-social activity; 'a powerful financial incentive'; his mother being anti-republican; and the prospect of saving lives.[61]

Martin Ingram, the former FRU operator, certainly found 'many motivating factors' for IRA spies such as: 'revenge' for a paramilitary beating; ideological opposition; the threat of imprisonment; a longing for excitement and 'status'; and 'good, old-fashioned greed'.[62] A former British soldier, who worked for a time in British Army intelligence collation during the Troubles, concurred: 'Almost every source was different … some…were doing it because either they work for us or they are going down … Others saw themselves as secret agents. Others did it for money'.[63] Even republicans generally accept that informers and agents had different motives. Tommy McKearney, a former Provisional republican from Tyrone, believes: '[some] IRA personnel…captured 'red-handed'…rather than face the prospect of spending years in jail they agreed…to give information. And there were people that for a variety of reasons felt that the IRA was clearly in the wrong'.[64] Other republicans, such as Gerry Bradley, believe that most informers and agents were '£5 touts … straight-out criminals – car thieves, robbers, drug pushers'.[65]

Academic studies on other conflicts also show that informers and agents have a variety of motives. Taylor and Snow promote the term MICE to account for the most common motives for some Americans informing for the Soviet Union during the Cold War. MICE means money, ideology, compromise or coercion and ego. The authors add that other influences include excitement and revenge. Crucially, they suggest that: 'people enter into treason for a variety of reasons and any attempt to classify risks oversimplification…no human act is ever motivated

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[61] Raymond Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA* (London, 1999), 25-108; Barker, *Shadows,* 139-149.
[62] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 36-39.
[63] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[64] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 18 April 2011, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[65] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 207.

by a single factor'.[66] There is also a growing literature on the reasons why some Palestinians worked for Israeli intelligence since the 1940s. Cohen and Dudai suggest:

> some collaborated after being pressured or blackmailed; others did it for personal gains; some because of ideological disagreement with the Palestinian political leadership and others due to disagreements, friendships, or alliances of a local nature.[67]

The mixture of motives for informers and agents across various conflicts is crucial to the intelligence services: it ensures that there will always be individuals who will inform.

Sources and methodology

In many ways, it is an ideal time to evaluate this topic because considerable time has elapsed since the Stakeknife and Donaldson revelations and the end of the conflict. Furthermore, a number of Troubles participants and commentators have aired their views on this theme, primarily through memoirs. My research has also gathered extensive interview material from a range of republicans (both those supportive of the Provisional movement and those who are now unaffiliated), former IRA spies, former British security personnel, alongside Irish and British political representatives. In particular, this thesis provides the reader with valuable insight into one particularly heated debate within republicanism concerning whether spies 'defeated' the IRA. Stephen Hopkins recently observed: '[t]he struggle for Irish Republican memory of the 'Troubles' is being played out not only in the commemorative practices of the movement…but also in the publishing houses'.[68] I include both the views of republicans who believe that British intelligence had little influence on the IRA throughout the conflict, and opinions of unaffiliated republicans, some of whom suggest that senior informers and agents facilitated the 'defeat' of the IRA. In relation to republican sources, the author does not use the term dissident for all non-mainstream republicans because it is employed today to identify republicans who still advocate armed methods of achieving republican goals, something many dissenting republicans do not in fact support. Furthermore, Hopkins points out that there is a wide range of dissenting republicans, including those who left the movement following Sinn Féin's decision to take seats in the Irish parliament in 1986, as well as those who split with the Provisionals over the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Instead, the terms unaffiliated or

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[66] Stan A. Taylor & Daniel Snow, 'Cold war spies: Why they spied and how they got caught', in *Intelligence and National Security*, (1997), 12:2, 101-125, at 101-110, 116-125.
[67] Ron Dudai & Hillel Cohen, 'Triangle of Betrayal: Collaborators and Transitional Justice in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', in *Journal of Human Rights* (2007), 37-58, at 40.
[68] Stephen Hopkins, *The Politics of Memoir and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Liverpool, 2013), 25.

dissenting republicans are used to capture the nuances between the different strands of non-mainstream republicanism.[69]

Investigating this topic across the entire conflict is now possible partly because of the availability of some former Troubles participants for interviews, but also since memoirs have been released that collectively cover the Troubles. Government documentation and recent Irish and British state inquiries concerning specific killings during the Troubles provide additional coverage too. Together these sources provide the reader with greater understanding of the intelligence campaign against the IRA.

One particular advantage of using the wealth of memoirs and interview material available is that they enable my research to uncover the impact of informers and agents on the IRA across various geographical areas where it operated. Republicans themselves recognise the importance of analysing the conflict outside its epicentre in Belfast. Recently, for example, Kieran Conway, a former IRA activist from southern Ireland, commented that whilst he believed that Moloney's *A Secret History of the IRA* was 'a superb work', he felt: 'it is overly Belfast-centric'.[70] This thesis highlights the crucial role that rural republican units and those in England played in sustaining the IRA's armed campaign into the 1990s. The sources used in this study reveal how local factors led to different motives for republican militarism, and a certain type of conflict in various geographical areas too. Crucially, Hopkins warns:

> a key criterion for judging the utility of [local experience] memoirs is an author's willingness or capacity to place their experiences within a broader *political* framework, and to what extent they attempt to interpret the conflict beyond the narrow confines of their immediate geographical area.[71]

It is therefore vital to cross-check a variety of memoirs and interviews, alongside numerical and other source material on this topic to establish how each IRA unit contributed to the movement's overall military campaign.

It is important to stress that discovering details on informers and agents within the IRA outside Belfast is challenging. The majority of rural republican units and smaller urban IRA units were extremely security conscious and evaded significant infiltration throughout the conflict. The lack of arrests in these localities, in particular, makes their volunteers reluctant to reveal their stories in fear of incrimination. Indeed, the author has discovered no memoirs written by IRA activists from south Armagh or Fermanagh. Nevertheless, a combination of

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[69] Hopkins, *Politics of Memoir,* 53-74.
[70] Kieran Conway, *Southside Provisional: From Freedom Fighter to the Four Courts* (Dublin, 2014), 208.
[71] Hopkins, *Politics of Memoir*, 32-35.

security force documentation and reports, public inquiries, memoirs, republican interviewees with knowledge of various units, statistics concerning IRA activities in rural areas and details of suspected informers and agents killed across Northern Ireland enables us to consider the impact of informers and agents on the IRA outside of Belfast. *Lost Lives*, which contains the names of those known to have been killed as a result of Troubles related activities, has been invaluable when researching IRA activity levels, killings and suspected infiltration across Northern Ireland and England.

Conducting oral historical research has enabled this research to gather 'hidden histories', particularly of rank-and-file republicans whose views have not been heard within the memoirs. There has been a tendency for the debate surrounding the past within republicanism to be between current and former Sinn Féin leaders, against specific unaffiliated republicans, whose critiques are regularly aired via their ability to produce memoirs.[72] By relying on these accounts, we overlook the multiplicity of views within republicanism on this topic. For example, I have interviewed unaffiliated republicans who do not share the views of leading dissenters such as Anthony McIntyre. Gathering these additional opinions broadens our understanding of the debates within republicanism. Paul Thompson, a veteran oral historian, promotes interview research precisely because: '[r]eality is complex and many-sided'. By gathering 'the voice of the rank-and-file', not just 'articulate…classes' who have produced memoir material, oral history gives us greater insight. Equally, interviewing those who have produced memoirs or whose opinions are regularly aired helps increase our understanding of the intelligence conflict because the memoirs are not always detailed enough to provide answers.[73]

There are many potential limitations with the source material chosen, particularly in relation to oral history in the current climate in Northern Ireland. One difficulty is that memoirs or interviews may be ideologically motivated. Dawson, for instance, talks about the 'present past' existing in Northern Ireland, where former Troubles participants on all sides construct particular memories of the conflict potentially to justify their present political stance.[74] As Trevor Lummis, an oral historical expert, puts it: '[c]ontemporary values clearly shape the

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[72] Stephen Hopkins, 'The Chronicles of Long Kesh: Irish Republican Memoirs and the Contested Memory of the Hunger strikes', in *Memory Studies*, Volume 7, Number 4, (October 2014), pp. 425-439.

[73] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, reprint paperback), 22-24, 90, 122-123, 134-137, 213; see also Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), vii-19, 26-75.

[74] Graham Dawson, Making peace with the past? Memory, trauma and the Irish Troubles (Manchester, 2007), 4, 9-10, 306.

informant's interpretation of their own past'.[75] Unaffiliated or dissident republicans, for instance, could overplay the role of informers and agents in bringing about the peace process to justify and promote opposition to the Good Friday Agreement. In contrast, mainstream republicans might downplay the role of spies to prevent Sinn Féin from losing support for its peace strategy. Finally, the British state, former IRA spies, and unionists may argue that the IRA was forced to end its military campaign by British intelligence in order to dismiss any claim that they compromised with violence, or to exaggerate their role in the outcome of the Troubles.

Nonetheless, it is important not to overstate how contemporary ideological views might influence some accounts. In fact, some interviewees from opposing sides actually produced remarkably similar accounts. To overcome any problems with relying on potentially ideologically motivated testimonies, the traditional method of cross-referencing a variety of interview and memoir accounts from all sides alongside military events is adopted. Lummis points out that: 'maximum triangulation with other sources can go a long way toward establishing the general reliability of the interview'.[76] The advantage of cross-referencing oral historical sources – and, indeed, any type of source – with a wide range of other material is summarised by Thompson: 'a historical interpretation or account becomes credible when the pattern of evidence is consistent, and is drawn from more than one viewpoint'.[77] I consistently attempt to support my interpretations by using multiple sources, which represent the opinions of various Troubles participants and commentators. In reality, the importance of cross-checking sources is applicable to all historical studies, not just those using oral history.[78]

Furthermore, just because an interviewee or author's version of events is inaccurate based on current evidence, this does not mean that their view is of little value. On the contrary, Alessandro Portelli, veteran oral historian, argues: '[t]he importance of oral testimony may not lie in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it … 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true''.[79] In the context of the intelligence conflict in Northern Ireland, it is nearly impossible to dismiss any accounts because we lack full disclosure of all sources. But even when a particular view lacks supporting evidence, Portelli's point is crucial: that an

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[75] Trevor Lummis, 'Structure and Validity in Oral History', 273-283, at 276, in in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[76] Lummis, 'Structure', 274-275.
[77] Thompson, *Voice of the Past,* 213.
[78] Ronald J. Grele, 'Movement without aim: methodological and theoretical problems in oral history', 38-52, at 40-41 in Perks and Thomson, *Oral History Reader.*
[79] Portelli, *Luigi,* 15-62.

opinion is 'psychologically true' for a certain person or group. We need to analyse why that viewpoint has been accepted by certain people or groups.[80] Inaccurate accounts or silences can tell us a lot about how contemporary debates or local experience contribute to diverse opinions within republicanism or the British state.

Perhaps the greatest methodological hurdle for this work emerged in 2011. It relates to an oral history project conducted by former Provisional republican Anthony McIntyre and his loyalist counterparts in Belfast between 2001 and 2006. They gathered candid interviews with former paramilitaries for Boston College in the United States. Interview accounts were not supposed to be released until after the person had died; and even then an interviewee could specify beforehand when their material was to be released. Trouble commenced in 2010, when journalist Moloney published *Voices from the Grave,* a book partly based on the testimony that Brendan Hughes, a former IRA commander in Belfast, gave to the Boston College project. Hughes claimed that the kidnapping, killing and 'disappearing' – meaning burying in an unmarked grave – of Jean McConville, a widow from west Belfast, in December 1972, was ordered by Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin president and a TD in the Dáil today.[81] In 2010, an interview was also published in *Irish News* with former Provisional Dolours Price (she died in 2013). The story claimed that Price admitted to being involved in the McConville killing alongside senior republicans, and that she had discussed it with the Boston College project.[82] Eventually, in 2011, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the British state began legal proceedings to extradite material relating to the McConville killing, and achieved some success. Indeed, by 2014, republicans allegedly associated with the McConville disappearance had been arrested, including Ivor Bell, partly based on their supposed interviews with the project. In May 2014, Gerry Adams was even arrested and questioned, although he denied all charges, including IRA membership, and was released.[83] More details surrounding the McConville case are provided in chapter two. The important point here is to explain why it has become difficult to conduct oral historical research on a sensitive area of the Troubles.

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[80] Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and the meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York, 2003), 3-20.

[81] Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (London, 2010), 124-136.

[82] Moloney, McIntyre and Ruan O'Donnell dispute that Price gave details about the McConville killing to Boston College. See *Irish News,* 'Dolours Price's trauma over IRA Disappeared', 18 February 2010: at https://bostoncollegesubpoena.wordpress.com/supporting-documents/irish-news/, <accessed 01 June 2015>; Ruan O'Donnell, 'Boston College Tapes: PSNI to get access to Dolours Prices Interviews', in *History Ireland,* Volume 21, No.3 (May/June 2013), 10-11.

[83] BBC News, 'Jean McConville: Ivor Bell to be prosecuted for aiding murder', 4 June 2015: at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-33005771, <accessed 4 June 2015>; BBC News, 'Gerry Adams freed in Jean McConville murder inquiry', 4 May 2014: at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-27278039, <accessed 4 June 2015>.

McIntyre describes the 'chill effect' that the prosecutions has had – and will continue to have - on other oral historical projects involving paramilitaries.[84]

After 2010, the author certainly noticed a decline in interest to participate in his research. Furthermore, the flurry of memoirs that arose in the early 2000s from former republicans has generally halted. Thus crucial perspectives may potentially have been lost because of ongoing court proceedings. However, this research has been able to continue with the willingness of various interviewees because of its clear ethical procedures developed to avoid the difficulties that the Boston College project experienced. One example was my clear guidance provided to interviewees on the information sheet that emphasised that this research was not concerned with names or personal experiences. Its primary aim was to research the general influence that informers and agents had, in their opinion, on particular republican units and the peace process. In addition, only information in the public domain was discussed with interviewees. Whilst researching paramilitary punishment beatings in 2002, Feenan adopted similar ethical procedures.[85]

Ironically, in some ways, the Boston College case has actually helped emphasise the importance of having clear ethical procedures and boundaries for interviewers and interviewees in Troubles related research. Indeed, interviewees were always keen to view questions and discuss the purposes of the project beforehand. Standard oral historical practises have also ensured interviewee confidence, including: type scripts being sent to interviewees to alter before being used in the final thesis; interviewees being able to skip questions or withdraw from the research at any time without an explanation; and anonymity was granted for all interviewees unless they stipulated on consent forms that they wanted to be named. Admittedly, some of these ethical procedures probably limited information divulged. However, in the current climate, they was no other option. Moreover, by complementing interview material with other sources, such as memoirs and IRA activity, any shortcomings or silences within the interview material have been overcome to a great extent.

It is worth noting that even documentary sources such as *Lost Lives* have their difficulties. One problem is that those noted as informers and agents are sometimes only suspected of infiltration. The decision of the intelligence services not to name their sources,

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[84] Anthony McIntyre, 'The Belfast Project and the Boston College Subpoena Case', paper given at Oral History Network of Ireland Second Annual Conference in Ennis, Co. Clare, 29 July 2012: at https://bostoncollegesubpoena.wordpress.com/2012/10/07/the-belfast-project-and-the-boston-college-subpoena-case/, <accessed 01 May 2015>; see also Ruan O'Donnell, 'Boston College Tapes', 10-11.
[85] Feenan, 'Researching paramilitary violence', 161-162.

whether dead or alive, creates this difficulty.[86] In addition, *Lost Lives* only lists those who died, and not those who were injured, or towns or areas that were damaged by IRA attacks. Hence the author has consulted other valuable sources, such as the CAIN website, in order to detail IRA activities in various areas that did not always lead to deaths. In regards to suspected informers and agents noted in *Lost Lives*, unless other evidence strongly collaborates the claims, the author does *not* suggest that the accusations are true. Nonetheless, if the IRA were killing people they suspected of infiltration in an area, it implies that they faced operational difficulties there, which is something that can be investigated by studying IRA activity levels at the time.

Of course, the arguments in this thesis represent work in progress since the murky world of the intelligence war in Northern Ireland has not been fully revealed. Nonetheless, based on what we currently know, I am confident that my conclusions present an accurate portrayal.

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[86] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 650-651.

Chapter one: 'Building something out of nothing'[1]: Informers and agents, the IRA, and British counter-insurgency strategy, 1969 to July 1972

Introduction

Perhaps the most visible sign that the intelligence war against the IRA was gaining momentum in the early 1970s emerged on 1 April 1999. Within *An Phoblacht,* the IRA admitted to 'disappearing' nine people during the Troubles. The IRA's admission in 1999 was given in the knowledge that if they returned the remains of the disappeared, the British and Irish governments promised that no remains would be forensically tested for prosecutions.[2] The IRA say that some of those disappeared 'were members of [the IRA] who were executed for activities which put other personnel at risk or jeopardised the struggle'.[3] Hence the IRA offered no apology for the killings. What they apologised for was the secret burial. But in light of recent accounts by former IRA volunteers, one name on the list now stands out: Eamon Molloy. The IRA's confession that they killed Molloy came as a 'surprise' to the disappeared campaigners, since they 'had not heard of him before'. *Lost Lives* was not even able to ascertain when Molloy was killed during 1975.[4] The IRA offered little explanation in 1999 either, simply stating that Molloy was: 'from Belfast, a member of the IRA, [and] was court-martialled in 1975 and found guilty of being an RUC informer'.[5] The IRA subsequently delivered Molloy's remains in a coffin at a graveyard in Dundalk in May 1999.[6] Only later did further details emerge to explain why the IRA killed him.

A number of sources, including Gerry Bradley, a former Belfast Third Battalion volunteer who operated with Molloy in the 1970s, say that Molloy became an informer in 1972. Molloy's initial dedication saw him promoted to quartermaster for the Belfast Brigade in the mid-1970s. This position increased his access to the organization's secrets and volunteers, since quartermasters knew where weapons were hidden, and would regularly meet various units to supply equipment. Molloy was therefore able to set-up numerous arrests

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[1] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[2] *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation locates grave sites', 1 April 1999: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/4724, <accessed 10 December 2013>; see also the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains: at http://www.iclvr.ie/en/ICLVR/Pages/Confidentiality, <accessed 26 June 2015>.
[3] *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation', 1 April 1999.
[4] See reference number 1321 in David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton and David McVea, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the men, women, and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Edinburgh, 2007 edition).
[5] *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation', 1 April 1999.
[6] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 99.

and weapons seizures in Belfast.[7] Bradley and others say that when senior IRA personnel in Long Kesh worked out that Molloy was informing in 1975, the order was given to kill him. For Brian Feeney, a veteran Troubles commentator, Molloy's disappearing was possibly the result of the embarrassment felt by senior Belfast volunteers about the damage that Molloy had inflicted on the Belfast Brigade.[8]

We shall return to the Molloy case in chapter two when evaluating the impact of spies on the IRA between 1972 and 1975. The point is that before the recruitment of senior IRA informers such as Stakeknife by 1980, the intelligence war was already underway.[9] The academic literature so far has not provided any in-depth evaluation of the impact of specific informers and agents on IRA and British state strategies up to 1975. Ed Moloney's journalistic account has provided some detail, but his primary focus is on informers and agents such as Molloy within the Belfast IRA between 1969 and 1975.[10] In fairness, the Molloy case demonstrates that often information has only recently come to light about intelligence activity in the 1970s. But now various memoirs are available, including those of former Special Branch officer George Clarke, and former Belfast IRA volunteers Gerry Bradley and Brendan Hughes, who both operated during the early 1970s. Taken together, these and other sources can provide evidence of the effect of infiltration on the IRA up to 1975. In light of this new material, it is surprising that recent academic accounts of the Troubles overlook the effect of specific agents and informers on the IRA up to 1975. Such an omission is puzzling when considering that Bew and Frampton, for example, argue that infiltration and disruption of the IRA's Belfast Brigade was a key factor influencing the Provisionals to call a prolonged ceasefire in 1975.[11]

Thus chapters one and two provide a long overdue analysis of the influence of informers and agents on IRA and British strategies between 1969 and 1975. The first section of this chapter investigates the aims of British state strategy towards the IRA up to its ceasefire of June 1972. Essentially, British policy aimed to introduce modest political and socio-economic reforms that would see moderate nationalists accept the unionist-led devolved government at Stormont, whilst simultaneously trying to defeat the IRA. Once the

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[7] See reference 1321 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 117-120; Moloney, *Secret History,* 134-142.
[8] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 117-120.
[9] See a similar point in David A. Charters, 'Have A Go': British Army/MI5 Agent-running Operations in Northern Ireland, 1970–72, in *Intelligence and National Security*, 28:2, (2013), 202-229, at 202-204.
[10] Moloney, *Secret History,* 119-142.
[11] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 49-54.

British government saw that the IRA could not be militarily defeated by December 1971, they began focusing instead on achieving 'an acceptable level' of violence, alongside implementing gradual political reforms.[12] In the words of the British Army in their review of the Northern Irish campaign, entitled *Operation Banner,* 'an acceptable level of violence' was where violence is reduced to 'a level at which normal social, political and economic activities can take place without intimidation'.[13] Reaching an 'acceptable level of violence' remained the aim of British policy until mid-June 1972, when they realized that the IRA's campaign was not being reduced. Reluctantly, the British government agreed to talk to the IRA in June 1972.

The second part of this chapter suggests that the inability of the British state to rapidly reduce IRA violence by July 1972 was partly the result of British Army and Special Branch lacking sufficient intelligence. The IRA's first lengthy ceasefire in June 1972 was called from a position of military strength, demonstrating the limited impact that informers and agents had on that organization at that time.

From 'defeating' to talking: British policy towards the IRA, August 1969 to July 1972

In 1969, inter-communal violence erupted primarily in the urban centres of Belfast and Derry city. The British government reacted by sending in the British Army ostensibly to 'keep the peace' between the nationalist-Catholics and unionist-Protestants. Initially, restoring law and order was the aim of British policy.[14] In practice, this meant attempting to prevent any more scenes that had been witnessed during the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969.[15]

Rather than attempting to 'avoid responsibility', initially the British government under Harold Wilson attempted to get Stormont to introduce some of the reforms that the civil rights movement demanded.[16] Reforms included ending gerrymandered electoral boundaries. According to Whyte, Unionists primarily in the west of Northern Ireland – Derry, Fermanagh, Tyrone and parts of county Armagh - discriminated in electoral boundaries, employment and housing. The result was that the unionist population could maintain control of the local authority, even when they were in a minority. One example was the Londonderry city council, where 14,000 Catholics had eight councillors, while 9,000 Protestants had

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[12] Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 43-69.
[13] *Operation Banner,* point 809.
[14] Desmond Hamill, *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland 1969-1984* (London, 1985), 7.
[15] Taylor, *Provos*, 48-54.
[16] Cf. Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 43.

twelve.[17] In the east of Northern Ireland, in areas such as Belfast, nationalist grievances were based more on other forms of discrimination, such as the use of the Special Powers Act, which enabled the RUC to ban nationalist marches, meetings, newspapers and flags.[18]

The first major turning-point in British strategy came in early 1970. The British Army's role altered and became increasingly hostile towards the nationalist population in working-class city areas, such as west Belfast and the Bogside. This shift occurred for a number of reasons. The British government partly slowed down the pace of reforms because of the negative reaction of many unionists. Indeed, following the publication of the Hunt Report in late 1969, which recommended disbanding the B-Specials, clashes between the British Army and loyalists followed.[19] British policy switched from placating nationalists to conciliating unionism purely based on the British government's fear of getting dragged further into the constitutional issues in Ireland again, and potentially a civil war. The sectarian divide in Northern Irish politics also meant that there were no electoral seats available in Northern Ireland for Labour, the Liberals and Conservatives.[20] Britain also had its own large Irish-immigrant community, and was keen to insulate the 'mainland' from explosive sectarian divisions creeping in from Northern Ireland, as government documents will reveal.

From early 1970, therefore, the British government decided to allow political and economic reforms to proceed at a pace that suited the majority of Ulster Unionists, whilst allowing the British Army to use 'colonial techniques' of population control to try to quell IRA violence.[21] In practise, this policy of appeasing unionist Stormont caused the British state immense difficulties in its relations with the nationalist community. For instance, a review of the British Army's campaign, *Operation Banner,* was produced in 2006. It represented the work of three officers who gathered the views of retired or serving officers, foot soldiers and thousands of regimental post-tour reports from across the Troubles. Reflecting nearly thirty years later, it recalled how:

> the British Cabinet saw…Northern Ireland as being Stormont's responsibility. However, given its [largely unionist] composition, Stormont was…unlikely to take

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[17] John Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the Unionist regime, 1921-1968?', in *Contemporary Irish Studies* (1983): at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/whyte.htm, <accessed 1 July 2014>; Taylor, *Provos*, 30-31.

[18] Laura K Donohue, 'Regulating Northern Ireland: The Special Powers Act 1922-1972', in *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 41, No. 4, (December 1998), 1089-1120.

[19] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 59-62.

[20] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 14-16.

[21] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 29-33.

substantive action [on civil rights issues]. Indeed it would probably have seen that as being contrary to its own interests. Stormont was part of the problem.

The British Army goes on to describe why they feel that Stormont undermined their peace-keeping role:

> the GOC [General Officer Commanding] was required to render assistance to [Stormont]. However, given its partisan composition, Stormont's intentions would tend to be partisan – for example, the urge to 'sort out' the Falls [in 1970].[22]

The Army believes that allowing Stormont to influence security policy made the armed forces look pro-unionist to Irish nationalists.[23] Admittedly, the Army seems to have reached this verdict in hindsight. Few documents at the time expressed similar concerns. Having said that, below we shall see that certain British military personnel did want the government to alter the political structure in Northern Ireland.

The Falls Road Curfew encapsulates the problems with allowing Stormont to heavily influence security policy. The British Army admits that the curfew: 'did not…discriminate between those perpetrating violence and the remainder of the community … [t]he search…convinced most moderate Catholics that the Army was pro-loyalist … The IRA gained significant support'.[24] Further indiscriminate British Army operations increased tensions. For example, internment without trial was suggested and implemented by Unionist Prime Minister Brian Faulkner in August 1971. An estimated 342 'republican' suspects were arrested, compared initially to no loyalists.[25] Many of those arrested had absolutely no connection to the IRA.[26] During the early 1970s, sociologist Frank Burton learned from his stay in a nationalist community in Belfast how: '[t]he gross physical assault of internment…had the effect in the [nationalist] community of tilting the balance of allegiance towards the Provisionals'.[27] Whilst in intelligence terms internment did eventually have an impact on IRA violence, as will be discussed, in the immediate term it inflamed moderate nationalists, who turned against the British state in Northern Ireland. In the six months before internment, for instance, there were 25 deaths; in the following six months after internment, there were 185 deaths.[28]

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[22] *Operation Banner,* 404, 804.
[23] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 45-46.
[24] *Operation Banner,* 217-218.
[25] See CAIN, 'Internment': at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/intern/chron.htm, <accessed 24 June 2015>.
[26] *Operation Banner,* 219.
[27] Frank Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy: Struggles in a Belfast Community* (London 1978), 80-81, 88, 107-108.
[28] Neumann, *Britain's Long War*, 57-58.

Elsewhere, in Derry city the shootings of innocent civilians radicalised nationalists before internment. The constitutional nationalists, the SDLP, withdrew from Stormont on 16 July 1971 after the British state refused to hold an official inquiry into the killings of two innocent and unarmed men, Seamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie, by the British Army earlier in the month.[29] The creation of no-go areas in the Bogside by 1971 demonstrates how isolated many nationalists had become from the British state. Similar nationalist anger towards the British state was witnessed across Northern Ireland, and led to a rapid intake of new IRA recruits.[30] Indeed, *Lost Lives* statistics show that the IRA was able to increase its killings from 107 deaths in 1971 to 280 by 1972.[31] When Bloody Sunday in January 1972 is added to the catalogue of British Army disasters in this period, it is clear that nationalist and British State relations had reached their lowest level. According to the recent Saville Inquiry, all thirteen people killed were civilians who were 'not armed or posing any threat of causing death or serious injury'.[32] Thereafter, Stormont was completely discredited because all nationalists withdrew from its corridors and the violence on the streets increased. No wonder the British government finally prorogued that parliament in March 1972. But ultimate responsibility for Stormont's failure to reform lay with the British government. They could have prorogued Stormont at any time, but Westminster's determination to quickly reduce the violence by 1970, and not to provoke a unionist backlash, meant that they were extremely reluctant to disturb the Stormont parliament.[33]

The British Army also shares a large degree of responsibility for the increase in IRA violence. Their indiscriminate population control measures were a catalyst for further tensions by early 1972.[34] Shane Paul O'Doherty, a former Derry city IRA volunteer, mentions a surge in anger after British Army restrictions and curfews were placed on the citizens of the Bogside, Shantallow and the Creggan areas. For example, mass times changed in those parts of the city.[35] The indiscriminate nature of such measures mirror techniques that had been used by British forces in past colonial campaigns, such as in Kenya, where Bennett details entire villages being punished and put under surveillance for Mau Mau activity

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[29] CAIN, 'Chronology of the Conflict 1971': at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/.htm, <accessed 06 August 2011>.
[30] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 81.
[31] Table 3 in McKittrick et al.*., Lost Lives*, 1554.
[32] *Saville Inquiry Report*, Vol. 1, Chapter 3, 'Events of the Day', 3.70, 15 June 2010.
[33] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 27-28.
[34] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 30-31.
[35] Shane Paul O'Doherty, *The Volunteer: A former IRA man's true story* (Durham, 2011), 8-39, 47; see also Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites*: *Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (London, 2005), 137-144, 232, 250-252.

there.[36] There seemed to be very little attempt to win 'hearts and minds' of the nationalist population in Belfast and Derry city between 1970 and March 1972. Neumann, for instance, makes a good case for arguing that the negative effects of internment for nationalists might have been remedied by a political initiative being announced at the same time. But this was impossible whilst Stormont remained in charge of security policy and was determined to undermine any potential opposition to its rule.[37]

The British government's view was that the violence had to be contained and, if possible, suppressed before any political initiatives were attempted.[38] For instance, during a cabinet meeting on 9 February 1971, Reginald Maudling, the Home Secretary, stated that the security forces would increase their efforts to reduce IRA violence. Other than saying that the government would 'not contemplate' abdicating from Northern Ireland, there was no discussion of political initiatives.[39] Even senior British Army figures, such as Brigadier Frank Kitson in Belfast during the early 1970s, author of the British Army's guide on *Low Intensity Operations* in 1971, recognized that the military instrument dominated British policy initially. In his *Future Developments in Belfast* paper of December 1971, Kitson stated that while there was the 'immediate mission of destroying the IRA' he believed that the 'long awaited political initiative' should commence as soon as possible.[40] Indiscriminate operations against the nationalist community alongside a lack of political reform only served to increase the violence.

In the context of mounting IRA attacks, the notion of militarily defeating the IRA decreased in British state vocabulary by 1972. In its place came the term coined by Reginald Maudling, 'an acceptable level of violence'. This term meant trying to reduce the violence to a level at which it could not significantly disrupt political and socio-economic activities in Northern Ireland.[41] This objective became a common feature of British policy throughout the conflict. Nonetheless, the British government still had little intention of implementing a political settlement immediately from December 1971. Although Heath met fairly regularly with Jack Lynch, the Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, from December 1971, to discuss the way forward politically, the British government continued supporting Stormont until shortly after

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[36] Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 29-46, 135-146, 230-245, 265.
[37] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 45-46, 57.
[38] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 54-61.
[39] National Register of Archives (NRA), Richmond, London, CAB 128/49, p.1-4, Minutes of cabinet meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 9 February 1971.
[40] NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-6.
[41] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 58-59.

Bloody Sunday in March 1972.[42] Only after March 1972 did the government turn towards the SDLP, as Westminster had run out of options to keep Stormont in business, since the IRA's campaign was not being reduced.

In light of this evidence, there is a large degree of accuracy in the suggestion that the British government did prorogue Stormont largely because of the IRA's escalating campaign. The SDLP had withdrawn from Stormont since July 1971, and yet the British government took no immediate action to create a political solution involving the SDLP. For this reason, the suggestion that Stormont was prorogued in response to SDLP or the Irish government actions does not seem convincing.[43] Republicans certainly felt their campaign brought down Stormont. Sean MacStiofáin, IRA Chief of Staff at the time, has even declared: 'I have yet to meet a single person who ever thought that Stormont fell for any other reason than the armed struggle of the Republican movement'.[44] Republicans are not alone in this thinking. Leading British military figure, Sir Michael Dewar, describes the IRA's campaign up until mid-1972 as 'effective'.[45]

The interests of the SDLP and the British government had converged by March 1972. Both sides feared that mounting IRA attacks showed that the organization was succeeding in its objectives. Reflecting on SDLP actions in 1971, Paddy Devlin commented: 'Provo violence…[was] actually writing the political agenda'. This seems a fair reflection, since the SDLP's withdrawal from Stormont was motivated by what was happening on the streets. However, Devlin is inaccurate to suggest that the SDLP had other choices besides withdrawing from Stormont.[46] Escalating IRA activity underlined the increasing isolation that nationalists felt towards the Unionist-dominated system of government. The SDLP risked completely discrediting itself if it remained at Stormont.

Thus by March 1972, both the British government and the SDLP saw that they needed to work together. It was in this context that the SDLP met British officials at their Laneside office in county Down, on 11 April 1972. Positioned on the shores of Belfast Lough, Laneside eventually became the home to the UK representatives for Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. When MI6's Frank Steele arrived at Laneside in 1971, he was instructed to

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[42] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 48-51.
[43] Cf. Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 61-68.
[44] Seán MacStiofáin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), 241; see also McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 118.
[45] Colonel Michael Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London, 1997), 66.
[46] Paddy Devlin, *Straight Left: An Autobiography* (Belfast, 1993), 155-157.

proactively gather opinions from both communities. Yet Steele told journalist Peter Taylor that the government 'wanted to beat the IRA' at that time and he was not to talk to them.[47] It was only natural, therefore, that the SDLP would use this office to recommence contact with the British government.

Returning to the 11 April 1972 meeting, the SDLP delegation consisted of Gerry Fitt, Austin Currie, Paddy Devlin and Ivan Cooper, and they met with UK representatives Howard Smith and Frank Steele. '[The SDLP's] main theme', a British report of the meeting described, 'was that the SDLP was engaged in a struggle with the IRA and that we should help the SDLP'. In the opinion of the SDLP representatives, the British government could help them by ensuring that 'the Army…take every possible measure to adopt a low profile' in nationalist areas. Furthermore: '[t]he SDLP were confident that if they were supported by actions of this type, the IRA could be finally defeated within the next three weeks'.[48] Despite this report stating that the SDLP's assessment was 'optimistic', it does seem that William Whitelaw, Northern Ireland Secretary of State, believed the SDLP. Whitelaw recalls that his various actions during the March and April 1972 period were designed to aid the SDLP in their 'struggle for support' with the IRA.[49] His actions included releasing some internees that were no longer considered dangerous,[50] and reducing the Army presence within nationalist areas where the IRA was strong, such as the Bogside.[51] Parallel to their work with the SDLP, the British government stepped up its attempts to enlist the support of the Irish government to tackle cross-border IRA units in April 1972. Edward Heath sent a telegram to Taoiseach Jack Lynch on 24 April 1972, using remarkably similar arguments to those the SDLP had presented to Steele a few days before. Heath claimed that 'the IRA are in some disarray', and that if they hit the IRA 'hard' now the organization could be permanently damaged and its violence rendered ineffective.[52] Heath potentially exaggerated IRA weakness to try to get Lynch to act. But it is more likely that the SDLP had convinced the British government that the IRA could be restrained through reduced British Army activity and help from the southern government. The problem was that the SDLP were out of touch with many working-

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[47] Taylor, *Brits,* 80; see also Tony Craig, 'From Backdoors and Back Lanes to Backchannels: Reappraising British Talks with the Provisional IRA, 1970–1974', *in Contemporary British History*, 26:1, (2012), 97-117, at 100-105.
[48] NRA, CJ3/98, Record of a meeting with the SDLP at UK Rep's Office, Laneside, SDLP and British UKREP meeting at Laneside, 11 April 1972, p.1-2.
[49] William Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London, 1989), 93-94.
[50] Whitelaw, *Whitelaw,* 92-93; Devlin, *Straight Left,* 173-74.
[51] *Operation Banner,* 225-226.
[52] NRA, PREM 10/1007, Heath telegram to Mr Lynch Taoiseach, 24 April 1972, p.1-2.

class nationalists in the no-go areas, since these were effectively controlled by the IRA. This meant that the British government's own assessment of the IRA's strength was based on the inaccurate reports presented by the SDLP. True, it is difficult to assess IRA support in this era because Sinn Féin did not stand in elections. Yet mounting IRA activity certainly suggests that it was at least a sizeable minority in working-class nationalist areas.

While British policy towards Northern Ireland was reactive and driven by circumstances on the ground in this period, this is not to say that after March 1972 there was 'a near-absence of policy'. Nor is it accurate to argue that between March 1972 and late June 1972, the British government gave 'the sense that 'anything was possible' and everything was 'on the table''.[53] Under Heath's Conservative government, the prospect of dialogue with the IRA was not on the table until June 1972. The British government's lack of interest in talking to the IRA is seen on 9 February 1972, at Victoria RUC barracks in Derry city. There, Frank Morris, the adjutant of the IRA at the time for Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh and Tyrone, met with British intelligence officers.[54] He told them that the SDLP lacked support in nationalist enclaves and had 'ceased to represent their constituents'. Morris added: '[n]o SDLP member will make a move towards the conference table save on terms previously agreed with the Provisionals.' Morris goes on to argue that the IRA was strong, but that MacStiofáin was interested in negotiations since neither side could defeat each other.[55] Evidence leans towards supporting Morris' assessment of IRA strength at that stage, at least in working-class nationalist estates, as will be seen. Nonetheless, in his article Craig details how British intelligence and forces mistakenly believed that they could still defeat the IRA.[56] The disinterest on the part of the Conservative government in talking to the IRA was still evident shortly before Whitelaw's change of heart in mid-June 1972. During a cabinet meeting on Monday 12 June, for example, Whitelaw remarked:

> The announcement of a round table conference [to find a political settlement] would further isolate…the Irish Republican Army … the nucleus of the conference would consist of representatives of the recognised political parties in Northern Ireland. *This would exclude not only…the IRA*, *but also…Sinn Fein*.[57]

The most likely explanations for the refusal of the British state to talk to the IRA before mid-June 1972 include a fear of a backlash from the Protestant community for 'talking to

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[53] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 39.
[54] See brief details of Morris' IRA career in Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 63.
[55] NRA, FCO 87/5, Summary of comments made by Frank Morris, 9 February 1972, p.1-4.
[56] Craig, 'From Backdoors', 103-104.
[57] NRA, CAB 130/560, Cabinet meetings minutes held at 10 Downing Street, 12 June 1972, p.5.

terrorists',[58] and because the British government was seeking to undermine the IRA to help the SDLP.

The British government only changed its mind about talking to the IRA once the SDLP began talks with the Provisionals in June 1972. Once more, British policy was tied to appeasing and fulfilling the aims of the SDLP, in a desperate move to get nationalists on side for a political settlement. After initially ruling out any negotiations after an IRA conference led by MacStiofáin in Free Derry on 13 June 1972, British government papers suggest Paddy Devlin and John Hume convinced the government to talk to the IRA. The SDLP representatives claimed that from their discussions with Daithí Ó Conaill and Séan MacStiofáin there was a genuine chance of a political deal with the IRA.[59] In addition, the SDLP persuaded Whitelaw to accept political status for IRA prisoners and to release Gerry Adams for the talks.[60] Whitelaw admits that he was persuaded to talk to the IRA primarily by the SDLP.[61]

The decision to talk to the Provisionals on the part of the SDLP and the British government showed that reduced security force operations against nationalists had not undermined the IRA. As a result, the British Army pours scorn on the government's decision to tone down their security operations in nationalist areas after March 1972:

> The Army was directed…to take a low key approach [after March 1972] … [But this approach] had little effect on weaning the Catholics from supporting the IRA. PIRA regrouped, retrained and reorganised. The level of violence increased dramatically through 1972 … The 'low profile' approach had failed, an explosive situation was developing and control was being lost.[62]

Statistics provided by the British Army support their view. Shooting incidents rapidly increased within four months: there were 399 shootings logged in March 1972, 1223 in May, and 1215 in June. In the meantime, arrests decreased: 375 arrests were made in March, declining to 229 in April and 199 in May.[63] The IRA remained resilient as a result of sizeable support on the streets, and because the organization practically controlled areas behind barricades such as in Free Derry. Both factors reduced opportunities for the British forces to

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[58] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 27-28.
[59] NRA, CJ 4/1456, IRA Truce, 26 June to 10 July 1972, P.1-13.
[60] NRA, CJ 4/136, Meeting between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the SDLP representatives (Mr Hume and Mr Devlin) at UK Rep office, 18 June 1972 June 1972, p.1-2.; Devlin, *Straight Left,* 173-178.
[61] Whitelaw, *Whitelaw,* 94-100.
[62] *Operation Banner*, 204-205.
[63] See table 2-1 in *Operation Banner,* 224.

arrest individuals and gather intelligence from which to disrupt the IRA.[64] The intelligence community had warned the government about this on 14 April 1972.[65] But Whitelaw believed that the key to reducing IRA activity was to follow the SDLP's advice. By agreeing to talk to the IRA, Whitelaw was, albeit implicitly, admitting that the British state had failed to produce an 'acceptable level of violence'. Moreover, he recognized that the IRA had considerable support within parts of the nationalist community. He told his fellow cabinet members as much on 16 June 1972, and that for this reason: 'it was inescapable that some understanding would have to be reached with the 'Provisional' IRA'.[66]

<u>Losing the intelligence war?: the impact of informers and agents on the IRA, 1969 to June 1972</u>

It was certainly the aim of the British forces to erode the IRA primarily through 'intelligence-led' operations from the beginning of the conflict.[67] Brigadier Frank Kitson had recognized in his *Low Intensity Operations* book in 1971 that: 'the problem of defeating the [insurgent] consists very largely of finding him…[highlighting] the paramount importance of good information'.[68] He also argued in his security assessment of Belfast in late 1971:

> future successes [against the IRA] will be increasingly hard to achieve…unless we…make our own organization very much more efficient … we are taking steps to do this in terms of building up and developing the MRF [Military Reaction Force] and we are also steadily improving the capability of Special Branch.[69]

It was Kitson's belief that the best way to reduce IRA violence was to improve intelligence. Human intelligence remained one of the main methods of gathering 'good information' on the IRA, even as electronic intelligence developed during the 1970s. Informers and agents could point the intelligence services towards who needed to be put under surveillance.[70] Another benefit of human intelligence was that, in theory, it enabled the security forces to differentiate between the IRA and other nationalists, which could help the state win 'hearts and minds'. As shall be revealed, however, a number of factors prevented British intelligence from reducing IRA activity to an 'acceptable level' by June 1972. Some of the explanations as to why human intelligence on the IRA was insufficient in this period are specific to the

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[64] *Operation Banner,* 217-218, 225-226.
[65] NRA, Prem 10/1007, Notes of a meeting, 14 April 1972.
[66] NRA, CAB 130/560, Confidential annex to cabinet meeting, 16 June 1972, p.1-3.
[67] *Operation Banner*, 856; Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[68] Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations* (London, 1971), 94-95.
[69] NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-6.
[70] Clarke, *Border Crossing*, 217-218.

different geographical areas where the IRA operated. For this reason, it makes sense to discuss the levels of infiltration in various localities where the IRA grew increasingly active by June 1972.

<u>Belfast and Derry city</u>

In the early 1970s, the heart of the Provisional IRA was in Belfast. It was where many northern republicans, who disagreed with the politicisation of republicanism and the unwillingness to defend Catholic areas from loyalist attacks, joined southern republican dissidents and formed the Provisionals in 1969.[71] But by 1972, the British Army felt that it was getting on top of the Belfast IRA. In December 1971, for instance, Kitson believed that his units had 'fined down' the Belfast IRA through arrests.[72] On 21 March 1972, an MoD assessment by the Commander of Land Forces (CLF), commented on the 'damage done' to the Belfast IRA.[73] There is some evidence to suggest that informers and agents 'damaged' the Belfast republican movement. On 14 March 1972, for example, Gerry Adams was arrested at a house in the Clonard district. Adams believes that the soldiers who arrested him 'were obviously acting on information', since he did not permanently live at that Clonard address, and instead moved between various houses. The British Army should not have been aware of his whereabouts.[74]

The period between late 1971 and June 1972 also saw the Military Reaction Force (MRF), a covert unit of the British Army, begin operating in Belfast. It is now possible to discuss the activities of this unit in greater detail since the recently released account by Simon Cursey (not his real name), a former MRF member. The GOC and Frank Kitson helped create the MRF. Kitson's experience in counter-insurgency operations elsewhere, and his emphasis on the need to create covert units in his book, explains why he was involved in creating the MRF.[75] Cursey recalls that the MRF consisted of 'approximately 30 men and a few women, specially chosen from Army units in late 1971'.[76] His dating of the MRF's creation seems accurate, since Kitson's report of December 1971 distinctly refers to 'developing' MRF units.[77] In Cursey's opinion, the MRF's creation was based on the British Army beginning to

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[71] Brendan Anderson, *Joe Cahill: A life in the IRA* (Dublin, 2002), 169-191.
[72] NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-2.
[73] NRA, FCO 87/2, MOD assessment of current operational situation in Northern Ireland, 21 March 1972, p.1-2.
[74] Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (Kerry, 2001), 188-190.
[75] Taylor, *Brits,* 127-137; Simon Cursey, *MRF Shadow Troop* (London, 2013), 65; NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-6.
[76] Cursey, *MRF,* xxvii-xxix.
[77] NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-2.

lose control in Belfast at that time. The increase in violence after internment certainly supports his view. Based in a secret part of Palace Barracks in Holywood, county Down, Cursey says that the MRF was split into three sections of eight men per unit. Their duties included: 'mobile and static surveillance techniques…long-and-short-range covert photography, hijack techniques, anti-hijack techniques, lifting and snatching operations, house breaking and lock picking, prisoner interrogation'. MRF soldiers also operated in civilian clothing and grew their hair, in order to blend in with nationalist Belfast. Summarising the role of his MRF section, Cursey states: '[o]ur objective was to gather information, spoil and interfere [with]…IRA plans…and when possible, to track down terrorists…[and] hand them over to the uniformed forces to arrest'.[78]

Cursey remembers a 'double top secret sub-unit of the MRF' too, whose, 'main responsibilities…were…observation/surveillance and … working with informers'. He adds that this separate section of the MRF took informers 'around in covert blacked-out vehicles' to '[point] out known and suspected terrorists'.[79] Peter Taylor concurs that this was a common practise during the early 1970s.[80] The more intriguing part of this section of the MRF's work was what came to be known as the 'Four-Square Laundry'. The discounted laundry service visited particular parts of nationalist Belfast. 'They collected laundry from various houses in the estates to be taken away for cleaning', Cursey explains, '[b]ut first they sent it to forensic testing for explosive residue, gun oil, lead and powder-burn traces'. Cursey continues:

> [a]fter the testing, they'd record and register any positive clothing and have the laundry washed and returned. Later, the uniformed forces would make follow-up spot searches of the whole area including the suspect addresses and would usually find weapons, ammunition or explosives in the houses.

Alongside the laundry service, this MRF sub-section ran an office and a massage parlour in Belfast, in order to covertly gather more information on the IRA.[81]

Cursey suggests that the laundry operation 'had been extremely successful for a very long time'.[82] Most accounts agree that it was eventually exposed by 'double-agents' to the IRA sometime in mid-1972, before the IRA eventually ambushed the laundry van in October

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[78] Cursey, *MRF,* xxvii-xxix, 46-48, 62-85, 202-205, 224-225.
[79] Cursey, *MRF,* 173.
[80] Taylor, *Brits,* 127-136.
[81] Cursey, *MRF,* 171-173; Taylor, *Brits,* 131-137.
[82] Cursey, *MRF,* 171-173.

1972.[83] IRA volunteers Seamus Wright and Kevin McKee were both kidnapped, killed and 'disappeared' by the IRA, allegedly for informing. Their 'disappearing' only became public knowledge when the IRA admitted to it in 1999.[84] A number of sources claim that Seamus Wright 'turned' during an interrogation at Palace Barracks in February 1972. Those who accept this conclusion include: Father Raymond Murray, who based his assessment on that given by Seamus Wright's widow to the Association for Legal Justice in May 1973; journalists Peter Taylor and Ed Moloney; and former Belfast IRA commander Brendan Hughes. As head of the Second Battalion D Company of the Belfast Brigade at the time, Hughes found it strange when one volunteer, Seamus Wright, repeatedly failed to report for duty, since there were constant operations to be implemented. Wright was also married into a staunchly republican family, making it unlikely that he had simply become disinterested with the IRA. It is alleged that Wright became an informer for MRF, and lived alongside other spies at Palace Barracks. Eventually, Hughes claims that Wright's wife met Seamus Wright in England. She went back and told Hughes that he had been involved with British intelligence, but that he wanted to return on the condition that he would be forgiven. When interrogated back in Belfast, Wright told the IRA about the laundry and other services run by the MRF, and about others apparently involved with the MRF, including Kevin McKee.[85] This case will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. What it demonstrates at this point is that there was infiltration of the Belfast IRA prior to the June 1972 ceasefire.

In Derry city, the other major epicentre of IRA activity in this period, we now know that Observer B was spying there, who was mentioned during the Bloody Sunday Inquiry in 2000. A former MI5 officer said that Observer B was recruited by an Army Battalion Intelligence Officer in 1970. The testimony of Observer B at the Saville Inquiry suggests that he was a businessman travelling across Northern Ireland, and that he gathered intelligence from various loyalist and republican contacts. Information provided to the inquiry suggested that his intelligence had some impact on the Derry IRA. For example, in May 1972, a Military Intelligence Liaison Officer (MILO) told the MI5 handler of Observer B that this agent had helped discover: 'a major arms smuggling route … [and] the location of a weapons…in the Rossville Flats'. The Observer B case highlights a degree of infiltration of

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[83] Cursey, *MRF,* 172.
[84] *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation', 1 April 1999.
[85] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 118-124; see reference numbers 626 and 627 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Taylor, *Brits,* 127-137; Moloney, *Secret History,* 119-121.

the Derry IRA, even if, as David Charters has stated in his recent article on British intelligence efforts in the early Troubles, it represents limited infiltration.[86]

The wide variety of motives for informing detailed in the introduction meant that it was always possible for states to acquire some spies. In addition, British intelligence had a long history of infiltrating militant republicanism and also recent insurgencies across the empire during the 1950s and 1960s. The key question here is: were there any particular features of the IRA in the city areas up to 1972 that made it susceptible to infiltration?

The Belfast and Derry city IRA units were initially based on the brigade, battalion and company structure. The Belfast Brigade, for example, was made up of three battalions; the first battalion covered the Andersontown and Upper Falls Road area; the second was based around Ballymurphy and the Lower Falls Road; and the third battalion consisted of the various nationalist enclaves such as the Unity Flats, the Ardoyne, the Bone, the Markets and the Short Strand.[87] According to Danny Morrison, the former Sinn Féin director of publicity, this structure meant that 'the IRA fought its armed struggle through local people in local brigades. Beechmont people would be fighting the British Army in Beechmont; Ballymurphy people would be fighting the British Army in Ballymurphy'.[88] Morrison explained that this structure was eventually cumbersome, since it 'made it much easier for British intelligence services to work out who was in A, B, C company'.[89] The particular weakness was that if one volunteer 'turned', as is said to have been the case with Seamus Wright in the Second Battalion area, they could reveal the identities of those with whom they operated, since they all lived in the same area.

Furthermore, following an escalation of loyalist and state violence, IRA volunteers rapidly increased in number by 1972. According to British Army statistics:

> by July 1971 there were…about 200 members of OIRA [Official IRA] and 500 in PIRA. Of those 700 about 130 were in Londonderry and 340 in Belfast … By May 1972 there were about 1700 active members of the two organizations, and a further 600 had been interned … Altogether about 10,000 people were involved in the IRA between 1969 and 1972.[90]

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[86] Charters, 'Have a Go', 219-228.
[87] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 48; Moloney, *Secret History,* 87.
[88] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[89] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011; Moloney, *Secret History,* 156-157.
[90] *Operation Banner*, 303.

Tommy McKearney estimates that each unit (company) of the Derry and Belfast IRA in this period had 'in the range of 10 or 20 volunteers'.[91] This seems a conservative estimate. Gerry Bradley, a former Third Battalion G Company leader in Belfast, remembers having 30 active volunteers in his unit by 1972.[92] This massive expansion of the IRA in the cities created opportunities for infiltration. The sheer volume of people made it difficult for the IRA to work out who exactly was informing. In fact, Kitson felt that the IRA's increasing size in Belfast was causing it operational problems in December 1971, since it had become 'much too big' to regulate.[93]

The IRA was also susceptible to infiltration by civilian-agents in Derry city and Belfast at this time. In the early 1970s, the organization's acceptance as defenders against British Army and loyalist incursions in some working-class streets, convinced the IRA to operate fairly openly. During an interview, Dr. Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, a former republican prisoner, recalled the IRA's openness in Belfast during the early 1970s:

> [y]ou would see people running around with guns in the early 1970s … I remember one time during a riot situation coming home from school and there was no bus. I went on down the Falls Road, and I saw this guy … He just walked up to this street corner and started shooting at a British Army foot patrol and then walked away.[94]

Other republicans recount similar incidents in Belfast, lending greater credibility to this account.[95] The relatively open nature of the Belfast IRA was echoed in Derry city. For instance, Shane Paul O'Doherty recalls an IRA training exercise in public in the Creggan prior to Bloody Sunday.[96] The IRA did not even wear masks initially when operating either.[97] Being so open did expose the IRA to infiltration.

The level of damaging infiltration within the Belfast and Derry city IRA up to June 1972 should not be overstated. Agents and informers had almost no effect on the IRA's decision to call ceasefires in March and June 1972. In fact, between 1970 and June 1972, the Belfast and Derry city IRA persistently killed security force members and other IRA 'targets' that they linked to the state. IRA 'targets' can be deciphered by looking to see if the IRA

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[91] He added the important caveat: 'because the IRA was a volunteer organization a lot depended on…enthusiasm … if someone…couldn't come along because his wife was ill…that excuse had to be accepted'. Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 23 May 2012, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[92] Feeney with Bradley, *Insider,* 49.
[93] NRA, CJ3/98, Paper by Frank Kitson: Future Development in Belfast, 30 December 1971, p.1-6.
[94] Dr. Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, Irish Republic, 09 September 2013.
[95] For example, see Hughes in Taylor, *Provos,* 53.
[96] O'Doherty, *The Volunteer,* 64.
[97] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 70-71.

apologised for killing a particular person in sources such as *Lost Lives.* In Belfast in 1971, the IRA altogether killed 32 soldiers, police officers and members of the UDR. By June 1972, the Belfast Brigade was already responsible for the deaths of 23 'intended targets', largely security force members, in just six months. The Belfast Brigade in total killed 58 'intended targets' in 1972, in addition to the financial damage inflicted on Belfast city centre during this period, and the number of innocent civilians killed (whose deaths are discussed in later chapters).[98]

Elsewhere, in 1971, the Derry city IRA was still in its infancy – for reasons to be explained – and killed five security forces members. However, in the first six months of 1972 alone, a total of nine security forces members were killed by the IRA.[99] Alongside these deaths, an MoD assessment in March 1972 recorded how:

> the commercial life of the [Derry] City is being rapidly and visibly reduce [sic]…businessmen are cutting their losses and leaving ... Londonderry remains an intractable problem. Both factions of the IRA are now in positions of strength, having recruited a large number of volunteers, amassed…arms and ammunition, and made themselves secure within the Bogside and Creggan areas.[100]

The evidence above suggests that the IRA was free from significant infiltration in Derry city and Belfast by the June 1972 ceasefire. No wonder *Operation Banner* recalls that between March and July 1972, 'control was being lost' to the IRA.[101]

Why did the IRA avoid crippling infiltration in Belfast and Derry city by June 1972? There are a few potential explanations. First, the increasing sense of isolation felt by the nationalist population towards the British state restricted the amount of intelligence available. As discussed, this isolation was primarily caused by British Army indiscriminate actions, including the Falls Road Curfew in Belfast and Bloody Sunday in Derry city. There are numerous other incidents in both cities that incensed the nationalist community, and led to many sympathising with the IRA. In Derry city, O'Doherty describes that many nationalists were 'delighted' when the British Army arrived in August 1969, feeling that this would stop loyalist attacks. But the change in atmosphere:

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[98] See appendix one for IRA 'intended target' killings; for financial damage caused in Belfast up to June 1972, see CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict 1971 and 1972: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch71.htm and http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch72.htm, <accessed 27 June 2015>.
[99] See appendix one.
[100] NRA, FCO 87/2, MOD assessment of current operational situation in Northern Ireland, 21 March 1972, p.2-5.
[101] *Operation Banner*, 226.

was noticeable within days. At the edge of the Bogside the Army set up tents through which everyone…had to pass …each person had to write his or her name, address or destination … Far from defending the Bogside from police and mob attack, the British Army was sealing it off … From that moment, I lost any sense of welcome for the British Army.

His account goes onto to argue that internment 'was a license to rape a community'. And despite drifting away from the IRA before Bloody Sunday, he re-joined shortly afterwards because 'the forces of so-called law and order were murdering us'. Admittedly, O'Doherty was drawn to militant republicanism after the 1966 Easter Rising celebrations too.[102] Yet in his innovative study of the start of the Troubles in Derry city, Niall Ó Dochartaigh (no relation) agrees that many Derry nationalists turned against the British state because of the largely indiscriminate actions by the British Army. Colonial techniques of population control and 'screening' – where, as Shane Paul O'Doherty notes, nationalists were questioned about their activities either on the streets or in custody for a few hours – embittered many nationalists in Derry city. The situation was similar in Belfast.[103] This sense of hatred obviously made it very difficult for British intelligence initially to recruit high-level spies in both cities.

The trouble was that without sufficient intelligence, the British Army had to conduct indiscriminate searches and raids in nationalist areas, making many nationalists more unlikely to become informers or agents. For instance, *Operation Banner* explains that:

house searches were a major aspect of…operations [in the early 1970s]. They were normally conducted on the basis of information received, which was often…poor ... Occupied house searches were hugely unpopular due to the invasion of privacy and inadvertent or sometimes deliberate damage that accompanied them … They probably contributed significantly to the alienation of the Catholic population.[104]

House searches were symptomatic of poor intelligence. But without sufficient intelligence available, the British Army had no choice but to conduct them to try to disrupt IRA activity. It was vicious circle.

Some of the MRF's actions further discredited the British state in the eyes of some nationalists. Various sources allege that MRF undercover operatives killed Patrick McVeigh, an unarmed ex-British serviceman, who was at a vigilante checkpoint in west Belfast when

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[102] O'Doherty, *The Volunteer,* 5, 23, 29-31, 38-39, 47, 70-77, 86-90.
[103] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 1-4, 137-156, 200-201, 248, 290-294; for Belfast, see Bradley, *Insider,* 34-35, 41-48, 56-68, 103-105; Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 56-57, 65-67, 80-82, 93-95.
[104] *Operation Banner*, 502, 514.

he was shot by a passing car in May 1972.[105] Taylor recalls that after another MRF unit opened fire from a vehicle and wounded three black-taxi drivers in Andersontown in June 1972, those involved were arrested. Sergeant Williams was subsequently charged with attempted murder, but was acquitted in 1973.[106] The purpose of such attacks is difficult to decipher, as those targeted were often not IRA members. These incidents would only have increased the sense of mistrust and support for maintaining barricades for paramilitaries to help protect the nationalist community. Thus *Operation Banner's* argument that Whitelaw's low-profile policy after March 1972 alone led to enhanced IRA control behind barricades is not entirely accurate.[107] British Army actions prior to March 1972 also created support for the 'no-go' areas in Free Derry and parts of west Belfast. These barricaded areas were a disaster for the intelligence effort as they became 'denied areas'.[108]

Many working-class nationalists tolerated the IRA as a necessary defensive force too, decreasing the prospects of British Army or RUC intelligence gathering copious amounts of information. Brendan Hughes claims that '[n]inety-nine per cent of the doors were left open' to his IRA unit in the early 1970s.[109] Gerry Bradley agrees that 'popular support was enormous' for the IRA in north Belfast, since: '[t]he areas of the third batt[alion] were constantly under attack from loyalists, from British Army raids. The IRA were the defenders … Every door was open'.[110] Since moderate nationalists such as Eddie McAteer, the nationalist party leader in Derry city, referred to the IRA as 'freedom fighters' after Bloody Sunday,[111] and with British Army personnel emphasising the hostility they encountered in nationalist parts of Belfast and Derry city,[112] it seems that the IRA initially had popular support within working-class nationalist city estates.[113]

Despite the drawbacks of brigade, battalion and company structure, it is often overlooked that this structure would have helped create communal solidarity with the IRA at first. Danny Morrison feels that this was one of the problems with getting rid of the company and battalions later:

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[105] See reference number 351 in McKittrick *et al.*, *Lost Lives*; Taylor, *Brits*, 130.
[106] Taylor, *Brits*, 130-131.
[107] Cf. *Operation Banner*, 225-226.
[108] Charters, 'Have a go', 206.
[109] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 56-95.
[110] Bradley in Feeney, *Insider,* 34-68.
[111] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 248.
[112] Taylor, *Brits,* 39-50,66-68, 88-108.
[113] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 1-4, 137-156, 200-201, 248, 290-294; Taylor, *Provos*, 72-83, 93-109.

local people…really took pride in their local IRA unit … Once the cell structure came in, it would not be people from the Falls Road making up D Company [for example]; it would be outsiders. The local element of pride…would have diminished.[114]

Féílim Ó hAdhmaill mentioned the same point.[115] Recruiting mass numbers into the IRA during this period was not a major security risk, since the IRA was well supported within its communities and could remain elusive in the no-go areas. Its level of support made good intelligence hard to obtain.

The dearth of intelligence gathered on the new Provisional IRA by Special Branch also explains why the Belfast and Derry city IRA had not been damaged to any great extent by 1972. The British Army came into Northern Ireland blind in intelligence terms, and so they relied upon Special Branch. But the RUC lacked adequate intelligence. Indeed, *Operation Banner* admits that internment failed at first since: 'suspect lists were badly out of date'.[116] The RUC's problem was that it was no longer welcome in working-class nationalist communities in Derry city or Belfast by 1969, starving them of intelligence gathering opportunities.[117] The Army felt that the Special Branch was also too small and 'overworked' in this period.[118] George Clarke, a former Special Branch officer in the border area in the early 1970s, agrees that many senior members initially 'were just not up to the job', because they lacked practical experience on the ground.[119] The situation where the British Army arrived in a country to find the local special branch in disarray was not new. They had experienced a similar situation in previous conflicts such as in Kenya.[120] It would naturally take time for the Army to build their intelligence, although Special Branch's lack of intelligence made the Army's job much harder.

Not only did the British Army feel that the Special Branch 'was almost completely ineffective', they also 'found the RUC to be secretive, and mistrustful of outsiders'.[121] Clarke concurs that the senior Special Branch chiefs of the early 1970s had created 'an elite force within a force', reluctant to share information.[122] This problem is illustrated in June 1969, when a Joint-Intelligence Committee was established, and an MI5 and MILO were sent to

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[114] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[115] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, Irish Republic, 09 September 2013.
[116] *Operation Banner,* 219.
[117] Charters, 'Have a go', 206-210.
[118] Operation Banner, 309.
[119] Clarke, *Border,* 77.
[120] Bennett, *Mau Mau,* 15, 29.
[121] Operation Banner, 308, 502.
[122] Clarke, *Border,* 77.

RUC headquarters at Knock. In a recent article, Charters describes how the MILO and MI5 officers found that Special Branch had no centralized system of collating intelligence reports.[123] Neither was Special Branch an organization ready to accept criticism. By July 1969, the two liaison officers had to move to a separate headquarters in Belfast, following disputes with Special Branch. William Whitelaw did create the Director and Coordinator of Intelligence (DCI), who 'was to serve as his personal security adviser and his link to the GOC and head of the RUC', to try to improve cooperation between the intelligence agencies. However, Charters argues that the 'problematic' relationship between Special Branch and military intelligence meant that the DCI never effectively coordinated and disseminated intelligence between the two agencies in the 1970s.[124] The upsurge in IRA violence in 1971 and 1972 is the clearest sign of poor intelligence cooperation between the RUC, MI5 and the British Army.

One potential explanation for tensions between the intelligence agencies is that the RUC was loyal to Stormont, whilst the British Army and MI5 were loyal to Westminster. Westminster was not always keen on Stormont's lack of reforms, whereas the RUC were directed by a Stormont government that was trying to maintain the status quo as far as possible. Personality was also a factor influencing cooperation. Clarke says that some MILOs working with Special Branch 'were upper-class twits, living in another world'. Clarke added: '[e]ach [army] unit had a four-month stint [tour] and all they really wanted were 'kills' or 'trophies''. Clarke did not always pass intelligence to the Army for this reason as he felt they might endanger Special Branch agents and informers. Furthermore, Clarke recalls how the 'military were recruiting potential sources…and only some of the intelligence gleaned was finding its way into the pipeline'. This happened because '[t]here were no clear lines drawn in the sand as to the exact nature of the intelligence-gathering operations in respect of the RUC/British Army', giving us a sense of the initial uncoordinated nature of the intelligence system in Northern Ireland.[125] A former British soldier said that he 'never really understood why' the Army had its own sources of intelligence separate from Special Branch; although he added that some spies 'would only work for the Army, and there were some who would only work for the police'.[126] The earlier example of Observer B is a case in point, since he refused to work for Special Branch whom he felt were bigoted.[127] Yet whilst there was some sense in

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[123] Charters, 'Have a go', 207.
[124] Charters, 'Have a go', 206-214, 228.
[125] Clarke, *Border,* 11-12, 125.
[126] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[127] Charters, 'Have a go', 219-228.

running both Army and police spies, the unwillingness of the different intelligence services to share information must have hindered the overall security force effort against the IRA.

Rural IRA units

IRA activities and the degree of infiltration in rural units between 1970 and June 1972 has received little attention in the secondary literature, with a few notable exceptions.[128] During an interview, Danny Morrison argued that it is 'a mistake to argue that the [IRA's] war was simply being fought in Belfast or Derry', a point emphasised throughout this thesis.[129] Yet it is understandable that little has been written about rural units up to 1972. Three of the most active rural brigades during the Troubles were South Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh.[130] In 1971, however, IRA operations in these areas were infrequent. Three 'targets' were killed by the South Armagh IRA, including custom officials and security force members; a soldier and UDR member were killed in county Tyrone; and a UDR member was killed in county Fermanagh. Prior to the June 1972 ceasefire, the South Armagh IRA became more active, targeting five security force members; the Tyrone IRA matched its 1971 killing levels of two security force members; and in Fermanagh, the IRA killed two security force members by June 1972.[131] Clearly, rural IRA activity remained low-key up to June 1972.

GOC Harry Tuzo told a government meeting at Downing Street as much on 21 March 1972: '[t]he situation in the rural areas of the Province [is] comparatively stable, and would improve as more intelligence became available and more military resources could be diverted from Belfast'.[132] It is interesting to note that Tuzo felt 'more intelligence' could turn the tide against the IRA in rural areas if needed; his statement also implies that once the Army had sufficiently damaged the Belfast IRA, they would turn their attention to rural areas. Another report by the CLF released in March 1972 agreed: '[t]he redeployment of some [Army] units from Belfast to these [rural] areas, which is planned to take place at the end of April, should lead to improved intelligence and increasing success'. The CLF added: '[t]he expected IRA move to the country areas has not yet materialised…increased force levels planned for the end of April should make it difficult for them to achieve a great deal when they do'. These

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[128] Harnden, 'Bandit Country'; Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier*.

[129] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.

[130] By 'rural IRA' I mean units that operated predominately in a rural locality. These include the south Down units operating in Newry, since they covered a predominately rural area. Furthermore, the number of IRA volunteers in smaller towns such as Strabane and Newry were far smaller than those involved Belfast or Derry city. Rural units recruited from a much smaller local population.

[131] See appendix one.

[132] NRA, CAB 130/560, Minutes of a meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 21 March 1972, p.4-5.

passages suggest that leading British Army figures felt that rural IRA activity was not a persistent threat by early 1972, and even if that threat increased, the redeployment of resources from Belfast would frustrate rural IRA efforts.[133] These reports support Tommy McKearney's view that 'the British government and Northern Ireland authorities… decided…to gain control in Belfast and Derry to effectively secure their base in the towns. After that then they could deal with the rural parts'.[134] Later chapters challenge McKearney's view that urban areas remained the focus of British security policy into the 1980s and 1990s, as the threat posed by rural units substantially increased.

George Clarke's recently released account of working for Special Branch on the border in the early 1970s suggests that low-level rural IRA activity was partly a result of infiltration. Clarke mentions acquiring 'three or four [other] good sources' in the South Armagh and South Down IRA between September and December 1971, who provided 'gold dust' intelligence. For instance, he claims that these sources spent their time across the border in Dundalk in hotels, houses and pubs owned by republican sympathisers. He reported their information to his Garda Special Branch contacts. In December 1971, this information led to the arrest of a senior Provisional whom he calls Liam Fegan, and the seizure of ammunition in Dundalk. '[M]y intelligence [sources]', Clarke further states, 'prevented…ambushes at Crossmaglen, Killeen, Newry and Mayobridge'. Whilst admitting that between September and December 1971, there were still 'a dozen bombings, numerous shootings and armed robberies', Clarke ponders '[w]hat would the figures have been without Special Branch input?'.[135]

Unfortunately, no other accounts are currently available to corroborate Clarke's claims. Certainly, Clarke seems to be telling the truth about his role, as another Special Branch officer confirmed to Henry Patterson.[136] In addition, in his study of the South Armagh IRA, Toby Harnden mentioned that they were tracking down alleged spies in the early 1970s. For instance, in June 1971, Harnden notes that IRA volunteers abducted, beat, poured tar over, and shot Cyril McKay. McKay was a farmer in Dundalk, who the South Armagh IRA alleged gave evidence in court against republicans who were brawling at a hotel in Dundalk. McKay's case shows that the IRA was aware of potential spies in the Dundalk area at that time, where many south Down and south Armagh recruits were on-the-run. Clarke's account

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[133] NRA, MOD assessment of current operational situation in Northern Ireland, p.1-5, 21 March 1972.
[134] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 23 May 2012, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[135] Clarke, *Border Crossing,* xi-xii, 62-76, 122-125.
[136] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier,* 33-34.

names republicans that were indeed known to be part of the movement in that area too, including Liam Fagan (although his spells his name as Fegan).[137] Clarke alleges that he set-up Fagan's arrest via intelligence from a source, and that Fagan was from county Louth. Harnden does mention a Liam Fagan (spelt differently) from the same area being involved with the IRA, who later joined Republican Sinn Féin in the 1980s.[138]

It would be mistaken though to suggest that informers and agents contained the IRA's campaign in rural localities by June 1972. In fact, the statistics above show an increase in rural IRA killings of security force members by July 1972. Other reasons better account for the lack of momentum behind the rural IRA's campaign. One explanation is that the Official IRA, the Marxist rivals to the Provisionals, retained significant support in rural villages and towns before that organization's permanent ceasefire in May 1972. It was the OIRA, for example, that shot dead a soldier near Crossmaglen in November 1971, and an RUC officer in Camlough, March 1972.[139] In county Tyrone, Tommy McKearney also recalls that '[b]y mid-1971, while the Provisional IRA had established a basic skeleton organization in the county, they were still a minority in comparison to the Official IRA'.[140] The issues that divided republicans in Belfast, which included the need to defend nationalist areas against the constant loyalist threat, were not initially present in rural areas.[141] Thus there was no incentive to split from the mainstream OIRA at first in the countryside. Another factor limiting the progress of IRA activities in rural areas is explained by MacStiofáin. He said that with 'new units springing up all over the place [this] created tremendous problems for the Republican supply organization'.[142] McKearney agrees that in county Tyrone, despite the massive increase of recruits after internment, 'the leadership's biggest problem in the area was not finding manpower but accessing sufficient arms'.[143]

A number of factors can explain why the IRA's support increased in rural localities by June 1972. MacStiofáin believes that the IRA defending nationalist areas in Belfast convinced many rural republicans to join the Provisionals in solidarity.[144] This explanation seems plausible, since clashes between the IRA and security forces in the cities would have

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[137] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 281-282, 473.
[138] Clarke, *Border Crossing,* 123*; and* Harnden, '*Bandit Country',* 305,308, 310.
[139] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 468-469.
[140] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 85.
[141] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014; Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 23 May 2012, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[142] MacStioáin, *Memoirs,* 170.
[143] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 85.
[144] MacStiofáin, *Memoirs,* 157-159.

appeared on television.[145] And as Northern Ireland is a small country, many rural Catholics had relatives or friends in Belfast or Derry caught-up in either loyalist or British Army actions from 1969, further encouraging anger towards the state. In August 1971, for example, Harry Thornton, a worker from south Armagh, was travelling through Belfast for a job. He was shot dead by the British Army when his backfiring van was thought to have been the sound of an IRA attack. According to Harnden, Thornton's death led to 'scores of young men in South Armagh [applying] to join the IRA'. Anger was visible as a riot occurred in Crossmaglen on the night of Thornton's funeral. Fifteen-year-old Pat Thompson, Thornton's neighbour, was involved. Eventually, Thompson was given a life sentence for killing four soldiers in 1975.[146] In addition, a number of on-the-runs from the cities fled to the border areas and began fighting the security forces by 1972. The most dramatic demonstration of urban fighters operating in rural areas came on 27 January 1972, when two Belfast Crumlin Road jail escapees, Martin Meehan and Anthony 'Dutch' Doherty, took part in a lengthy gun battle against the British Army in south Armagh.[147]

Nonetheless, the main catalysts increasing rural IRA activity were historical and contemporary events in each rural locality involving nationalists and the British state. Danny Morrison suggests that it is 'totally false' to argue that the Harry Thornton killing alone 'trigger[ed] a growth of the IRA in…south Armagh'. Indeed, the South Armagh IRA had already carried out one of the first uses of a car-bomb during the conflict in August 1970, which killed two constables near Crossmaglen.[148] There was also a historical hatred of the British state on the part of some nationalists in counties Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone. When elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly as an abstentionist candidate for mid-Ulster in 1982, Morrison discovered that many elder nationalists were committed republicans:

> [o]ne of the most important factors which a lot of the older people [said made them support the republican movement] was…Michael Collins had actually convinced the majority of the IRA in the North that partition was only temporary [in 1921] … But of course the Unionists when they got into power … repudiated the boundary commission.[149]

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[145] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier*, 19.
[146] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 49-52.
[147] Harnden, '*Bandit Country',* 74-75.
[148] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014; the same point was made by Dr. Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014; Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 467.
[149] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.

Other sources agree that older republicans within border communities were motivated by a sense of betrayal at being forced into a Northern Irish state run by Unionists.[150] Harnden records South Armagh IRA activity back to the Irish War of Independence and notes attacks against British forces even after the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921. The fathers of Eamon Larkin and Peter John Caraher, both prominent Provisionals initially in south Armagh, were part of the IRA units in south Armagh during the War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. One of Caraher's sons was later arrested for IRA activity. Another, Fergal, was killed by British soldiers in 1990. And one of his daughters was elected for Sinn Féin in 1996. Harnden records other examples of the sons, daughters, granddaughters and grandsons of IRA veterans from the 1920s who joined the Provisionals in south Armagh during the Troubles. In fact, the tradition of militant republicanism against British rule in some border areas stretched back as far as the O'Neill rebellion under the Tudors.[151]

South Armagh was not unique in its history of militant republicanism. For example, Tommy McKearney recalls that nationalists in county Tyrone 'had a long tradition of electing IRA personnel from Crumlin Road jail to Westminster, even in the 1950s'.[152] In May 1955, north, east and west Tyrone nationalists elected republican Tom Mitchell, a convicted IRA member who took part in the Omagh barracks raid of 1954 during the IRA's ill-fated Border Campaign, to the Mid-Ulster constituency on an abstentonist basis for Sinn Féin. Other nationalists in south Tyrone also helped elect Phil Clarke, another IRA member captured during the Omagh raid, to the Fermanagh-south Tyrone seat, later won by Bobby Sands.[153] These examples support McKearney's point that there was potentially sizeable support for militant republicanism in county Tyrone prior to the Troubles.[154] The vote for Phil Clarke shows that this was the case in county Fermanagh too.

Yet evidence suggests that discrimination by local Unionist authorities in western rural localities in Northern Ireland, British Army actions against rural nationalists and the end of the Official IRA's campaign in 1972 primarily gave the Provisional IRA's campaign momentum in border areas by 1972. First, unionist discrimination directly affected the lives of many nationalists in Tyrone, Armagh and Fermanagh, as discussed. Whyte states that complaints and actual cases of discrimination in the allocation of state housing, employment

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[150] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier,* 1-11, 15.
[151] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 44-45, 93-154.
[152] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 18 April 2011, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[153] Robert W White, *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary* (Indiana, 2006), 50.
[154] Taylor, *Provos,* 37-40.

and electoral boundaries were far more 'prominent' west of the River Bann. As the Catholic-nationalist population either matched or at times exceeded the unionist-Protestant population there, local unionists had to discriminate to a greater extent to maintain their hold on local authorities. In Dungannon in county Tyrone, for instance, a 53 per cent Catholic voting majority returned only seven councillors, compared to fourteen Protestant-unionist councillors.[155] For elections to Fermanagh county council, Taylor records that there was an even split between the two communities, but that the unionists always won and ensured that two-thirds of the public housing built between 1945 and 1969 went to Protestants.[156] In Tyrone, discrimination in the allocation of housing was seen as so unfair that in June 1968, Austin Currie, later a leading SDLP figure, began squatting in a house in Caledon. This was in reaction to a nineteen-year-old Protestant woman, Emily Beattie, secretary to the local Unionist councillor's solicitor, being provided public housing by the local administration over larger Catholic families. McKearney records that this incident, where Currie and the Catholic families were forcibly removed from squatting, 'provoked a 3,000 strong protest [civil rights] march from Coalisland to Dungannon in county Tyrone'.[157] Such discrimination created anger from which the IRA could feed on in rural areas.

Greater IRA activity in rural areas also arose after particular British Army actions, which reignited dormant tensions between rural nationalists and the British state. In order to prevent IRA members from coming across the border, especially after internment when many Provisionals went on-the-run to southern Ireland, the British Army began blocking and cratering particular cross-border roads, and blowing-up cross-border bridges from October 1971.[158] In hindsight, *Operation Banner* admits that closing border roads was 'generally unpopular with the local population, many of whom had legitimate farming or other business interests and family links on both sides of the Border'. The Army also conceded that locals would remove some roadblocks themselves.[159] Obstructing cross-border trade created support and recruitment for the IRA in rural areas, especially for the poorer rural tradesmen and farmers whose livelihoods relied on such trade.[160] Furthermore, many nationalists living on the border looked to the Republic for their recreational activities, since they often felt greater

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[155] Whyte, 'discrimination'.
[156] Taylor, *Provos,* 31.
[157] Taylor estimates the crowd at 2,500. McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 20-21; Taylor, *Provos,* 37-40.
[158] Moloney, *Secret History,* 102-103.
[159] *Operation Banner ,* 413.
[160] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 99; Catherine Nash, Bryonie Reid and Brian Graham, *Partitioned Lives: The Irish Borderlands* (Farnham, 2013), 12-13, 65-69, 88-94, 101.

affinity with the cultural pursuits of Irish Republic citizens. They might frequently visit family members south of the border too. Derry nationalists often went to Donegal; Tyrone nationalists frequently travelled to Monaghan; south Armagh and Down nationalists visited Dundalk. Unsurprisingly, blocking access to the Irish Republic increased acceptance of the IRA, if not actual support for that organization. On the other side of the border, British Army obstructions caused anger for similar reasons for the people of Dundalk, Monaghan and Donegal. This explains why these particular areas allowed the Provisionals relative freedom of movement over the border during the early part of the conflict.[161]

Other British Army aggressive and indiscriminate actions provided further recruits to the rural IRA. We have already mentioned the case of Thornton from south Armagh. In the town of Strabane, where the British Army noticed an increase in IRA violence by March 1972,[162] British forces had already caused controversy. On 18 August 1971, a 28 year-old man, Eamonn McDavitt, a 'deaf mute', was shot dead by the British Army during a riot in the town. The Irish government later used the McDavitt case against the British government during a European Court of Human Rights case in the 1970s. The Irish Government argued that the British Army had shot 'a wholly innocent person' without being disciplined afterwards. MacStiofáin writes that the McDavitt killing fuelled anti-British sentiment in the area, and provided an upsurge in republican support. This is an entirely plausible explanation accounting for the increased violence in Strabane by 1972.[163] The early 1970s saw internment and screening introduced to rural localities too.[164] Both measures would have created local grievances towards the British forces, for similar reasons as discussed for nationalists in Belfast and Derry city. McKearney, for example, recalls that internment provided a boost to the Tyrone IRA, whose numbers soared after it was introduced in August 1971.[165] With the Official IRA ending its campaign in May 1972 too, it was the Provisionals in rural areas who could feed-off short and long-term resentment building towards the state. The historical hatred felt by many border nationalists towards partition, and the anger felt towards British Army and Unionist government actions made it increasingly unlikely that many rural nationalists would work against the IRA as informers or agents by June 1972. Unlike the situation in Belfast, where we will see the situation somewhat improve for the security forces after 1972, the IRA's campaign became more destructive in rural areas. Later, there will be a

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[161] Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 6-129.
[162] NRA, FCO 87/2, MOD assessment of current operational situation in Northern Ireland, 21 March 1972, p.3.
[163] See reference 108 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* MacStiofáin, *Memoirs,* 193-194.
[164] Clarke, *Border,* 11-12.
[165] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 85.

more in-depth analysis of the reasons why informers and agents had minimal impact on various rural units.

Talks from a position of IRA military strength: June and July 1972

So far, this chapter has argued that spies and British forces had not created an 'acceptable level' of IRA violence by June 1972. This leaves one important question to consider: why did the IRA call a ceasefire and enter negotiations with the British state between 26 June and 9 July 1972? There was some pressure from fellow nationalists emerging against a continuing IRA campaign. Indeed, public outrage had partly forced the OIRA into a permanent ceasefire on 29 May 1972, following their killing of a local Catholic British soldier on leave, in Derry city.[166] And MacStiofáin admits that: '[b]y the end of May…the demands and calls for peace where mounting more loudly'.[167] In addition, the SDLP had effectively 'vetoed' the IRA's political plans for the nationalist community in mid-1971. The Provisionals had called for a federal Ireland with four federal parliaments, based on the four traditional counties of Ireland. In Ulster, the idea of leading Provisionals, including Ruairi Ó Bradaigh and Dáithí Ó Conaill, was to create a nine-county parliament based on the ancient province of Ulster. They felt that this set-up would redress the sectarian imbalance of the six-county Northern Ireland state. But when republicans held a convention in Monaghan to discuss forming the nine-county Ulster parliament in August 1971, unsurprisingly, no unionists attended. Far more damaging was the fact that the SDLP rejected this idea, and, instead, the SDLP convened the Northern people's assembly in Armagh, October 1971. Whilst not representing a serious effort to create a peace settlement, the Armagh assembly was on a six-county basis and discounted non-elected representatives. In other words, it challenged and rejected the Provisionals' plans for the nationalist community.[168] Neither were the Irish government interested in working with the Provisionals by 1972 because of IRA activity.

Having said that, it is important *not* to overplay the impact of limited public outrage and political pressure on the IRA's decision to call a ceasefire in June 1972. On the contrary, both MacStiofáin and Peter Taylor describe how two senior republicans from Derry suggested negotiations, since they believed that it was best to do this from a position of military strength. MacStiofáin agreed that: '[I]t was a good moment from the military

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[166] Taylor, *Provos,* 136.
[167] MacStiofáin, *Memoirs,* 257-259.
[168] Marc Mulholland, 'Irish Republican Politics and Violence before the Peace Process, 1968–1994', in *European Review of History*, 14:3, (2007) 397-421, at 402-403; for more on Sinn Féin's federalist plans in the early 1970s, see White, *Ó Brádaigh,* 165-185.

standpoint…we were not only strong but…held the initiative'.[169] It is perhaps an exaggeration to say that the political initiative was entirely in the hands of the Provisionals, since Éire Nua had been rejected by other nationalists. Nevertheless, the fact that the SDLP convinced the British government to talk to republicans from June 1972, shows that the SDLP accepted republicans had considerable support. The SDLP saw that mounting IRA violence was, at the very least, preventing attempts to produce a centre-ground settlement.

In addition, the IRA would have been aware that the Fianna Fáil-led Irish government and elements of the SDLP proposed radical solutions to the Troubles in 1972. The SDLP's *Towards a New Ireland* document, for instance, proposed that Britain declared Irish unity as the way forward, and in the meantime joint sovereignty of the north should arise between the Irish Republic and Britain.[170] Jack Lynch's Irish government was constantly pressing the British government to declare that they wanted Irish unity.[171] So similar were constitutional nationalists objectives to the IRA's at this time, that a report sent to Prime Minister Heath about the meeting with the republican delegation in London on 7 July 1972, pointed out that the IRA demand for all-Ireland self-determination: 'was very close to the position of Mr Lynch'.[172] Since the Irish government and the SDLP had failed to come up with any popular alternatives for a political settlement by June 1972, as witnessed by the fact that Provisional violence was increasing, it seems that a significant part of the political 'initiative' did lie with the Provisionals.

On the question of whether the killing of innocent civilians harmed the Provisionals' support, it is difficult to correlate this with the decision to call a ceasefire in June 1972. As the IRA broke that ceasefire with car bombs in the centre of Belfast during shopping hours, civilian casualties clearly did not cause the organization to rethink its strategies at this time. The organization still had visible support within working-class nationalist communities because of the IRA's defensive duties, such as in Free Derry. And with the ban on Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland still being in place in 1972, the Provisionals could not see the harmful effect that the killing of innocent civilians had on their support levels either, making them less inclined to react.

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[169] MacStiofain, *Memoirs,* 260-261; Taylor, *Provos,* 136.
[170] Kerr, *Destructors,* 48-49.
[171] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 23-46.
[172] NRA, Prem 15/1010, Secret and personal message to the Prime Minister, 7 July 1972, p.2-3.

Ultimately, the IRA's decision to call a ceasefire in June 1972 was based on their willingness to reach a negotiated settlement, albeit largely on their terms. As early as July 1971, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, one of the IRA's seven-man Army Council, told the *Belfast Telegraph*: 'I cannot imagine the IRA driving the British Army into the sea…but I think it would be possible to force the British authorities to the conference table'.[173] Republican leaders were fighting to get the British government into talks, and they had made plans by September 1971 for their top-line objectives for future negotiations. Their 'Five Point Peace Plan' contained these points: a ceasefire by the British forces; the abolition of Stormont; free elections for a nine-county Ulster parliament; a new federal structure for Ireland; the release of detainees; and compensation for those injured by the British Army.[174] The idea of a federal Ireland was prominent here again. It could be labelled as naïve primarily because it overlooked that unionists were likely to reject joining with the other three counties of the ancient province of Ulster. But Éire Nua did at least consider the role of unionists in a new Ireland. Mulholland is right to argue that it was grounded in a 'hard political logic' that could claim to rival the legitimacy of the six-county state.[175] Indeed, in his presidential address to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in October 1971, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh stressed that this new federal system would ensure that unionists would not be swamped by Irish nationalism, since unionism would still have a majority in the nine-county parliament, but the increased nationalist minority opposition would ensure that there was no more discrimination.[176] It is evident that the Provisional leadership had plans they wanted to discuss.

Signs that the IRA was willing to halt its campaign and to negotiate a political settlement are evident from mid-1971. A few examples are: the September 1971 peace plan; the call for negotiations by volunteer Frank Morris in February 1972; the March 1972 ceasefire and meeting with Labour leader Harold Wilson;[177] and the Free Derry press conference led by leading Provisionals Martin McGuinness, Dáithí Ó Conaill, Séan MacStiofáin and Séamus Twomey on 13 June 1972. The Provisionals were not purely a militaristic organization in this period, and believed that they had a right to present their case at the peace conference table. They did not see their lack of an electoral mandate as diminishing the reality of their support levels on the streets. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh told a BBC reporter in March 1972 that electoral mandates were meaningless at the time, since:

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[173] White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 169.
[174] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 108; MacStiofáin, *Memoirs,* 209-210.
[175] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 402-404.
[176] White, *Ó Brádaigh,* 173-174.
[177] Anderson, *Cahill,* 247-250.

it's over three years since there has been an election … the Republican Movement now enjoys massive support from the population … to be realistic, it would be necessary…to make…talks meaningful…to have representatives of the Republican movement at the conference table.[178]

Frequent IRA attacks, the no-go areas and the fact that the SDLP suggested that the government should talk with the IRA in June 1972, all highlight that while perhaps not having 'massive support', the Provisionals had quite considerable backing in working-class nationalist areas. As we saw earlier, even Whitelaw agreed that IRA support levels made them vital to bring into political conversations by mid-June 1972. The Provisionals felt that they had clear support on the streets, and that this would gain substantial concessions from the British Government, especially as the British Army had not contained the violence in Belfast and Derry city. Danny Morrison, for instance, saw the 1972 ceasefire as:

an occasion where both sides were equal … [it was] the first time since 1921 that the British government was directly engaging with the republican movement. There was a feeling that maybe this was going to be the end of the conflict.[179]

The upsurge in IRA violence, and the sense of despondency evident within British government documents discussed supports Morrison's view that 'both sides were equal' by June 1972. The IRA entered the negotiations with evident support from the nationalist community, and a deadly military campaign in Derry city and Belfast, which was spreading to the rural areas. In addition, they had the bargaining tool of the no-go areas. The IRA entered the June to July 1972 ceasefire from a position of military strength.

The general consensus in the academic and journalistic literature about the 7 July 1972 talks is that the IRA made ridiculous demands for immediate British withdrawal. Following that line of argument, the blame for the ceasefire collapsing lies purely with the IRA, whose leaders were completely removed from reality in a clandestine organization, believing that one last push would drive the British government out.[180] Parts of the primary literature present a similar view. Maria McGuire, who worked with leading republicans such as the Ó'Brádaighs in the Irish Republic at the time, suggests that MacStiofáin and many

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[178] NRA, FCO 87/2, Interview with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, 17 March 1972, p.1-12.
[179] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[180] Cf. MLR Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?: The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London, 1995), 104-116; Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 39-41.

Belfast volunteers sought only the full acceptance of republican demands.[181] Whitelaw certainly felt that MacStiofáin made 'absurd ultimatums' during the 7 July meeting.[182]

Many secondary accounts also argue that the confrontation at Lenadoon in west Belfast on the weekend following the 7 July talks that led to the collapse of the ceasefire was staged by the IRA. Taylor, who was reporting in Lenadoon that day, remembers how a crisis developed because Catholic-nationalist families that were intimidated out of the loyalist Rathcoole estate attempted to move into vacant houses near the interface between loyalist and republican communities in Lenadoon avenue. The loyalist Ulster Defence Association (UDA) threatened mayhem if nationalists moved so close to a loyalist area. Taylor implies that senior IRA figures in Belfast, such as Twomey, saw a confrontation at Lenadoon as the perfect opportunity to break the ceasefire. Taylor admits that the British Army did ram the lorry carrying nationalist families' possessions, but feels that the IRA was already in place for a confrontation anyway.[183] This argument is supported by Brendan Hughes who says that he and other IRA volunteers were ready to fire at Lenadoon that day, as instructed by Twomey.[184]

A recent innovative article by Andrew Mumford, however, has justifiably argued that the 1972 truce collapsed partly because the British government offered '[n]o coherent pathways out of violence [to the IRA]'.[185] Indeed, at that time, Sinn Féin was a proscribed organization in the north.[186] Neither Whitelaw nor Wilson proposed to de-proscribe Sinn Féin during talks in 1972, which might have at least indicated a political route out of the conflict for republicans. Wilson had even told republicans in March 1972 that the SDLP should speak for them at the conference table.[187] Their views overlooked the fact that some republicans were keen to play a more politically active role. Both former SDLP member Paddy Devlin, and Maria McGuire, a former Provisional, have written about their conversations with Dáithí Ó Conaill, an IRA Army Council member and leading republican. They present a man who

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[181] Maria McGuire, *To Take Arms: A Year in the Provisional IRA* (London, 1973) 33, 123-128, 132-144, 151-158.
[182] Whitelaw, *Memoirs*, 100.
[183] Taylor, *Brits,* 120-124; see similar view in Whitelaw, *Memoirs,* 100.
[184] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 100-101.
[185] Andrew Mumford, 'Covert Peacemaking: Clandestine Negotiations and Backchannels with the Provisional IRA during the Early 'Troubles', 1972–76', in *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:4, (2011), 633-648, at 637-638.
[186] Anderson, *Cahill,* 249-250.
[187] NRA, PREM 15/1022, Letter from John Peck (British Embassy in Dublin) to W K K White (Republic of Ireland department), 16 March 1972, p.1-3.

was eager to politicise the movement and engage in talks.[188] Ó Conaill co-authored the Éire Nua plans, alongside the Ó'Brádaigh brothers, highlighting their political interests and willingness to consider unionists in a united Ireland.[189] British officials also felt Ó Conaill would compromise. He was selected alongside Gerry Adams to speak with government intermediaries Philip Woodfield of the Northern Ireland Office, and Frank Steele of MI6, in Donegal on 20 June 1972, before the June ceasefire was announced. Woodfield and Steele were impressed that both men made no hard-line demands during the meeting, and were interested in talking to the UDA if the British could arrange meetings. In a summary, Woodfield concluded: 'these two [O'Connell and Adams]…genuinely want a cease-fire and a permanent end to violence'.[190] As the British government partly agreed to talk to the Provisionals based on good vibes from this meeting, they must have recognized that elements within the Provisionals were willing to change course. And yet no political alternatives were outlined during the London talks.

The claim that many republicans wanted the ceasefire to end is questionable in light of recent evidence too. Brendan Hughes does say that Twomey and Ivor Bell, two of those who attended the talks on 7 July in London, wanted the ceasefire broken, but added that he did not 'think Gerry [Adams] wanted the ceasefire broken'.[191] This claim could be true, since Steele and Woodfield felt that Adams 'genuinely' wanted 'a permanent end to violence'.[192] Joe Cahill, another senior Belfast republican at that time, also mentions feeling that failure to politicise the republican cause was a missed opportunity to get a strong electoral mandate, and he says that he saw no purely military solution at that time. McGuire has stated that she also felt Cahill was a moderate.[193] There is even evidence that MacStiofáin, who the British had pleaded with Ó Conaill not to bring to the July 7 talks,[194] felt that the meeting was a success, and the start of substantial political negotiations that would lead to a conference on the future of Ireland.[195] The fact that MacStiofáin discussed with Whitelaw when the next meeting would be shows a willingness to continue negotiations.[196] Even Whitelaw recognised that some republicans wanted further negotiations. On 10 July, once the Truce was broken, he

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[188] McGuire, *To Take Arms,* 28-30, 70-75, 126, 132-144; Devlin, *Straight Left,* 176-179,
[189] White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 165-174.
[190] NRA, Prem 15/1009, Note of a meeting with representatives of the Provisional IRA, 21 June 1972, p.1-6.
[191] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 99-101.
[192] NRA, Prem 15/1009, Note of a meeting with representatives of the Provisional IRA, 21 June 1972, p.1-6.
[193] Anderson, *Cahill,* 241-248; McGuire, *To Take Arms,* 128.
[194] NRA, Prem 15/1009, Note of a meeting with representatives of the Provisional IRA, 21 June 1972, p.1-6.
[195] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence' ,403-404; Moloney, *Secret History,* 114.
[196] NRA, CJ 4/1456, IRA truce 26 June to 10 July 1972, p.7-11.

told the cabinet that the ceasefire might be renewed by those Provisionals who were more disposed towards negotiations.[197]

The British government was extremely naïve to believe that the Provisional delegation would simply turn up in London and make major compromises, when considering the republican movement's strengths by July 1972. These strengths included increasing military activity across Northern Ireland, the existence of no-go areas, and that the SDLP wanted the British government to talk to the IRA. Indeed, Ó Dochartaigh points out that it 'is simply bad negotiating practice to let it be known how much you are willing to concede'.[198] The IRA would have known that if they had compromised straight away, the British government would have been far more reluctant to shift ground themselves. It was probably not so much that various Provisional leaders would not compromise; even if that were true of some republicans, such as Seamus Twomey. It was more likely that various republican leaders were (sensibly in terms of negotiating technique) biding their time until future meetings for some compromises that might be needed.

The incidents at Lenadoon provided an excuse for the British state to get out of trying to compromise with the Provisionals, whom the government realised during the 7 July talks were buoyant. This is implicit in Whitelaw's statement that, if he had to meet the Provisionals again, it was going to be very difficult. The Provisionals wanted him to produce a statement by the 14 July meeting (the next scheduled) that could appease republican demands for a declaration of intent for British withdrawal. But the British government did not want to enrage unionists.[199] With UDA pressure against the ceasefire building, Lenadoon presented the British government with the perfect reason to ensure that they still were only fighting a single-front campaign.[200] Despite publicly blaming the IRA for the incidents at Lenadoon, Whitelaw admitted to the Cabinet in private that 'the heaviest responsibility for the resumption of violence rested with the Ulster Defence Association, who had never welcomed the [IRA] 'ceasefire''.[201]

Baring in mind that the Provisionals had emerged in Belfast initially to defend working-class nationalist areas from loyalist attacks, it was unlikely that they could ignore a

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[197] NRA, CAB 130/560, Meeting at 10 Downing Street, 10 July 1972, p.1-4; NRA, CJ 4/1456, IRA truce 26 June to 10 July 1972, p.11-12.
[198] Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation', 2.
[199] NRA, Prem 15/1010, Secret and personal message to the Prime Minister, 7 July 1972, p.1-4; Whitelaw, *Memoirs,* 101.
[200] Moloney, *Voices,* 98.
[201] NRA, CAB 130/560, Meeting at 10 Downing Street, 10 July 1972, p.1-4.

situation where the British Army seemed unwilling to stop loyalist intimidation of nationalist refugees. Yet some leading Provisionals had tried to save the ceasefire. MacStiofáin mentions that Ó Conaill phoned a 'hot line' to Frank Steele at Laneside during the Lenadoon incident to try to save the ceasefire.[202] A report in the government archives mentions that Ó Conaill attempted to contact Whitelaw as the situation deteriorated too. But Whitelaw did not respond. The report also mentions that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive had agreed before the riots to allow the Catholic families from Rathcoole to move into Lenadoon. And the GOC and the 39 Brigade commander in Belfast had met at Lisburn on 8 July as the disturbances in Lenadoon begun, and agreed that they should target the IRA before a sectarian battle between commenced, in which the Army might get caught in the middle. It is true that the Army did mediate between the UDA and Seamus Loughran of the Provisionals on 9 July, but this ended once Catholics tried to cross an agreed peace-line to move into the area.[203] Alongside this evidence, Frank Steele told Taylor that a section of the Army felt the ceasefire should end as they could bring the IRA to its knees. Steele further admitted that Ó Conaill and another republican did phone him, but that the British state refused to back-down.[204] Thus the evidence suggests that the Lenadoon incident was allowed to get out of hand by the British government in order to end talks with the IRA, whom the British had mistakenly believed would make substantial concessions.

It has to be said, however, that the Provisionals did not help their own attempts to extract concessions during the 7 July talks. Joe Cahill speaks of a missed opportunity for republicans in the early 1970s period, particularly after the outpouring of nationalist anger following Bloody Sunday. Cahill thought that:

> if we had been in a strong position politically, then we could have taken over the country … I have never seen such a wave of revulsion against British rule in Ireland … if we had had political clout…we could have done fantastic things. If we had had a couple of TDs [Dáil members] at that stage and a stronger Sinn Féin…we could have seized the opportunity.[205]

It could be argued that Cahill is attempting to heap criticism on the previous Provisional leadership, since he later sided with the Adams-McGuinness leadership that promoted politicisation in the 1980s. But Cahill makes a valid point for the period up to July 1972. Regardless of the IRA's military strength, the British government could always ignore the

[202] MacStiofáin, *Memoirs,* 286-289.
[203] CJ 4/1456, IRA truce 26 June to 10 July 1972, p.11-13.
[204] Steele in Taylor, *Provos,* 144-147.
[205] Anderson, *Cahill,* 241-242.

IRA's demands whilst republicans lacked a substantial political mandate. The British were always inclined to do this throughout the conflict because they were determined not to forgo their commitment to uphold the majority-consent principle in Northern Ireland, in order to avert a loyalist backlash and a two-front war.[206] If republicans wanted to really pressurise the British position, a republican political mandate was essential. The increase in IRA violence, and signs of solidarity with republicans in southern Ireland by 1972, such as the burning of the British embassy after Bloody Sunday, demonstrates that there was support for the movement at that time. This support could have been quite substantial and significant politically. Whilst it is true that Sinn Féin were banned in the North, the organization could have asked before the ceasefire for the de-proscription of Sinn Féin. Attempts to form some understanding with the Irish government and the SDLP could also have reaped political rewards. It has been seen that both wanted some form of united Ireland to end the conflict. A unity of purpose between nationalists and republicans, such as agreeing to get the British to persuade for unity in talks, as was later attempted in the 1990s, could have produced political concessions from the British government in the early 1970s.

Conclusion

British government policy between 1970 and March 1972 focused on supporting Stormont to introduce gradual political and socio-economic reforms to appease unionists and non-violent nationalists, and, more importantly, to reduce or even end IRA violence. Two reasons explain why the British government decided to work with Stormont. First, the British government was keen to not spark a unionist revolt that might lead to a disastrous civil war and tarnish Britain's image; second, Northern Irish votes had very little impact on Westminster politics. Yet the British government's aim of reconciling non-violent Irish nationalism with the unionist regime was completely undermined by allowing Stormont to slowdown the pace of reforms and influence security policy. This dragged the British Army into conflict with the nationalist population, especially as the British Army frequently used indiscriminate population control techniques previously used across the empire. As nationalist anger increased, the SDLP pulled out of Stormont and IRA activities increased. Escalating violence eventually influenced the British government's decision to prorogue Stormont and assume direct rule. By March 1972, in order to reduce IRA violence, Whitelaw decided to follow the advice of the SDLP to reduce Army activity. But IRA activity continued. Eventually both the

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[206] Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation', 4, 16.

SDLP and Whitelaw realised that the IRA had to be included in negotiations if peace was to arise in Northern Ireland.

Informers and agents had minimal impact on the IRA's military capacity and decision to call the June 1972 ceasefire. Various reasons explain why infiltration was limited in city and rural areas where the IRA operated by June 1972. In urban areas, IRA support increased following: republicans' role in defending nationalist areas from loyalist attacks; indiscriminate British Army actions inflaming local nationalists; the lack of political and socio-economic reform by Stormont; and the IRA's ability to hide behind barricades, particularly in Free Derry. Other unique factors to rural areas restricting the intelligence flow to the security forces included a long-term sense of injustice on the part of many nationalists at being forced into a unionist-dominated Northern Ireland state in the 1920s. The failure to coordinate British military and Special Branch intelligence on a consistent basis between 1970 and 1972 also made infiltrating and containing the IRA more difficult.

The chapter concluded by arguing that the IRA called a truce in June to July 1972 primarily because it was keen to negotiate from a position of military strength, but, equally, because many of its leaders recognized the need for a negotiated political settlement. Very few Provisional leaders envisaged driving the British Army back home at the point of a gun – although that is not to say that some volunteers did not envisage such a scenario.[207] Evidence also suggests that the British government are at least equally at fault for the collapse of the 1972 ceasefire.[208] The British government never outlined for the Provisionals the boundaries of a political settlement. Neither did they try to politicise the Provisionals by de-proscribing Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland during that period. Whitelaw also provided no concessions to the IRA if they agreed to end their campaign during the 7 July meeting. This chapter has also suggested that the Lenadoon housing estate incident was utilised by the British government – and some hard-line republicans - to remove itself from the difficult situation of further talks and a potential two-front war against republicans and loyalists.

At the same time, the Provisional movement had their part to play in their inability to create a settlement with the British during the June and July ceasefire. In spite of their sizeable support levels in working-class nationalist areas, as symbolized by the no-go areas, they had no political mandate from which to encourage the British government, the SDLP or

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[207] See Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 84-85.
[208] Mumford, 'Covert Peacemaking', 637-638.

the Irish government to provide concessions towards the republican position.[209] The IRA also would not engage in talks and a possible agreement on nationalist principles with the SDLP and the Fianna Fáil-led Irish government in 1972, both of whom were urging the British government towards Irish unification. The IRA had missed an opportunity by not obtaining a political mandate to influence a settlement towards fulfilling some of their objectives by July 1972.

By June 1972, informers and agents had little impact on the IRA. The security forces and intelligence services were in some disarray, and were losing control in Northern Ireland. And yet by the end of the ceasefire in July 1972, the IRA had nothing to show for their military advantage. By 1975, this military advantage had been eroded, partly because of the increasing flow of information to British intelligence in Belfast.

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[209] Anderson, *Cahill,* 241-242.

<u>Chapter two: Informers and agents, the IRA, and British counter-insurgency strategy, July 1972 to December 1975</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

Chapter two begins by examining British policy towards the IRA between July 1972 and December 1975. Current secondary literature is in agreement that British policy focused on creating a political settlement with the constitutional nationalists and unionists, whilst trying to reduce the IRA's campaign to an 'acceptable level' between August 1972 and April 1974.[1] In contrast, this chapter engages in the continuing debate surrounding British policy after the collapse of the power-sharing executive in May 1974, and during the IRA's ceasefire in 1975. After consulting papers by the British government, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, a senior republican negotiator, and Brendan Duddy, the main republican intermediary with the British government in 1975,[2] this chapter argues that Merlyn Rees, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State, and Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, envisaged loyalists and republicans agreeing to an independent Northern Ireland.[3] A constant feature of British policy between July 1972 and December 1975 was the aim of reaching an 'acceptable level' of IRA violence by reducing their activities through covert and military means. Under William Whitelaw, the British government sought to damage the IRA to such an extent so that it could not disrupt the new power-sharing executive.[4] Under Rees, a reduction in IRA activities was seen as a prerequisite to getting republicans to accept a political compromise.[5]

The second section presents a number of cases of alleged and actual spies for the various geographical areas where the IRA operated. Whilst the Belfast Brigade faced some operational difficulties because of infiltration, I detail various explanations as to why the Derry city IRA, rural republican units and cells operating in England were not damaged to any considerable extent by 1975. Chapter two therefore concludes by arguing that a majority of IRA leaders agreed to ceasefire in late 1974 primarily because they felt that the British were seriously contemplating political withdrawal.

<u>From 'defeating' to talking to the IRA part II: July 1972 to December 1975</u>

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[1] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 71-73, 96-98; Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 43-45.
[2] For more information on Brendan Duddy see Peter Taylor, *Talking to Terrorists: Face to Face with the Enemy* (London, 2011), xxv-47.
[3] See a similar view in Kerr, *Destructors,* 13-15, 249-326.
[4] Whitelaw, *Memoirs,* 100-110.
[5] Implicit in McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 138-139.

In the short-term, Bloody Friday altered the British government's approach to dealing with the IRA. On 21 July 1972, the IRA attempted to increase the intensity of its campaign to alter British policy by detonating numerous car bombs in Belfast city centre. So many bombs were planted that it was too difficult for the security forces to evacuate each area between each bomb warning.[6] Nine people died, primarily innocent civilians, and many others were injured, with devastating scenes appearing on national television.[7] Bloody Friday was a propaganda disaster for the IRA and ushered in a swift British security response. Thereafter, IRA barricades preventing the security forces entering particular areas in Belfast and Derry city were removed during *Operation Motorman*.[8]

Chapter one demonstrated that Whitelaw's disillusionment with the 7 July talks predisposed him to returning to the policy of trying to reduce IRA violence to an 'acceptable level' anyway. Whitelaw saw Bloody Friday as the perfect opportunity to decisively break from further dialogue with the Provisionals and to end the IRA no-go areas. For Whitelaw, the IRA had had its chance. 'I would never again consider', he writes, 'any such meeting with the IRA leaders'.[9] He was true to his word. Instead, he wanted to work only with constitutional nationalists and unionists to produce a political settlement. On 11 September 1972, during a cabinet meeting, Whitelaw suggested: 'we must…make sure that the Irish Republican Army...could not…prevent progress towards a constitutional settlement'.[10] His aim of reducing IRA violence was evident again during a meeting at Downing Street on 9 November 1972. Whitelaw informed the meeting that 'the broad lines of the Government's future strategy [were] to seek increasingly to isolate the extremists from the moderates of both communities'. He hoped that this approach would 'develop the…prospect of a peaceful political settlement' between constitutional nationalists and unionists. 'This strategy', he insisted, 'must be pursued simultaneously on the security and on the political fronts'.[11] Whitelaw's thinking was that by increasing military pressure on the IRA, whilst also creating a 'moderate' nationalist and unionist political agreement, the IRA's campaign could be rendered impotent in terms of its ability to disrupt Northern Irish political affairs.[12]

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[6] Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 104-106.
[7] See reference numbers 487-494 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[8] *Operation Banner,* 106, 303.
[9] Whitelaw, *Memoirs,* 102-103.
[10] NRA, CAB 130/560, Minutes of a meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 11 September 1972, p.4-6.
[11] NRA, CAB 130/560, Minutes of a meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 9 November 1972, p.1.
[12] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 404.

From late 1972 until the Conservatives left office in February 1974, the British government, the Northern Ireland Office and Laneside officials refused to negotiate again with the Provisionals.[13] For instance, in November 1972, MI6's Frank Steele met representatives of Conciliation Ireland, at Laneside. Their representatives had met leading Provisionals in Dublin, and informed Steele that the Provisionals 'wanted a negotiated peace that left them with some honour'. Steele replied: 'neither [Whitelaw] nor his staff would again negotiate with the IRA'. Steele added that it was not 'advantageous' for the British government to talk to the IRA at the time, because Whitelaw was creating a constitutional party alliance.[14] Paddy Harte, a Fine Gael TD in Donegal, faced a similar rejection after approaching British officials in Dublin in July 1973. While a British official told Paddy Harte that '[t]he door was not…screwed shut' to the IRA, the official's other remarks showed that, in reality, it was:

> [i]f the Provisionals really wanted to stop shooting, they only had to bury their arms and go home … We had nothing to offer the Provisionals … the consequences [of talking to the IRA] for Mr Whitelaw's negotiations with Unionists and the SDLP...would be catastrophic.[15]

Once more, British officials sent a negative reply to the Provisionals via potential mediators.

The strongest rebuke was reserved for one-time senior British Army commander and King's College London principal, Sir John Hackett. Hackett had been speaking with Daithí Ó Conaill on the telephone in September 1973, and wanted to meet with Ó Conaill in Donegal. Hackett's perception was that Ó Conaill only sought a 'place at the conference table', and, 'the Provisionals would have to be recognised…if there was to be any genuine settlement in Ireland'. Woodfield warned Hackett that 'there was no conference table of that kind and…there could be no…place at it for the Provisionals', especially as the SDLP and Ulster Unionists were close to accepting new power-sharing proposals.[16] Nonetheless, Hackett continued talking to Ó Conaill and met a Provisional intermediary in Donegal. He sent his report to Whitelaw on 4 October.[17] In reply, Whitelaw firmly instructed Hackett to discontinue the conversations, since it put the government 'in a false position'. 'I hope', Whitelaw stated, 'that both I and my officials have made it absolutely clear to you that Her Majesty's Government will in no circumstances negotiate with the IRA'.[18] Hackett's talks

[13] Craig, 'From Backdoors', 107-108.
[14] NRA, FCO 87/4, Frank Steele telegram to Dublin FCO from UK Rep Belfast, 28 November 1972, p.1-3.
[15] NRA, FCO 87/178, Note from PJC Evans to Mr W K K White, 19 July 1973.
[16] NRA, CJ4 / 319, A note for the record by P J Woodfield, 12 September 1973, p.1-2.
[17] NRA, CJ4/319, Letter from Sir John Hackett to William Whitelaw, 4 October 1973, p.1-6 and annex II.
[18] NRA CJ4/319, Letter from William Whitelaw to Sir John Hackett, 13 October 1973.

demonstrate that not everybody within the British state agreed with excluding the Provisionals from a political settlement. Yet the replies Hackett received shows that he was in a minority that wanted to re-open negotiations.

The decision by the British state to re-open dialogue with the Provisionals was a direct result of the Sunningdale agreement collapsing in 1974.[19] Out of the ashes of Sunningdale emerged Rees and Wilson's idea of resurrecting attempts to draw the IRA into a political settlement. As Tommy McKearney, a former IRA volunteer, argues, a 'dual approach' strategy was born in spring 1974. In the first part of the strategy, the British government permitted their security forces to continue applying military pressure on the IRA, primarily through intelligence-led operations. The aim for the British government – but not necessarily the security forces who saw an opportunity to completely erode the IRA's military capabilities[20] – was to force the IRA to ceasefire. Once a ceasefire was called, British officials would try to convince republicans to 'acquiesce' in a political settlement that would involve some understanding with loyalists in a six-county framework. If the IRA returned to 'war', the British would 'settle back for a long war of attrition at the end of which the IRA would either be annihilated, rendered impotent (and thus irrelevant) or exhausted and…agree to [a power-sharing political compromise on a six-county basis]'.[21]

In terms of increasing intelligence-led operations against the IRA, Taylor recalls British forces aimed to 'cut off the head' of the Provisional leadership in Belfast. The feeling was that once the leaders were removed, the IRA's campaign would falter. Senior IRA members, such as brigade quartermasters, were targeted for 'turning' by British intelligence. These higher-ranked volunteers had access to many weapons and volunteers, and could set-up arrests.[22] *Operation Banner* confirms that an intelligence-led strategy was being pursued in Belfast during these years. The report mentions: 'intelligence operations … [i]n the mid-1970s…targeted…the HQ of the PIRA Belfast Brigade', and claims that this strategy was effective, which will be debated.[23] My emphasis on intelligence-led operations being crucial in these years differs from McKearney's description of British strategy by 1975. He does not mention that informers and agents were used to target the IRA as part of this dual-approach. In addition, McKearney argues that the British tried to get the IRA to 'acquiesce with

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[19] Kerr, *Destructors,* 249-256.
[20] *Operation Banner*, 848.
[21] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 138-139.
[22] Taylor, *Brits,* 149-156; Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 117.
[23] *Operation Banner*, 505.

London's plans for a shared administration in a Northern Ireland firmly embedded within the United Kingdom'.[24] Yet Wilson and Rees were even contemplating an independent Northern Ireland.[25]

There are competing accounts concerning the intentions of British policy towards republicans between June 1974 and early 1976. These can be divided into four groups. First, there are those that believe the British government tricked the IRA into a ceasefire by promising to discuss withdrawal. In the meantime, the ceasefire sapped the IRA's military strength and provided time for the British to introduce new 'criminalisation' security measures.[26] Brendan Hughes certainly felt that the ceasefire was a trick by the British state. He was in Long Kesh at the time, and claims that the IRA leaders told the prisoners 'the British want out'. Hughes was very sceptical, since: '[a]t the same time, right beside us [in Long Kesh internment camp], there was this major prison being built', which later became the Maze prison.[27] For Laurence McKeown, a former republican prisoner: '[i]n hindsight…[the 1975 ceasefire] seems…a deliberate ploy by the British government…to get a ceasefire, get the IRA to become more open and…to gather information on the IRA'.[28] A few British state documents do exhibit signs that the British government had no intention of granting concessions to republicans in 1975. After the IRA called its prolonged cessation on 10 February 1975, for instance, Merlyn Rees advised his colleagues that the government had to: 'promote a ceasefire short of conceding anything of substance … [The IRA] would not find it easy to start a campaign again'. 'Our aim', Rees added, 'should…be to play the Provisionals along'.[29]

In contrast, Bew and Frampton argue that the British wanted a ceasefire, partly because 'Harold Wilson's personal pessimism over the situation [in Northern Ireland] brought a new round of flirtation with the idea of withdrawal'. They add that Wilson's policy advisor Bernard Donoughue and Meryln Rees also considered withdrawal. Nevertheless, Bew and Frampton stress that Wilson's ideas were not 'carefully thought out policy' and that 'British withdrawal at no point became the settled objective'. In fact they note opposition to withdrawal from other parts of the British state, such as the civil service. Bew and Frampton therefore conclude that the British state under Wilson 'was not [a] monolithic entity' and that

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[24] Cf. McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 138-139.
[25] Kerr, *Destructors,* 13-14, 173-321.
[26] For example, see Moloney, *Secret History,* 141-148.
[27] Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 183-196.
[28] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 16 May 2011.
[29] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 18 February 1975, p.1-4.

there was no clear policy being pursued during 1975. In their eyes, some British state personnel sought greater disengagement from Northern Ireland; others sought to 'trick' the IRA into a prolonged ceasefire to weaken the organization.[30]

A third group of historians and commentators contend that there *was* a clear objective to politicise the Provisionals in 1975. Neumann, for instance, argues that Rees was not considering withdrawal because of the turmoil that would be left behind. Instead, he feels that Rees aimed to get 'extremists' to compromise together. Whilst admitting that government policy was not always clearly communicated, Neumann does see a central aim being to politicise the republican movement. Only once republicans refused to politicise did 'the government's motivation in maintaining the ceasefire [shift] towards…buying time for the long-intended reorganization of the military presence'. [31]

By far the most comprehensive evaluation of British policy after Sunningdale is provided by Michael Kerr. His account does not neatly fit into one of the three strands above. Kerr agrees that Rees and Wilson wanted to politicise the Provisionals. Yet Kerr suggests that the aim of politicising republicans and loyalists was designed to initiate 'some form of British withdrawal'. He argues that Wilson and Rees primarily wanted 'a form of compromise that…paved the way for dominion status, or provoked an independence moment that resulted in Northern Ireland leaving the UK'. Essentially, he suggests that the British government's intention was to utilise what Rees termed 'Ulster Nationalism' to see if the loyalist and republican paramilitaries could agree to a semi-or-completely independent Northern Ireland.[32] Indeed, in March 1975, Merlyn Rees noted in his own diary: 'what we need is time…over a period of x years and that the more it unfolds…we will get to something like an independent [Northern Ireland] with links with the South [of Ireland]'.[33] Kerr does concede that parts of the British state were against such a policy, such as the British Army who believed that they could defeat the IRA.[34] Kerr, however, complicates his position by not explicitly stating whether he feels that there was a clear policy being followed by the British state.

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[30] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 48-62.

[31] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 74-92, 95-98; see also Taylor, *Brits,* 166-186.

[32] Kerr, *The Destructors,* 13-14, 173-179, 201-259, 297.

[33] London School of Economics Library Archives, London, Merlyn Rees Papers, Merlyn-Rees/1/7, Transcripts of diary tapes: ceasefire discussions, March 1975.

[34] Kerr, *Destructors,* 284.

The view presented below is different from the above accounts in several ways: there does seem to have been a clear policy of trying to reach a six-county settlement most likely in the form of dominion status or independence; ambiguity was deliberately used to keep republicans and loyalists talking to British intermediaries and to provide time for the government to achieve the maximum possible political withdrawal without provoking civil war; and whilst elements within the British state were unhappy with withdrawal, those directing policy, including Rees, Wilson and Sir Frank Cooper, the Permanent Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, met with little actual resistance.

The British government was certainly using a 'dual approach' strategy to get the IRA into a ceasefire and agreeing to a political compromise. Alongside a ceasefire weakening the Provisionals' military capacity, Rees felt that it provided the opportunity 'to look for the outside chance of reaching some more substantial settlement with the Provisionals'. From Rees's perspective, '[n]o progress can be made without an end to violence. Violence cannot be ended except with the consent of Provisionals'.[35] Thus the British government intended to politicise the Provisionals. This aim motivated Rees's House of Commons speech on 4 April 1974, where he announced the legalization of Sinn Féin and the UVF. Rees claimed:

> there are signs that on both extreme wings there are people who…would now like to find a way back to political activity. It is right to encourage this … counterpart of our action against those who use violence.[36]

His ambition to 'encourage' politicisation of paramilitaries hints that it was part of a dual-strategy to reduce violence. The diary of Duddy and the minutes of the republican movement both note British representatives persistently asking republicans to take part in the Constitutional Convention and to politicise. For instance, during a formal meeting between republican representatives (MacCallion, Ó Brádaigh and McKee) and British representatives on 5 March 1975, the republican transcriber notes:

> British … [say] convention is a sign that [Her Majesty's Government] no longer wants to dictate events in Ireland … Westminster will look at every expression of view <u>whether expressed through the convention or not.</u> It would be a great pity if the Sinn Fein view does not come through … All options remain open.

The republican movement was reluctant to engage in any political initiatives based on a six-county structure, since they wanted at least a nine-county Ulster parliament. Nevertheless:

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[35] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 18 February 1975, p.1-2.
[36] Hansard, Merlyn Rees speech in House of Commons in Northern Ireland debate, vol. 871, 04 April 1974: at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1974/apr/04/northern-ireland-1#S5CV0871P0_19740404_HOC_379, <accessed 10 October 2013>.

Brits replied that [a 32-county convention] was not possible because they rule 6 counties only … The Brits then said that Sinn Fen should attend the convention (6-county) and there advocate an all-Ireland convention. Perhaps an all-Ireland convention could follow after the 6-county convention.[37]

The British were trying to show republicans that they had no problem with their objectives, if pursued politically. In a memorandum on 14 March 1975, Rees expressed his feeling that:

[n]o process of reconciliation can be achieved without the consent and cooperation of extremists … they have the power to frustrate [the Convention]. I am discreetly seeking ways and means of encouraging them to talk together and to…the Convention.[38]

These extracts show that there was an ambition on the part of Rees and Wilson to get republicans involved in politics. At this point in early 1975, before the Provisionals refused to attend, the convention was seen as the easiest way to get the 'extremists of all sides…to talk together'. Rees realized that if paramilitaries did not participate, their violence could 'frustrate' any political initiatives, as he witnessed with the collapse of the executive in May 1974.

The other standout feature of British policy in this period was the willingness by Wilson and Rees to contemplate that the 'extremists' on both sides might agree to a semi-or-completely independent Northern Ireland.[39] At 10 Downing Street on 15 July 1974, Harold Wilson and Merlyn Rees met Jack Lynch, leader of Fianna Fáil. When Lynch pressed Wilson about 'some positive encouragement by the British Government for…Irish unity', Wilson replied: '*that ideal was most likely to come about by agreement between the IRA and Protestant extremists'*.[40] Of course, this is not a statement of policy. Yet it demonstrates that Wilson saw Irish unity as 'the ideal' settlement, as he had formally proposed in 1971.[41] In the meantime, the only way he saw Irish unity happening was by getting 'IRA and Protestant extremists' to find common ground. Rees' diary comments for March 1975 above show that he agreed that this was the best way forward. He also informed the Northern Ireland ministerial committee in February 1975:

[t]he Provisionals will no doubt try to bring us quickly to discuss a declaration of British intent to withdraw. We must…make them realise that this is…an irrelevancy; it

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[37]National University of Ireland Galway Archives (NUIG), Galway, James Hardiman Library, The Ruairí Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 5 March 1975 (underlined in original).

[38] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 14 March 1975, p.3.

[39] Kerr, *The Destructors,* 13-14, 173-179, 201-259, 297.

[40] NRA, FCO 87/342, Record of a meeting between the Prime Minister and Mr Jack Lynch at 10 Downing Street, 15 July 1974, p.2-3 (italics mine).

[41] Hansard, Harold Wilson speech in House of Commons: Northern Ireland debate, 25 November 1971, Vol. 826: at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1971/nov/25/northern-ireland-1#S5CV0826P0_19711125_HOC_436, <accessed 11 October 2013>.

is their Protestant fellow-Irishmen with whom they must come to terms. But if the Provisionals are looking for a face-saving formula, I do not rule out the possibility that we could find a form of words which would…not inflame the Loyalists.[42]

A 'face-saving formula' for the Provisionals about withdrawal that would 'not inflame Loyalists' seems to subtly imply Northern Irish dominion status or independence. Others supported the idea of a form of British withdrawal. In a note to Wilson on 16 January 1976, John Hunt, Secretary to the Cabinet, argued:

we must not face another seven years like those we have been through … [the way forward]…could only be some form of semi-independence accompanied by the maximum safeguards for the minority.[43]

These passages demonstrate the willingness of significant personnel within the British state to consider, at the very least, semi-independence for Northern Ireland as the solution to the Troubles in 1975 and early 1976.

Thus British intermediaries encouraged republicans to think about a political deal with loyalism that could eventually lead to British departure from Northern Irish affairs. In May 1975, for example, British intermediaries told the republicans: 'the Brits feel that both Republicans and Loyalists want a way out of the situation; the Loyalists are not rigid regarding the British connection and there is an opportunity here for [republicans]'.[44] The British at this point believed that greater independence for Northern Ireland was a loyalist aim too. Such an idea probably came from Rees, who spoke of loyalist resistance to power-sharing under Sunningdale as a demonstration of 'Ulster nationalism'.[45] His ideas were not completely groundless. British intermediaries had met the UDA's Glen Barr and Andy Tyrie in June 1974, who were willing to discuss a six-county solution with the Provisionals, and to politicise loyalism.[46] Intriguingly, government documents reveal that Rees and Wilson kept an eye on these conversations. In a letter from Rees to Wilson on 26 September 1974, Rees concluded that whilst currently there was no meetings between loyalists and republicans, the government might 'sponsor some kind of joint meeting' if the opportunity arose.[47] In March 1975, leading UDA members also met in Holland and discussed Ulster independence for the

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[42] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 18 February 1975, p.1-4.
[43] NRA, Prem 16/960, John Hunt note to Prime Minister, 16 January 1976, p.8-9.
[44] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 7 May 1975.
[45] Kerr, *Destructors,* 257.
[46] NRA, FCO 87/342, Possible paramilitary/IRA contacts, 21 June 1974; NRA, FCO 87/342, Note of a meeting between the Minister of State and Mr Glen Barr held in Londonderry, 25 June 1974.
[47] NRA, Prem 16/151, Letter from Merlyn Rees to Harold Wilson, 26 September 1974, p.1-3.

six-county area to try to remove the border from politics in Northern Ireland.[48] With republicans wanting a new nine-county Ulster parliament, Rees and Wilson's idea of potential common ground existing between loyalists and republicans was not completely far-fetched.

Hence British intermediaries kept encouraging the two 'extremes' to talk throughout 1975. On 25 August 1975, the republican minute-taker records: 'Meeting with Loyalists suggested [by British] … it appears to [British] that common aims could be identified'.[49] Again on 22 October, the British are alleged to have enquired with the Provisionals: '[i]n the event of [Her Majesty's Government] giving the [declaration of intent to withdraw] - what accommodation could be reached with the Loyalists by the Republican Movement?'[50] When Duddy replied that Sinn Féin would consider a six-county, independent Northern Ireland under Loyalist rule in the short-term, this sparked intense interest on the British side, right up to the highest levels.[51] In a telegram from Rees to Wilson at the end of November, Rees describes how:

> [w]e discussed at Chequers on 24 October the approach which we had had, through contact [Duddy], from...Sinn Fein. Contact had said that they were ready to contemplate a future Loyalist government in a six-county Ulster … they wanted first from us a private indication of intent to withdraw from Ireland ... We replied through contact on 27 October…expressing interest combined with readiness to talk…but not to give a Declaration of Intent.

This document clearly suggests that Wilson and Rees were contemplating a loyalist-led, six-county Northern Ireland, even if that meant granting Northern Ireland independence. What they would not consider was a British declaration of intent to withdraw, even if given privately. Rees feared that such actions would provoke a 'massive confrontation with the Protestant population in Northern Ireland'. As IRA violence continued, and with the Provisionals insisting on a declaration of intent to withdraw, British interest in further conversations declined. By late November, Rees was confident that the IRA had lost support, declined in its military capabilities, and that its campaign would 'peter out as others have done before it'.[52] Despite the British engaging with the Provisional representatives in talks

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[48] See CAIN, Chronology of the conflict 1975, 27 March 1975: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch75.htm, <accessed 1 July 2015>.
[49] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 25 August 1975.
[50] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Message from Brits, 22 October 1975.
[51] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 27 October 1975.
[52] NRA, Prem 16/958, Merlyn Rees telegram to Harold Wilson, 29 November 1975, p.1-5 (italics mine).

again in February 1976,[53] the prospects of republicans and loyalists reaching an agreement were almost non-existent after an increase in sectarian attacks. The '[c]ontinuation of direct rule' was gradually accepted as the way forward from November 1975.[54]

Nevertheless, the gradual shift in British policy from late 1975 should not detract from the fact that leading elements within the British state had sought to withdraw from Northern Ireland in some form. This accounts for the fact that British representatives gave republicans ambiguous statements about 'structures of disengagement' in talks, but never agreed to a declaration to withdraw. At a formal meeting in early April 1975, for instance, republican representatives asked about a declaration of intent to withdraw. British intermediaries apparently replied:

> a firm public undertaking [of declaration of intent to withdraw] is…absolutely out of the question. This would lead to a Congo-type [civil war] which both Brits and [republicans] wish to avoid ... If on the other hand [the republican movement] helps [Her Majesty's Government] create circumstances out of which the structures of disengagement can naturally grow, the pace quickens immensely … The only way to develop is to get the ground work right. HMG cannot say they are leaving Ireland because the reaction will prevent that happening.[55]

The British government were constantly fearful of provoking a loyalist uprising if they reneged on the principle of consent for the majority in Northern Ireland.[56] Instead, Wilson and others felt that dialogue between loyalists and republicans could investigate whether both sides would accept negotiated independence in 1975. If an agreement occurred, then 'structures of disengagement' could be accepted by the British government since civil war would not occur.

Rees and Wilson aimed to create engagement between the 'extremes'. As Michael Oatley, an MI6 mediator with republicans in early 1975, puts it 'ambiguity' was also deliberate, so that all sides could see the ceasefire as beneficial and continue talking.[57] When Duddy said that the British had a 'something might turn up' approach, he was right.[58] What the British hoped would 'turn up' was a republican and loyalist agreement. All the British government felt they could do was encourage dialogue. It was up to the parties to reach an accord. Sunningdale had taught them this very point. Not everybody agreed with Wilson and

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[53] NRA, Prem 16/960, Meeting With O Brady, McKee and McCallion, 10 February 1976.
[54] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Minutes of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, 11 November 1975, p.2.
[55] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 2 April 1975.
[56] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 27-28.
[57] Oatley in Taylor, *Brits,* 178-179.
[58] NUIG, Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Duddy Diary, 19 July 1975.

Rees's radical ideas. But there was never any significant obstruction from within the government, MI6, the British Army or the Northern Ireland Office.[59] The British state was not monolithic, but the government's agenda in Northern Ireland was primarily driven by Rees, Wilson and Frank Cooper. They held the positions of power from which to directly influence Northern Irish affairs. The intentions of British state policy up to December 1975 are important to consider as they help us reassess why the IRA called a prolonged ceasefire in 1975.

The influence of informers and agents on the IRA between July 1972 to December 1975

Various authors credit the actions of informers and agents with heavily influencing the IRA's decision to call a prolonged ceasefire in 1975. Bew and Frampton, for example, emphasise multi-casual factors encouraging an IRA ceasefire in that year, including the British government's indication to republicans that they might accept constitutional change. Yet they suggest that a primary factor for the ceasefire was that 'the British Army had made important advances in the intelligence war'. 'The result', they feel, 'was that…republicans were under a great deal of pressure – especially in Belfast' by 1975.[60] This dominant view within secondary literature is also present within some of the primary material. Tommy McKearney, for instance, recalls that the IRA leadership called a ceasefire, 'knowing that the Belfast Brigade was in a parlous position'. During our interviews, McKearney added that the IRA leadership also called a cessation because they believed that the British were ready to withdraw.[61] Kieran Conway, who worked for IRA GHQ at the time, expressed a similar view. He was 'strongly in favour of the truce', partly because 'of the reassessment that was taking place in London'. But Conway also believed 'a truce made tactical sense … Belfast, in which we knew the war would be won or lost, was…on its knees'.[62] The British Army also describes the 'massive and sustained' damage they inflicted on the Belfast Brigade by 1975, and even speculate that 'the defeat of the insurgency might have [been possible and] led to the long-term neutralisation of the PIRA, before it became a skilled terrorist organization'.[63] The key themes arising from these sources are: that the intelligence war directly contributed to the IRA's decision to ceasefire by 1975; and that the Belfast IRA spearheaded republican's

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[59] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 48-62.
[60] Cf. Bew *et al., Talking to Terrorists,* 50-54; see similar views in Moloney, *Secret History,* 133-142.
[61] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 138-139; Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011.
[62] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 182.
[63] *Operation Banner,* 505, 838, 848-849.

military campaign, meaning that their decline encouraged republicans to ceasefire.[64] In regards to the latter point, McKearney says that by 1975:

> [t]he Belfast brigade…had suffered quite serious losses. That was quite influential because the Provisional IRA…was made up of 50 percent Belfast and 50 percent the rest … Therefore with the Belfast Brigade damaged, the Provisional IRA also understood itself to be damaged in terms of its capacity.[65]

Our confidence in McKearney's view is increased when we consider he was not a Belfast volunteer, and is unlikely to overestimate the importance of that brigade.

This section argues that while informers and agents did damage the operational capacity of the Belfast IRA in this period, elsewhere the IRA was not restrained by the security forces or spies to any great extent.

Belfast

The graph below displays how deaths of intended IRA targets declined in Belfast from their height in 1972, when the IRA killed 58 intended targets. There was a reduction in 1973 to 24, and to twelve in 1974.
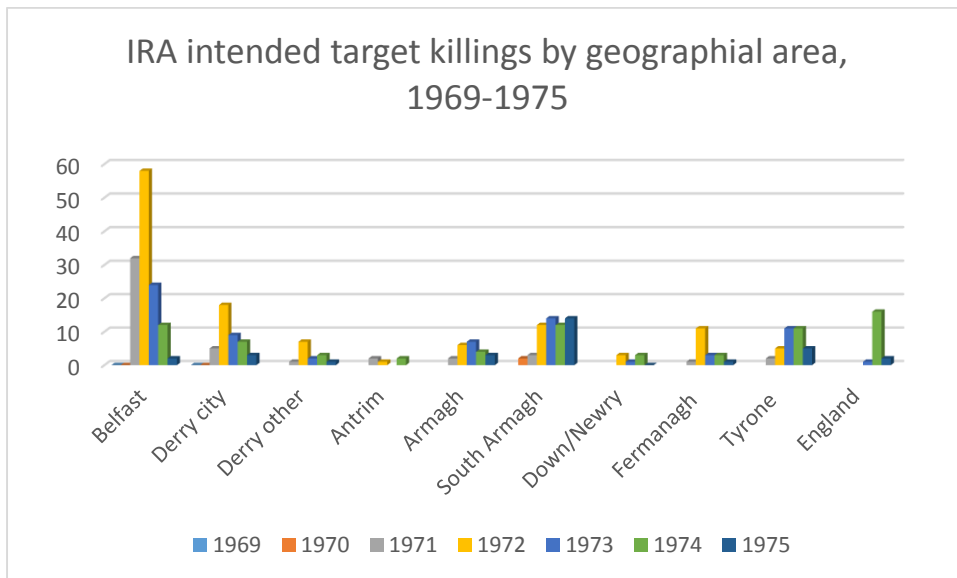

Figure 1.[66]

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[64] Moloney, *Secret History,* 118.
[65] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011.
[66] See appendix one.

We should view these statistics with caution. For a variety of reasons that will become apparent, reduced IRA killings are *not* necessarily evidence of a reduction in IRA activity. Note also that the statistics for 1975 include the period when the ceasefire was being observed in many areas. Nevertheless, other evidence confirms a decrease in IRA activities in Belfast between July 1972 and December 1974. This decline partly resulted from the arrests of leading republicans. In the summer of 1973, Brendan Hughes and other leading Belfast republicans were arrested. Hughes eventually escaped from Long Kesh, but was arrested again in mid-1974.[67] Bradley, a north Belfast IRA volunteer, remembers significant damage also being inflicted on the Belfast IRA's Third Battalion. He notes two G company leaders being arrested by autumn 1972. Later, in January 1974, Bradley was captured and interned.[68] Hughes also remembers Bradley's Third Battalion being almost 'wiped out' by arrests in 1973.[69] The British Army certainly felt that the Belfast IRA's campaign was being significantly eroded by arrests: '[i]n March and April 1974 a total of 106 PIRA officers were arrested, including three successive OCs [Operation Commanders] of the Belfast Brigade. This was a major factor in the defeat of the 1974 summer bombing campaign'. They added: '[a]t one stage the active tour of duty of a PIRA officer from appointment to arrest was about four weeks'.[70]

There is no doubt that informers and agents contributed to the gradual demise of the Belfast Brigade by 1975. One sign of significant infiltration there came in October 1972. The IRA attacked the four-square laundry service in Belfast, which was detailed in the previous chapter. According to Cursey, the former MRF operative, these intelligence operations '[were] fully instrumental in the finding of hoards…of weapons and explosives'.[71] His view cannot be verified; although as the covert laundry operation continued for many months, British intelligence obviously saw its value. As mentioned in chapter one, informers aided the laundry operation. Conversely, they also led to its exposure.[72] Various accounts claim that Seamus Wright 'turned' during interrogation at Palace Barracks in early 1972. Wright is said by Hughes and others to have asked to return from England to Belfast without the threat of execution. Hughes argues that the IRA agreed, provided Wright revealed everything. Hughes remembers '[w]e formally interrogated [Wright] and got the whole rundown on the Four

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[67] Taylor, *Brits,* 154-156; Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 151-153, 156-163, 167-174.
[68] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 105-106, 117, 130-131.
[69] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 162.
[70] *Operation Banner*, 505.
[71] Cursey, *MRF,* 172.
[72] Cursey, *MRF,* 172.

Square Laundry situation'. In addition, Hughes alleges that Wright revealed the identities of other informers involved, including Kevin McKee and Brian Palmer – the former killed alongside Wright, and the latter killed later in 1976. According to Hughes, senior IRA commanders waited until they could strike at the various outlets of British intelligence. The day came on 2 October 1972, when the IRA attacked the laundry van in the Twinbrook area, killing MRF operator Edward Stuart, the driver of the vehicle. 'Jane', who knocked on the doors to gather laundry, survived after being comforted by local people and being picked-up shortly after the attack. The fact that she was from Coleraine and had a Northern Irish accent probably saved her. The Massage parlour and the office run by the MRF were also attacked, but nobody was killed.[73] Wright and McKee were kidnapped on the same day, and were subsequently 'disappeared', an action not formally admitted by the IRA until 1999.[74]

It is in the context of the discovery of the MRF in October 1972 that the Jean McConville 'disappearing' case of December 1972 should be considered. Originally from Protestant east Belfast, she was intimidated out alongside her Catholic husband, who was a former member of the British Army. He died in January 1972. By that stage, Jean McConville had ten children living with her in the Divis Flats area of west Belfast. In December 1972, she was forcibly taken from her house by the IRA and was never seen again. Why Jean McConville was disappeared is subject to continual debate and police investigations. The IRA admitted to 'disappearing' her in 1999, claiming she informed for the British Army.[75] McConville's children reject this accusation and say that the IRA targeted their mother for comforting a dying soldier. In 2006, Nuala O'Loan, the Police Ombudsman at that time, issued a report stating that there was no evidence that McConville was an informer. The IRA rejected her report. Brendan Hughes, for instance, argued that McConville was eventually killed for repeated informing.[76] It is impossible to discern the truth in this case, since British intelligence agencies never name informants dead or alive.[77] McConville's body was only found on a county Louth beach in August 2003 by a dog-walker at a location

[73] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 118-124; Moloney, *Secret History,* 119-122; Taylor, *Brits,* 131-137; reference numbers 624, 626, 627, 1741 in David McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[74] *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation locates grave sites', 1 April 1999: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/4724, <accessed 10 December 2013>; disappearing was not a set policy in Belfast, since the IRA shot dead another alleged spy that day in public, Edward Patrick Bonner. See reference number 625 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[75]*An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation locates grave sites', 1 April 1999: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/4724, <accessed 10 December 2013>.
[76] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 124-132; Reference number 699 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[77] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 650-651.

near where the IRA had told the authorities to search.[78] Nevertheless, as noted in the introduction, prosecutions have and may still emerge in her case following revelations by Brendan Hughes and Dolours Price in 2010 about who was allegedly involved in the killing.

What can be said when putting the McConville case in context is that the IRA was likely to be alert to any talk of informers and agents after discovering the MRF operations in October 1972. On top of this, increasing arrests and weapons seizures in Belfast would have doubled IRA efforts to deal immediately with suspected spies. This heightened vigilance and paranoia continued into 1973. In November 1973, for example, the body of fifteen-year-old Bernard Teggart was found near Bellevue Zoo, west Belfast. He had been shot dead by the IRA. His sister says that Bernard had witnessed a hijacking of a lorry in west Belfast, and told the IRA to leave the driver alone. Immediately afterwards, soldiers arrived and arrested the IRA members. Bernard was held accountable. His family have since stressed that Bernard had a mental age of an eight or nine-year old, which made him act in the way he did. The IRA admitted that they killed him in 2004, and that his killing was 'wrong'.[79]

Nevertheless, the Belfast IRA was right to suspect that mounting arrests were not simply bad luck. Various sources can now be cross-referenced to piece together Eamon Molloy's alleged informing and the damage he inflicted on the Belfast IRA. Molloy was a Third Battalion volunteer from the Bone in north Belfast.[80] Sometime in 1972, he was arrested and taken to Castlereagh barracks. Moloney and Bradley suggest that during interrogation, Molloy agreed to work for British intelligence. The problem was that if released immediately, it would raise IRA suspicions that Molloy had turned. But, incredibly, he was released. According to Moloney, the IRA accepted his cover story because a senior Belfast Brigade figure had been preparing Molloy for a senior quartermaster position, and refused to believe his protégé was an informer.[81]

Molloy 'was free to wreck havoc'. 'Soon, as more and more key men were lifted', Feeney says, 'Molloy graduated from third battalion staff to…Belfast quartermaster in 1973'. The result was increasing arrests, weapons seizures and a decrease in IRA activities. In 1999,

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[78] *The Guardian,* 'Jean McConville timeline', 3 May 2014: at
http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/may/03/jean-mcconville-timeline-murder-gerry-adams, <accessed 1 July 2015>.

[79] Bernard's last name is spelt differently by various sources as either Teggart or Teggert. See reference number 959 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives; An Phoblacht*, '15-year-old Bernard Teggert was not an informer', 6 August 2009: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/20457, <accessed 11 December 2013>; Susan McKay, *Bear in Mind These Dead* (London, 2008), 51-55, 234-235.

[80] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 117; Moloney, *Secret History,* 133-139.

[81] Moloney, *Secret History,* 133-139.

an IRA source told the *Irish News* that Molloy's information led to the arrests of 'about 25 to 30 top men'. It is likely that Molloy was involved in these arrests. The Belfast Brigade quartermaster would know the whereabouts of leadership meetings, and may have often attended these to discuss weapons. Molloy was surely involved in the arrests of almost the entire Third Battalion leadership in July 1973 too. He had worked with Third Battalion leaders for a considerable length of time and would have known the personnel and their haunts. In addition, Bradley remembers that the Third Battalion's weapons dumps lost 'a lot of big stuff' because of Molloy. So damaging was his information that various sources conclude that this is why he was 'disappeared' until 1999. The IRA leaders only worked out that he was informing in Long Kesh when piecing together the common themes surrounding their arrests during the ceasefire.[82] For Moloney, Molloy damaged the IRA 'on such a scale that…his activities played a major role in forcing the IRA to call a cease-fire'.[83]

There are reasons unique to this period to explain why there was damaging infiltration of the Belfast Brigade. The IRA's battalion and company structure did make the Belfast IRA prone to infiltration. Bradley and McKearney suggest that at the time, Belfast units would typically have been sixteen to twenty volunteers in each company. Baring in mind that the Third Battalion alone had A to G Company, this means that there were at least 100 volunteers in that battalion.[84] In addition, *Operation Banner* estimates there being around 1600 active IRA volunteers by 1973. Since McKearney and McKeown state that Belfast made-up 50 percent of IRA volunteers, this means that the Belfast Brigade had approximately 800 active volunteers by 1973. Increasing arrests and variations in commitment levels at times meant that this figure fluctuated.[85]

For former Belfast prisoner Séanna Walsh, the trouble was that '[t]he structures of the early seventies…meant that everybody knew everything about everybody else',[86] because IRA units operated in large numbers around their own streets. For instance, Bradley's G Company contained volunteers from his area of Unity Flats and nearby New Lodge.[87] Danny Morrison recalled the problems with this set-up:

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82 Moloney, *Secret History,* 133-142; Bradley in Feeney, *Insider,* 117-119; reference number 1321 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 162.
83 Cf. Moloney, *Secret History,* 138.
84 Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 106; Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012.
85 *Operation Banner*, 303; Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic. 23 May 2012; Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.
86 Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.
87 Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 106.

it was fairly easy for the British to discover…who carried out an IRA operation. If the IRA carried out an operation in Ballymurphy it was more likely to have been carried out by Ballymurphy men and women.[88]

On top of this, an informer or agent probably knew most local people because of the tight-knit and small nature of republican working-class communities in the cities; especially as streets experienced increasing segregation after sectarian disturbances in 1969. A single informer at a company, battalion or even brigade level could therefore gather a considerable amount of information on their counterparts, and, in turn cause significant damage.

Feeney also points out that '[e]ven if there had not been many informers, men drank and talked and gossiped', increasing the flow of information to the intelligence services in the cities.[89] Brendan Hughes, for instance, wanted Séamus Twomey, a leading republican, court martialled in 1970. Hughes claims that he went to talk to Twomey at a local social club and found '[Twomey] sitting there talking about weapons and operations'. Hughes dropped the court martial threat after Twomey apologised. Nevertheless, this example shows that loose talk existed.[90] Sean O'Callaghan, a former spy for the Garda, agrees that: 'inner city urban areas were dominated by pubs, bookies, and a certain culture of living … [which] created weaknesses for an organization trying to run those areas', since it enabled spies to gather loose-talk.[91] This inner-city culture continued to cause security leaks for the IRA after 1975. It was particularly problematic before 1975, though, because the IRA had more active volunteers in Belfast, meaning that there was a greater risk of 'loose talk'. The IRA certainly realized loose-talk was a problem. They issued an article entitled 'Loose Talk Can Be Fatal' in January 1974. Remember that this article was written following the various arrests of major republicans in 1973. It warned: '[t]he informer is 'the greatest listener'. What may seem insignificant to you in the course of conversation may be the final piece in the jigsaw puzzle for the informer'. Nationalists were instructed to 'stop and think before [speaking] on any 'chancy' subject'. A final piece of advice was to be on the lookout for those in social situations who were 'asking the questions', and to report them to the republican movement.[92]

Screening provided further information for the British forces by 1975. Profiling of working-class nationalist estates in Derry city was done via checkpoints.[93] There was also

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[88] Danny Morrison, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[89] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 128.
[90] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 108-109.
[91] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.
[92] *An Phoblacht,* 'Loose Talk Can Be Fatal', 25 January 1974, p.4.
[93] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 38-39.

screening, where the British Army picked-up civilians for questioning for a few hours at a local security force base. And personality checks occurred in and around pubs.[94] *Operation Banner* believes that '[d]etaining individuals for a few hours to allow screening was useful, since some individuals were quite happy to pass information in privacy'.[95] A former British soldier echoes this point:

> [i]n the seventies we were picking-up people every day … you could pull in five people and one of the individuals could be the one you were going to pitch to. So it was a means for…making an approach to a contact.[96]

Screening provided a cover to recruiting informers or agents, as so many people were brought in for interviews and then released. Danny Morrison remembers that with:

> dozens of people [screened] at a time … it became hard for the IRA to work out who…were informers or who had become informers. These would mainly be not great informers, just low-level … But…they would be providing some background information to the British Army.[97]

Neither did IRA questioning people after screening prevent informing. Bradley says: '[m]ost people did talk…and afterwards told the IRA they didn't'. Bradley recalls screening being 'very effective' because:

> [i]f [the Army] were satisfied you were who you said you were they…asked about some other guy – who he knocked about with, where he drank, where he worked … People didn't see any harm in answering those questions because they weren't about…the IRA.[98]

By avoiding direct questions about the IRA to interviewees, the British Army was gradually able to learn about who lived where and who associated with whom.

Operation Motorman and the end of the no-go zones made infiltration easier to an extent in Belfast after July 1972. Charters describes how British Army foot-patrols were told to 'have a go' at recruiting sources on the streets. Since troops could now patrol republican streets after July 1972, this provided greater opportunities to recruit spies.[99] The British Army also praises Operation Motorman for facilitating increased arrests and targeting of IRA members.[100] Cursey refers to the killing of IRA volunteer James Bryson in mid-1973. Cursey alleges that an informer confirmed that Bryson had returned to Belfast. Afterwards, the MRF

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[94] *Operation Banner*, 504.
[95] *Operation Banner*, 504.
[96] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[97] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[98] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 103-104.
[99] Charters, 'Have a go', 206, 217.
[100] *Operation Banner*, 226-229.

lured Bryson and his IRA unit to a house in the Ballymurphy area by feeding a false story 'through various channels' that an undercover surveillance team was there. Bryson and other IRA volunteers prepared to attack, but an undercover British Army unit shot them when they arrived.[101] The end of the no-go areas enabled British forces to use intelligence in this way to proactively seek out IRA members in Belfast.

It is crucial, however, to stress other reasons that are unconnected to informers and agents that contributed to a decline in the intensity of the Belfast IRA's campaign by 1975. The end of no-go areas made it much more difficult for the IRA to operate. 'Shootings were seriously restricted after Motorman', Bradley explains, because the British Army moved into permanent checkpoints in his area. These checkpoints reduced the IRA's ability to transport bombs into the city, and prevented weapons from easily entering the area.[102] Security force sources also suggest that the IRA's decision to engage British troops in conventional gun-battles was ill-advised. *Operation Banner* argues that:

> [i]n the early 1970s … [IRA] terrorists wounded a soldier on a foot patrol in an average of one in six attacks … Terrorists rapidly learned that to stand and shoot it out with the Army did not work. The Army was better trained, equipped, organised, and could produce greater numbers.[103]

In fact, a former British soldier believes that '[i]n a stand-up fight in the cities, PIRA were beaten' by 1975, and were forced into smaller cells and more selective operations later.[104] In addition, Tommy McKearney reminds us that 'IRA losses mounted as British Army commanders began to understand better the geography of Belfast'. He notes: 'constant house searches coupled with non-stop checkpoints, meant that eventually the enemy became familiar with the areas they occupied'. The IRA's decision to base itself primarily in working-class nationalist estates did not help in this respect.[105]

The current secondary literature, however, crucially overlooks how the Belfast IRA adopted counter-intelligence measures *before* the security forces in Ireland and Britain learned that the urban IRA adopted a cell-structure by 1977.[106] One counter-intelligence tactic in Belfast was to move IRA commanders to middle-class nationalist areas, where the British Army presence was lower. Bradley remembers 'stay[ing] with teachers and

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[101] Cursey, *MRF,* 174-176.
[102] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 96-99.
[103] *Operation Banner*, 527.
[104] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[105] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 114-115.
[106] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 73-75.

businessmen…hospital consultants, dentists', outside the Unity Flats area after 1972.[107] After his escape from Long Kesh, Brendan Hughes moved to the prosperous Myrtlefield Park area of Belfast, and changed his identity to that of a travelling salesman. Moloney believes that Molloy eventually gave away Hughes' location, since Molloy was the Belfast Brigade quartermaster and always had contact with IRA leaders.[108] Nevertheless, Bradley was not captured in middle-class areas, demonstrating that the relocation strategy had some success.

The most important long-term security development in Belfast emerged in late 1973. Bradley recalls being informed that the leadership was going 'to restructure the whole army' into 'squads' or 'active service units' (ASUs), also known as cells. These ASUs would typically consist of four to ten volunteers, and would be independent of battalion and company commanders. Once selected for a squad, Bradley says that volunteers were told to lie to company commanders and say that 'they'd jacked it in', to increase the new ASUs' security. These 'squads' were to operate across battalion areas. In Bradley's view: '[s]quads were the right idea. You could have maybe ten in a squad, all from different areas of Belfast. It was hard for the Brits to tie the men together. They didn't socialize together'.[109] Other sources confirm that parts of the IRA began restructuring by 1974. Cursey states that 'the developing 'Cell' structure' in 1973' meant 'each volunteer only knew about their own unit's activities', making captured grassroots republicans of limited use in intelligence terms.[110] Frank Steele, former MI6 officer, also records that Brendan Duddy told him in November 1973:

> there had been a complete screening of the Provisionals 'army' and those who were inefficient…had been weeded out. There was now a small but taut organization with adequate supplies of arms and explosives which could efficiently mount attacks against us indefinitely.

Steele pondered whether these words were an attempt by the IRA to appear a greater threat in order to get the British to negotiate.[111] But when Duddy's statement is considered alongside the evidence above, it is clear that, at least in Belfast, the IRA was creating a 'small but taut' organization. It is quite conceivable that the IRA was preparing for an indefinite campaign if necessary too. The cell-structure permitted this type of conflict with fewer volunteers in each unit, which, in theory, prevented crippling infiltration. The problem was that Molloy, for

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[107] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 111-112.
[108] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 167-173.
[109] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 128-129.
[110] Cursey, *MRF,* 176.
[111] NRA, FCO 87/4, Telegram from Steele to Woodfield, 13 November 1973, p.1-2.

instance, was on the brigade staff and still had access to various cells as quartermaster. Once he was removed after 1975, the cells in Belfast helped facilitate a 'long' campaign there.

The restructuring in Belfast partly explains the reduction in IRA activities. With fewer volunteers, and with it becoming harder to engage the security forces in republican areas after Motorman, IRA attacks were going to decline by 1975. The aforementioned statistics show that the IRA killed twelve intended targets in Belfast in 1974, half the number of 1973.[112] Yet when Belfast formally disbanded battalions and companies after 1975, the Belfast IRA never killed more than eighteen intended targets per year. In fact, the ability to inflict twelve casualties in a single year was a relatively high figure for the Belfast Brigade after 1975.[113] In other words, the decline in killings was partly a sign that the IRA was changing tactics. It began focusing on a lower, but more sustainable campaign in Belfast by 1974. Whilst it faced difficulties with damaging infiltration, the Belfast Brigade reacted *before* the ceasefire and was not in total disarray by 1975. However, British Army efforts and those of spies did encourage the IRA into restructuring and shifting towards a long-term campaign in Belfast.[114]

Various reasons kept many within the Belfast Brigade motivated to continue fighting after 1975, including: a desire to remedy working-class nationalist grievances concerning their treatment by the Unionist and British state since 1969; the belief that a united Ireland would solve the discrimination experienced in Belfast;[115] the political education of volunteers in the jails before internees were released, focusing on a long-term conflict;[116] anger following what some within the IRA saw as British duplicity during the ceasefire;[117] and politicisation following the hunger-strikes and rise of Sinn Féin in the early 1980s.[118]

Derry city

There is evidence that the Derry city IRA faced difficulties potentially as a result of infiltration. In 1972, for instance, they killed eighteen 'intended targets', compared to nine in 1973 and seven in 1974.[119] On 17 January 1975, Sir Frank Cooper even speculated that 'PIRA sought a truce' because '[t]hey were battered in Belfast and *at a standstill in*

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[112] See appendix one.
[113] See appendix one.
[114] *Operation Banner,* 838.
[115] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 13, 37-41, 140; Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 36, 46-47, 56-57.
[116] Moloney, *Secret History,* 147-162.
[117] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 190-193.
[118] English, *Armed Struggle,* 187-237.
[119] See appendix one.

Londonderry.'[120] Leading Provisionals in the city, including Sean Keenan, Martin McGuinness and Joe McCallion, were arrested in late 1972. Keenan was arrested by the British Army, while McGuinness and McCallion were captured by the Gardai in county Donegal. Alongside the arrests of senior Provisionals in Belfast, Taylor believes the: 'decimation of the Provisional IRA's leadership was nothing if not a crisis'.[121]

Derry city units appeared to suffer some infiltration between 1972 and 1975. Patrick Duffy from the Creggan estate disappeared whilst holidaying with his wife in Donegal in early August 1973. Eventually, on 17 August, the IRA told a Derry newspaper that they 'executed' Duffy 'for giving information to…Special Branch'. Special Branch deny this allegation. Another civilian, James Joseph Brown, was shot dead by the IRA on the Foyle Road on 21 September 1973. The IRA claimed that the 26-year-old 'was responsible for the arrests of at least three IRA volunteers, as well as the loss of arms and explosives', and that Brown 'had attempted to infiltrate the IRA' for the British Army since August 1971. There was also Patrick Lynch. He was killed in February 1974, and his body was found in the Creggan estate. Lynch was different because the IRA admitted that he was a volunteer. The IRA claimed that Lynch told the British Army where specific weapons were hidden. Lynch's family poured scorn on these accusations. The *Belfast Telegraph* investigated, but found that the British Army would say nothing. '[B]ut it is known', their report continued, 'that an Armalite rifle and some ammunition were seized by troops in a house [near the Creggan estate] recently'.[122] Of course, this does not mean that Lynch was responsible. In all three cases there is not enough evidence available to ascertain whether these individuals were informing.

One problem for the Derry city IRA was its similar set-up to its counterpart in Belfast. Alan Barker, a former Special Branch officer who worked there from 1974, explains that there were four IRA battalions in Derry city. The first covered the Bogside and Brandywell areas; the second the Creggan and Rosemount; the third covered the Shantallow; and the fourth operated in the Waterside area.[123] There were numerous volunteers in each battalion, matching the set-up of the Belfast Brigade – even if numbers were smaller in Derry city

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[120] NRA, Prem 16/515, Message from Frank Cooper to Prime Minister and Northern Ireland Secretary of State, 17 January 1975, p.1. (italics mine).
[121] Taylor, *Provos,* 152-153.
[122] Reference numbers 912, 940 and 1020 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[123] Barker, *Shadows*, 87, 95.

because of the lower population there.[124] In theory, one informer or agent could inflict mass arrests upon their own battalion, because they knew and operated with many other volunteers.

O'Doherty, a former Derry city volunteer, also remembers that by August 1972, '[t]he British Army was…in effective control of the ghettos' in Derry city. He recalls the 'sense of occupation' there following Operation Motorman. In fact, according to O'Doherty and Kieran Conway, who operated on the run with Derry volunteers in the early 1970s, many Derry city volunteers fled thereafter to Donegal. Even when O'Doherty returned to participate in sniper operations in 1973, he says it was difficult to operate as the British Army could quickly swamp areas after attacks.[125] Conway concurs: 'Operation Motorman…robbed us of the advantages we previously held', with the end of the no-go areas.[126] A further dilemma for the Derry city IRA was the Gardai crackdown. The Garda's more proactive stance was partly the result of what the Irish state saw as an increased IRA threat in its territory by 1975. For example, the organization killed Fine Gael senator Billy Fox in March 1974,[127] and the IRA leadership sanctioned post office robberies in the south to gain further funding.[128] Increased IRA activity in southern Ireland also angered some citizens there who did not want violence leaking into their territory.[129] Such a threat was ever-present following loyalist attacks as seen in Dublin and Monaghan in 1974. The point is that increased Garda activity caused problems for the Derry city IRA, as many of their volunteers were based in Donegal after Motorman.

Frank Cooper's view that the Derry city IRA was at a 'standstill' by 1975, however, appears inaccurate. Taylor records, for example, that in the early 1970s, only twenty out of the 150 shops in the city centre were still trading.[130] Barker explains that bombings kept occurring even after Operation Motorman, because the IRA used small incendiary devices. These were frequently concealed by women, who were less likely to be searched at checkpoints. The IRA's sniper campaign proved a constant threat too. In September and October 1974, Barker describes how the Shantallow units became 'particularly active'. 'Such

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[124] See table for breakdown of population by district between 1987 and 1996 at CAIN: http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/popul.htm, <accessed 2 July 2015>.
[125] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 92-99; Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 115, 124-125, 172; Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites,* 250-253.
[126] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 123.
[127] Reference number 1027 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[128] For examples of robberies, see J.J. Barrett with Martin Ferris, *Martin Ferris: Man of Kerry* (Dingle, 2006), 50-57.
[129] Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives*, 79-80.
[130] Taylor, *Provos,* 158-159.

was this escalation', he explained, 'that the month of October saw our [RUC patrols] ambushed by snipers every day for a full week'. Snipers killed a British soldier that month and injured another colleague in the city centre. Earlier, in the summer of 1974, Barker mentions that a police officer, 'Andy', was seriously injured by an IRA sniper in the Shantallow area whilst on patrol.[131] Thus Barker's frontline policing experiences do not depict the Derry city IRA as reaching a 'standstill' by 1975. O'Doherty echoes this judgement. He was part of units operating against the British security forces in 1973 and 1974. In his view, the period prior to the December 1974 ceasefire actually saw 'the most efficient and lethal IRA campaign I had ever experienced in Derry [city] … we were running rings around the Army and police'.[132] IRA killings of intended targets may have declined, but commercial bombings and their sniper campaign continued. Thus the death statistics fail to provide an accurate assessment of the IRA's military strength in Derry city by 1975.

Why did the Derry city IRA not experience the same levels of debilitating infiltration as the Belfast Brigade? One explanation is that there was no Bloody Friday in Derry city. Admittedly, the IRA had carried out some actions that were opposed by Derry city nationalists. Barker, for instance, refers to the bombing of a supermarket frequented by nationalists in June 1974.[133] A visible decline in support did emerge when many Derry voters supported the SDLP and the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974 too. Yet there remained a hard-core commitment to the Provisionals from many working-class nationalists in Derry city. Ó Dochartaigh believes that the IRA retained this support in Derry city because of a hatred towards the RUC, anger towards British Army interference in everyday life, and bitter memories of Bloody Sunday.[134] Barker certainly remembers the hostility the RUC faced:'[i]t would have been unusual to have carried out a patrol in the Shantallow area without coming under attack from a hail of stones, bricks or other missiles'.[135] O'Doherty also recalls significant support for the IRA in working-class communities in Derry city. When returning to operations in January 1973, O'Doherty was instructed to live on-the-run as part of a small sniper team. 'I was introduced to various families', he recalls, 'whose doors were always open to the IRA'. The 'silence' of the local people was crucial, as the IRA 'had to rely on the local people for everything'. It would have been possible to strangle the IRA there if the local people had turned against them. As O'Doherty suggests 'almost everyone who was interested

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[131] Barker, *Shadows,* 53-54, 71-73.
[132] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 124, 134.
[133] Barker, *Shadows,* 68-69.
[134] Ó Dochartaigh, *Armalites,* 249-252, 298.
[135] Barker, *Shadows,* 54-55.

would know within a very short time who the operators were'.[136] Since O'Doherty was not arrested until returning home in mid-1975 (which only happened because the Republican Movement told him it was safe) it is clear that local supporters remained loyal to the IRA. Conway also found 'care and support' for the IRA in the Bogside and Creggan in the early 1970s.[137]

More specifically, a 'smaller, tighter' IRA was created in Derry city after Motorman, with only five or six on-the-run members operating.[138] Bryan Webster served with the British Army there in 1975. He says that intelligence indicated that there were, at most, forty to fifty active IRA volunteers in Derry city by the mid-1970s.[139] The smaller IRA also proved more difficult to apprehend. And even if caught, volunteers sent back to Derry city after Motorman were unlikely to yield vital intelligence on the inner-secrets of the Derry Brigade staff, since the latter were located in Donegal.[140] Whilst the Garda might have arrested some leaders such as McGuinness, as will be explained later, the trouble for the Garda was that the border was extensive and difficult to police effectively.[141] The border therefore constantly provided a relative 'safe haven' for Derry city volunteers. For these reasons, the Derry city IRA remained a formidable opponent by 1975. Spies had had little impact on their decision to call a ceasefire. O'Doherty actually suggests that the Derry Brigade considered a ceasefire in autumn 1974, after some volunteers wanted 'political progress' and a 'realistic deal with the British'. The other motivating factor was that living on the run 'was really a mode of life that was acceptable for a limited period'.[142]

The IRA in rural localities

In the countryside, the IRA's campaign actually gained momentum by 1975, in spite of a few spies allegedly working against rural units. Perhaps the most high-profile case is that of alleged spy from county Tyrone, Columba McVeigh. McVeigh was 'disappeared' in November 1975. In 1999, the IRA admitted to killing and secretly burying him, accusing him of being an agent. His family reject the accusations, and there is not enough evidence available to confirm them. His body has yet to be found.[143] Elsewhere, the South Armagh

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[136] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 98-99.
[137] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 70, 75.
[138] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 99.
[139] Imperial War Museum Sound Archives (IWMSA), London, 13583, Bryan Courtney Webster, recorded 29 November 1993.
[140] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 95, 97-98,
[141] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier,* 49-50.
[142] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 115-120, 135-138.
[143] Reference number 1511 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*

Brigade were allegedly involved in the kidnap and killing of Ivan Johnston in December 1973. Johnston was a former Special Branch officer, who left the force shortly before his death. He was kidnapped by the IRA in Monaghan whilst at a customs post. His body was found the following day near Keady. The IRA claimed that he had photographs of wanted men when they kidnapped him, and that he admitted to spying, which the RUC denied.[144] A similar killing took place in south Armagh in August 1975. The IRA said that they killed William Meaklin, a former RUC reserve, near Newtownhamilton because he was gathering intelligence. Rumours later emerged in the *Sunday Times* in 1999, that Captain Robert Nairac of military intelligence was involved in this death by naming spies to the IRA in order to gain their trust.[145]

It is true that Robert Nairac spied on the South Armagh IRA during this time. Details about his activities are shrouded in mystery, partly as he was 'disappeared' by the IRA in May 1977. His body has never been found. It seems that Nairac was an SAS liaison officer working with the Special Branch in the Armagh and south Down area from the early 1970s. George Clarke has noted his contacts with Nairac and suggests that Nairac wanted Special Branch to share greater intelligence on IRA 'players'. Furthermore, he records Nairac going to Dundalk, where IRA members were often hiding. Astonishingly, Nairac frequently visited republican drinking outlets too in south Armagh in civilian clothing. Some of the most serious accusations about him are that in order to get into republican clubs, Nairac provided the IRA with information about other agents.[146]

The overall effect of spies on the military capabilities of the South Armagh and Tyrone IRA was extremely limited by 1975. In both areas there was a rise in IRA activity, as demonstrated in figure one. In terms of the IRA's ability to strike desired targets in south Armagh, in 1972 it managed twelve, fourteen in 1973, and whilst the killings of intended targets declined to twelve in 1974, they reached fourteen again in 1975. The latter killings caused particular concern for the security forces because the IRA had been on ceasefire throughout much of that year. A similar pattern occurred in Tyrone. In 1972, the Tyrone Brigade killed five intended targets. The level rose to thirteen in both 1973 and 1974, before declining to five in 1975, but that resulted from the IRA being on ceasefire.[147] Based on this

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[144] Reference number 979 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Barker, *Shadows,* 47-48.
[145] Reference number 1432 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[146] Clarke, *Border,* 105-115; Harnden, '*Bandit Country',* 293-312; reference numbers 1432 and 1932 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[147] See appendix one.

evidence, it seems that high-level intelligence on these units was in short supply by 1975. The examples of alleged agents above justify this view. If true, none of these cases represent infiltration to the heart of the South Armagh or Tyrone IRA. In fact, putting Oxford graduates such as Nairac undercover suggests that British intelligence struggled in south Armagh.[148] Brigadier Morton even concluded that the intelligence picture there was 'pathetic' and that British forces 'didn't know much at all' in the early 1970s.[149] A former British soldier supports this assessment for most rural areas before 1975: 'I don't think [we] were getting…[substantial] penetration of the IRA in the rural areas up to [1975], and I don't think [we] were physically defeating the IRA [in rural areas].'[150] Government members agree. On 5 November 1975, Merlyn Rees and Frank Cooper told their Irish counterparts at the Irish Embassy in London that there was 'virtual anarchy' in south Armagh. 'The PIRA there', Rees explained, 'had achieved a remarkable and highly dangerous level of sophistication'.[151] Kieran Conway agrees that by 1975: 'the IRA was…stronger in many rural areas than it had ever been'.[152]

The Tyrone and South Armagh IRA never killed the numbers of intended targets that the Belfast Brigade managed in 1972. But they were never expected to do so. Both units had a much smaller population from which to recruit, and, therefore, had much smaller numbers.[153] Thus they could not carry out numerous attacks at once. The main threat posed by the rural IRA was its ability to inflict numerous casualties in single attacks. After events such as Bloody Friday, the IRA scaled-down its car-bombs in city areas as various civilian casualties had produced negative publicity. The situation was different in rural areas. There, the IRA had the luxury of space. Larger bombs and landmines were possible to use without causing extensive civilian deaths. As a former British soldier summarises, by the mid-1970s:

> if it was going right [for the IRA] in Belfast, one person dies, but if it was going right in the rural areas, a lot of people died … in Belfast, they were small bombs. Whereas in the rural areas, they had huge bombs.[154]

So deadly were IRA landmine and bomb attacks on country roads in Tyrone and South Armagh, that the security forces abandoned motorised vehicle patrols for much of the

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[148] See reference number 1932 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[149] Harnden, '*Bandit Country',* 280.
[150] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[151] NRA, Prem 16/521, Note of a meeting held at the Irish Embassy in London, Wednesday 5 November 1975.
[152] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 182.
[153] See table for breakdown of population by district between 1987 and 1996 at CAIN: at
http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/popul.htm, <accessed 2 July 2015>.
[154] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.

Troubles.[155] Many security force members were killed in single attacks in these regions too. On 10 September 1972, for instance, an IRA landmine exploded under an Army Saracen near Dungannon, county Tyrone, killing three soldiers and injuring many others. The explosion created a deep crater in the road. At the time, this was the biggest device ever used by the IRA.[156] Later, in November 1974, the IRA targeted soldiers visiting an electricity substation after an explosion the previous evening in Tyrone. The IRA left a landmine, which killed two and injured seven.[157] Parallel attacks took place in south Armagh. To take a few examples: in April 1973, two soldiers were killed by an IRA landmine when driving their Land Rover near Newtownhamilton;[158] and on 17 July 1975, the IRA placed a bomb in a beer-keg on a bridge in Tullydonnell, killing four British soldiers.[159] The South Armagh IRA also specialized in snipers and booby-trap bombs in abandoned houses, which killed and injured other security force members by 1975.[160] These attacks perfectly demonstrate how statistics of fatalities overlook intended targets injured by the IRA, and the danger that the rural units posed in terms of their ability to kill numerous security force members in single attacks.

Admittedly, the Fermanagh IRA's campaign was less intense. As figure one shows, the IRA killed eleven intended targets there in 1972, a significant increase from one the previous year. Many killings there involved booby-trap car bombs under vehicles belonging to security force members, the shooting of off-duty security force members on their farms, and the ambushing of soldiers.[161] There were also landmine attacks, such as on 7 August 1972, when one exploded under an Army Land Rover near Lisnaskea, killing two soldiers.[162] Yet IRA killings of intended targets in Fermanagh declined to three in 1973 and 1974.[163] This decline is curious since Fermanagh had a history of electing republican representatives,[164] and of discrimination in jobs and voting there before 1969, which would encourage IRA support.[165] Informers and agents do not appear to explain the reduction in killings. There were no known spies operating there before 1975. Of course, some may remain undetected, but as IRA activity increased in Fermanagh after 1975, including five deaths inflicted in

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[155] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 117; Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 18-19.
[156] See reference numbers 586, 587 and 588 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[157] Reference numbers 1224 and 1225 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[158] Harnden*, 'Bandit Country'*, 471.
[159] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 476-477.
[160] For examples, see Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 468-479.
[161] See appendix one.
[162] Reference numbers 528 and 529 in McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives.*
[163] See appendix one.
[164] White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 50.
[165] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier*, 15.

1979, spies had little long-term effect.[166] The two main factors influencing this fluctuation were the large Protestant security force community living there, which made the IRA more cautious;[167] and a lack of organisers in that vicinity at particular times.[168] The rise and decline in Fermanagh IRA activity was a constant feature of the conflict for these reasons, as will be detailed in the next chapter.

Why were rural units generally resistant to damaging infiltration by 1975? Various explanations will be discussed in later chapters. There are, however, a few reasons specific to the early 1970s. One is that British forces had neglected rural areas prior to Operation Motorman, enabling infant IRA rural units to organise, train and gather expertise. By the time greater British Army resources were dedicated to rural areas in the mid-1970s, the IRA in places such as south Armagh had become well-trained and 'sophisticated'. Harnden has spoken about how the South Armagh IRA used veteran republicans to gradually train new recruits. He believes this 'system meant that there were fewer mistakes and therefore fewer arrests in South Armagh than in any other IRA brigade area'.[169]

Tommy McKearney, a former Tyrone volunteer, suggests that '[w]ith wider spaces and different terrain, the smaller rural ASUs proved more difficult to pin down'. He also points out that rural volunteers crossed into the Irish Republic, and were shielded there by 'a measurable degree of hard-core support concentrated along the Border areas', such as in Donegal and Monaghan.[170] Indeed, there were close links between nationalists in Derry and Donegal, Monaghan and Tyrone, and south Armagh and Dundalk, since they ignored the border for family, work or social activities.[171] No wonder the British Army regularly complained that IRA units operating in Fermanagh and Tyrone came from Monaghan,[172] and that south Armagh units were based in counties Louth or Monaghan,[173] or that Donegal provided a relative 'safe-haven' for Derry volunteers.[174]

According to McKearney, rural ASUs were also 'self-contained semi-autonomous groups', that only met senior IRA leaders in the Irish Republic for training, supplies or to

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[166] See appendix one.
[167] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone border study, January 1981, p.16-17.
[168] Conway, *Southside Provisional*, 99.
[169] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 46-47.
[170] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 116.
[171] Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 6-129.
[172] NRA, CJ 4/3474, East Tyrone area review, July 1980, p.18, 42, 60; NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone border study, January 1981, p.15.
[173] NRA, CJ 4/3474, South Armagh area review, p.19-20.
[174] NRA, CJ 4.3474, Londonderry area review, May 1980, P.34.

discuss 'broad policy directives'.[175]A degree of autonomy made rural ASUs more resistant to infiltration by outsiders. Their autonomy was enhanced further as no longer did they accept every on-the-run volunteer from elsewhere. Clarke, for example, recalls how eventually '[t]he South Armagh lads didn't like the Belfast men'.[176] Keeping most outsiders out of South Armagh IRA activities no doubt increased security. So secretive were the South Armagh IRA that even senior republicans knew very little about them. For instance, Clarke remembers visiting a senior informer he calls McMahon in county Louth sometime between 1972 and 1973. Michael McVerry, a one-time senior south Armagh volunteer, was apparently present. McMahon told Clarke that he knew very little about McVerry because: '[w]e don't tell each other of our role…[unless] on active service together'.[177] Conway also recalls that whilst carrying out IRA GHQ duties some rural 'fiefdoms' were reluctant to work with him, since they were concerned that he would expose their units as an ex-prisoner.[178] By restricting information to outsiders, and with only small numbers involved in rural ASUs who were often related or friends, it was easier to keep information within a closed circle.[179]

Admittedly, both O'Callaghan from rural Kerry and O'Doherty from Derry city claim to have operated with Tyrone units whilst on the run before 1975. O'Doherty was probably used after demonstrating his reliability to the IRA by carrying out operations in England. As an explosives expert, he also offered particular expertise.[180] In general, though, outsiders from urban areas became less common within rural units by the mid-1970s. Laurence McKeown explains why:

> somebody coming down from Belfast [for example] … would have to get use to operating in the country, which was different. The amount of time it might have taken to acclimatise to a rural area meant that some people would not be taken on down there in the first place.[181]

Conway, originally from Dublin, recalls how tricky he found operating on the Derry border, and how glad he was to eventually be positioned in Derry city in the early 1970s. He preferred operating in the city because:

> it was…physically less demanding than operating on the border, [where there was] tough living conditions, exposure to the elements, long hours and days of waiting,

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[175] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 116.
[176] Clarke, *Border,* 167-169.
[177] Clarke, *Border,* 174-179; McVerry was shot dead in November 1973. See reference number 962 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[178] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 189.
[179] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 116-117.
[180] O'Doherty, *The Volunteer,* 116-119; see also O'Callaghan, *Informer*, 62-84.
[181] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.

and…marches through difficult terrain, often with heavy equipment such as landmines.[182]

It was therefore too risky to place urban volunteers into rural units where they were expected to occasionally engage British forces in territory and conditions that were unfamiliar.

A combination of these factors meant that the South Armagh and Tyrone IRA were difficult to infiltrate, and spread the IRA's campaign by 1975. McKeown emphasised the growing importance of these units to the IRA:

> [t]here was an attitude from Belfast people that if Belfast wasn't going well then that was a serious problem. I am not sure whether in reality that was the case. Personally, I think that rural units were important … They helped to stretch the enemy as far as possible.[183]

Evidence in this chapter supports McKeown's view. Rural units stretched British forces by 1975. So much so that the SAS had to be officially sent into south Armagh by 1976.[184] The increase in IRA activities across Northern Ireland actually made the movement a greater threat in many ways by 1975. No longer was it an urban phenomenon that could be extinguished in Belfast and Derry city. Being so difficult to capture and infiltrate made rural units more durable in the long-term too.[185]

England

An important additional dimension to the IRA's campaign was its attacks in England between 1973 and December 1975. McKearney explains the IRA's logic for attacking England:

> extra pressure could persuade the British population to demand a troop withdrawal … England had much less security on the streets than Northern Ireland … Many Republicans felt that if the English sent their soldiers to make war in Ireland, the IRA should in return [conduct] war on England.[186]

Following IRA thinking, if they could bring 'war' to England, this could intensify a 'troops out' consensus in Britain.[187] Furthermore, IRA volunteers believed that the threat of violence in England worried parliamentarians and made Westminster react to the 'Irish problem'.[188] For instance, O'Doherty's small letter-bombs caused injury and received national press coverage in England in 1973. Whilst later operating in Tyrone, he mentions a substantial

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[182] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 1-5, 61-68.
[183] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.
[184] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 158-159.
[185] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 117.
[186] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 124-125.
[187] Gary McGladdery, *The Provisional IRA in England: The Bombing Campaign 1973-1997* (Dublin, 2006), 75-76.
[188] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 194-195.

bombing not being reported. He concluded that small attacks in England were more effective in highlighting the republican cause.[189]

The other reason for turning to England was that IRA attacks had declined in Belfast since 1972. McKearney: '[a]though still a very powerful insurrectionary force, the IRA in Belfast had suffered heavy losses … [The IRA] saw an English bombing campaign as…taking pressure off their hard-pressed volunteers'.[190] In his account of IRA English operations, McGladdery also emphasises: 'PIRA…came to believe that they could turn an 'acceptable' level of violence in Northern Ireland into an 'unacceptable' level of violence with additional bombings in England'.[191] This chapter disputes the idea that there was an 'acceptable level' of IRA violence across Northern Ireland by 1975. Nonetheless, there was military pressure on the Belfast Brigade, and so it is quite possible that this factor partly influenced attacks in England to commence.

The English campaign, however, started disastrously. On 8 March 1973, 200 people were injured and one person died after two car bombs exploded, including outside the Old Bailey. Other bombs were defused. A number of Provisionals were arrested when attempting to fly back to Ireland on the same day. In November 1973, nine people were found guilty of the bombings, including Gerry Kelly, today a senior Sinn Féin MLA, and Marian and Dolours Price, prominent dissenting republicans in recent years.[192] There has always been suspicion that a high-level informer leaked details of the operation, since the police sealed the borders before the attacks.[193] In 2009, these suspicions were somewhat vindicated by the release of George Clarke's account. Clarke alleges that information was provided by a senior Provisional, whom he describes as being involved since the 1950s. This individual is alleged to have trained volunteers, offered safe houses and supplies from county Louth. His close association with senior IRA leaders apparently meant that this informer, 'McMahon', knew about the London bombings in March 1973. Clarke says that McMahon's information alerted the mainland police and set-up the arrests. The risk for McMahon was that few people knew about the proposed attacks, which could have placed suspicion on him.[194] Yet no suspicion arose, presumably because other senior Belfast personnel, such as Brendan Hughes, did not

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[189] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 105, 107-115, 118.
[190] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 124-125.
[191] McGladdery, *IRA in England*, 57-60, 68, 104.
[192] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict 1973', 8 March 1973: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch73.htm, <accessed 3 July 2015>.
[193] McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 62-64.
[194] Clarke, *Border,* 1-31.

believe spies were involved. Instead, Hughes felt 'the simple mistake we made was that we tried to get the people out of England too quickly'.[195] Hughes does make a valid point. In future, IRA bombing teams in London were not pulled-out immediately and remained as 'sleeper' units, hiding across England. The volunteers involved in March 1973 mostly came from Belfast too, which made the risk of exposure greater. If one became known, others could be discovered simply via the intelligence services investigating who they associated with. Kelly, in particular, was a 'red light', a volunteer already on-the-run, making his disappearance from the area suspicious.[196]

The IRA tried to ensure that similar mistakes were not repeated. One tactic adopted was to reduce the number who knew about English operations. McKearney described how 'operations in England thereafter would be organised directly through IRA GHQ staff. This strategy proved more effective and helped improve security'.[197] The GHQ staff were split into specialised sections, including finance, engineering and a quartermaster department.[198] McKearney described how:

> [i]t would be generally one or two people on the GHQ staff who would know [about English operations] … Usually operations [department] would have known and possibly the quartermaster on the basis he had to supply the equipment … The Chief of Staff, of course, would know. So you effectively had a small working group who would know within the GHQ.[199]

McKearney's insight is supported by evidence provided by other republicans and sources in chapter three. Indeed, the Chief of Staff was appointed by the Army Council, and directed the IRA's day-to-day activities.[200] The point made by McKearney is that the IRA began to tighten knowledge surrounding English operations. A person such as McMahon was no longer supposed to be informed about activities in England. Ó hAdhmaill, a former republican prisoner, also recalls that English department operators began to be selected from 'all over Ireland'. Indeed, members of the so-called 'Balcombe Street Gang' unit were from across the Irish Republic,[201] whereas the letter-bomb campaign in late 1973 was conducted by O'Doherty from Derry city. Leaving IRA cell members in England rather than trying to pull them out immediately after bombings tightened IRA security too. For instance, O'Doherty

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[195] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 149-150.
[196] Clarke, *Border,* 1-16.
[197] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 124-125.
[198] Moloney, *Secret History,* 375-380, 711.
[199] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 23 May 2012, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[200] Moloney, Secret History, 375–380.
[201] Reference number 1449 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*

was not arrested in England. His security was helped by the fact that he told nobody about operating in England before leaving Ireland in late 1973.[202] The reasons why English units became more secure against infiltration will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

These changes aided the IRA in carrying out further attacks across the English mainland in 1974. The security services seemed at a complete loss to counter many operations. On 4 February 1974, an IRA bomb exploded on a coach on the M62, killing nine soldiers and three civilians, and injuring many others. The lack of intelligence that British forces had on this attack was evident when Judith Ward was wrongly convicted.[203] In autumn came a series of indiscriminate pub bombings, which primarily claimed the lives of innocent civilians. For example, on 5 October 1974, two public houses were bombed in Guildford, leading to five deaths and many injured.[204] Four people were again wrongfully convicted for the bombings. On 21 November 1974, the IRA attacked another two public houses in Birmingham. 21 people died. Six Irish men were arrested and convicted, but again were released in 1991 on appeal.[205] Shortly before the ceasefire, the IRA bombed Edward Heath's flat in London too.[206]

The lack of informers within English units was again apparent when the IRA's campaign recommenced in west London in mid-1975. In September, they bombed a Hilton hotel, killing two people and injuring others. The IRA continued attacks in west London, such as in Chelsea and Westminster. In the words of Taylor, the Metropolitan Police Special Branch appeared 'virtually blind'. So bad had the situation become that some Londoners avoided tube trains and restaurants. In the end, the IRA unit carrying out these attacks was arrested after a five-day siege in Balcombe Street. The Metropolitan police had decided to swamp the west end in the hope that the IRA would continue its campaign. Sure enough, the unit attacked a Mayfair restaurant. The police pursued them, but the IRA held hostages in a flat in Balcombe Street before surrendering five days later. It was only because the IRA risked coming out for further attacks during an increased police presence that they were arrested. It was not because of prior intelligence.[207]

[202] O'Doherty, *Volunteer,* 107.
[203] McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 78-79,89.
[204] Reference numbers 1198-1202 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[205] Reference numbers 1246-1264 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[206] McGladdery, *IRA in England*, 99-100.
[207] Taylor, *Brits,* 183-185.

Persistent attacks in England suggest that the IRA's English campaign was certainly not in decline by late 1974. Alan Barker even argues that IRA bombings in England 'placed heavy pressure on the government' to commence peace talks.[208] There is evidence that radical policy departures were partly motivated to stop English attacks. During a meeting at Downing Street on 4 December 1974 that included Rees, Cooper and Wilson, the following comments were made:

> [t]here was a serious danger of an overspill of Northern Ireland conditions into Great Britain which could inflict deep damage on our social fabric … *the question that now faced us was the extent to which we could insulate Great Britain from the ills which afflicted the Province.* Further consideration should therefore be given to…re-partition…and perhaps of making independent that part which did not go to the South.[209]

Whilst repartition was eventually seen as too problematic, this quote shows that such options were considered partly to stop the IRA attacks in England. Government fears of an over-spill were well-founded. In Birmingham, for example, some factories temporarily closed following clashes between Irish and English workers after pub bombings.[210] Nonetheless, the pub bombings also put pressure on the IRA. Ó Brádaigh, for example, says that talks with the British government and the IRA cessation in late 1974 helped counter the negative fallout from such bombings.[211]

IRA leadership

A number of leading republicans were arrested between July 1972 and December 1975, including Gerry Adams, Brendan Hughes and Martin McGuinness. Other notable arrests included Séan MacStiofáin in southern Ireland in November 1972;[212] Joe Cahill, an Army Council member, who was caught trying to smuggle weapons in from Libya in 1973;[213]Séamus Twomey, another Army Council member, Kevin Mallon, IRA leader in Tyrone, and J.B. O'Hagan, an Army Council member from Lurgan, who were arrested in the Irish Republic in September 1973.[214] Later, in 1975, Ó Conaill, an Army Council member, was arrested.[215] Were informers and agents at work? There is not enough evidence to confirm

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[208] Barker, *Shadows,* 78; see a similar view in Taylor, *Provos,* 174.
[209] NRA, CAB 134/3778, Minutes of a meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 4 December 1974, p.4. (italics mine).
[210] McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 92-93.
[211] White, *Ó Brádaigh,* 220-222.
[212] Taylor, *Provos,* 152.
[213] Anderson, *Cahill,* 270-280.
[214] Taylor, *Provos,* 158; for details on each person, see Moloney, *Secret History,* 142-143.
[215] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 197-198.

any suspicions. As most of these people were arrested in the Irish Republic, it is to Irish police informers that we would need to turn. But they have released few accounts.

On the other hand, foreknowledge of what leading IRA members were doing remained limited for the intelligence agencies. Clarke admits that 'McMahon's knowledge on PIRA operations was at times limited'. McMahon 'couldn't ask' IRA leaders about details of forthcoming attacks without raising suspicion.[216] Numerous IRA operations across Northern Ireland and England demonstrate that high-placed spies were not discovering much detail about operations from IRA leaders. The escape from Mountjoy jail by Twomey, O'Hagan and Mallon on 31 October 1973, also highlights the lack of information on leading IRA members.[217] Otherwise, this escape would have been prevented, or the escapees quickly rearrested. It is true that the IRA leadership took risks in these years. Sometimes they were directly involved in smuggling weapons, as seen with Cahill in 1973. Later the concept of 'permanent leadership' entered, where leading members lost their rank if imprisoned. To avoid this situation, senior IRA figures would no longer be directly involved in operations, making them harder to arrest after 1975.[218]

Overall, whilst the Belfast IRA had been damaged by informers and agents to some extent, the same cannot be said for organization in Derry city, England and in rural areas. Whilst fifty percent of the IRA's strength was not as deadly as it once had been, the other fifty percent was certainly pulling its weight by 1975. And since the Belfast Brigade could still operate, it is not the case that only fifty percent of the IRA was causing the British state security concerns by 1975. The implication of this argument is that we need to reassess why the IRA called a lengthy ceasefire in 1975.

Why did the IRA call a prolonged ceasefire in 1975?

In light of the IRA's ability to orchestrate a persistent campaign across Northern Ireland and England, the view that its ceasefire in 1975 was equally motivated by 'a great deal of pressure' from British intelligence and political factors can be questioned.[219] If this were the case, it is surprising that the IRA did not call a ceasefire earlier in 1974, when arrests dramatically increased in Belfast. In contrast, the IRA called a ceasefire primarily because they felt from back-channel conversations that the British state might be willing to withdraw.

[216] Clarke, *Border,* 127-134, 140-146, 209.
[217] Taylor, *Provos,* 158.
[218] Moloney, *Secret History,* 157-158, 375.
[219] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga*, Talking to Terrorists,* 52-54.

This is not to deny that infiltration of the Belfast Brigade and the arrest of senior operators did not influence the ceasefire decision at all. But the evidence suggests that this factor was not of equal importance compared to political factors. The IRA leadership felt that the British were ready for withdrawal. For example, Billy McKee from Belfast, a member of the Provisionals' delegation who met British representatives during 1975, was only willing to talk because he claims that at the initial meeting on 7 January, MI6 officer Michael Oatley mentioned withdrawal.[220]

Nonetheless, Ó Dochartaigh is right to say that Republican leaders 'were willing to make major compromises'.[221] The IRA initially wanted Éire Nua, a four-province federal system.[222] Yet during the 1975 ceasefire, some leading republicans suggested that they would go further to accommodate loyalists and unionists. On the 27 October 1975, for instance, Duddy outlined republican thinking to the British representatives at Laneside. His statement explains the process by which republicans would accept a temporary six-county set-up under Loyalist rule:

> the [Provisional Army Council] does not <u>want</u> war ... Would they work politically? Yes … *Could the Rep[ublican Movement] work with the Loyalists? Yes. In a six county, Northern Irish state? Yes* … But it would require a steady transition [to] a '32 County [socialist] Rep[ublic] … The Rep position is that the [Protestant] Majority had the right to rule [Northern Ireland]. They did not have the 'right' to abuse that 'right'. *The [Republican Movement] had but one aim…eventual withdrawal of the British. Everything is compromsibale [sic] after the British Declaration of Intent.*[223]

This statement shows that republicans were ostensibly willing to negotiate with loyalists on the possibility of continuing the six-county set-up, provided that British sovereignty was renounced. Such a compromise could potentially be sold to republicans as the 'steady transition' to a united Ireland because British sovereignty over the North would cease. Irish people would be ruling their own affairs. Admittedly, on reflecting upon his role as a negotiator with republicans and unionists during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Jonathan Powell said: '[s]ometimes it is necessary…to temper the message…or to bend it a little…to point out the opportunities it presents and so move the negotiation along'. The caveat for Powell was that 'it is crucial not to distort that message too far or you will find the two sides negotiating on false premises'.[224] In this context, perhaps Duddy exaggerated how far

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[220] McKee in Taylor, *Brits,* 179-180.
[221] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 3.
[222] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 402-404.
[223] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 27 October 1975 (underlining in the original. Italics mine).
[224] Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (London, 2008), 318.

republicans might compromise. Elsewhere, however, Duddy does record that Ó Brádaigh told him in November 1975, 'We had offered the British everything – To live in a Protestant N[orthern] I[reland] under [loyalist] control if only the British would leave'.[225] In Ó Brádaigh's own records, he notes proposed talks with loyalists between intermediaries Séan McBride, for republicans, and Desmond Boal, for loyalists, in the spring of 1977. In a proposed joint loyalist and republican statement, the aim was to produce '[a] lasting peace on a basis acceptable to all <u>the people of our Island'.[226]</u> In the end, the Irish government discovered and exposed these talks, fearing that loyalists and republicans could undermine their own state by redrawing state boundaries. But Ó Brádaigh took these talks seriously. He must surely have known that compromise was needed, perhaps in a six-county format independent of British rule, since unionists had already rejected a nine-county Ulster province.[227] Duddy alleges that McKee, in a personal capacity, remarked in May 1976 that he too would 'settle for an independent Ulster'.[228]

The precondition to any republican compromise with loyalists though was some form of public or private commitment by the British government to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Duddy's extended quote makes this clear. Ultimately, republican leaders felt that loyalists would never accept significant political change until the British left Northern Ireland. Since the republican movement was not facing terminal military decline by 1975, and believed that the British government was considering withdrawal, they saw no reason to accept British control of Northern Ireland. During a meeting on 19 January 1975, for instance, republicans warned British representatives 'if [Her Majesty's Government] wanted to disengage quietly from Ireland [we] would help them, but if [Her Majesty's Government] wanted to restructure British Rule in Ireland…then [we] would contest the ground with them'.[229] Hence why the IRA refused to take part in the Constitutional Convention, since it did not include British withdrawal as a perquisite to any settlement. Rees later realized in November 1975 that while republican leaders might compromise with loyalists: 'they wanted first from us a private indication of intent to withdraw from Ireland'. Rees refused to provide it, fearing a loyalist uprising.[230] As Duddy reports Ó Conaill and Ó Brádaigh saying,

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[225] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 17 November 1975.
[226] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/95, Joint statement to be released by Sinn Féin and Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee, 15 April 1977 (underlined in original).
[227] For more information on these talks, see White, *Ó Brádaigh*, 259-261.
[228] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/132, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1976, 12 May 1976.
[229] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 19 January 1975.
[230] NRA, Prem 16/958, Telegram from Merlyn Rees to Harold Wilson, 29 November 1975.

republican leaders 'want peace but will die rather than accept British rule'.[231] The ceasefire was only called, and only held, as long as the IRA leadership felt British withdrawal in some form was on the agenda. This point explains why after the Constitutional Convention met in early summer 1975, IRA violence increased. For the IRA, the convention meeting seemed to show that the British were moving away from withdrawal.[232] Meanwhile, republicans continued talking to the British in the hope that IRA attacks could extract further concessions.

Were republicans deluded about British withdrawal? The British certainly mentioned it. Duddy and Ó Brádaigh claim that in a Christmas letter in 1974, the British were prepared to discuss 'structures of disengagement'.[233] On 20 May 1975, Duddy records a phone conversation where Rob Middleton, a senior British intermediary, allegedly assured him: 'don't expect to see it in print. It is inevitable that the British are going'.[234] Similar statements are attributed to the British representatives within the Ó Brádaigh papers, with the caveat that the British could not declare privately or publicly any intention to withdraw in fear of that provoking civil war.[235] Intrigued by the British government's supposed statements, Peter Taylor once asked Michael Oatley whether republicans were telling the truth. Oatley replied:

> I always made it clear that the Government's ability to consider withdrawing from Northern Ireland was entirely dependent upon the will of the majority in Northern Ireland … [But] I said I am prepared to discuss anything you like.[236]

He does not confirm that the word 'disengagement' was used, but admits that the British government would consider 'anything', provided it was agreed with unionists. In February 1975, Rees gave a similar response about how the government should act towards republican demands, as seen earlier. The British government tried to get republicans to realize that anything could happen *if* republicans reached an agreement with loyalists first. Thus when republican delegates told their rank-and-file members that the British wanted to go, it was true. Where republican leaders were economical with the truth was when it came to a British declaration of intent to withdrawal being on the horizon. Provisional leaders perhaps promised a declaration was forthcoming to satisfy 'hardliners' that the ceasefire was worthwhile.

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[231] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, POL 35/132, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1976, 22 May 1976.
[232] Taylor, *Brits,* 184.
[233] Taylor, *Provos,* 177-191.
[234] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63 , Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 20 May 1975.
[235] NUIG, Ó Brádaigh Papers, Pol 28/67, Formal meeting between British and Irish republican representatives, 2 April 1975 (underlined in original. Italics mine).
[236] Oatley in Taylor, *Brits,* 178-179.

It is fair to say, however, that republican leaders overestimated their importance to the British government. As Ó Dochartaigh argues, republicans overlooked that 'countervailing pressures from loyalists, unionists, the security forces…the Irish government', and the SDLP, meant that the British government would not prioritise republican demands. Nor did the British government need to, as the Provisionals did not have an electoral mandate in 1975. Without a strong electoral mandate across Ireland, or an outright IRA military victory, there was very little leverage that the IRA could get towards British withdrawal. Furthermore, the British government were primarily concerned with keeping the unionist population on side to avoid a two-front war. After the ceasefire collapsed, the Provisionals realised the importance of an electoral mandate by the 1980s.[237]

Were the British deluded in their belief that there were 'doves' within the Provisional movement ready to make substantial compromises in 1975? Frank Cooper told Rees and Wilson on 17 January 1975 that the initial ceasefire broke down because the Provisional militarist 'hawks' had overcome the political 'doves'.[238] We have also seen that some Provisionals were serious about considering an independent Northern Ireland.[239] Talk of 'hawks and 'doves' within the IRA leadership was not plucked out of thin air. Those speaking on behalf of republicans told British representatives that such divisions existed. One example is when Father Denis Faul of Dungannon and Father Patrick Conning of Dublin spoke of divisions within republican ranks to Michael Oatley in April 1973: 'O'Connell was anxious for peace and a move to politics… Adams…might readily be persuaded to the same point of view … Twomey was…intransigent'.[240] Reverend Dr Edward Daly agreed. On 7 January 1975, he met leading Provisionals and noted 'division between hawks and doves'. In particular, Ó Conaill was praised for 'being sincerely interested in peace. Twomey however struck the Bishop as…extremely nasty'.[241]

There were divisions throughout the republican movement over what would represent a politically acceptable compromise in 1975. For example, Bradley: 'didn't want a political settlement, I wanted a withdrawal'.[242] In contrast, O'Doherty recalls in Derry: '[t]hose giving support to the ceasefire process argued that it was absolutely necessary…to

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[237] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 4-6.
[238] NRA, Prem 16/515, The end of the IRA ceasefire, 17 January 1975, p.1-3.
[239] Cf. Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 91-92.
[240] NRA, FCO 87/221, Meeting between Michael Oatley and Father Denis Faul and Father Patrick Conning at Laneside, 25April 1973.
[241] NRA, CJ4/860, Note of a meeting between the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Bishop of Derry, 7 January 1975, p.1-2.
[242] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 123-124.

translate…suffering into some realistic deal with the British … Some individuals…regarded [it] as…a traitorous sell-out'.[243] There were other differences between republicans too. Later, many younger republicans such as Adams were against a nine-county Ulster parliament, as they felt that it enabled unionists to deny all-Ireland self-determination. Conway certainly felt that it: 'seemed entirely insane … to propose giving the whip-hand straight back to the unionists in the event of our success'. He added: 'this particular policy [Éire Nua] was…hard sold…in places like Belfast, which had been under the unionist cosh since partition'.[244] Éire Nua was eventually removed from the Sinn Féin constitution in the early 1980s under Adams' direction.[245]

The evidence gives the impression that the British misunderstood republican divisions. Disagreements between republican leaders were about tactical issues, such as: was the IRA's campaign the sole vehicle leading to a united Ireland? Should the organization announce a ceasefire before major concessions were granted? What the movement's leaders *did not* disagree on was the need for a British declaration of intent to withdraw *before* any political compromise in 1975. Indeed, the Provisional delegation meeting with British intermediaries continually asked for a declaration of intent to withdraw. The 'doves' did not disagree with the 'hawks' that a declaration of intent to withdraw, given in private if necessary, was crucial before any compromise with loyalists. Thus opposition to the ceasefire is exaggerated, probably because hindsight has convinced various republicans that it was a 'trick'.[246] Conway agrees: '[t]here have been suggestions, bumped up by the leadership that took over in the late 1970s, that the British followed a policy of…stringing [us] along … It is not at all clear that they were that clever, or our negotiators that stupid', particularly as the Irish government at the time felt that the British were trying to withdraw.[247] Reservations towards the ceasefire only emerged once the British showed no signs of withdrawal. At that point, opposition even emerged within the so-called 'doves' camp. For example, Duddy records how: 'O'Connell…decided on war' in June 1975.[248] Subtle differences between the 'doves' and 'hawks' were never really understood by the British state, who were somewhat blinded by a desire to end the persistent IRA campaign by 1975.

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[243] O'Doherty, *The Volunteer,* 136-137.
[244] Conway, *Southside Provisional*, 51.
[245] Moloney, *Secret History*, 182-184.
[246] Craig, 'From Backdoors and Back Lanes', 110-111.
[247] Conway, *Southside Provisional*, 193-194; For the Irish government's fears in 1975, see Kerr, *Destructors*, 256, 302-303.
[248] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 25 June 1975.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Chapter two began by illustrating how William Whitelaw had no interest in bringing the Provisionals into any political settlement after July 1972. His intention was to create a power-sharing settlement with constitutional parties, leaving Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. At the same time, the security forces would try to reduce IRA activity to a level where it could not obstruct the power-sharing assembly nor influence British policy towards Northern Ireland. Once the executive collapsed in mid-1974, British policy radically shifted. Wilson, Rees and Cooper were serious about encouraging some form of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, most likely an independent Northern Ireland. What the British government attempted to do was get republicans and loyalists to agree to it. There would be no public declaration of intent to withdraw because the British government did not want a loyalist uprising.[249] Whilst sections of the British state may not have agreed with this approach, Wilson, Cooper and Rees were in the most powerful positions influencing Northern Ireland policy. If they wanted withdrawal, it is not clear what the Army or other state institutions could do to oppose it. Ambiguity over policy was intentional. It ensured that republicans would continue talks with promises of 'structures of disengagement', which gave British intermediaries time to try to convince republicans to accept a six-county compromise. Throughout this period, both Whitelaw and Rees felt that erosion of the IRA's military capacity was essential. For Whitelaw, the aim was to reduce IRA violence to help the power-sharing executive create stability. For Rees, he wanted to force an IRA ceasefire before trying to get republicans talking to loyalists. The use of informers and agents was also crucial. They enabled the security forces to directly target the IRA without inflaming the entire nationalist community via indiscriminate operations.

The second part of this chapter investigated whether increased infiltration was a major factor influencing the IRA to call a prolonged ceasefire in 1975. The Belfast IRA faced some damaging infiltration by 1975 for the various reasons given. Yet the Belfast units reacted by re-organizing into smaller cells by 1974. This change did begin to reignite the IRA's campaign there in later years. Meanwhile, in Derry city the IRA was not facing terminal decline by the 1975 ceasefire. The Derry city IRA reacted immediately to Operation Motorman by operating from across the border in Donegal, and by sending only small teams back to nationalist estates to continue its campaign. These measures meant that the Derry city

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[249] Kerr, *Destructors,* 13-15, 249-326.

IRA was difficult to infiltrate and not restrained to any great extent by informers and agents by 1975. In the IRA's centres of activity in rural areas, particularly south Armagh and Tyrone, their military capabilities increased by 1975, as demonstrated by the statistics increasing for intended deaths of IRA targets there since July 1972. Despite experiencing some infiltration, spies were largely ineffective for a number a reasons, including tight security arrangements. The other outlet for the IRA by 1975 was its campaign in England. An informer appears to have pre-warned the authorities about their first attacks in March 1973. However, the IRA reacted by tightening its security for cells in England. The inability of British intelligence to prevent numerous subsequent attacks shows a consistent lack of intelligence on IRA operations in England.

It is true that the level of IRA killings had declined since 1972. But the movement had spread further across Northern Ireland and the borderlands of the Irish Republic and maintained a persistent, if reduced, campaign, causing the security forces constant difficulties. For these reasons, this chapter questions any suggestion that the IRA was in serious decline by 1975. Neither are elements of the security forces right to suggest that they were on the verge of defeating the IRA by 1975.[250] As Rees told the Northern Ireland ministerial committee in February 1975, the IRA may have been damaged in some locations, but 'they are not beaten'.[251]

With the IRA continuing to keep Northern Ireland unstable by 1975, this chapter has suggested that pressure applied on the IRA by British intelligence was not a crucial influence on the organization's ceasefire decision in 1975. The prime motivating factor for the ceasefire was the IRA leadership's belief that British withdrawal was on offer. Without a substantial decline in the IRA's ability to continue its campaign, and without a political mandate, republican leaders saw no reason to accept British rule in any form in 1975. The final section also evaluated whether the IRA and British governments were deluded in their expectations of each other in 1975. To an extent they both misunderstood how flexible their opponents were. Republicans persistently stressed the need for a British declaration of intent to withdraw, although some leaders would consider an independent Northern Ireland as a last resort. The British government mistakenly believed that an appetite to politicise republicanism on the part of Ó Conaill and others was evidence that they might forgo a declaration of intent to withdraw. Republicans made it clear that any political compromise

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[250] Cf. *Operation Banner,* 848.
[251] NRA, CAB 134/3921, Memorandum by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, 18 February 1975, p.2.

depended upon a public or private declaration to withdraw being given first. There was no major distinction between the 'hawks and doves' in the Provisionals at this time in terms of their overall aims.

It does not appear that the British government lied about withdrawal. However, republicans did not realise that the British government was unlikely to grant withdrawal without significant military *and* political pressure being applied, since the British government were always looking to keep unionists on side to avoid a two-front war. In this sense, both the 1972 and 1975 ceasefires were a missed opportunity for republicans. They might have acquired further concessions from the British government if they had applied political pressure via an electoral mandate, or via an alliance with the SDLP and Irish government on nationalist objectives. Of course, we cannot say whether such an alliance would have worked, nor whether Sinn Féin would have received considerable electoral support; although Duddy claims John Hume contacted the Provisionals in September 1975.[252] Republicans did learn this lesson from 1975, and began to actively organize politically by the 1980s.

By late November 1975, Rees decided to bypass the Provisionals. The British state prepared for a 'long war'. They sought to bring about an acceptable level of violence, and a future power-sharing settlement within a Northern Ireland embedded within the UK. Informers and agents were again to play a crucial part in trying to reduce IRA activities and make the organization, at the very least, politically and militarily irrelevant. Not everyone agreed with this approach. One British civil servant wrote in May 1976:

> Republicanism…will not go away … recent years have shown that it has consistently enjoyed a good deal of political if not electoral support ... Until we...involve the leaders of the Republican tradition in political life, the formation and execution of a coherent long-term political strategy will fail.[253]

As Ó Dochartaigh notes, this was a 'losing paper'. Yet the next chapter reveals that this civil servant was prophetic. Not even informers and agents within the IRA's higher levels made the movement politically or militarily irrelevant by the 1990s.

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[252] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/63, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1975 to 1976, 15 September 1975.
[253] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Long Negotiation', 7-8; NRA, CJ4/1427, The Republican movement, 5 May 1976.

<u>Chapter three: The Struggle to Contain the IRA, January 1976 to August 1994</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

Chapter three starts by explaining the two stages in the evolution of British security and political policy towards republicans in this period. Between 1976 and 1989, British policy towards Northern Ireland consisted of trying to create a political settlement between the constitutional nationalist and unionist parties alongside the Irish government. Meanwhile, British security policy focused, at the very least, on creating an 'acceptable level' of IRA activity, 'a level at which normal social, political and economic activities can take place without intimidation'.[1] By significantly reducing IRA activity, the British state tried to bring about what Frampton, Bew and Hennessey term the 'strategic defeat' of the IRA. In other words, a situation where the IRA's campaign and Sinn Féin's political strategy were countered to such an extent that the Provisionals no longer influenced political affairs in Northern Ireland. In this scenario, the IRA would be 'forced' either to continue with an ineffective military campaign, or to accept a political settlement over which they had little influence.[2] In order to reduce IRA activity, the British state continued to utilise intelligence, partly because it enabled the state to avoid targeting the nationalist community indiscriminately. Furthermore, informers and agents were particularly important because the clandestine nature of the IRA increased following the full-implementation of cells in urban areas.

Chapter three goes on to highlight a significant shift in British policy towards republicans by 1990s. At this point, the British state began to re-engage with the Provisionals in back-channel dialogue and public statements. The British aimed to draw republicans into a ceasefire and all-party talks involving a political compromise with other parties.[3] Nonetheless, the intelligence campaign continued so that the IRA would agree promptly to a ceasefire and political compromise.

The primary focus of chapter three, though, is to provide the first in-depth analysis as to whether informers and agents played a crucial role in encouraging the IRA to ceasefire in 1994, as various authors have recently suggested.[4] The central argument of this chapter is that when we actually compare IRA levels of activity and suspected infiltration between 1976 and

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[1] *Operation Banner*, 809.
[2] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga,, *Talking to Terrorists*, 62-64, 72; Hennessey, 'Dirty War', 593-596.
[3] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 8-13,
[4] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 77-78, 86-93; Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 107-111, 246-247; Hennessey, 'Dirty War', 593-596.

1994 across each area where they operated, it does *not* appear that informers and agents pushed the IRA's campaign into a trajectory of decline. In Belfast, the cell structure helped remove low-level spies frequently, so that the IRA campaign could persist. Elsewhere, in many rural areas – with the exception of east Tyrone - the elusive nature of the IRA made it difficult to infiltrate and restrain. In England, the IRA's campaign actually increased in intensity by the 1990s. Attacks in England alongside the ability of the IRA to import various consignments of heavy weapons from Libya also shows that the IRA leadership was not infiltrated at its highest-levels. And in geographical areas where the IRA's campaign did decline by the 1990s, such as Derry city, it was often for political reasons rather than substantial infiltration. Ultimately, various parts of the IRA evaded significant infiltration and persisted in disrupting Northern Irish political and socio-economic life right up to 1994. The latter point is crucial because the IRA sought only to persist, certainly after 1983, in order to bring the British state back to the negotiating table; albeit whilst obtaining the strongest possible electoral mandate from which to extract considerable concessions in future negotiations.[5]

British political and military strategy towards the IRA and Sinn Féin, 1976 to 1994

Rees and Mason, 1976 to 1979

Chapter two detailed how Wilson and Rees had even contemplated granting Northern Ireland independence or dominion status in 1975. By 1976, they saw no prospect of that option being grasped by the Provisionals, who wanted at least a British private declaration of intent to withdraw. There were other reasons for the British state turning their back on the Provisional movement by 1976. Ó Dochartaigh accurately argues that a willingness to negotiate on the part of the Provisional leadership actually had a 'perverse effect of providing incentives for the British government to minimise movement towards the Republican position'. 'If the Provisionals were weakening and…were reluctant to restart their campaign', Ó Dochartaigh points out, 'it didn't make sense for the British government to incur the costs involved in negotiating a settlement with them'. In particular, the British state feared that including the Provisionals in talks would provoke a unionist rebellion and create a two-front conflict.[6] In Rees' opinion, compromises with the IRA were unnecessary by November 1975. Increasing arrests, declining support on the streets for the IRA, and constant attempts by Duddy and the IRA leadership to ask for talks suggested to Rees that the Provisionals were getting

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[5] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6-7.
[6] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 4-8.

'desperate'.[7] From a British state perspective, there was therefore nothing to gain by granting concessions to the IRA. On 8 May 1976, for instance, Brendan Duddy records angry exchanges with British intermediaries during a meeting in Belfast: 'I said 'the IRA want peace' … [Middleton]…said, 'if the IRA is losing support, why should we aid them by giving them a way out?''.[8]

As Ó Dochartaigh argues, 'In 1976 … a dominant consensus [emerged within the British state suggesting] that the struggle against the Provisionals could be won and that it was not necessary to engage with them'.[9] This sentiment was illustrated in November 1975. Rees told Wilson that the republican military campaign 'will eventually peter out as others have done before it'.[10] In April 1975, Frank King, the GOC, also believed 'the present Provisional IRA campaign will…peter out if attrition is maintained for long enough'.[11] The trend in British policy towards republicans after 1975 was to isolate republicans from political settlements whilst eroding the organization's military capabilities to a point where they had no influence on Northern Irish politics.[12]

The British state's new objective against the IRA was encapsulated in a document entitled *The Way Ahead for Security Policy,* circulated in autumn 1977. Various civil servants, MI5, the Northern Ireland Office, leading Army and RUC personnel had an input into its contents.[13] The general consensus was that increasing arrests and a decline in support for republicans was weakening the IRA. The authors foresaw a situation where: '[t]hose who recognise that the [IRA] campaign has failed…may revive attempts to negotiate a ceasefire'. The British government, they argued, should reject any such attempts. 'PIRA is unlikely to sacrifice its basic principles – a declaration of intent to withdraw…and a commitment to a 32 county Ireland', the document explained. For this reason, 'we cannot see any negotiations having a lasting impact on the security situation'. Instead, the document declared:

> [Her Majesty's Government's] policy is the restoration of law and order. This means treating [the IRA] through the courts and seeing them serve their prison sentences in the ordinary way. This is a long term policy and leaves no scope for honourable or lasting 'ceasefires' or 'stacking of arms' by PIRA.

[7] NRA, Prem 16/958, Merlyn Rees telegram to Harold Wilson, 29 November 1975, p.1-5.
[8] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, POL 35/132, Brendan Duddy Diary: 1976, 8 May 1976.
[9] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 8.
[10] NRA, Prem 16/958, Merlyn Rees telegram to Harold Wilson, 29 November 1975, p.1-5.
[11] NRA, FCO 87/484, Note of a conversation at Headquarters Northern Ireland in Lisburn, 9 April 1975.
[12] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6; Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga,, *Talking to Terrorists*, 62-64, 72.
[13] Hamill, *Pig in the Middle,* 184-185.

The document also noted how 'covert operations' were vital 'to maintain a high rate of attrition against PIRA terrorists'.[14] *The Way Ahead* document reveals two cornerstones of British policy towards republicans between 1976 and 1989. One was that the British state was no longer interested in encouraging the IRA to accept a political compromise because 'PIRA is unlikely to sacrifice' its demand for British withdrawal. The second feature is that a combination of legal convictions for IRA volunteers, alongside covert operations, which would include using informers and agents, were seen as the way to reduce the IRA's military strength.

The overall ambition of British policy between 1976 and 1989 was to eventually reduce IRA activity and political support to such an extent that it no longer influenced Northern Irish political or socio-economic affairs.[15] As *Operation Banner* puts it, British forces sought an 'acceptable level of violence': 'a level which the population can live with, and with which local police forces can cope … and at which a political process can proceed without significant intimidation'.[16] One way of envisaging what an 'acceptable level' of violence would look like is to consider the situation between the British state and dissident republicanism today. Despite militant dissident groups posing a threat, they have not vetoed a political settlement, and Northern Irish political, social and economic life generally takes place without significant intimidation.

In order to 'criminalize' the IRA, Merlyn Rees ended Special Category Status for paramilitary prisoners in March 1976. The British state hoped that 'criminalisation' might discourage the nationalist community from backing the Provisionals.[17] Mason expanded on Rees's efforts by focusing primarily on security policy. Mason was in complete agreement with *The Way Ahead* document from 1977: there would be no further negotiation opportunities for the Provisionals.[18] In January 1977, for example, Mason explained to the Prime Minister James Callaghan: 'we have no intention of engaging in further talks with…Sinn Fein'. As a result, contacts with Duddy were terminated.[19]

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[14] NRA, CJ4/1656, Annex B: 'The way ahead for security policy', 9 September 1977 (Italics mine).
[15] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists, 72,* 107, 246-247; see a similar view in Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6.
[16] *Operation Banner,* 809.
[17] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 84-85.
[18] Taylor, *Provos,* 202-203.
[19] NRA, Prem 16/1343, Letter from Roy Mason to James Callaghan, 9 February 1977.

Despite a decline in deaths caused by the IRA under Mason's tenure,[20] this decrease resulted partly because of a change in the organization's tactics and numbers, as will be explained.[21] Criminalisation also struggled to degrade the IRA's military capacity by 1979, as evidence later in this chapter shows. *Operation Banner* addressed a particular difficulty with criminalisation: '[t]he security forces [often] had information about offences that was not strong enough to bring a conviction'. Consequently: 'people suspected of up to a dozen or more terrorist offences [were often] able to move openly in the community'.[22] IRA counter-intelligence methods contributed to this difficulty. Gerry Bradley recalls: 'By 1976 you were worrying about forensics – cleaning up, burning stuff'.[23]

The supergrass system after Mason's time demonstrated further limitations with the criminalisation strategy in restraining the IRA. With the security services predicting increased IRA operations following the hunger-strikes in 1981, the RUC began pressurising paramilitary members to give evidence against their comrades in return for a lower prison sentence or total immunity from prison. There were some initial successes. In Belfast, Christopher Black's evidence led to 35 convictions in 1983 in return for immunity from prosecution.[24] Agent turned supergrass Raymond Gilmour from Derry set up the arrests of 40 republicans in 1984 in return for immunity from prosecution.[25] The supergrass trials, however, had collapsed by 1986. The British court of appeal eventually found it unacceptable to justify upholding convictions based solely on the evidence of a dubious witness. Most supergrasses (apart from Gilmour) were paramilitary members beforehand, threatened with convictions. Supergrasses were therefore likely to implicate others purely to reduce their own sentence or to gain immunity.[26] Unsurprisingly, this incentive encouraged some supergrasses to fabricate evidence. Robert Quigley, for instance, admitted to not implicating two men because they were his friends. The Northern Ireland Court of Appeal agreed that many convictions were based on dubious uncorroborated evidence, and quashed convictions based purely on supergrass evidence by 1986.[27] The supergrass system was further undermined by

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[20] Moloney, *Secret History,* 149-151.
[21] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 99-123.
[22] *Operation Banner,* 233.
[23] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 151.
[24] Stephen Greer, 'The Supergrass System', in Anthony Jennings (ed.), *Justice Under Fire: The Abuse of Civil Liberties in Northern Ireland*, (London, 1990) 73-99, at 73-79.
[25] Barker, *Shadows,* 214-215.
[26] Greer, 'Supergrass', 77-78.
[27] Stephen Greer, *Supergrasses: A Study in Anti-Terrorist Law Enforcement in Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1995), 192, 205.

IRA amnesties accepted by volunteers including Eamon Collins from Newry, who retracted their evidence.[28]

Stretching the law also failed to increase nationalist support for the British state. Sinn Féin's vote actually increased in the 1983 general election. Furthermore, seventy percent of Catholics interviewed for a national survey afterwards felt that the supergrass trials showed the British judiciary to be corrupt.[29] Neither had criminalisation or supergrass trials curtailed the IRA's ability to conduct high profile operations. For instance, the IRA killed eighteen British soldiers at Warrenpoint and Lord Mountbatten in County Sligo on 27 August 1979,[30] and bombed the Conservative Party conference in Brighton in 1984.

Changes in IRA structure and objectives

It was particularly crucial for the intelligence services to improve their coverage of the IRA after 1975, once the organization began operating in smaller cells in major cities.[31] The IRA declared that it was prepared now to fight a 'Long War' in 1977. Yet an insurgent movement containing a large number of volunteers knowing about the organization's plans 'does not lend itself to long-term conduct of a guerrilla struggle'.[32] The cell structure aimed to solve these problems in various ways: each cell was to consist, typically, of four to six volunteers, who supposedly were unknown to each other beforehand; each cell was not supposed to know the identities of other cells; numbers were reduced within each unit to prevent informers and agents facilitating mass arrests; cells tried to get volunteers operating outside their local area to 'confuse' British intelligence; only the cell leader was supposed to have access to senior volunteers to procure weapons, intelligence and operational plans; and the IRA would recruit primarily 'green lights' into cells, meaning republicans who were unknown to the security forces.[33]

In practice, we shall see that Derry city and Belfast cells did occasionally overlap, long-serving volunteers were still recruited, and senior IRA informers and agents had some access to cells. Nonetheless, the cells did improve the internal security of the IRA in urban areas, as this chapter explains. Ó hAdhmaill remembers how in Belfast: 'the cells made it

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[28] Kiran Sarma, 'Informers and the Battle Against Republican Terrorism', in *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal* (2005), 165-180, at 170.

[29] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 85-86.

[30] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 197-237.

[31] Republicans explained that the cell-structure was not implemented in rural areas because of their smaller numbers and wider terrain.

[32] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.

[33] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 128-129, 152-154; Taylor, *Provos,* 210-212.

much more difficult for local people to know who was in the IRA; or at least…who held what positions in the movement … it was much more secretive'.[34] According to *Operation Banner,* the security services saw a refined IRA as a formidable opponent after 1975:

> PIRA gradually recommenced activity…in a new, effective cellular structure … attacks were fewer; but more selective, better conducted and more effective. This period demonstrated the emergence of PIRA as a highly effective terrorist organization.[35]

Hindsight has not altered the British Army's opinion. In late 1978, Brigadier James Glover and the Army's intelligence staff conducted a review of the counter-insurgency effort.[36] They believed that the cell-structure meant: 'PIRA…is less vulnerable to penetration by informers', and that it could sustain a 'disproportionate' level of violence compared to its numbers.[37]

The cell structure also signalled a major change in IRA strategy towards a 'Long War'. The organization publicly declared in 1977 that they would fight on indefinitely until the British grew tired and declared their intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland. Most authors take the 'Long War' declaration at face value.[38] Even some republicans, such as Tommy McKearney, agree that: '[t]he concept behind the Long War strategy was that the organization would…pursue its armed campaign for whatever length of time it took to force the British government to declare its intention to withdraw from Ireland'.[39] In contrast, Ó Dochartaigh convincingly argues that for the republican leadership, the 'Long War' strategy was actually: 'a bargaining move aimed at pressuring the British government to re-engage in negotiations with the Provisionals'. The republican leadership sought *only* to pressure the British back to the negotiating table with the threat of persistent IRA activity. In particular, the introduction of Sinn Féin's electoral mandate to republican strategy from 1981 was envisaged as further pressurising the British government to recommence talks. Republican leaders hoped that a considerable electoral mandate could help maximise concessions towards fulfilling republican objectives. Talk of imposing republican objectives on the British government through military and political pressure was primarily designed to motivate volunteers; and, more importantly, to convey republican military resilience to the British, so that the latter did not see a republican willingness to negotiate as a sign of weakness.[40]

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[34] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 9 September 2013.
[35] *Operation Banner,* 232.
[36] Taylor, *Provos,* 214-216.
[37] NRA, FCO 87/976, Future Terrorists Trends, 15 December 1978.
[38] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 74-75; Moloney, *Secret History,* 169-171.
[39] Cf. McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 141.
[40] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 3-7.

A few republicans interviewed agreed that their aim was to get the British back into negotiations after 1975. Séanna Walsh explained that by the late 1970s:

> [t]here would be smaller numbers involved rather than big numbers ... *When you understood that we were about fighting the British here until the British realised that they don't have any alternatives but to sit down and talk to the Republican leadership*, then you don't need your thirty to forty people in every area.[41]

Danny Morrison echoed this view:

> The IRA from…1977 onwards said publicly that this was going to be a long war … the Brits were thinking that they were going the squeeze the IRA … all these statements backfired on the Brits. Whereas the IRA was able to say that we did not say we were going to win in 1978 … *they said that they were fighting until you come to the negotiating table.*[42]

Morrison would certainly have considerable insight into republican leadership strategy because he had close connections to leading republicans including Gerry Adams at the time. Of course, it could be argued that both republicans are perhaps trying to alter republican objectives in hindsight so that the Good Friday Agreement appears a success for Sinn Féin. But other evidence suggests that by at least 1983, the republican leadership did want a negotiated political settlement. Brendan O'Brien, a one-time senior RTÉ reporter with contacts in the republican movement and leadership during the Troubles, wrote:

> by 1983 … [t]he thinking of the [republican] leadership was that … in the event of a settlement good enough to bring about an end to the IRA campaign, the Republican Movement would not remain on the outside, marginalised … that meant getting into elections, maximising their political support North and South, to arrive, finally, at the negotiating 'table' with the strongest possible mandate.[43]

The fact that O'Brien reached this verdict in various versions of his book between 1993 and 1999 is important. It cannot be claimed that O'Brien attempts to tone down republican objectives in order to justify republican compromises since 1998. Crucially, Father Alec Reid, who was involved in dialogue with Gerry Adams in the early 1980s, told the producers of the *Endgame in Ireland* documentary in 2001 that: 'the representatives of…Sinn Fein…consistently told us', between 1981 and 1983, 'that they would cooperate fully with the church and her representatives in…the creation of an alternative method to the armed

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[41] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012 (italics mine).
[42] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014 (Italics mines).
[43] O'Brien. *Long War,* 118.

struggle'. Reid adds that republican leaders accepted the need for a 'democratic resolution' by the early 1980s.[44]

Of course, republicans wanted the highest possible level of disruptive attacks and political mandate possible, so that when talks emerged they could extract substantial concessions. But the republican leadership *did not* believe that this strategy would definitely bring about a British withdrawal. Ó Dochartaigh points out that leading republicans such as McGuinness and Adams had been present during the failed ceasefire talks in 1972, had witnessed the lack of progress towards a political agreement in 1975, and found the Thatcher government reluctant to concede to the five demands of the hunger-strikers in the early 1980s. After such experiences: 'it [was] unlikely that…the [republican] leadership ever envisaged a moment when they would finally impose their demands on the British government'.[45] Admittedly, during interviews for the *Endgame in Ireland* documentary in 2001, leading republican Pat Doherty said that the republican movement had: 'wanted the British to withdraw and…a timeframe for British withdrawal'. Nonetheless, he adds the important caveat that the leadership 'were…realistic enough' to know that the strength of their electoral mandate, and the willingness of other Irish nationalists to back republican demands, would inevitably determine what concessions were achievable.[46]

With the IRA adopting the 'Long War' and the cell structure by 1977, the security forces had to respond. They did so primarily by expanding their 'intelligence war' against the IRA. RUC and British intelligence had learned from informers and agents that parts of the IRA, such as its internal security department created in the late 1970s, potentially had access across the organization. In theory, placing spies into the higher echelons 'could cause havoc' throughout the organization.[47] Meanwhile, British intelligence would recruit low-level spies to restrict further the IRA's ability to operate. Disruption would be gradual to enable spies to climb the IRA's hierarchy and be in a position to prevent more attacks. The importance of human intelligence is implicit in the recent de Silva review (2012), which investigated state collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in the killing of Pat Finucane. By the 1980s, it describes how the British state placed a 'high-priority in pursuing an intelligence-led approach …

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[44] King's College London's Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), London, Endgame in Ireland, Television Documentary Archives, Endgame in Ireland 3/19, Typescript transcript of rolls 284-288 with Father Alec Reid; for more about Reid see Moloney, *Secret History,* 219-245.
[45] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 5.
[46] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 2/6, Typescript transcript of rolls 193-195 with Pat Doherty.
[47] Moloney, *Secret History,* 156.

[which focused on] the penetration of agents to the heart of a terrorist group'.[48] *Operation Banner* also recalls that from 1972: '[t]he whole campaign rapidly became dominated by considerations of intelligence'.[49] Whether the British state achieved its aim against the republican movement with the help of informers and agents will be debated shortly.

The Thatcher years, 1979 to 1990

'The British Government's main military objective in the 1980s', *Operation Banner* notes, 'was the destruction of PIRA'.[50] Lord Charles Powell, private secretary to Margaret Thatcher between 1983 and 1990, also commented to the *Endgame in Ireland* documentary in 2001:

> Mrs Thatcher's pre-occupation in dealing with Northern Ireland could be summed up in a single word – security … the task was to defeat the IRA … she…had rather less interest in trying to resolve the political aspects of the problem.[51]

Thatcher's approach primarily involved isolating Sinn Féin from political life in Northern Ireland, whilst 'containing' and damaging the IRA's military capabilities.[52]

On the political front, Thatcher remained committed to ensuring that there would not be 'honourable ceasefire' for the IRA. Particular republican attacks, including the Conservative Party conference bombing in Brighton in 1984, can account for Thatcher's lack of appetite for political deals including republicans. Furthermore, she believed that the hunger-strikes showed that the Provisionals were uncompromising and weakening.[53] Admittedly, there was dialogue between Brendan Duddy and MI6's Michael Oatley during the hunger-strikes.[54] But neither the British state nor the IRA viewed these conversations as the beginning of political dialogue; hence the back-channel contacts were terminated thereafter until 1990.[55] At first, Thatcher reached a similar view to Mason: all-party talks were a waste of time until the constitutional parties were ready to negotiate. Instead, Thatcher 'started from the need for greater security'.[56] Following the deaths of Lord Mountbatten and eighteen British soldiers in August 1979, she sent Maurice Oldfield to coordinate and

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[48] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012,: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter004/, http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/executive-summary-and-principal-conclusions/, <accessed 09 May 2013>.

[49] *Operation Banner,* 501-506, 809, 818, 835, 855-856.

[50] *Operation Banner,* 242.

[51] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 1/14, Typescript transcript of rolls 94-96 with Charles Powell.

[52] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 82-116; Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 120-147.

[53] Taylor, *Brits,* 238-239, 265-267.

[54] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 88.

[55] See *Setting the Record Straight: A Record of Communications between Sinn Féin and the British government October 1990 – November 1993,* (Belfast, 1993) 2-3, 11-12.

[56] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1995), 385-386.

improve the intelligence system in Northern Ireland. There was also the supergrasses and the return of the SAS to the province in the 1980s to try to make further inroads into the IRA.[57]

Her ambition to improve the security situation was quickly dashed. The SDLP and the Irish government refused to support her approach without the British state commencing talks about power-sharing with an Irish dimension. Thatcher 'had to contemplate' the Irish government's demands if she wanted the Republic to counter the IRA.[58] Humphrey Atkins, Thatcher's first secretary of state, therefore attempted multi-party talks in 1980. But hopes for a constitutional party settlement faded after the hunger-strikes led to Sinn Féin's electoral rise.[59] Furthermore, the Ulster Unionist Party under James Molyneaux wanted greater integration with the rest of the United Kingdom; the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) favoured a return to majority rule; and the SDLP favoured power-sharing with an Irish dimension, particularly as they feared that settling for anything less would see their support drain towards Sinn Féin.[60]

In order to boost support for constitutional nationalism at the expense of Sinn Féin, the British government eventually signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. The agreement provided the Irish Republic, and thus northern nationalists, with a consultative role over Northern Irish policy. The agreement tried to promote the message that constitutional nationalism succeeded in gaining improvements for their community, whilst violent republicanism did not. It also sought to secure constitutional nationalist support in the security and political effort against the IRA.[61] Thatcher confirmed that the agreement showed her determination to reject the Provisionals as part of any political settlement during an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph*:

> Des McCartan *Belfast Telegraph*
> [The Anglo-Irish Agreement] obviously does not envisage [working with] Sinn Fein…
>
> Margaret Thatcher
> [Y]ou cannot do everything in life …there are evil people about, but there are far…more who are decent and…want to work together and in the end you believe that those who...want to work together can overcome those who are disruptive.[62]

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[57] Taylor, *Brits,* 226, 254-259.
[58] Thatcher, *Downing Street Years,* 385-386.
[59] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 135.
[60] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 83-85.
[61] Moloney, *Secret History,* 241; Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 126-127.
[62] *Belfast Telegraph,* Margaret Thatcher interview, 13 December 1985: at
http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106202, <accessed 13 June 2011> (italics mine).

In the short-term, however, the agreement failed to match her expectations because: 'greater support by the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland or the Irish Government…for the fight against terrorism [was] not…forthcoming'.[63] The agreement also provoked anger amongst unionists, setting back any return to power-sharing talks. Unionists were dismayed that they had not been consulted and that the Irish government had not changed their constitutional claim over Northern Ireland. In retaliation, they refused to engage with the British government for several years.[64]

A case could be made for suggesting that British strategy towards republicans began to alter in 1986. According to Moloney, Tom King, the Northern Ireland Secretary of State at the time, alongside select members of the intelligence services, replied to letters from Gerry Adams. The British made it clear that they would be willing for republicans to help create a political settlement, and that they were 'indifferent about the nature of any settlement as long as it was not imposed by force'. All that the British state required first was that the IRA ending their armed campaign before talks. Moloney believes that there was no departure in British government policy by replying to Adams: 'Britain had always made it clear that IRA violence was an obstacle to Sinn Fein's taking part in normal political life'.[65] Tommy McKearney provides a similar view. He believes that the hunger-strikes fundamentally altered British strategy towards Irish republicanism:

> (post-internment, pre-hunger strike) … the [British] objective was to entomb the IRA physically as well as politically…the…SDLP would fill the vacuum and again enter a power-sharing administration … The hunger strikes of 1980-81 derailed this plan ... the insurgents had a bedrock of support that could not easily be eroded … the British introduced a third phase, which involved creating conditions that would encourage a significant section of the IRA to engage within Northern Ireland's parliamentary political process.

McKearney believes that 'repression' remained vital in order to remove IRA hardliners. But the British ultimately wanted a deal with the Adams leadership, McKearney suggests, because it was 'better to deal with the devil you know'.[66] Following this line of argument, the King contacts could be viewed as part of a British strategy aimed at drawing republicanism towards a political compromise.

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[63] Thatcher, *Downing Street Years,* 406-407.
[64] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 101-103.
[65] Moloney, *Secret History,* 246-260.
[66] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011.

The trouble with subscribing to the view that British policy began to evolve under King, however, is that he cut contacts with Adams because of continuing IRA activities in 1987. Their activities included volunteers being caught at King's Wiltshire estate with plans to target him. Moloney admits that 'the stark difference' between Adams' statements alluding to peace and the IRA continuing its campaign convinced the British state that the IRA was 'spoofing'.[67] Yet he does not draw the obvious conclusion that British policy *did not* envisage a political settlement with republicans thereafter for a number of years. Between 1980 and 1989, the British government actually showed little interest in bringing republicans into a political settlement. The broadcasting ban, the oath of non-violence for councillors in Northern Ireland and restrictions on funding to republican projects were introduced to reduce the republican influence over political affairs in Northern Ireland. These measures were not designed to pressurise Sinn Féin into multi-party talks up to 1989 because no such talks were on offer that included republicans. The IRA's continuing campaign convinced Thatcher and her officials that the IRA would never accept a political compromise. The validity of their view will be challenged in chapter four.

The return to political dialogue: July 1989 to August 1994

Various authors accurately state that Peter Brooke created a small, but 'significant' shift in British policy towards Provisional republicans. His objective switched to attempting to create a political compromise that would include Sinn Féin and bring an end to IRA activity.[68] Dialogue recommenced with republicans via public statements and back-channel talks through intermediaries, despite continuing IRA activity. In November 1989, for example, Brooke suggested that the British could not militarily defeat the IRA and promised 'imaginative' dialogue if the conflict ended.[69] Brooke also authorized MI6's Michael Oatley to recommence discussions with the Provisionals' 'contact' Brendan Duddy. Oatley subsequently met with Martin McGuinness in October 1990, with contact continuing between British and IRA intermediaries until late 1993.[70] The majority of personnel within the British state supported re-engaging with republicans. MI6 via Michael Oatley, MI5's John Deverell and other intermediaries took some part in the back-channel talks, showing that the intelligence agencies clearly agreed with re-engagement.[71] In addition, Margaret Thatcher by

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[67] Moloney, *Secret History,* 256-257.
[68] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 7-13.
[69] David Bloomfield, *Political Dialogue in Northern Ireland: The Brooke Initiative 1989-92* (London, 1998), 15-18.
[70] *Setting the Record Straight,* 12.
[71] Taylor*, Provos*, 320-322.

November 1989 and her successor John Major obviously supported the new strategy since they allowed Brooke to make conciliatory statements and to reopen back-channel contacts. No longer was the British state seeking to isolate republicans from politics in Northern Ireland. Instead, they wanted a political settlement that included the Provisionals, provided that IRA activity ended beforehand.[72]

The reasons for the British state's change in its strategy towards republicans will be evaluated in chapter four. As IRA violence continued, however, John Major still believed: '[m]any [IRA] members knew no other way of living than through violence…and would never give it up voluntarily'. As a result, Major insisted that the British state needed to continue: 'squeezing out terrorism by every means, persuasive as well as military'.[73] A former senior civil servant working with Major at the time on Northern Ireland agreed that there were two-strands to British policy towards the IRA in the 1990s. The thinking was that 'the harder you lean down successfully in containing the security threat, and the more you open the door with the bright sunshine behind it'.[74] Thus a dual-strategy towards the republican movement re-emerged by 1990, similar to that created by Rees and Wilson in 1974.[75] The security forces would continue their intelligence and overt operations to erode the IRA's military capacity. The hope was that a decline in the IRA's military capabilities would quickly force republicans into a ceasefire. In the meantime, the British government would talk to the Provisional leadership before and during a ceasefire to persuade them to accept an internal power-sharing settlement.[76]

The remaining parts of this chapter consider whether informers and agents were crucial in reducing IRA activity and bringing about a ceasefire by August 1994, as some authors have suggested.[77] The crucial part played by the intelligence war and spies in getting the IRA to the negotiating table is promoted in some primary sources too. Sir Michael Dewar, a one-time senior British Army colonel, argues: 'British intelligence was beginning to take its toll' on the IRA by the 1990s, so that 'the IRA came under increasing pressure and that pressure led them eventually to sue for peace in 1994'.[78] A former British civil servant also suggested:

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[72] Taylor, *Provos,* 315-321.
[73] John Major, *The Autobiography* (London, 1999), 432-433.
[74] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014.
[75] Taylor, *Provos,* 328-329.
[76] McKearney's description of the dual-approach differs as he suggests that it represented British strategy since the 1970s. McKearney, *Provisional IRA*, 138-139.
[77] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 107-128, 244-247, 255-256.
[78] Cf. Dewar, *British Army,* 222-226.

IRA-Sinn Fein had run out of road in terms of the use of violence … The security system had really got its hand on their neck … The number of security forces casualties…was right down into single figures per year. And there was no sign that it was going to loosen. Politics was the road forward.[79]

The central argument of this chapter, however, is that the intelligence campaign against the IRA did *not* force the organization into the peace process by 1994. The IRA's cellular structure in Belfast, alongside the secretive and elusive nature of many rural units and the IRA leadership, enabled the Provisionals to persist in causing instability in Northern Ireland and England into the 1990s. Below, I provide the first extensive analysis of the impact of informers and agents on IRA units across the various geographical areas where the organization operated between 1976 and 1994.

It is vital that we compare the trajectory of the IRA's campaign in the 1980s and 1990s to levels of IRA activity *after* 1975. The introduction of the cells and the 'Long War' declaration implied that the IRA in Belfast and Derry city would no longer reach the activity levels managed in the early 1970s. This chapter therefore evaluates whether the IRA remained capable of persisting in its attacks against some of its targets, who by killing or damaging the organization felt it could influence British policy. Targets included the RUC, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), British soldiers, contractors working for the security forces, retired security force members, alongside English and Northern Irish towns and cities. Whether somebody was a target can be seen by looking within *Lost Lives* to see if the IRA apologised after a particular killing.[80] Attacks on loyalists are not considered here because they were not inflicting damage on the British state. The impact of civilian killings on republican strategy is considered in chapter four.

The intelligence structure, 1976 to 1998

Before evaluating the impact of the intelligence campaign on the IRA, it is worth explaining how the intelligence system was supposed to function. In Northern Ireland, the RUC Special Branch led the intelligence matrix and gathered intelligence through 'surveillance and…human agents'.[81] It was divided into sub-divisions, with agent-handlers positioned within each region. The recent inquiry in to the killing of lawyer Rosemary Nelson in 1999 also noted that Special Branch had 'three regions, Belfast, North and South, [which] enjoyed

[79] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014.
[80] For an example of an IRA apology see reference number 2528 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[81] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.6-3.14: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.

a considerable degree of autonomy'. An agent-handler for Special Branch would give an informer or agent a reference number and code-name if the 'source' was seen as being reliable after the third meeting. A local RUC source unit led by a detective chief-inspector would debrief handlers after they met their informers or agents. An SB50 form was also created, which, according to de Silva, 'were typically brief summaries of the intelligence received from an agent'. If Special Branch chose to share the intelligence with other intelligence agencies, such as the FRU, the SB50 form would be rewritten onto an RIRAC form. Special Branch also copied intelligence centrally and stored it at their headquarters at Knock.[82] Special Branch could therefore determine what - if any - information other agencies could receive.

British Army intelligence-gathering fundamentally altered by the early 1980s. The major innovation was the creation of the FRU for their central human-intelligence gathering agency. Before the 1980s, individual brigade intelligence units collected information from informers and agents. The FRU centralised and coordinated human intelligence work for the Army. Its structure consisted of a headquarters and four regional units covering the north, east, south and west of Northern Ireland. Each detachment had an operating commander (OC) and agent-handlers. The OC would report intelligence to the FRU's Commanding Officer (CO). From there, the FRU CO would provide reports to the CLF and GOC. FRU handlers frequently created two types of intelligence reports. The 'Contact Form' noted 'detail about a meeting between a handler and an agent and were circulated internally within Army structures'. In contrast, a Military Intelligence Source Report 'was a summary of the intelligence received that was transmitted to [Special Branch] and, when appropriate, to [MI5] personnel'.[83]

The primary role of MI5 was to provide technical surveillance. They were directed where to bug by the Special Branch and FRU. They did, however, run a small selection of agents and informers themselves. MI5's role later expanded because they took over the lead role in counter-terrorism activities on the UK 'mainland' from the Metropolitan Police Special Branch in late 1992.[84] MI5 also had liaison officers at Army headquarters in Lisburn and RUC headquarters at Knock. But they had to gain permission from Special Branch if they

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[82] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.7: at
http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>; *The Rosemary Nelson Inquiry Report* (House of Commons, May 2011), 137-139.
[83] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.15-3.21: at
http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.
[84] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 771-775.

wanted to recruit an informer or agent.[85] Another crucial figure in this intelligence web was the DCI, who delivered 'high-level policy direction and advice relating to intelligence activity in Northern Ireland…to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland…the Chief Constable of the RUC and the GOC'. The DCI met regularly with the RUC Chief Constable and GOC to ensure that the Secretary of State's priorities were in the minds of the security forces. There was a direct link, therefore, between the intelligence effort and government policy during the conflict. Nonetheless, government ministers and officials in Whitehall would not demand specific operations, such as to recruit particular individuals as informers. Instead, Westminster and Whitehall would provide overall strategic objectives for political and security policy.[86] Former agent-handlers from the Special Branch and FRU certainly felt that government objectives influenced their work. Whilst complaining that the government did not provide guidelines for the handling of agents, for instance, a former FRU handler told de Silva that the government would be 'calling for counter terrorist measures' at particular times.[87]

The Tasking and Co-ordinating Groups (TCGs) created in the late 1970s were also crucial in the grassroots intelligence network. To avoid conflict between the various agencies involved in undercover work, TCGs were comprised of representatives from Special Branch, MI5, FRU, 14 Intelligence company and the SAS. Led by a regional Special Branch superintendent, they planned and implemented operations based on information gathered from all agencies in a regional TCG. There were three TCGs: TCG Belfast, TCG South based in Gough Barracks covering the Armagh and southern areas, and TCG North covering the Derry area.[88]

In practice, this system had some success in improving cooperation between the intelligence agencies. Indeed, later in this chapter the Loughgall ambush will be detailed, where eight IRA members were killed by the SAS whilst attacking a police barracks in Armagh, May 1987. Ian Phoenix, a former Special Branch leader of TCG South, claims that

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[85]*Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.22-3.27: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>; *Nelson Inquiry Report*, 138, 161-169.
[86] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.29: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>; *Nelson Inquiry Report*, 161-163.
[87] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 4.77-4.81: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter004/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.
[88] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 132-135; *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.34-3.35: at http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.

his TCG set-up the ambush.[89] Nevertheless, a former colonel who worked at British Army headquarters told the Nelson inquiry: '[o]nly…crumbs from Special Branch's table came to us.'[90] Rob Lewis, the pseudonym for a former FRU agent-handler who worked in Fermanagh during the 1980s, agreed: 'Special Branch did not always play ball with us'.[91] Moreover, Ian Phoenix recorded in his diaries that parts of his own organization saw 'people [build up] little fiefdoms' that did not share information. Yet Phoenix also found that MI5 increasingly interfered with Special Branch's work after the end of the Cold War, as the latter looked for new outlets.[92] Former Special Branch employees have also stressed they felt that the Army and FRU were often only after short-term gains during their short tours of duty, explaining Special Branch reluctance to always share intelligence.[93]

Conflicting evidence currently makes it too difficult to attribute blame to one particular agency for the lack of cooperation sometimes experienced. The crucial point is that 'institutional rivalries' did create a 'strained relationship', particularly between the FRU and Special Branch.[94] There is no doubt that these flaws within the intelligence system made it more difficult for the British state to bring about an 'acceptable level of violence'. Indeed, de Silva discovered government documentation from the late 1980s concerning meetings between government ministers and the security forces demanding better coordination, particularly following the IRA killing of eight soldiers at Ballygawley in 1988.[95] Whether there existed sufficient intelligence anyway to significantly erode the IRA's military capacity across Northern Ireland and England is debated below.

Belfast

In *Future Terrorist Trends* in 1978, Brigadier Glover argued: 'the PIRA leadership appreciate that their campaign will be won or lost in Belfast'.[96] Much of the secondary literature agrees with his view for three reasons: Belfast was Northern Ireland's capital city; it was where the Provisionals emerged in 1969; and leading figures in the republican movement such as Gerry

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[89] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 205-221.
[90] *Nelson Inquiry Report*, 184-185.
[91] Rob Lewis, *Fishers of Men* (London, 2000) 120, 227.
[92] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 189-190, 321-322.
[93] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.45: at
http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.
[94] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.46-3.48: at
http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.
[95] *Pat Finucane Review*, 2 December 2012, point 3.41-3.42: at
http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/volume01/chapter003/, <accessed 9 May 2013>.
[96] NRA, FCO 87/976, Future Terrorists Trends, 15 December 1978.

Adams came from Belfast.[97] The previous two chapters revealed that various republicans also felt that Belfast was pivotal for the IRA. McKearney, for instance, suggested that Belfast was roughly fifty percent of the IRA's strength even after the introduction of the cell-structure, because there was a larger concentration of nationalists there to recruit.[98]

By the 1990s, Bew and Frampton believe that the Belfast Brigade's campaign was 'being brought to a standstill'. Evidence to support their argument includes the case of Stakeknife, which will be discussed shortly, and the fact that no British soldiers were killed in the city after 1992. These authors quote Ian Phoenix too, who suggests that eight out of ten Belfast IRA operations were prevented by the 1990s. They also note that the last commercial bombing in Belfast happened in 1993. They argue that the 'decline' in the vitality of the IRA's campaign in Belfast '[prompted] a growing realization within [the IRA] leadership that the 'armed struggle' had reached a point of deadlock' by 1994.[99] Some evidence below does suggest that there was significant infiltration of the Belfast Brigade at certain times between 1976 and 1994. However, Bew and Frampton are inaccurate in suggesting that the Belfast Brigade reached deadlock by the 1990s because of spies. Their inaccuracy stems from their limited analysis of the impact of informers and agents on the Belfast IRA.

After the collapse of the 1975 ceasefire, IRA killings of alleged spies recommenced. Seamus Brendan O'Brien was killed on 17 January 1976 in west Belfast. According to *Lost Lives*, the IRA shot him for informing and working with loyalist paramilitaries to attack republican pubs. O'Brien was supposedly 'named to the IRA as an informer by Vincent Heatherington', whose case will be discussed. O'Brien's mother and journalist Martin Dillon both dispute these claims.[100] The most bizarre case of alleged IRA infiltration during the late 1970s involved Vincent Heatherington and Myles McGrogan, two young men from west Belfast. Details surrounding their activities have emerged from various sources, including *Lost Lives*, Brendan Hughes, and journalists Moloney and Dillon. The details are as follows. At the start of May 1974, two RUC officers were shot dead in Belfast. Heatherington and McGrogan were arrested. When they entered Crumlin Road jail they asked to be placed in the IRA's section. Yet neither were active republicans. Brendan Hughes contacted the IRA outside the jail via smuggled notes. He found that Heatherington was once in the IRA youth-

[97] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 110-111; Moloney, *Secret History,* 164.
[98] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011.
[99] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 110-111; Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 93-96.
[100] Reference number 1588 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Martin Dillon*, The Dirty War* (London, 1991), 85-86.

wing, but was thrown out for anti-social behavior. The IRA unit who shot the two RUC officers also verified that both men were not involved.

Eventually, according to Hughes, Heatherington admitted 'he had been working with…Brits'. Heatherington also allegedly gave the IRA the names of other spies. The IRA began interrogating prisoners in Crumlin Road and Long Kesh. Heatherington's next 'confession' spread absolute panic in IRA ranks: his mission was to collect poison from somebody within the prison and poison the tea of leading IRA figures including Hughes. After poison was discovered on the loyalist wing, Hughes recalls 'mad hysteria'. All food and water was monitored by the IRA. The plot thickened. Heatherington withdrew the original names he provided and created a new list. Hughes was in disbelief: 'he was playing with me. It was basic counter-intelligence disinformation that they were spreading'. The damage to IRA morale in the jails was enormous. Hughes: 'we were in total disarray … You didn't know who was a tout, or who was going to poison you'. McGrogan and Heatherington were acquitted and removed from prison. Moloney and Dillon claim that the loss of support for Hughes and his counterparts who interrogated others based on Heatherington's information led to most volunteers accepting the ceasefire of 1975. No wonder that, after 1975, the younger generation called for action to be taken against Heatherington, McGrogan and their associates.

What followed were a series of IRA killings. Heatherington was found dead in Belfast on 6 July 1976, having been abducted in Andersontown. The IRA took longer to strike at Myles McGrogan, who they killed in the Lisburn area in April 1977. A month later, the IRA shot James Green. A former member of the British Army, Green had worked with taxi firms in Belfast. Unconfirmed reports say that Heatherington named him as a British agent. There is no proof that any of those killed were British informers and agents; although the evidence does point in that direction for Heatherington and McGrogan. The RUC and Army have not confirmed any allegations.[101] But Ingram admits that it certainly was a tactic of British intelligence to divert IRA energies to spy hunting to 'sow alarm, despondency and paranoia' within the organization.[102]

IRA killings for alleged infiltration continued thereafter. For example, on 8 April 1978, a masked gang entered Brendan Megraw's flat in west Belfast and abducted him. He

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[101] For all the above information, see reference numbers 1090-1091, 1679, 1748, 1913 and 1926 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Dillon, *Dirty War,* 75-92; Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 177-182, 190-191.
[102] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 83.

was never seen again. For years, the IRA denied involvement. His widow denied that Megraw was an informer. Yet in April 1999, the IRA claimed said: 'Brendan Megraw, a civilian from Belfast…in 1978…admitted to being a British army agent'. This claim cannot be verified. His body was only recently found in late 2014 in county Meath. Why he was 'disappeared' remains unclear.[103]

IRA killing rates of 'intended targets' between 1976 and 1979, however, do not indicate any particular difficulties in Belfast with informers and agents. Ten deaths of IRA 'intended targets' occurred in 1976, sixteen in 1977, six in 1978, before a rise to eighteen in 1979.[104] Of course, these figures represent a significant decline from 1972. But this decrease resulted partly from the IRA choosing to have fewer volunteers. As McKeown observed:

> If you are trying to build something long-term … we cannot be running about on the off-chance that there might be soldier down the road. We would lose weapons and volunteers doing that … This would inevitably reduce the number of operations that you are carrying out … you did not need lots…of volunteers.[105]

The British state's area review for Belfast in October 1980 concurs that a decline in random IRA shootings at security forces was 'probably a reflection of…increased discipline of the terrorist organization, which is no longer willing to expose men in…unproductive attacks'. The review also commented: '[t]he threat posed by [Belfast] PIRA is now based on a limited, secure and refined organization mounting relatively few attacks'.[106]

In contrast, parts of the 1980s did see a short-term decline for the Belfast Brigade. The IRA struggled to maintain its killing levels compared to the period between 1976 and 1980. A particular period of concern for the IRA was between 1982 and 1986, where the figures dramatically declined to low single figures each year, although they did rise temporarily thereafter.[107] Nevertheless, the statistics do correspond somewhat with significant infiltration of the Belfast Brigade in the 1980s. And whilst death statistics do not always provide an accurate picture of the IRA's vitality, *Operation Banner* argues '[t]he quality of intelligence became very good indeed – by the end of the 1980s PIRA was unable to mount a bombing operation in Belfast for about two years'.[108] The declining trend in intentional

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[103] Reference number 2013 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* BBC News, 'Brendan Megraw', 14 November 2014: at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-30044240, <accessed 10 March 2015>; *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA investigation locates grave sites', 1 April 1999: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/4724, <accessed 10 December 2013>.
[104] See appendix one*.*
[105] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.
[106] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Belfast area review, October 1980, p.33, 38.
[107] See appendix one.
[108] *Operation Banner,* 505.

deaths caused by the IRA continued in Belfast into the 1990s. For instance, five intended targets were killed in 1990, rising temporarily to nine in 1991, before a decline to two in 1992, one in 1993 and two in 1994.[109]

Academics, journalists and former Troubles participants have all presented examples of what they believe represents 'senior' infiltration within the Belfast IRA. Their primary example is Stakeknife. Various Republicans, a former British intelligence officer and journalists all agree that the agent Stakeknife was originally an IRA volunteer from the Markets area in Belfast, interned in the early 1970s. Once released, he was involved in IRA intelligence work in Belfast. By the early 1980s the IRA had created an internal security department. Moloney suggests: '[t]he department was tasked with vetting recruits and investigating IRA operations that had gone wrong'. He adds that its remit eventually grew from Belfast to cover the entire organization.[110] The remit of this department is disputed by republicans and other sources, as will be seen, although evidence does suggest that it had access to some Belfast and Newry units at the very least.

A number of republican sources confirm Moloney's description of the internal security department. More importantly, they agree that Stakeknife, and the man widely suspected of being that person, was a leading figure within that department. Eamon Collins, killed by republican dissidents in 1999, wrote in 1997 that he once worked for the internal security department in Newry alongside 'Scap', the man accused of being Stakeknife. Collins also says that the department was led by 'John Joe Magee'. Magee, an ex-British Army special services officer, is now rumoured by various sources to have worked for British intelligence.[111] Collins' account is particularly intriguing because he never knew about the allegations concerning Stakeknife or Magee, since he was killed in 1999. Elsewhere, Tommy McKearney writes that is 'now widely accepted' that 'Freddie Scappaticci, head of IRA internal security, was a British agent and had had access to the organization's secrets and layout'.[112] Anthony McIntyre, a former Belfast Provisional and prisoner, agrees that Stakeknife was in the internal security department, vetted volunteers and hunted informers.[113] And Gerry Bradley from Belfast says that Scappacticci 'ran the IRA's fearsome Internal

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[109] See appendix one.
[110] Moloney, *Secret History,* 574-577; Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 277; Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 60-61, 95-104.
[111] Moloney, *Secret History,* 575; Moloney, *Voices,* 278-279; Eamon Collins with Mick McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London, 1998, second edition), 216-219, 233-244.
[112] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142, 173.
[113] McIntyre, 'Stakeknife'.

security, in Belfast' alongside John Joe Magee, and alleges that 'all operations in Belfast had first to be cleared by Internal Security' by the late 1980s.[114] Evidence below will test Bradley's opinion because no other volunteers claim that the internal security department in Belfast also vetted operations there for a period of time. A number of republicans interviewed did not object to the Stakeknife rumours either, demonstrating that it is not just republican dissenters who accept the allegations.

There is evidence to suggest that Stakeknife had a significant impact on the IRA in Belfast. Reflecting on the IRA's campaign in Belfast, Bradley, for example, strongly suspects that Stakeknife helped prevent nine out of every ten IRA operations there by the early 1990s; although Bradley does not explain exactly how he would know such details.[115] Nevertheless, these figures do closely match those provided by former RUC Superintendent Ian Phoenix.[116] As appendix one demonstrates, there was a noticeable decline in 'intended target' killings by the Belfast Brigade after the late 1970s, the period when Joe John Magee and Stakeknife operated within the internal security unit. Stakeknife's power to vet new volunteers entering Belfast units did cause significant arrests too. In January 1994, for instance, Bradley's unit planned to shoot Derek Martindale, an RUC Chief Superintendent. But Bradley and another volunteer were arrested on the day of the operation at a house they had taken over. Important republican figures such as Davy Adams, a relative of Gerry Adams, were also arrested when the police intercepted their vehicle preparing for the operation. As the IRA personnel were caught red-handed, substantial prison sentences resulted. The IRA personnel were discovered because Kevin Fulton (known also as Peter Keeley), a British Army agent from Newry, had supplied the IRA unit with phones and materials in Belfast. These materials enabled the intelligence services to bug and track the IRA unit. Later, Bradley claims to have discovered from another volunteer that Fulton, despite being in the British Army and distrusted by the South Armagh IRA, was cleared to join the Belfast Brigade 'by, of all people, [Stakeknife] and John Joe Magee'.[117] McKearney also believes that Stakeknife's 'access to the organization's secrets … inflicted considerable damage on the IRA'.[118] McIntyre goes further, saying:

> The organization's weaknesses and strengths, the unquestioning or critical approaches
> to leadership…would all have been known to Stakeknife … Stakeknife damaged the
> IRA irreparably and helped pave the way for its defeat … a seriously compromised

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[114] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 208-220, 259-260.
[115] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider*, 219-222, 234.
[116] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix*, 391.
[117] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 248-260; Fulton, *Unsung Hero*, 213-217.
[118] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142, 173.

IRA campaign would reinforce a peace lobby within republicanism. Arguably, this is where the role of Stakeknife became crucial.[119]

We need to treat such allegations with caution. These claims may simply represent attempts to embarrass the republican leadership, particularly in the case of McIntyre, who is an outspoken critic of Gerry Adams and the peace process strategy.

Stakeknife was not the only senior spy within the Belfast IRA. Special Branch agent Joseph Fenton was shot dead in February 1989. Fenton became an estate-agent with the help of his handlers in the early 1980s, in order to discover and thwart IRA plans discussed in the houses that he lent the organization. According to Ingram and Brendan Hughes, Fenton tried to entrap senior IRA volunteers. After being released from prison, for example, Hughes alleges that Fenton offered him a house during the mid-1980s. Hughes refused as he was very suspicious as to why Fenton – whom he didn't know - was being so friendly. Fenton represented major 'penetration', according to senior Belfast republicans, and led to various arrests and the seizure of many weapons, such as a mortar-bomb factory at a house he owned in west Belfast in 1988. Eventually, Hughes claims that he was appointed to help the internal security department remove spies in the late 1980s. He is convinced that Fenton was promptly killed by Stakeknife and others before he could interrogate Fenton properly in 1989 to protect another agent. Hughes decided that Belfast was 'rotten' with informers and agents by the 1990s.[120]

There were various cases of suspected low-level infiltration between 1980 and 1994 too. According to Brian Feeney, Peter Valente 'had a major impact on the whole republican movement in Belfast'. Feeney's judgement is well-informed, since his account is based on interview material with Gerry Bradley, an IRA volunteer from the Unity Flats who knew Valente from the local area. On 14 November 1980, Valente was found shot dead in the Highfield estate, a loyalist area of Belfast. Initially, the IRA said Valente was killed by loyalists. It transpired, however, that the IRA killed him as an alleged informer. The IRA explained in *An Phoblacht* in January 1982 that: 'for the sake of his staunchly republican-minded family…his execution was not claimed at the time'. The article claimed: 'Valente gave information on IRA operations…named Volunteers and detailed movements and locations of weapons'. Bradley says that Valente was exposed because a republican was visiting a country hotel in 1980, and spotted Valente chatting to a police officer. Bradley

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[119] Cf. McIntyre, 'Stakeknife'.

[120] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife*, 233-240; Dillon, *Dirty War*, 315-325; Hughes in Moloney, *Voices*, 281-286.

passed on this information to senior personnel and '[t]he next thing I heard, Valente was…whacked. He told his interrogators…[he was] a British agent'.[121]

Feeney describes how 'the shooting of Valente sent ripples through the IRA in Belfast … [since] the IRA shot at least three others on foot of information extracted from Valente'. On 20 January 1981, Maurice Gilvarry from north Belfast was shot dead and dumped on a border road in south Armagh. The IRA alleged Gilvarry 'turned' under interrogation at Castlereagh in 1977, 'and…gave information regarding a planned operation that led directly to the deaths of several IRA Volunteers'. They were referring to the SAS ambush of the IRA unit attacking a postal depot in June 1978, where three volunteers were killed. Gilvarry's family deny the claims. Next, Patrick Gerard Trainor from Divis Flats was abducted and shot dead by the IRA. 'From June 1976 until his execution…in February 1981', *An Phoblacht* detailed, 'Trainor supplied names of Volunteers…and gave locations of weapons dumps'. His family and the RUC deny IRA allegations. The IRA then shot dead Vincent Robinson, a twenty-nine year old from west Belfast, who was active in the hunger-strike campaigns. The IRA believed that Robinson 'supplied information which led to the discovery of…explosives…close to his home'. Both his family and the RUC denied the claims.[122] Dillon also suggests that Anthony Braniff's killing in September 1981 was connected to Valente's informing. The IRA accused Braniff, allegedly a high-ranking Provisional in north Belfast, of giving away arms dumps. However, in September 2003, the IRA admitted that Braniff only broke under interrogation, but immediately went to the IRA once released. His case fuels doubts surrounding why others were killed as informers and agents, especially as various authors believe Stakeknife and Magee carried out the interrogations and executions. Indeed, Ingram believes that Stakeknife suggested that Braniff was an informer in order to remove him.[123]

Others were killed as alleged informers before the 1994 ceasefire. There is not the space available to detail all cases, but a few further examples show the infiltration that the Belfast IRA believed it suffered.[124] In September 1985, for example, the IRA shot dead

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[121] Reference number 2273 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 207-208; Dillon, *Dirty War,* 385-397; *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA combat RUC informers', 28 January 1982, p.6-7.
[122] For details on Gilvarry, Trainor and Robinson, see Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 84; reference numbers 2031, 2273, 2284, 2292, 2338 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Dillon, *Dirty War,* 385-397; *An Phoblacht,* 'IRA combat RUC informers', 28 January 1982, p.6-7; Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 207-208.
[123] Dillon, *Dirty War,* 392; Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 84-85; reference number 2370 on McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives; An Phoblacht,* 'IRA combat RUC informers', 28 January 1982, p.6-7; *An Phoblacht,'*Anthony Braniff'*,* 25 September 2003: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/10570, <accessed 10 December 2013>.
[124] See further examples in appendix three.

Catherine and Gerard Mahon, husband and wife, in west Belfast. The IRA suggested that the Mahons were forced to inform by the security services following unpaid fines in the early 1980s. Their premises were bugged before being lent to IRA volunteers. Ingram adds that the Mahons were discovered because Joseph Fenton, a senior agent, attempted to deflect attention away from himself after raids on his safe houses.[125] There is also the case of Patrick Murray, an IRA member shot dead in August 1986 for allegedly informing for eight years. Bradley writes that he was placed in a cell in north Belfast in the mid-1980s that included Murray. On one occasion, Bradley recalls a blast bomb being thrown at an RUC vehicle but not exploding. Eventually, internal security stepped-in and Murray supposedly admitted to informing. But the damage Murray inflicted did not end with his death. According to Bradley: 'Murray was a bricklayer. He made brilliant dumps … As soon as his body was found, the cops immediately did every dump'.[126] In another case, Charles McIlmurray, a taxi-driver, was threatened with a driving offence in October 1986. Instead, McIlmurray informed, the IRA allege, which eventually led to his death. Father Denis Faul admits that McIlmurray came to him a few weeks before the IRA killed him, because he was 'caught between the IRA and the police'. Father Faul instructed McIlmurray to tell the police authority and Sinn Féin. Whether he followed this advice is unclear.[127] Belfast man John Joseph Mulhern was later found shot dead on a country road in county Tyrone in June 1993. This time, the IRA said that he was an associate who had informed since 1990, leading to volunteers being captured and weapons being seized.[128] Caroline Moreland, a single mother from west Belfast, had the indignity of being the last suspected spy killed before the ceasefire in August 1994. Moreland, the IRA believed, passed information to the Special Branch since September 1992.[129] Both Mulhern's and Moreland's cases are currently being reinvestigated by the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland as the families say that Stakeknife was involved.[130]

Other low-level informers further damaged the Belfast IRA's military capabilities, but survived. Martin McGartland, from west Belfast, initially operated as a taxi-driver for the Belfast IRA, whilst infiltrating the organization as a Special Branch agent between 1987 to

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[125] Reference numbers 2715-2716 and 3017 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 238-240.

[126] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 210-218; reference number 2771 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*

[127] Reference number 2826 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Ingram and Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 88-89.

[128] *An Phoblacht,* 'Informer worked for the RUC for three years', July 1 1993, p.2; reference number 3399 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 92.

[129] Reference number 3505 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Ingram and Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 93.

[130] *The Guardian,* 'Families demand justice over IRA victims 'executed' as informers', 1 June 2015: at http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/01/families-justice-ira-victims-executed-as-informers-british-army-agent-stakeknife, <accessed 6 July 2015>.

1991. The advantage of McGartland's position was that he initially avoided the restrictions of a cell, travelling with various Belfast units, making him less suspicious when operations failed.[131] Some of his claims can be verified. Ian Phoenix recorded in his diaries that McGartland (known as 'Agent Carol') provided, for instance, intelligence to prevent the IRA killing an off-duty policeman in east Belfast in April 1991.[132] Details surrounding his eventual discovery by the IRA and escape will be analysed shortly.

Various sources suggest that multiple factors made the IRA more susceptible to infiltration in the major cities such as Belfast. A former British soldier feels that the compact nature of city nationalist estates allowed 'nosey neighbours' to spy on the IRA more easily than in vast rural areas.[133] Ó hAdhmaill, a former republican prisoner and Belfast resident, supports this point: 'in Belfast…somebody could have picked-up the phone and mentioned spotting a republican', since nationalist enclaves were small.[134] Indeed, a host of low-level informers and agents mentioned gathered information by observing what was happening in the bars, pubs or the streets in the compact working-class areas of cities such as Belfast.

A second factor potentially increasing infiltration opportunities in Belfast was the IRA's need for operational expertise, which meant that former internees and prisoners were still recruited to cells after 1976. There are two potential problems that this caused for the IRA: first, unknown cell members could be exposed by associating with former prisoners. Second, mixing volunteers from different parts of Belfast and from different age groups potentially removed inhibitions for some people to inform. They had no personal ties to those they operated alongside. True, close ties between volunteers did not stop Molloy and others before 1975 informing on people from their own street in the old battalion structure. But mixing personnel with no close bonds did pose the risk that certain people might feel less resistance to informing if pressurised or tempted.

Tommy McKearney presents two other explanations for difficulties with significant infiltration in Belfast. He believes that the only way to increase security was 'ensuring that the guerrilla soldier is kept out of the enemy's hands'. 'The decision by the IRA', McKearney observes, 'to encourage…members to remain in their own homes…granted their opponents an enormous advantage in terms of access to active volunteers'.[135] For McKearney, British

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[131] McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking,* 108-111, 142-148.
[132] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 267.
[133] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[134] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.
[135] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 143.

intelligence and spies simply had to watch a person's house and movements to gather information, particularly in Belfast where there was no border to escape across. In the case of Fenton and the Mahons, their knowledge of IRA volunteers' living arrangements certainly enabled the security forces to track particular volunteers.

A further problem that McKearney saw for the IRA after 1975 is that the cells interacted with each other: '[i]f a cell hasn't enough manpower…it needs…help from its neighbouring cell. Equipment was constantly moved from one IRA unit to another. So people become more aware'.[136] This contact presented spies with opportunities to infiltrate various units. For instance, McGartland and other 'taxi drivers' were deadly to the IRA. They aided a number of units in the cities, whose volunteers did not use their own vehicles fearing they were already on the computer systems of the intelligence services. But if multiple cells cooperated with other cells or particular taxi-drivers, this could lead to infiltration. The mass arrests inflicted by Christopher Black during the supergrass trials in the early 1980s demonstrates this very point. His information was not restricted to one cell. In fact, Bradley recalls that Black's evidence 'wiped out Ardoyne and the Bone' for a time.[137]

Loose talk was a continuing problem permitting infiltration in city areas. Martin McGartland contends that he gathered a lot of information from IRA members through their 'loose talk' in pubs: 'the IRA ordered that their members are not supposed to talk about operational details … But most of them just drink…and never stop talking'.[138] Indeed, Jack Holland interviewed IRA personnel from Belfast for *Hibernia* in January 1977, reporting how: 'drinking clubs…became an important source…of information for the police'.[139] This factor is not necessarily a problem unique to the urban IRA. Rural units, however, could evade capture after loose talk by crossing the border, as will be seen.

The other structural weakness for the Belfast IRA was its centralisation. Bradley argues that the Belfast Brigade staff, and later the internal security unit, had to 'okay' every operation for his cells. A primary reason for this vetting, according to Bradley, was to ensure that IRA operations in the city were not contradicting the political objectives of Sinn Féin.[140] Tommy McKearney made a similar point during an interview: 'the political imperative …

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[136] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012.
[137] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 209.
[138] Martin McGartland, interview with author, 4 September 2011.
[139] NRA, FCO 87/682, *Hibernia*, 21 January 1977.
[140] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 151-152, 161-165, 193-194, 226.

meant it wasn't feasible…to allow cells to act totally independently'.[141] McKearney explains that the problem with centralization for the IRA:

> The greatest threat to a cell system…is when someone from Headquarters (particularly if they have responsibility for coordinating or scrutinising activities) is working for the opposition, and it is now recognised that … Freddie Scappaticci … [was] carrying out this role for British intelligence.[142]

By allowing the internal security department significant access to IRA volunteers and plans in Belfast, the cell-structure was undermined. Whilst I suggest below that Stakeknife's access to cells in Belfast was not as extensive as some authors claim, there is no doubting that he had *some* access and that this did restrict operations at times. But any suggestion that the new cell-structure and centralisation of the movement made damaging infiltration more likely is debateable. The IRA also experienced numerous arrests in Belfast *before* 1975.[143]

The current literature overplays infiltration as the main reason for a decline in IRA killings in Belfast at times between 1976 and 1994. Bradley recalls: '[w]hen something went wrong, [everyone said] it was always…touts. It wasn't'.[144] The decline in shootings of British soldiers from the late 1980s, for instance, actually had more to do with improvements in British Army protective gear. By the 1990s, flak jackets became harder to penetrate for the IRA with low-range weapons in Belfast. Switching to long-range weapons was not an option there because, as will be explained, the IRA did not want increased civilian killings that might lose Sinn Féin votes.[145]

Surveillance measures also had a restraining effect on the Belfast IRA. After Operation Motorman, British troops and RUC officers poured into working-class nationalist areas, and imposed restrictions on movement via helicopters, CCTV and patrols. Laurence McKeown recalls how 'there was more surveillance in the cities … People in urban areas were easier to spot. With choppers in the sky and mobile posts on many streets, you were tied down to certain streets.'.[146] In particular, Bradley remembers:

> If the chopper was up, you weren't allowed to move out of a house: army orders … Ops were cancelled regularly because of it … If the chopper spots one major player in the wrong place, that's it, an op is ruined.

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[141] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, 23 May 2012, Monaghan, Irish Republic.
[142] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142.
[143] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 76.
[144] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 207.
[145] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 410-411.
[146] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.

Bradley recounts a situation where the IRA transported a substantial bomb to the Europa Hotel. Yet: 'the chopper spotted one [volunteer] … [and] the men transporting [the bomb] were arrested'. Bradley also believes towers in security bases equipped with listening and monitoring devices ruined IRA operations. 'Between the chopper and the towers', Bradley argues, 'maybe 80 percent of ops had to be called off'.[147] A former British soldier also emphasised that: '[t]he change in technology in the 1980s was enormous … One of the big pluses of technical source information is that it is very difficult to work out, on the PIRA side, where did that come from'.[148] Technology did erode the IRA's military capacity to a small extent, sometimes complementing informers and agents. For example, the Mahons and Fenton all directed the intelligence services where to bug in order to discover IRA plans.

One of the most important alternative explanations for a decline in IRA activities in Belfast is greater political control being exerted over the IRA by Sinn Féin. Marc Mulholland accurately describes the situation: 'the IRA generally was anxious to be seen not to be targeting the 'Irish, working class'' who, ultimately, Sinn Féin relied on for their electoral mandate. He continues: '[g]iven the high risk of collateral damage in built-up areas, the use of heavy antipersonnel weaponry was really only effective in rural districts. By the mid-to-late 1980s, IRA operations in urban areas were little more than harassment'.[149] Admittedly, there were incidents where numerous civilian deaths occurred, such as the notorious Shankill fish shop bomb of 1993. But there is evidence supplementing Mulholland's view. Gerry Bradley remembers operations decreasing in Belfast partly: 'because the pressure was on not to injure civilians … [the leadership] worried about 'international opinion', about 'electoral considerations'. You practically had to guarantee no one would be injured by mistake'. Bradley goes on to describe when his unit planned to blow-up a main sewer near Belfast city centre. The operation was cancelled because the leadership feared that the risk of civilian deaths was too high, since the bomb would cause an uncontrollable explosion.[150]

Laurence McKeown echoes Bradley's suggestion that after 1975: 'it was about trying to control the operations more, to stop the sectarian things or civilian casualties occurring as in the early 1970s'.[151] Danny Morrison explained why the IRA had to be careful:

> The struggle was not…that we would be very successful if we kill more people this year than we killed last year. The war was always directly related to politics … the IRA

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[147] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 202-207.
[148] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[149] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 409-411.
[150] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 161-165, 193, 209, 222-225, 237-239.
[151] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.

strove to avoid civilian casualties … The perception then from the outside world would be that this is a war. If the only people killed are civilians in no warning bombs then that's terrorism. So the IRA was quite conscious about having to demonstrate that it was fighting…legitimate…warfare.[152]

Even a former high-ranking British civil servant told the author that the IRA: 'was not a movement dedicated to violence for its own sake. It has moral and legitimacy boundaries surrounding it, although you may say that it did not have these boundaries at certain points and towards certain people'.[153] Of course, it is a contentious view. For instance, off-duty security force members and their families in the borderlands would not believe that the IRA had any 'moral' compass. Also, innocent civilians were still killed and these had a significant impact on the republican movement, as the next chapter reveals. Yet republicans, like Mulholland, convincingly suggest that deaths and operations decreased in Belfast following 1975 partly because operations aimed to avoid civilian casualties, if only to help Sinn Féin's electoral prospects.

An additional reason for the decline in operations and arrests in Belfast is presented by McKeown. He convincingly suggests that personalities played a major role in determining how security conscious an IRA cell or brigade were.[154] McKeown's assessment is supported by Séanna Walsh. Walsh stressed during an interview that: '[t]he IRA was not some sort of monolith. It doesn't matter if you are talking about Belfast or even about areas within Belfast. Some [volunteers] would have been much tighter than others'.[155] It will be seen that the South Armagh IRA, for example, promoted a 'risk averse' culture later, resulting in fewer arrests than elsewhere. Bradley's account shows that some cells in Belfast were not risk averse. On 28 November 1981, for example, Bradley's cell killed a police officer in Belfast. A few days beforehand, Charlie McKiernan, a cell member, was arrested. 'Normally', Bradley explained, 'the operation would have been called off … the squad...decided McKiernan would be okay' and wouldn't say anything. But McKiernan did. Thus Bradley's cell was arrested and remanded in custody until McKiernan withdrew his evidence against them.[156]

Nevertheless, the bulk of evidence contradicts the view that the Belfast Brigade was at a virtual 'standstill' by the 1990s. Despite no British soldiers being shot dead there after

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[152] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.
[153] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014.
[154] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 4 February 2014.
[155] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.
[156] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 166-173.

1992, this is not a sign of terminal decline. In fact, from the early 1990s, the IRA was able to switch tactics and conduct a series of destructive bomb attacks in the city centre. For example, they bombed the Grand Opera House and Crown Bar in 1991.[157] Later, on 15 February 1992 and on 22 May 1993, they caused millions of pounds in damages with bombs on Adelaide and Glengall Street in Belfast city.[158] Despite the city bombings ceasing by late 1993, there were still regular incidents in 1994. On 17 February, to take one example, an IRA rocket hit a police Landrover in the Markets area, killing an RUC officer and injuring two others.[159] Ciaran de Baroid, a Ballymurphy resident and activist, believes that such regular incidents show that up to August 1994, the Belfast IRA remained 'formidable'. What makes his account believable is that he admits that by the second prolonged ceasefire in 1997, the organization began to struggle in Belfast.[160] Furthermore, the fact that commercial bombings inflicted significant financial damage and regularly went ahead casts serious doubts on any claim that Stakeknife or other informers had complete access to Belfast IRA operations on a regular basis. The Belfast IRA was clearly not completely 'rotten' with informers by the 1990s.[161]

The cell structure also provided the IRA with 'greater operational security' than before 1975 in areas such as Belfast. In particular, cells often restricted foreknowledge about operations.[162] A former British soldier recalled:

> The times when you would be given chapter and the verse [by an informer or agent] were very, very few … People would be told at the last minute about an operation … PIRA did this deliberately, frightened that the information would be told to the intelligence agencies from sources.[163]

For instance, McGartland's cell leader asked him to attend a meeting in June 1991. McGartland claims that he was suddenly instructed to drive two IRA gunmen to kill Tony Harrison of the British Army in June 1991, and that he had no chance of preventing this operation without his IRA accomplices discovering his true identity.[164] Danny Morrison also suggests that the smaller number of IRA volunteers involved after 1975 helped filter out

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[157] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 278.
[158] CAIN, 'Chronology of conflict', 1992 and 1993; at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch92.htm <accessed 3 March 2012>, and http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm <accessed 1 March 2013>.
[159] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict', 1994: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch94.htm <consulted 01 March 2013>.
[160] Ciaran De Baroid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War* (London, 2000), 336, 362.
[161] Cf. Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 284.
[162] Sarma, 'Informers', 171.
[163] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[164] McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men,* 247-252.

informers and agents via the cells. The trouble for spies was, '[t]he more information they give, it became easier for the IRA to work out who was the common denominator'.[165] His explanation explains why Martin McGartland was eventually discovered. As more volunteers were arrested, McGartland was asked to join a cell. When his cell prepared to attack British soldiers at a pub in Bangor in July 1991, he informed Special Branch, which led to the IRA couriers being arrested on the way to the pub. McGartland was quickly discovered because suspicion already surrounded him for other failed attacks. He only survived by jumping from a high-rise flat where he was being interrogated by the IRA. Once he recovered, McGartland fled abroad.[166]

With this evidence in mind, it seems reasonable to accept Danny Morrison's view that: 'even if Belfast happened not to do much for three or four months … the IRA was…philosophical about that. They were always working to rebuild and renew structures when they were infiltrated'.[167] A focus on persistence, rather than escalation, meant that the IRA could afford for its campaign to ebb and flow in the city after 1975. But the Belfast Brigade still maintained an ability to disrupt the life of the city into the 1990s to a considerable extent. Republican areas and the city centre remained gripped by constant checkpoints, helicopter flights, driving restrictions, security patrols and reinforced security barracks. If the IRA's aim was to persist and maintain high security alerts, it seems to have achieved this objective by August 1994. On top of this, Sinn Féin had become the leading nationalist party on the Belfast city council by 1993. Gerry Adams had been the MP for west Belfast until 1992 as well, although he temporarily lost that seat to the SDLP.[168] In Belfast, there was a permanent republican presence and potential resistance to political settlements that they disliked. Memories of the tumultuous events of 1969 including the burning of nationalist houses, and events such as the hunger-strikes, helped cement IRA support there in the long-term.

Derry city

The previous chapter detailed how the Derry city IRA proved difficult for the security forces to contain before the 1975 ceasefire. Thereafter, the statistics concerning IRA intended targets killings per year suggest a dramatic decline for that brigade's military strength.[169]

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[165] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[166] McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men*, 259-308; see also Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix*, 267-270.
[167] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.
[168] O'Brien, *Long War,* 195-198.
[169] See appendix one.

Eight 'intended targets' were killed there in 1976, before the number declined to between one and a maximum of six intentional killings per year up until 1989. Between 1990 and 1992, the killings of 'intended targets' even dropped to zero. In contrast to Belfast, there was no commercial bombing campaign in Derry city after 1980 either. Kevin Toolis believes that the decline in killings there was caused by crippling infiltration.[170] Certainly, there are examples of higher-level infiltration in the city. For example, Ingram says that he was involved with handling Frank Hegarty during the 1980s. Rob Lewis, another former FRU operative, confirms that Hegarty informed. Hegarty is alleged to have previously been an informer in the Official IRA in the early 1970s, and began informing on the Provisionals by the 1980s. Eventually, Hegarty became quartermaster in Derry city, as republicans trusted him following many years of service. This position enabled Hegarty to inform the security services in the north and south about some of the Libyan weapons moved to the border with Derry in the mid-1980s. The IRA knew Hegarty was the culprit because he disappeared at the time the weapons were seized. Once he returned, for reasons that remain disputed, he was kidnapped and shot dead.[171]

Raymond Gilmour also spied on the Derry city IRA between the late 1970s until 1982. Some of his activities are verified by Alan Barker, his former Special Branch handler. Initially, Gilmour decimated the Derry INLA. It proved harder to join the IRA, Barker remembers, because they were more selective with recruits. Eventually, Gilmour was accepted, and inflicted considerable damage. Barker recalls that a merging of cells during the hunger-strikes allowed Gilmour to set-up the arrests of IRA volunteers from other cells. Later, Gilmour's alleged promotion to Derry Brigade staff gave him insight into where a heavy-machine gun was hidden, allowing the security forces to seize it. Thereafter, Special Branch pulled Gilmour out of Derry city and he turned supergrass, leading to 39 people being charged. Whilst Gilmour's evidence was later rejected by the courts, some republicans never returned to Derry city from Donegal for fear of arrest.[172]

Controversy surrounds the case of Patrick Flood, killed by the IRA in July 1990 for allegedly informing. Toolis writes that Flood apparently began ferrying weapons around for the IRA in the 1980s. Flood, according to Toolis, became an informer following his arrest in 1987 when weapons were found around his property by the RUC. Flood supposedly became

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[170] Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts* (London, 2000), 5, 214.

[171] Reference number 2754 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*; Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 117-122. Lewis, *Fishers,* 185-195.

[172] Barker, *Shadows,* 137-221; Gilmour, *Dead Ground,* 79-330; Taylor, *Provos,* 260-264.

the brigade's chief bomb-maker whilst setting-up arrests. For instance, in August 1989 three volunteers arrived at a house where Flood was preparing a bomb. Flood temporarily left and the house was raided. An IRA investigation apparently found that the bomb was also missing batteries. Following similar incidents, the IRA interrogated Flood and he supposedly admitted to informing.[173] Flood's wife denies these allegations. So too does Ingram.[174] There is not sufficient evidence to establish the truth.

There were low-level informers and agents allegedly damaging the Derry city IRA in these years too. Barker says that in 1982 the Special Branch gained 'priceless information' about the IRA from another IRA associate, whom he calls Sean McCord. McCord was friends with a leading member of the Waterside cell, who told him details about IRA activities, despite the latter not being a member. McCord relayed the information to Special Branch. McCord's loose association with the IRA, and the fact that Barker does not suggest that McCord provided intelligence for many years, probably saved him from IRA suspicions.[175] Others did not survive. Kevin Patrick Coyle, a twenty-four year old from the Brandywell area, was shot dead by the IRA in the Bogside area in February 1985. The IRA claim that Coyle had informed since 1981.[176] Ruari Finnis, a volunteer from the Waterside area, was killed on 6 June 1991. At the time, the IRA alleged that Finnis 'had been acting as a police informer for three and a half years'. Finnis' family and Ingam reject this view. The latter states that failed operations Finnis was involved in 'were almost certainly detected via electronic surveillance'.[177] Later, in November 1992, Gerard Holmes's body was discovered in the Creggan area. The IRA said that although Holmes was not a volunteer, 'he had been passing information to…Special Branch for 11 years, causing the arrest of several people'. His family reject the accusations. Again, the evidence available is inconclusive.[178] All that can be said is that the Derry city Brigade was struggling to conduct operations during this period, leading them to suspect infiltration.

Explanations for infiltration of the Derry city IRA after 1975 correspond to those given for the Belfast IRA. McKearney's point, for example, about the interaction between cells is applicable to Derry. Barker's writes: '[u]p to [the early 1980s], the cell system had been working fairly well…but…[eventually] one cell contaminated another while they

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[173] Toolis, *Rebel Hearts,* 192-241, 255-257; reference number 3126 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[174] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 90.
[175] Barker, *Shadows,* 201-204.
[176] Reference number 2676 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*; Toolis, *Rebel Hearts,* 225-226.
[177] Reference number 3209 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 90-91.
[178] Reference number 3357 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*; Ingram with Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 91.

moved weapons or assisted each other'. He supplements his argument by suggesting that a coming together of IRA cells in Derry city after the hunger-strikes enabled Gilmour to set-up various arrests.[179] During an interview with Peter Taylor, Hugh McMonagle, a former Derry Provisional, concurred with Barker's view.[180] Barker also says that loose talk was a problem in Derry city. McCord, for example, apparently gathered information via the loose talk of a cell member.[181] Unknown volunteers would quickly become suspicious in Derry city too. One example is Gilmour who had no republican background. As Gilmour puts it: 'people were not stupid. When they saw you going around with guys like Eddie McSheffrey [a known republican], they knew exactly what you were involved in'.[182]

Barker admits, however, that Gilmour's original cell leader, McSheffrey, was 'extremely security-conscious' and frequently did not provide full details of operations beforehand. 'Whilst Raymond knew what operations were planned', Barker recalls, 'the minute details and timing were known only to Eddie'. Gilmour supports Barker's view: '[s]ometimes jobs would be carried out on the night of the meeting…which made it impossible to warn' the intelligence services. One example is when Gilmour's cell was suddenly instructed to shoot at soldiers on the city walls, which led to Private Shenton being shot dead. Barker trusts Gilmour's account because the latter usually informed on forthcoming IRA attacks.[183] This example again shows that the cell-structure and need-to-know basis in the IRA posed difficulties for spies in the cities who were trying to prevent operations.

There are reasons other than infiltration to explain why the Derry city IRA struggled at times to conduct its armed campaign. One alternative reason was good relations between the RUC in Derry and the Garda in Donegal. Whilst some Derry city volunteers, such as McMonagle, escaped to Donegal, the Garda were proactive in harassing republicans there. Barker, for example, praises cooperation between the Donegal Garda and Derry Special Branch.[184] In 1980, a British area review of the security situation in Derry also reported excellent cooperation with the Donegal Garda, which the report believed resulted from previous good relations before the Troubles in dealing with cross-border criminality.[185]

[179] Barker, *Shadows*, 184.
[180] See McMonagle in Taylor, *Provos,* 257.
[181] Barker, *Shadows,* 203.
[182] Gilmour, *Dead Ground,* 127.
[183] Barker, *Shadows,* 151, 179-183; Gilmour, *Dead Ground,* 124-128, 141-142.
[184] Barker, *Shadows,* 122.
[185] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Londonderry area review, May 1980, p.24, 62-64.

A crucial factor explaining the decline in activity of the Derry city IRA is nationalist opinion. In particular, the Provisionals became unpopular there following the 'human-bomb' killings. Patsy Gillespie was a canteen worker at the British Army barracks at Fort George in Derry. On 24 October 1990, armed men entered his house in the Shantallow area and forced him to drive a van bomb to Coshquin vehicle checkpoint on the border. Gillespie and five soldiers died.[186] The negative fallout that this incident had on IRA support levels in Derry was an important factor restraining the Derry city IRA's activities in the 1990s. Indeed, Brendan O'Brien interviewed Adrian Healy, a local man, who argued that the Paddy Gillespie killing 'sickened a lot of people ... [because] [h]e was just a cook in the Army barracks'.[187] Local council elections for Derry city support Healy's argument. Although Sinn Féin won five seats in each election between 1985 and 1993, the SDLP increased their seats from fourteen in 1985 to seventeen in 1993.[188] The SDLP also won support by ensuring that significant regeneration and investment went into the city. O'Brien records that there was £163 million worth of investment into jobs and factories there by 1993 alone.[189] A former British soldier also recalls: '[i]n the 1990s, you started having a lot more money going in ... You had a whole air of normality returning'.[190] The IRA would have been reluctant to attack the new buildings and jobs created for the nationalist community for fear of isolating themselves. After becoming the majority party on the city council during the 1980s, the SDLP changed the name of the council to the Derry (rather than Londonderry) city council too, in order to represent the views of the majority nationalist population. Never again did the IRA bomb the city council.[191] Neither did the IRA recommence a commercial bombing campaign in Derry city centre during the 1990s, despite IRA units elsewhere hitting other major towns in county Derry such as in Magherafelt in May 1993.[192] The Coshquin attack itself apparently involved Derry city volunteers, demonstrating the potential military capacity of that brigade.[193] But political circumstances meant that the Derry city units could not afford to carry out bombings in the city, or they risked losing significant support. Furthermore, there was little incentive for IRA activity against loyalists in Derry city since there was only a very

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[186] Reference number 3146 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[187] O'Brien, *The Long War,* 56.
[188] See appendix two.
[189] O'Brien, *The Long War,* 51-52.
[190] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012 (italics mine).
[191] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites,* 260-263.
[192] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict': at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm, <accessed 03 March 2013>.
[193] Toolis, *Rebel Hearts,* 252-254.

small loyalist population in the Waterside area.[194] Thus political factors provide the most convincing explanation why the Derry city IRA and the British Army engaged in mutual gestures of de-escalation by the 1990s.[195]

South Armagh

Evidence suggests that the South Armagh Brigade was the IRA's most formidable unit and led the organization's military efforts in the 1990s, including operations in England. Yet they did suffer a limited degree of infiltration between 1976 and 1994. One of the most widely publicised cases was that of a undercover British soldier, Robert Nairac, partly detailed in chapter two. The exact details surrounding his activities for British forces are disputed. What is known is that South Armagh and Dundalk IRA members kidnapped him after he was acting suspiciously whilst undercover in a republican pub in south Armagh in May 1977. He apparently denied being SAS, but the IRA unit personnel did not believe him and shot him dead. His body has never been found. It can be said, however, that he did not help contain the South Armagh IRA by 1977, as the evidence below demonstrates. In fact, Harnden reveals a document created by Nairac about intelligence-gathering in south Armagh which commented that the intelligence gathered there before 1977 was of poor quality.[196]

A series of suspected low-level spies were also killed by the South Armagh IRA between 1977 and 1994. William Martin was a retired poultry farmer from Crossmaglen. Yet according to the IRA, he was in 'a ring of informers'. Eventually, the IRA shot him dead. The RUC denied the IRA's claims, but did say: '[Martin]…might have passed a few words with soldiers when he met them'.[197] Patrick McEntee was a Crossmaglen postman and a former member of the British Army. An IRA statement, however, released in July 1978, a few weeks after they shot dead McEntee, claimed: '[McEntee] had maintained occasional contact with security forces…and from 1975…had given regular information to army intelligence'. It transpired that McEntee had previously been partially crippled by the IRA for supposedly informing in 1973. Harnden also reveals that one local RUC officer admitted that McEntee provided useful information.[198] Later, on 17 May 1980, the South Armagh IRA killed Anthony Shields because he allegedly refused to leave Ireland after informing. Harnden adds

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[194] Moloney, *Secret History,* 352.
[195] Moloney, *Secret History,* 363-371.
[196] Reference number 1292 and 1932 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives;* ; Harnden, 'Bandit Country', 293-312, 509-516; Clarke, *Border,* 105-115; Darach MacDonald, *The Chosen Fews: Exploding Myths in South Armagh* (Dublin, 2000), 158-184.
[197] Reference number 1961 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives,*.
[198] Harnden, '*Bandit Country',* 277-278; reference number 2035 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*

that Shields had learning difficulties, making him easy to exploit.[199] John McKeown was one of the fortunate spies that escaped death in south Armagh. In August 1999, *An Phoblacht* described how John McKeown's informing: 'began in 1989 when he was caught stealing meat while he worked for a meat plant in Newry … two RUC detectives offered to drop the charges if McKeown agreed to inform'. He was told to provide details on the movements of known Provisionals and to monitor Sinn Féin activists. Whilst being questioned by the IRA for 'stealing cattle' McKeown apparently revealed his informing because he had recently married and wanted a 'fresh start'.[200]

The best-documented example of infiltration in south Armagh is that of John McAnulty, a road haulier and smuggler. During the recent Smithwick tribunal, which investigated Garda collusion with the South Armagh IRA in the killings of Chief Superintendents Buchanan and Breen in March 1989, a former Special Branch officer named McAnulty as a source. This admission caused considerable debate during the proceedings, since the intelligence services do not usually name informants, either dead or alive. Various sources say that McAnulty ran a haulage company and was heavily involved in cross-border smuggling with the IRA, including helping them move weapons. Amongst other things, the IRA accused McAnulty of providing intelligence that led to the arrest of Raymond McCreesh in 1976, who later died on hunger-strike. The Smithwick tribunal also uncovered intelligence to suggest that McAnulty had told the RUC in 1985 that the IRA had a mole within the Dundalk Garda.[201]

None of these cases represents significant infiltration of the South Armagh IRA. The individuals involved did not have detailed information on IRA attacks, partly because most were not volunteers. The British state's area review of the campaign in south Armagh admitted in 1980 that gathering intelligence had been 'extremely difficult'. Instead, they gathered low-level intelligence, which provided 'poor' insight into the IRA, but was 'better than nothing'.[202] This assessment differed little in the 1990s. Ian Phoenix noted how south Armagh 'had proved particularly resistant to penetration of any kind'.[203]

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[199] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 279-280; reference number 2240 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[200] *An Phoblacht,* 'Informer Comes Forward', 19 August 1999: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/5262 <accessed 10 December 2013>.
[201] *Smithwick Tribunal of Inquiry Report* (Government of Ireland, 2013), 161-162, 339-343, 392; *Irish Times,* 'Mole named at Smithwick Tribunal', 11 May 2012: at http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2012/0511/breaking31.html <accessed 12 May 2012>; reference number 3047 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*; Dillon, *Dirty War,* 358-363.
[202] NRA, CJ 4/3474, South Armagh area review, March 1980, p.55.
[203] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 289.

Admittedly, the killings of security force members there did fluctuate: ten were killed in 1978 compared to 28 in 1979 (which includes the Warrenpoint attack). The number was typically between one and six per year from 1980 to 1992, before IRA snipers killed eight in 1993.[204] But South Armagh's killing statistics further highlight the problem with basing an assessment of IRA strength *only* on killings. Killings in 1979 and 1985 (where fourteen security force members were killed) are distortions because they resulted from the South Armagh IRA being involved in high-profile attacks elsewhere at Warrenpoint and Newry. The statistics also ignore the fact that attacks by the South Armagh IRA did not always cause death. On 12 November 1992, for example, they set fire to a British Army watchtower in Crossmaglen, using a flamethrower towed by a tractor.[205] Sir Michael Dewar has also written: 'South Armagh remained consistently dangerous into the nineties' and '[i]ncidents occurred on a regular basis'. 'Mortar attacks on the Crossmaglen base continued unabated', Dewar says, citing 'attacks in 1993 on 4 February, 7 April and 11 July'. He recalls one particular incident where the IRA fired a mortar into Crossmaglen barracks in February 1994, causing damage but no casualties. A van was discovered nearby with mortar firing equipment. Based on such evidence, Dewar concluded: '[r]ight up to the cease-fire in August 1994 South Armagh remained a hotbed of terrorism'.[206]

According to Harnden, by the end of the 1970s, the South Armagh IRA had killed 68 British soldiers, which represents more soldiers in ten years than were targeted by republicans in other rural areas across the entire conflict.[207] Almost every year up to the ceasefire in 1994 the South Armagh Brigade killed security force members.[208] *Operation Banner* also admits that the increased sniper killings by the South Armagh IRA in the 1990s 'had an impact on morale among some troops and police officers'.[209] In fact, two former RUC officers described south Armagh as 'quite frankly scary'.[210] The sniper attacks show that the organization was able to increase its killings, despite the area being surrounded by British Army helicopters and watchtowers from the 1980s. These watch towers were fitted with the latest technology to monitor movement below the hills. *Operation Banner* concedes that the

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[204].See appendix one.
[205] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 123-24.
[206] Dewar, *British Army*, 127-136.
[207] Harnden, '*Bandit Country'*, 82; see tables eight and nine in McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 1556-1557.
[208] See appendix one.
[209] *Operation Banner,* 529-530.
[210] Former RUC officers two and three, interview with author, 20 April 2011.

number of kills and near-misses by the South Armagh IRA snipers show that republicans found an 'effective response' to the watchtowers:

> attacks…were carefully mounted to use dead ground away from…observation posts … Many of the shots were from the back of a specially converted car which was immediately driven away to avoid leaving any forensic traces.[211]

The South Armagh IRA's level of ingenuity and care taken in planning and implementing attacks will be discussed shortly.

The South Armagh Brigade's formidable capabilities also saw it selected for high-profile attacks elsewhere, including the killing of eighteen British soldiers at Warrenpoint in 1979, a barracks attack in Newry which killed nine RUC officers in 1985, and major bombings on the English mainland in the 1990s. On 10 April 1992, for example, a substantial bomb prepared in south Armagh exploded in St Mary's Axe in London, killing three people and costing £350 million in damage. South Armagh were apparently also behind the IRA's audacious mortar attack on Downing Street in 1991.[212] The various English attacks suggest that there was no trajectory of decline for the South Armagh IRA, despite killing fewer security force members in certain years.

The South Armagh IRA's ability to carry out attacks in England, whilst still targeting security forces members in its own area during the 1990s, suggests that it was the motor behind the IRA's campaign in these years. Danny Morrison commented:

> South Armagh would always deliver and would bring the movement out of the doldrums, which happened occasionally as the result of arrests, or a large number of deaths [elsewhere] … South Armagh always had the capability … from an IRA point of view [it] always produced the goods.[213]

A former British soldier certainly feels that the security forces had 'few and far successes in South Armagh' before the 1994 ceasefire. The low rate of arrests in south Armagh is cited by the former soldier and by David McKittrick as highlighting the South Armagh IRA's tight security.[214] Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's former aide and senior negotiator, also commented how south Armagh 'was home to the most proficient IRA brigade'. For this reason, Powell

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[211] *Operation Banner,* 529-530.
[212] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 11-14, 21-26, 197-237, 317-351.
[213] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.
[214] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012; David McKittrick, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.

was keen to support Sinn Féin's request to demilitarise the area there quickly after the Good Friday Agreement, in order to prevent south Armagh republicans going solo.[215]

Certain factors made the South Armagh IRA particularly immune to significant infiltration. Julian Thompson, a former Royal Marines Commander posted to South Armagh in the 1970s, claims:

> [The South Armagh IRA were] [q]uite a small number, probably no more than about 30 ... But they were supported by a big infrastructure of willing helpers ... *there was unlikely to be anybody in the local population who was likely to be of any assistance whatsoever* ... [The local population] would report if you had been around. It was not worth their while to know that you were there and not [to] have told the IRA.[216]

Thompson's view is supported by another former British soldier who found that the South Armagh IRA received, 'huge support from the local population'.[217] Yet Thompson suggests the support was partly because nobody dared to disobey the IRA, as Patrick McEntee discovered.

Nonetheless, MacDonald's study convincingly suggests that there was 'tacit and active support of the local population' for the IRA.[218] The British state's area review for south Armagh reached a similar verdict in 1980. 'It would be wrong…to suggest that the people of the area all support the [IRA]', the report recognised, but 'this [lack of complete support for the IRA] is not…equally [matched] by support for the Security Forces, particularly the Army who are regarded by many as an occupational force'. In the British state's view, the IRA maintained support not only through intimidation, but because it represented 'the most active and best publicised representatives of the ideals commonly accepted by the population'. The report conceded that the 'higher terrorist effectiveness' in south Armagh was partly because 'the local population are prepared to act as 'eyes and ears' for PIRA whilst, at the same time, refusing to assist the Security Forces'. The result was that 'the gathering of intelligence about terrorist activity [was] extremely difficult'.[219]

The overwhelmingly Catholic composition of south Armagh meant that '[f]or all practical purposes, the border does not exist in the eyes of the local population and they look to the Republic for employment, politics, cultural heritage and the nearest towns'.[220] Thus

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[215] Powell, *Great Hatred*, 162-163, 176.
[216] IWMSA, 28361, reel 31, Julian Thompson, recorded 10 November 2005.
[217] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[218] MacDonald, *Chosen Fews*, 40-41.
[219] NRA, CJ 4/3474, South Armagh area review, March 1980, p.8-9, 19-20, 28.
[220] NRA, CJ 4/3474, South Armagh area review, March 1980, p.19-20.

south Armagh nationalists were dismayed that their area was placed into the Unionist dominated state.[221] But as detailed in the last chapter, it was not simply long-term hatred that provoked distaste towards British forces there. The behaviour of the British Army made the situation more volatile. Following IRA activity, the Army's behaviour, perhaps unsurprisingly, grew more aggressive there. Christine Toner, the wife of a former SDLP councillor and no supporter of the IRA, recounts constant 'harassment' of ordinary people by soldiers, who 'treat[ed] everyone as terrorists'. In her mind: '[t]he security forces…were responsible for a lot of unrest'. In addition, helicopters constantly flew in and out of the British Army bases night and day, because the roads were mined, disturbing sleep, children and animals, and thus causing further friction with the locals.[222] A former British soldier also believes that support existed for the south Armagh IRA because they permitted smuggling activity to continue.[223] Locals informed MacDonald that smuggling took place because the border interrupted trade because of tariffs, so it was a necessity to smuggle to survive financially.[224] Laurence McKeown believes that smuggling experience helped the local IRA learn 'a clandestine life'.[225]

On the other hand, McKeown feels it is disingenuous to attribute the effectiveness of the South Armagh IRA solely down to smuggling:

> There is more than that … South Armagh had discipline. I remember somebody saying sometime after they had got out on an escape and ended up in south Armagh about an intelligence brief to monitor the sentry post and how long it took a chopper [helicopter] to land. This person told them it was between 9 to 11 seconds. Someone says back 'well is it 9? Is it 9.5? Is it 10? Is it 10.5? Is it 11? Go back out and find out' … there was that sort of attention to detail ... they were very tight security wise.[226]

During the Smithwick tribunal, numerous security force members from both northern and southern Ireland made similar points. Retired Brigadier Mike Smith operated in south Armagh during the 1980s. He saw that unit as 'amongst the most capable and experienced of the terrorist groupings' primarily because 'they were very much risk averse'. In other words, they did not carry out attacks without plenty of intelligence and planning beforehand. Ian Liles, a retired Brigadier who served in south Armagh in the early 1990s, also described the

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[221] MacDonald, *Chosen Fews,* 25-29; Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 6-19, 62.
[222] Christine Toner, *A Different South Armagh* (Newry, 2011), 75, 130-140, 150-170; MacDonald, *Chosen Fews,* 39-41, 100-106, 121-123, 174.
[223] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[224] McDonald, *Chosen Fews,* 28-29; Toner, *A Different South Armagh,* 32-39.
[225] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 22 May 2012.
[226] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 22 May 2012.

South Armagh IRA as 'extremely professional and extremely risk averse'. According to Smithwick's report:

> [Liles] emphasised that…the South Armagh Brigade…survived intact for so long…because "they were ultra-cautious." … if they had seen one vehicle out of place, they would simply have called an operation off'.

Peter Maguire, a long-serving Garda officer, also believed that the South Armagh Brigade was 'the most efficient' IRA unit because it was 'security conscious'.[227] The reasons provided can explain why the South Armagh IRA remained at the forefront of the republican military campaign by August 1994, and evaded debilitating infiltration.

Fermanagh

In terms of 'intended targets' killed per year, the IRA's campaign in Fermanagh remained intermittent after 1975.[228] Appendix one illustrates that three 'intended targets' were killed there in both 1976 and 1977, declining to one in 1978, before increasing to five and eight killings in 1979 and 1980. This inconsistent pattern remained similar in Fermanagh up to 1990. For example, they were responsible for the deaths of no personnel linked to the security forces in 1983, whereas they killed five in 1984. At least two killings per year occurred until 1990, when the level again dropped to zero. The Fermanagh units only targeted three security forces members between 1990 and 1994. Informers and agents do not appear to explain these statistics. *Lost Lives* actually records no known informers and agents from the Fermanagh area being executed there or elsewhere by the IRA between 1976 and 1994. Admittedly, some spies from Fermanagh only emerged after 1998. In February 2006, for example, Séan Lavelle, a local Sinn Féin helper, confessed to being a Special Branch agent there for many years. At the time, Tom O'Reilly, the local Sinn Féin minister at the Stormont assembly, said: '[t]he knowledge…Lavelle had on republicans in Fermanagh isn't worth talking about,' since Lavelle was not a member of the republican movement.[229] Evidence below supports O'Reilly's argument. In 2000, Rob Lewis, a former FRU member, released his account of agent-handling in Fermanagh during the 1980s. Lewis claims that their best source was a woman he calls 'Brenda', a Sinn Féin member. Brenda was tasked with forming a relationship with 'Liam Donnelly', who the FRU believed was a leading republican in Fermanagh. Another low-level agent, 'Declan', informed the FRU that Donnelly attended

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[227] *Smithwick Tribunal,* 93-103.
[228] See appendix one.
[229] *An Phoblacht,* 'Fermanagh informer had 'limited information'', 2 February 2006: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/14776, <accessed 11 December 2013>.

particular clubs looking for women, and so a plan was hatched to get him with Brenda. The idea worked and they began dating. Her photos of Donnelly were crucial, Lewis says, because the FRU's older photographs looked nothing like him, meaning that 'he had been travelling back and forth into Northern Ireland for a long time completely unknown'. But Donnelly stopped crossing the border after a particular incident, minimising opportunities to arrest him. Nevertheless, he did ask Brenda eventually to receive his mail at her address to avoid detection. She agreed, and it was handed over to the FRU and, in turn, MI5 in London, since it supposedly discussed Libyan weapons. To cover Brenda, the Army raided all houses in her street, allowing her to tell Donnelly that she burned the letter for security. On other occasions, she used a post-box down the street, allowing the intelligence services to read it before returning the letter. Brenda's informing ended once Donnelly became tired of her refusals to marry him.[230]

Nonetheless, the examples provided do not indicate high-level infiltration of the IRA in Fermanagh. On the contrary, those noted were loose acquaintances of the organization, occasionally gathering 'loose talk'. In Brenda's case, her information could not lead to the arrest of Donnelly since he did not enter the north frequently. Donnelly was also very security conscious so that Brenda never knew where he disappeared for weeks. It actually proved extremely difficult to recruit spies within republican ranks in Fermanagh. Lewis records attempted recruitments of a former IRA prisoner and a female close to a suspected volunteer. Both refused. Lewis commented: '[t]he border areas…were a desert for intelligence-gathering…the communities were tightly knit affairs that were a real nightmare scenario for source-recruiting'. The cross-border nature of IRA operations in Fermanagh also made recruiting IRA volunteers to inform tricky because they tended to reside in the Irish Republic.[231] The British state area review for Fermanagh in January 1981 concurred: '[t]he collection of intelligence presents difficulties, as few terrorists in the region live north of the border. The supporters and sympathisers who do are so intensely hostile as to make the recruitment of sources very difficult'. The report notes a 'dearth of available intelligence' on the Fermanagh and Monaghan IRA volunteers, meaning that the British forces 'had very few successes' against the Fermanagh units.[232] Lewis agrees that: '[t]he information we extracted from our sources remained…fairly low-level'.[233]

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[230] Lewis, *Fishers,* 164-184.
[231] Lewis, *Fishers,* 111-137, 163-184, 198-209.
[232] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.23-30.
[233] Lewis, *Fishers,* 112-113.

As little intelligence emerged for British forces in Fermanagh, IRA activity there remained a persistent threat to the security forces, even if it was sporadic. And whilst 'intended target' killings by the IRA in Fermanagh declined in the 1990s, the Fermanagh units actually remained an active threat. Richard Latham, a former RUC officer who patrolled the area in the 1990s, certainly did not sense a trajectory of decline for the Fermanagh IRA before 1994. They attacked Roslea, Tempo and Newtownbutler RUC and British Army barracks right up to the 1994 ceasefire, which made Latham believe 'the whole talk of a ceasefire hardly seemed credible'.[234]

As a former British soldier suggested in the previous chapter, what made the IRA potentially so dangerous in the rural areas such as Fermanagh was their capacity to inflict multiple deaths in single attacks. At times, the Fermanagh Brigade certainly posed a threat of this nature: on 15 May 1976 three RUC officers were killed by an IRA landmine during a patrol in Belcoo; similar incidents occurred in April 1977 and April 1982, where on each occasion a British soldier died after their vehicle struck a landmine in Belleek; a UDR soldier was killed in February 1986, when the IRA detonated a bomb in a wall as a security patrol passed in Belcoo; and in November 1992, a sniper shot an RUC officer at a Belcoo checkpoint from across the border in Donegal.[235] The typical IRA method of attack in Fermanagh, involving the shooting of off-duty security force members, who were dotted across the border farmlands, also continued . These tended to be 'soft-targets' for the IRA, who frequently operated out of Monaghan to hide from the security forces before and after these attacks.[236] This variety of IRA operations in Fermanagh meant that the security forces were unable to lower their guard by 1994.

The intermittent nature of the IRA's campaign in Fermanagh compared to the IRA's campaign in south Armagh can be explained by reasons besides infiltration. According to the British state's area review, on the one hand, the local security force community living on the border there provided 'soft targets' for the IRA. On the other, the larger border Protestant population had two inhibiting effects on the Fermanagh and Monaghan IRA. One was that 'the presence of Protestants within the community gives PIRA the perception that it is more difficult to operate unobserved and unreported'. The other was that:

> [t]he Protestant community…is seen to be under attack and this alters the public
> perception of the threat. If a policeman is killed in Belfast he is seen as a policeman,

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[234] Richard Latham, *Deadly Beat: Inside the Royal Ulster Constabulary* (Edinburgh, 2001), 143-147.
[235] Reference numbers 1680-1682, 1909, 2427, 2733, 3354 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[236] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.16.

while if a policeman is killed in Fermanagh he is seen as a Protestant … the Protestant perception of this threat…leads to local demands for reassurance by the Security Forces.[237]

Henry Patterson's work on Fermanagh concurs. Despite the IRA arguing that they were killing police officers because of their uniform, the fact that the majority of officers in Fermanagh tended traditionally to be Protestant meant that killing them provided ammunition for local unionists claiming that the IRA was conducting 'ethnic cleansing' in the border areas.[238] The West Fermanagh Brigade did not help its own image on this front. During a Remembrance Day service in Enniskillen in 1987, a bomb killed eleven innocent Protestant civilians. This unit was eventually stood down by the late 1980s after they also shot dead an innocent girl in March 1988 near Belleek, whose family the IRA claimed was connected to the security services.[239] The temporary disbanding of the West Fermanagh Brigade could account for the decline in attacks during that period. But innocent killings had to be addressed by republican leaders as they could erode Sinn Féin's support. After the Enniskillen bombing, for instance, the SDLP dropped their support for Sinn Féin candidates in favour of the Ulster Unionists for the chairman positions on the Fermanagh District Council.[240] Sinn Féin's voting percentage also decreased in local district council elections too.[241]

Laurence McKeown provides an alternative explanation as to why IRA attacks in Fermanagh declined in particular periods:

A lot of time in these places it depended on whether people could come together who had leadership qualities. In Fermanagh things really revived once Seamus McElwaine came out of jail ... Perhaps the activities died off because a few were killed or imprisoned leaving nobody there to grab the initiative.[242]

With fewer volunteers to recruit from a smaller population, finding leading figures with 'initiative' in small rural areas was vital to sustaining a campaign.[243] Kieran Conway also found whilst operating for IRA GHQ that 'rural areas were variously strong or weak depending on the presence there of…one or two strong personalities who would galvanise the

[237] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.16-17.
[238] Henry Patterson, 'Sectarianism Revisited: The Provisional IRA Campaign in a Border Region of Northern Ireland', *in Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22:3, (2010), 337-356.
[239] Reference numbers 2283-2893, 2921 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[240] Paul Bew and Gordon Gillespie, *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1999* (Dublin 1999), 210.
[241] See appendix two.
[242] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[243] See table for breakdown of population by district between 1987 and 1996 at CAIN: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/popul.htm, <accessed 01 August 2012>.

rest'.[244] For the Fermanagh IRA, Seamus McElwaine from County Monaghan was crucial; hence the IRA selected him to escape from the Maze prison in 1983. According to Ken Maginnis, a former UDR officer and an Ulster Unionist MP for the area, McElwaine was responsible for at least a dozen killings. His influence is clear as IRA killings did decline in Fermanagh after his arrest in 1981. Once he escaped in 1983, they increased to five in 1984, before declining thereafter, particularly after he was shot dead in 1986. Even McElwaine's death at the hands of the SAS on 26 April 1986 was not the result of prior intelligence. His unit placed a bomb on the Lisnaskea to Roslea road. By pure chance, a soldier spotted the trip wire during a routine patrol, allowing the SAS to wait for the IRA to come and recover the bomb after it failed to explode.[245] Further evidence of a lack of spies in the Fermanagh IRA can be seen in the British area review in 1981. It described how intelligence-led operations using the SAS had been 'successful' against the IRA elsewhere, and called for 'a similar operation in…Fermanagh'. Sufficient intelligence 'does not exist', the authors commented at the time to enable SAS operations to commence.[246] A sustained SAS assault on the Fermanagh IRA never emerged, suggesting a lack of adequate intelligence.

Down, south Derry and north Armagh

IRA activity in other predominately rural areas maintained a lesser degree of military pressure on the British state at different times across the period. The South Derry IRA, for example, was particularly active in the late 1970s under the leadership of Francis Hughes, who died on hunger-strike in 1981. Hughes is a further example supporting Laurence McKeown's argument that local initiative was crucial in driving activity in small rural areas. Hughes and Dominic McGlinchey – who became a member of the INLA in 1982 – led south Derry volunteers in attempting to dominate the area. In 1976, they killed seven intended targets, followed by another four in 1977.[247] Hughes and McGlinchey were key protagonists, as witnessed when the RUC issued a 'wanted' poster included their images in 1977. In a gun battle in 1978, however, Hughes was wounded and captured.[248] His departure – and that of McGlinchey in 1982 – had a detrimental effect on the South Derry IRA. Conway argues: 'south Derry was never the same after the break-up of the unit centred on Francis Hughes and Dominic McGlinchey'.[249] From 1979 to 1988, for instance, very few IRA targets were killed

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[244] Conway, *Southside Provisional*, 99.
[245] Reference number 2744 in McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*.
[246] NRA, CJ 4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.30.
[247] See appendix one.
[248] Reference number 2312 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[249] Conway, *Southside Provisional,* 192.

in the region.[250] Yet by the 1990s, the IRA became more active outside of Derry city again. Examples include the destructive bombings of Coleraine and Magherafelt town centres in 1992 and 1993.[251] It is not entirely clear whether south Derry volunteers were involved in these incidents, because, as already noted, Derry city volunteers had contributed to recent attacks such as at Coshquin in 1990. Whatever the case, such attacks show that the IRA evaded operational difficulties in one area by switching its focus to other areas. This is not to say that south Derry units posed a serious threat to the security forces across the period. But they did help the IRA to persist in its campaign across the North. In addition, local republican groups were difficult to eradicate entirely because of a sizeable republican support base. Council elections in Magherafelt, for instance, saw republicans frequently gain four or five seats, the same number as the SDLP.[252]

Another area where the IRA remained active until the 1990s was north and mid-Down. Local IRA units there did experience infiltration. Dillon, for example, records that James Young from Portaferry became an informer in 1981. The IRA claimed that Young ruined a local bombing offensive in the mid-1980s.[253] Despite this setback, the IRA maintained a persistent low level of activity in Down from 1983 (this does not include south Down as a separate unit covered that region). The organization killed five intended targets – UDR and RUC officers – across county Down in 1983, and another fifteen between 1984 and 1989. A further five killings took place in 1990, which included four UDR soldiers in a single attack in April 1990 when their vehicle struck a landmine near Downpatrick.[254] Although there were very few killings in the 1990s, IRA bombs devastated Bangor and Newtonards town centres in 1992 and 1993.[255] The north and mid-Down units created additional military pressure on local security forces, although republicans did not pose a political threat there as the SDLP won the electoral battles by a massive margin.[256]

North Armagh units shared some similarities in their experience to Belfast and Derry city volunteers as they operated in towns such as Lurgan and Portadown. Their lower number of volunteers, however, resulting from a smaller population available to recruit, help explain

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[250] See appendix one.
[251] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict', 1992 and 1993: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch92.htm, and http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm, <accessed 8 July 2015>.
[252] See appendix two.
[253] Reference number 2606 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*; Dillon, *Dirty War,* 364-376.
[254] See appendix one; reference numbers 3101-3104 in McKitrrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[255] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict', 1992 and 1993: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch92.htm, and http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm, <accessed 8 July 2015>.
[256] See appendix two.

why they escaped significant infiltration. There were exceptions. David McVeigh, an IRA volunteer from Lurgan, was found shot dead near Carlingford in September 1986. The IRA claimed he became a police informer after being arrested in relation to a bombing at Lurgan Golf Club in 1982. McVeigh's family denied the claims.[257] A further three volunteers from Portadown were killed in July 1992, in a particularly disturbing case involving infiltration. Gregory Burns, Aidan Starrs and John Dignam were shot dead by the IRA. It is alleged that all three men had been informing during the 1980s on IRA activity in north Armagh. Ingram says that Gregory Burns applied to the UDR in 1980, but the FRU supposedly approached him to inform. His information allegedly included informing the police on the whereabouts of his brother Sean Burns, who was shot dead by an undercover RUC unit in November 1982. Ingram also suggests that these men profited from IRA robberies. They were eventually caught out. According to Ingram, the FRU decided to not relocate them after Burns revealed to a girlfriend, Margaret Perry, that he worked for the intelligence services. The story then took a nasty twist. The three men supposedly agreed to kill Perry and leave her body in an unmarked grave, since they feared that she would expose them. Ingram's account concludes with the IRA eventually investigating the matter and luring Dignam, Starrs and Burns to their deaths at the hands of Stakeknife and Magee.[258]

Moloney also alleges that Joe John Magee was put in charge of security for the North Armagh Brigade in the 1980s, and the IRA's campaign 'collapsed'.[259] The intended-death statistics show that the IRA's activity was not consistent during the 1980s. After killing sixteen 'intended targets' between 1979 and 1982, killings declined to thirteen between 1983 and 1989. Yet the statistics for the 1990s suggest that the North Armagh Brigade became more active. Eleven targets were killed in 1990 and a further six in 1991. And whilst killings declined to between two and three 'intended targets' per year between 1992 and 1994,[260] the North Armagh Brigade began to pose a significant threat to surroundings towns and security force barracks. Lurgan town centre, for instance, had to be completely rebuilt after an IRA bombing in 1992.[261] And in February and September 1993, another two large devices were detonated in Portadown and Armagh city, causing extensive financial damage.[262] As with

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[257] Reference number 2775 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[258] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 122-135; reference numbers 3212, 3324-3326 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[259] Moloney, *Voices,* 278-279.
[260] See appendix one.
[261] *Nelson Inquiry Report*, 28.
[262] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict', 1993: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch93.htm, <accessed 8 July 2015>.

other more sparsely populated areas, what made the North Armagh IRA particularly threatening was that they could inflict numerous deaths in single attacks. Examples include: three RUC officers killed in a landmine attack there in October 1982; another three RUC officers being killed by an IRA landmine attack in Armagh city in July 1990; and two UDR officers who died following an IRA mortar attack in Armagh city in March 1991.[263] These attacks support Dewar's view that the North Armagh IRA remained 'particularly challenging', for the security forces by 1994.[264]

The North Armagh IRA escaped crippling infiltration for similar reasons that will shortly be described for rural units. Nevertheless, two important factors made the North Armagh Brigade difficult to contain. The recent inquiry in to the killing of lawyer Rosemary Nelson saw RUC intelligence suggest that one particular republican increased IRA activity in Lurgan. The RUC charged this man with committing various offences, but he was acquitted during the 1990s.[265] The other important factor maintaining tension there was loyalist activity. Throughout the conflict, there were accusations of collusion between rogue north Armagh security forces and loyalist groups there, including the killings of innocent Catholics by the so-called Glenanne gang, operating out of a farm in the mid-Armagh area in the 1970s.[266] Rosemary Nelson's death was also suspected by nationalists to be a collusive act, since she had defended prominent republicans and the Garvaghy road residents from loyalist marches forced through their area in the 1990s.[267] On top of this potent loyalist threat in the area, there was also a history of discrimination in jobs, housing and voting from partition up to the 1970s. Thus republicans were motivated in north Armagh to continue their campaign to strike back at the state and local unionist population.[268]

Tyrone and Newry

Two brigades operating in predominately rural territory struggled to persist in their military effort by the 1990s. Before the 1990s, the East Tyrone Brigade and other units in Tyrone sustained a persistent low-intensity campaign. The figures of intended killings in Tyrone in the 1970s were six in 1976, eleven in 1977, five in 1978, twelve in 1979 and a decline to one in 1980. Only the South Armagh and Belfast IRA killed more security force members in

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[263] Reference numbers 2473-2475, 3122-3124, 3176-3182 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[264] Dewar, *British Army*, 136.
[265] *Nelson Inquiry Report*, 32-70
[266] Anne Cadwallader, *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Cork, 2013), 15-373.
[267] *Nelson Inquiry Report.*
[268] Whyte, 'discrimination'.

these years. Between 1981 and 1985, 34 further 'intended targets' were killed in Tyrone, the same number killed between 1976 and 1980. Between 1986 and 1990, the average only slightly declined to 30 'targets' killed.[269] As seen in the previous chapter, what made Tyrone units particularly alarming for the security forces was their ability to inflict numerous casualties in single attacks amongst the large open spaces of the countryside. This threat continued after 1975: four British soldiers were killed by an IRA landmine near Dungannon in December 1979; later, in July 1983, four UDR officers died after their vehicle struck an IRA landmine near Ballygawley; in December 1985, the IRA destroyed Ballygawley RUC barracks and shot dead two RUC officers there; and in August 1988, the Tyrone IRA killed eight and wounded other British soldiers via a landmine exploding underneath an Army bus between Omagh and Ballygawley.[270]

Nonetheless, between 1991 and 1994 Tyrone units killed thirteen 'intended targets', marking a decline in their capacity to kill.[271] With a few exceptions, such as in January 1992 when the Tyrone units killed eight contractors working at a British Army base travelling on a bus in Teebane Cross, attacks that killed various security force members declined.[272] Evidence does suggest that the erosion of the East Tyrone Brigade's military capacity was a key reason for this decline. The British state area review in July 1980 had commented, 'East Tyrone PIRA is…particularly secure [from infiltration]', partly because the local population was staunchly nationalist.[273] Nevertheless, it could appear that intelligence increased thereafter. At the Loughgall police barracks on 8 May 1987, for example, the SAS shot dead eight east Tyrone volunteers when they came to detonate a bomb.[274] Hughes and Tommy McKearney both suspect that informers were involved.[275] In contrast, Ingram claims that technical surveillance led to the Loughgall ambush.[276] Ian Phoenix, who helped organise the Loughgall ambush for the southern TCG, does not specify exactly where the intelligence came from.[277]

Certainly, in the area review for Tyrone in 1980, the British state mentioned that '[t]he removal of BLANK and a small number of his close associates from the terrorist

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[269] See appendix one.
[270] Reference numbers 2187-2190, 2543-2546, 2726-2727, 2972-2979 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[271] See appendix one.
[272] Reference numbers 3277-3284 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[273] NRA, CJ 4/3474, East Tyrone area review, July 1980, p.30.
[274] Reference numbers 2838-2845, in McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives.*
[275] Hughes in Moloney, *Voices,* 266; McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142-143.
[276] Harkin and Ingram, *Stakeknife,* 53.
[277] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 205-221

organization would have a major beneficial effect'. At the time, the British lamented the 'shortage of usable intelligence', but hinted that in the coming years, '[t]t is essential to attack the structure of East Tyrone PIRA with more efforts to place human sources of intelligence within the organization'.[278] Since the East Tyrone IRA was 'attacked', it could be that 'sources of intelligence' were acquired allowing for a number of SAS ambushes. Indeed, following the Ballygawley bus bombing, the southern TCG struck back, killing three IRA volunteers in August 1988, as they attempted to kill an off-duty UDR member. Phoenix claims that he knew the identity and plans of the three volunteers in advance through 'intelligence'.[279] In June 1991, another three Tyrone volunteers were ambushed by the SAS during an operation in Coagh. And in February 1992, four more Tyrone volunteers were ambushed by the SAS after attacking Coalisland barracks.[280] Frampton and Moloney suggest that this erosion of the East Tyrone Brigade was an important factor influencing the Provisionals into a ceasefire, since it had been one of the IRA's strongest units.[281]

It certainly could be the case that informers and agents were at work. On each occasion mentioned, the SAS knew exactly where the IRA was going to strike. In fact, shortly after the Clonoe ambush in August 1992, the IRA killed Robin Hill, a former member from Tyrone, whom they said was an informer. The family denied the claims. It is not clear whether the IRA believed he was responsible for the ambush, although the fact that they were looking for spies suggests that they suspected infiltration.[282] On the other hand, Tommy McKearney, a former Tyrone Provisional, believes that senior informers set-up SAS ambushes in Tyrone:

> SAS operations were removing personnel at a time when the IRA leadership was seriously considering…a ceasefire … *it was directed against the Tyrone IRA to a large extent ... [so Tyrone] was not capable of creating political opposition to a ceasefire; and in consequence…did not offer any significant opposition to a ceasefire ...* Tyrone…had the political views and numbers to oppose the Belfast republicans. For example, Fermanagh-south Tyrone elected Bobby Sands … [and] had elected an independent MP in the late 1970s … *In my view, there was surgical sight here to remove not only the military but the political opposition to any emerging ceasefire negotiations.*

[278] NRA, CJ 4/3474, East Tyrone area review, July 1980, p.30, 38, 79-80.
[279] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 241-244.
[280] Moloney, *Secret History,* 318-319.
[281] Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes', 92-93, 96; Moloney, *Secret History,* 319.
[282] Reference number 3330 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*

McKearney added that 'agents of influence' such as Donaldson could have identified those who opposed the peace process for the intelligence services.[283] The trouble with analysing this view is that there is no collaborating evidence available. Donaldson's role will be detailed elsewhere, but it seems that he was primarily accessing political intelligence. Otherwise, why did Donaldson or Stakeknife not set-up similar SAS ambushes against the South Armagh and Fermanagh IRA? Since IRA attacks occurred in rural areas on a regular basis, it seems that Donaldson and Stakeknife had, at best, extremely limited access to many rural units.

Alternative explanations could account for the erosion of the East Tyrone IRA's military capacity. Laurence McKeown suggests that perhaps IRA casualties were unusually high in there because of 'an element…rushing into things and not giving the attention that you had' in places such as south Armagh.[284] Brendan Hughes also believes that whilst informers were involved at Loughgall: 'that operation went ahead without the proper intelligence, without proper organization and without proper training'. In hindsight, Hughes alleges that senior republicans 'threw caution to the wind' at the time to deliberately damage strong IRA units and prevent them opposing a ceasefire.[285] There is no evidence available to supplement his view, and his opinion could be designed to justify his opposition to the Adams leadership.

It is also important to emphasise the political support that republicans maintained in Tyrone by August 1994. Although Sinn Féin no longer held the Fermanagh-south Tyrone constituency, they did perform well in council elections. In Omagh, they were never beaten by the SDLP up to 1994, and gained the majority of nationalist seats in 1985 and 1993. Republicans also beat the SDLP in Cookstown in 1985, although the SDLP narrowly gained more seats there in 1989 and 1993. The SDLP held a narrow lead over Sinn Féin in Strabane and Dungannon district council elections too between 1985 and 1993.[286] Nevertheless, Sinn Féin support was sizeable across Tyrone, meaning that the republican movement could not be ignored in local politics. The Teebane Cross bombing in 1992 also suggested that the IRA had not disappeared in Tyrone, and potentially could reinvigorate itself if the conflict continued.

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[283] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011 (italics mine).
[284] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[285] Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 266-270.
[286] See appendix two.

The other geographical area where the IRA struggled was in Newry and south Down. As with the IRA in areas such as south Derry and north Armagh, there needs to be more research on the IRA's campaign here. The available evidence suggests that informers and agents certainly helped disrupt its activity. The South Down Brigade, for instance, only killed a few security force members between 1976 and 1986, before a decline to zero killings in the majority of years up to the 1994 ceasefire; although there was the exception of ten being killed in 1985 in the Newry barracks attack with help of the South Armagh Brigade.[287] Eamon Collins, who joined the South Down Brigade in the early 1980s, admits that 'no more than 50 per cent of our plans worked out as intended', and that 'betrayal by informers' was a key reason.[288] The fact that Stakeknife and Magee are both mentioned by Collins and Kevin Fulton as being involved in internal security in Newry shows that damaging infiltration partly arose from outside interference.[289] Fulton actually says that it was internal security that allowed him to join the IRA in Newry and later Belfast, despite him previously serving in the British Army. He went on to disrupt various operations in Newry, including a planned attack on Newry courthouse and the plan to kill a worker at the RUC barracks, who subsequently retired.[290] Yet there are other explanations for the low level of IRA activity in Newry. Collins puts some failures down to 'sheer incompetence…and…bad luck'. On the theme of 'incompetence', for instance, he recalls a young boy being killed by a bomb in Banbridge town centre in the early 1980s because the timer was too short.[291] Collins' view cannot be verified, but it does support McKeown's point about good leadership being crucial to the rural IRA's ability to conduct an effective campaign. Another factor harming the IRA in Newry was that it lacked support compared to the SDLP. In 1989, for instance, Sinn Féin won five seats compared to the SDLP's seventeen on the Newry and Mourne district council. This electoral pattern continued up to 1994.[292] The South Down IRA was recruiting and drawing support from a restricted base of support, further diminishing the prospects of running an effective campaign there.

Overall assessment of rural unit's influence on the IRA's campaign

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[287] See appendix one.
[288] Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 14, 152, 235.
[289] Fulton, *Unsung Hero,* 182-189; Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 216-294; See Fulton in *Smithwick Tribunal*, 250.
[290] Fulton, *Unsung Hero,* 23-215*; Smithwick Tribunal*, 237-268; Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 251-260.
[291] Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 120, 152-179, 222-223.
[292] See appendix two.

Whilst the Tyrone and South Down IRA were eventually restrained by the security forces by the 1990s, this was not the case with other rural units. As David McKittrick suggested: '[w]ith the possible exception of east Tyrone...in...other [rural] places … [i]t was a continuing battle.'[293] In many rural areas and towns the IRA continued disrupting local political, social and economic life until 1994. In south Armagh and Fermanagh, the IRA posed a significant threat to the security forces. The implication of this evidence is that many rural units were not a sideshow. As Danny Morrison argued: '[r]ural units…were extremely important in the fight against the British presence'.[294] Their importance can be summarized in three ways. First, they provided the IRA with opportunities to kill a greater number of security force members in single attacks in wider terrain.[295] *Lost Lives* statistics, for example, show that the greatest number of full-and-part-time RUC, RUC reserve and UDR deaths occurred in Armagh and Tyrone, with Down and Fermanagh also high on that list.[296] The bombings in England also provided another outlet for the IRA to inflict damage on the British state, which were primarily conducted by the South Armagh IRA during the 1990s. Lastly, rural units stored and ferried supplies across the border for other IRA units.[297] The freedom of movement in rural volunteers, compared to those operating within compact cities with frequent patrols and extensive surveillance, was a major advantage for rural units.[298] Ultimately, without rural units the IRA would have struggled to continue a persistent, low-intensity conflict between 1976 and 1994. So important were rural units that *Operation Banner* has reflected: '[w]ith hindsight…the Border area was critical to the conduct of PIRA operations and therefore should have been the geographical focus of the campaign'.[299]

Why were rural IRA units generally resistant to significant infiltration? Chapters one and two suggested that many border nationalist communities were historically opposed to the British state for forcing their area into unionist Northern Ireland state in the 1920s. Chapter one also described how discrimination against the majority nationalist population west of the River Bann by local unionist councils before 1969, created intense hostility towards the state. But as chapter two suggested, short-term reasons also made rural nationalists reluctant to inform. British Army actions, for instance, frequently angered local nationalists. Lewis

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[293] David McKittrick, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[294] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.
[295] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 410-411.
[296] See table nine in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*, 1557.
[297] For examples, see NRA, CJ 4/3474, East Tyrone area review, July 1980, p.18, 42; NRA, CJ4/3474, South Armagh area review, March 1980, p.19-21.
[298] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.
[299] *Operation Banner,* 414.

recalls how a particular Scottish regiment's sectarian abuse towards nationalists in Fermanagh made source recruitment difficult.[300]

As McKearney also suggested, rural units frequently evaded arrest and potential pressure to inform by escaping across the border to the Irish Republic. British security forces certainly felt the border was rather porous. In 'Future Terrorist Trends' in 1978, Glover commented that 'the Republic…provides many of the facilities of the classic safe haven so essential to any terrorist movement'.[301] In the late 1980s, the British Army reported that the majority of rural IRA units were based in the Irish Republic.[302] The Fermanagh area review, for instance, suggested: '[t]he main threat to security…comes from cross-border PIRA terrorists'. It also believed that '[t]he collection of intelligence presents difficulties, as few terrorists in the region live north of the border'.[303] The ability of rural units to evade extensive arrests was significant because, in the words of Séanna Walsh, 'you didn't have to replenish your ranks. As you do replenish your ranks you are opening up the possibility of bringing people in with an ulterior motive'.[304] Furthermore, without extensive arrests, it was difficult to gain an opportunity to try to 'turn' rural volunteers in the first place for British intelligence. In the words of a former British soldier: 'If you are looking at the issue of source development in [rural areas], the major problem was that the IRA was in the south. Where are you going to start making inroads?'.[305] With many volunteers from places such as Fermanagh living across the border, this also meant that any 'loose talk' in pubs was difficult for British intelligence to act on.

The cross-border activities of rural units raise questions about the effectiveness of Garda intelligence. Researching the impact of Garda Special Branch spies on the IRA is very difficult. Apart from the memoirs of Sean O'Callaghan, a one-time Garda informer, the author has come across no other memoirs or accounts detailing their activities. Yet based on the available evidence it does not appear that the Irish state's spies had any significant restraining effect on cross-border IRA units. This was a point echoed in the British situation report for the Fermanagh area in the early 1980s. The cross-border nature of the security threat, the report argued, meant that they relied on Garda intelligence. But: '[a]t the moment,

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[300] Lewis, *Fishers,* 140.
[301] NRA, FCO 87/976, Future Terrorists Trends, 15 December 1978.
[302] Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier,* 1.
[303] NRA, CJ4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.6, 23.
[304] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.
[305] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.

Garda penetration of PIRA is not good enough to provide this'.[306] The south Armagh report concurred.[307] In many cases, it was not that the Garda did not want to help. On the contrary, the Fermanagh report stated: '[a]lthough Gardai willingness to cooperate …[is] good, the strength, nature and equipment of their force produce practical limitations on their effectiveness'.[308] Patterson adds that the sheer size and terrain of the border made it very difficult to police.[309]

A former British soldier also remarked: 'rural areas were better at preventing infiltration … If you saw somebody loading chemical drums into…a van, it is very difficult to hide that in a city … Doing that in a rural area is a lot easier'.[310] The vast rural terrain aided the IRA in hiding its activities from 'nosey' neighbours in the countryside. Getting around border obstructions did not appear an issue either for rural volunteers. Local volunteers and people developed a 'border cuteness' and were able to find routes across the border from their knowledge of their areas, avoiding capture and potentially pressure to inform.[311] Furthermore, McKearney suggested that the smaller rural units tended to consist of 'friends or work mates'. Close personal ties between volunteers made it was less likely that they would inform on each other potentially compared to person in a cell in Belfast, who was mixing with people that he or she had never previously associated. Of course, McKearney is right to say that '[t]he downside of this…was that if one member was exposed, the others came immediately under suspicion'.[312] SAS ambushes in Tyrone could demonstrate the dangers in operating with local friends or family. Yet the fact that these ambushes did not occur with the same devastating effect in Fermanagh or south Armagh strongly suggests that there was a deep sense of loyalty and trust between rural IRA volunteers. Other factors such as farming together meant that rural nationalists had greater knowledge and personal connection to rural volunteers, potentially making it more unlikely that they would inform.[313] A former British soldier certainly felt that connections between IRA volunteers and the local community in rural areas made infiltration difficult: '[i]n the rural areas…[the IRA] could get away with it because they knew everybody'.[314]

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306 NRA, CJ4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.26-27.
307 NRA, CJ4/3474, South Armagh area review, March 1980, p.31, 53, 67.
308 NRA, CJ4/3474, Fermanagh and west Tyrone area review, January 1981, p.40.
309 Patterson, *Ireland's Violent Frontier,* 49-50.
310 Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
311 Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 135.
312 McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 116-117.
313 Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 88.
314 Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.

A crucial factor explaining why many rural IRA units escaped significant infiltration was their semi-autonomous nature in terms of vetting volunteers and preparing operations. Stakeknife seems to have had had limited access to rural units outside Newry, where a collapse of the IRA campaign in the late 1970s permitted interference from Belfast.[315] Elsewhere, Sean O'Callaghan explains that:

> [t]he notion that the IRA security department vetted every IRA volunteer is complete nonsense ... what was the point in bringing down a few guys from Belfast to interview a new recruit in Crossmaglen? The South Armagh Brigade would know everything about the new guy's family; they would have known him for years.[316]

A former British soldier familiar with rural IRA units agrees: 'anyone coming in from Belfast [PIRA] thinking that they were going to…check on…rural units would be told to think again'.[317] Indeed, Eamon Collins remembers the south Armagh leader rejecting the internal security unit carrying out extensive reviews of local volunteers and operations.[318] Brendan Hughes also claims that when he worked for the intelligence department from the late 1980s: 'the South Armagh men believed the major problem [with informers] was in Belfast … the South Armagh people did not trust Belfast'.[319] Since the South Armagh, North and mid-Down and Fermanagh IRA did not appear to suffer substantial infiltration, it seems that Stakeknife and Magee were not vetting these units. Otherwise, we would expect to see more failed operations. The general pattern in most rural areas was that they vetted their own recruits and maintained a degree of autonomy. As journalist Paul Larkin concludes about Stakeknife: 'he…questioned IRA volunteers after certain operations and in certain areas. He was…never in a position to walk into a particular area and demand prior details of an operation'.[320]

The IRA leadership

At the IRA's leadership level, the frequency of major operations in England during the 1990s indicates a lack of consistent infiltration. The IRA's strategies and policies were sanctioned and selected by its Army Council, a seven-man body whose members were chosen by a twelve-man Army Executive. The Executive, in turn, was chosen by IRA volunteers at one of the rare General Army Conventions. The IRA Chief of Staff - chosen by the Army Council -

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[315] Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 14.
[316] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.
[317] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[318] Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 235, 245.
[319] Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 276.
[320] Paul Larkin in *The Gurdian,* 'How spooks are undermining the Peace Process in Northern Ireland', 13 February 2012: http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/feb/13/spooks-undermining-peace-northern-ireland, <accessed 6 June 2012>.

implemented IRA policy on a day-to-day basis.[321] Operations and volunteers for the English department were carefully and secretly selected by the leadership.[322] The purpose for the IRA in targeting England was discussed in the previous chapter. In particular, McGladdery argues that attacks in England sought to ensure that an 'unacceptable level of violence' was maintained, particularly if units were struggling in Northern Ireland. But this is not to say that the IRA's campaign in Northern Ireland was weakening.[323] In fact, whilst IRA attacks increased in England in the 1990s, many rural and urban units remained problematic for the security forces across Northern Ireland.

Despite a few devices exploding or being defused in Bristol, London and Liverpool, IRA attacks in England temporarily declined in the late 1970s. Andrew hints at 'success in penetrating PIRA' as being responsible. But Andrew also says that the IRA in England made some basic errors, such as purchasing a fake driving license which had been used before, enabling the intelligence services to track down the unit.[324] Alternatively, McGladdery suggests that the IRA decided to 'lay low' for a while so that new 'sleeper cells' were not detected.[325] Yet informers and agents still infiltrated English cells in the 1980s for a short period. Occasionally, IRA leaders got their selection wrong and a spy slipped through. Sean O'Callaghan, an IRA volunteer from Kerry, was a Garda informer. Alongside disrupting some IRA robberies and training camps in southern Ireland, O'Callaghan says that he acquired information on the English department following 'loose talk' of one of its members. In late 1982, O'Callaghan claims that he was promoted to the English department and prevented an attempt to kill Prince Charles and Princess Diana, alongside beach bombings in 1983. He allegedly disrupted these attacks by revealing to the newspapers his presence in England so that the IRA would cancel the operations. There is not sufficient information available to corroborate these claims, although his memoir was endorsed by Garret Fitzgerald, Taoiseach at the time. O'Callaghan was also given a royal pardon from serving his entire prison sentence for his IRA activities before turning informer.[326] The republican movement argues that he exaggerates his role.[327]

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[321] Moloney, *Secret History*, 375-380.
[322] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012.
[323] Cf. McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 5-6, 57-60, 142.
[324] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 650-651.
[325] McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 111-117.
[326] O'Callaghan, *The Informer,* 100-158.
[327] *An Phoblacht,* 'O'Callaghan: The truth', 6 March 1997, p.10-12.

It is possible that other informers and agents disrupted English units. Andrew recalls the arrest of Robert Fryers a republican from Belfast in the 1990s. Fryers was tracked down to Scotland where MI5 observed him in the company of an unknown Provisional Hugh Jack. Further MI5 surveillance revealed that this pair planned a new bombing offensive in Birmingham and Manchester. MI5 believed that the arrest of Fryers in July 1993 represented a 'serious blow to PIRA's mainland campaign'.[328] Earlier, in 1985, Peter Sherry, described by Phoenix as a well-known Tyrone republican who stood in the local elections in Dungannon, was found to be operating on the mainland. Phoenix does not disclose how he discovered this information. Special Branch decided to follow Sherry, and eventually found that he met with Patrick Magee, the Brighton bomber, in England. Phoenix's undercover unit watched Magee and Sherry travel to a flat in Glasgow, before the police swooped, arresting five republicans including Sherry and Magee. There were very few attacks in England thereafter until 1989, suggesting that these arrests hindered IRA operations.[329]

The Fryers and Sherry arrests though could have resulted from the IRA selecting well-known volunteers to operate in England. Using experienced volunteers posed a potential risk of exposure for IRA units in England, as Tommy McKearney describes:

> experienced operators if not necessarily always known to the security forces would certainly have been known to their colleagues at home. If they happened to leave the area it is difficult to stop tongues wagging … the assumption is made that [they] could be in England or on the Continent … once that word begins to filter through to the British intelligence…they put a photograph to the name. It's not that difficult…to find that person.

The dilemma for the IRA was that there was a need for expertise whilst operating in England to ensure maximum damage was inflicted. But experienced operators risked exposing the entire unit, as they were often known to the security services or informers and agents. The two cases above both demonstrate how known volunteers exposed unknowns operating in England. McKearney also says that operating in England carried other specific difficulties, such as the hostile population 'actively watching for any suspicious activity'; and the need for supplies meaning greater contact with other personnel increasing the risk of infiltration.[330]

Despite these hurdles, the IRA did manage to operate on the mainland frequently with a devastating economic and physical impact, particularly between 1989 and 1994. Even

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[328] Andrews, *Defence of the Realm*, 782-785.
[329] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix*, 180-186.
[330] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012; McKearney, *Provisional IRA*, 126-127.

before O'Callaghan's time, the IRA carried out deadly bombings in England, including in July 1982, when the Regents' and Hyde Park bombs killed eleven British service personnel, and a bombing at Harrods in December 1983 that killed six people.[331] In addition, after O'Callaghan was not selected again after failed attacks in 1983, the IRA detonated a bomb that killed five people, and nearly killed Margaret Thatcher, at the Conservative Party conference at the Grand Hotel in Brighton, October 1984. Activities declined in England between 1985 and 1988, partly following the arrest of senior English department operators such as Patrick Magee – discovered after his fingerprints were found on a room registration card at the Grand Hotel.[332] Despite occasional arrests, however, the IRA maintained a persistent campaign in England between 1989 and 1994. Attacks included a number of high-profile incidents: on September 22 1989, the IRA exploded a bomb at the Royal Marines School of Music in Deal in Kent, killing eleven in October 1989; in July 1990, Ian Gow MP was killed after an IRA booby trap exploded under his car;[333] in February 1991, the IRA fired mortars at Downing Street;[334] in 1992 there was the Baltic Exchange bombing previously mentioned; in April 1993, a large bomb exploded near the NatWest Tower at Bishopsgate killing one person, injuring thirty and costing an estimated £350 million pounds in damages;[335] and on 9, 11 and 13 March 1994, IRA units fired numerous mortars onto Heathrow airport runways from outside the perimeter fence, although none exploded.[336]

There were also many small scale attacks in England.[337] In fact, Andrew found that the number of IRA incidents after 1990 increased in England compared to the 1980s.[338]A combination of low and high-level attacks by the IRA in England suggest that that department and IRA leadership were free from significant long-term infiltration. As David McKittrick argues: '[i]f they had been infiltrated the British security forces would have made it a huge priority to stop the English attacks, and they didn't manage that'.[339] Even McKearney admits: '[i]n spite of [the] great [difficulties] the IRA continued to bomb England until the end of its war and at times did so with spectacular results'.[340]

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[331] Reference numbers 2440-2450, 2592-2597 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[332] Reference numbers 2652-2655 in McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*.
[333] Reference numbers 3057-3066, 3070, 3127 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[334] Taylor, *Provos,* 321-322.
[335] Andrews, *Defence of the Realm,* 783.
[336] CAIN, 'Chronology of the conflict': at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch94.htm <accessed 3 March 2013>.
[337] See McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 146-169.
[338] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 782-783.
[339] David McKittrick, interview with author, 22 May 2012.
[340] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 127.

The previous chapter explained how hand-picking volunteers for English operations and ensuring that only the IRA leaders knew about operations there increased the security of English units. Laurence McKeown confirms that few volunteers knew about IRA activities in England:

> [m]ost volunteers wouldn't know who was in those units … what type of work they are involved with wouldn't be said and nobody would ask … if somebody was asking…it would appear…suspicious.[341]

A former British soldier also believed that IRA cells in England were much harder to infiltrate for similar reasons:

> I did not get the impression that there was any major penetration [of the IRA in England] ... PIRA kept it pretty tight because only a few individuals were involved ... you would not have…low-level sources, eyes and ears individuals who might tell us that 'fred bloggs is back in the area'.[342]

Without periphery sources directly involved in operations in England, they were not privy to information concerning who was involved, where they were based and the targets. True, the IRA did have periphery members involved in transporting materials and volunteers to England. Bradley remembered: '[y]ou had to have a lot of people even to get one bomb over to England. There would maybe have been about thirty people involved in the Brighton bomb in 1984'. Bradley is likely to have an insight into this attack, since he knew Magee. Nevertheless, Bradley says that periphery members had minimal input: '[o]ne individual would…get something from A to B, somebody else B to C. They wouldn't know what each other was doing, or who the other people were'.[343] The process of transporting materials and volunteers to England remained as cautious as O'Doherty found in the early 1970s.

Operating in a hostile environment also provided the IRA with an extra level of security at times. Ó hAdhmaill explains, 'fewer people knew about their existence [in England]', making detection of IRA volunteers far harder.[344] McKeown explained that fewer people knew about volunteers' existence in England partly because: '[they] were told to stay out of Irish pubs and clubs'.[345] A republican activist agreed that 'penetration was difficult' because '[t]here would be absolutely no communication, no backwards and forwards. It's going into enemy territory undercover … for however long is necessary'.[346] Other counter-

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[341] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[342] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[343] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 113, 236-237.
[344] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 9 September 2013.
[345] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[346] Republican Activist one, interview with author, 21 May 2012.

intelligence measures adopted by English units also prevented significant infiltration across the period. After O'Callaghan's unit failed to kill Prince Charles and Diana, for instance, he was not selected again for English operations. Rotating volunteers helped prevent permanent infiltration. Holland and Phoenix add that: '[m]any of the big bombing attacks were organised from south of the Irish border or from south Armagh. Both presented surveillance problems'. One problem was that the Irish Republic 'was outside the RUC's jurisdiction'. The other difficulty was that south Armagh had proved 'resistant' to infiltration.[347]

In Bradley's opinion: 'why did the Brits talk to us in 1992 and 1993 when the England department was blowing the City of London to bits? To get us to stop, that's why'.[348] Barker, a former Special Branch officer, also believes that the London bombings, 'did the trick' and convinced the 'British government…to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict or see the financial powerhouses move out of London'. Barker believes that the British government's desire for 'financial stability' explains the talks process rapidly increasing by 1993. He even suggests that additional IRA mainland bombings in 1996 meant that, 'anything that Sinn Fein wanted…they would get…eventually'. Barker cites a 'Sinn Fein wish list' being fulfilled, such as the release of all prisoners and the disbanding of the RUC.[349]

The concessions that the IRA actually extracted from the British government were more limited than Barker suggests. It is true that IRA bombings in England certainly did not stop the talks with the British, particularly by 1993. Indeed, a meeting between 'Fred' (also known as British Government Representative), Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly went ahead in March 1993, despite the Warrington bombing. Taylor argues that such attacks actually emphasised the need for the British to bring closure to the conflict.[350] In addition, the *Financial Times* editor in 1993, for instance, did say that attacks in the city of London emphasised the need to end the conflict. And after studying IRA attacks in England during the 1990s, McGladdery feels that they 'arguably [shaped] the peace process. The city bombings in particular demonstrated the financial cost of the conflict to the British'.[351] Bradley and Barker seem right to argue that the British were keen to talk to end the physical and financial damage caused by attacks in England during the 1990s. But it is also evident

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[347] Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix,* 289.
[348] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 194-195.
[349] Barker, *Shadows,* 233-234.
[350] Taylor, *Provos,* 333.
[351] McGladdery, *IRA in England,* 143, 172.

that IRA attacks and threats led to the British government delaying face-to-face talks. The British consistently stressed in back-channel meetings with republicans that 'events on the ground' had to decrease before intense discussions with Sinn Féin could take place.[352] Neither is Barker accurate to argue that Sinn Féin has been granted everything it wanted. Republicans want a truth commission similar to South Africa, which has not happened. Despite the heavy costs of the bombings for the British government, the IRA and Sinn Féin lacked the political support to force major political concessions, as the next chapter explains. Barker's view exhibits his frustration that the RUC was disbanded after the Good Friday Agreement.[353]

The landing of numerous major weapons shipments from Libya further illustrates that the IRA's highest ranks escaped major infiltration. The Army Council, the Chief of Staff, the quartermaster and selective members of his department decided when and where to import the weapons, and who would hide them. Weapon shipments were not always landed without being impeded. Libyan weapons aboard the *Eksund,* for example, were intercepted in 1987 off the coast of Brittany. Moloney suggests that this incident points to a high-level informer.[354] Within the *Endgame in Ireland* archive, the author did discover Lord Powell in 2001 hinting at an IRA leak. He said: '[v]ery rarely did one get very specific intelligence about arms shipments … But there was the particular case of the [Eksund] which was…successfully intercepted'.[355] Earlier, O'Callaghan led to the seizure by the Irish Army of weapons aboard the *Marita Ann* from Boston in 1984, and the arrest of senior republicans in Kerry such as Martin Ferris. Despite not being told when the guns were coming, O'Callaghan says that he discovered the details from the loose talk of the skipper of the vessel.[356] Yet based on his contacts with British intelligence when he left Ireland in the mid-1980s, Sean O'Callaghan argued:

> The British wanted ... to stop the IRA getting very large amounts of sophisticated equipment ... they failed miserably ... Once the IRA had landed [from Libya] that amount of equipment, [the British] knew ... that the IRA could drag it out for a hell of a long time.[357]

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[352] *Setting the Record Straight,* 30-36.
[353] Cf. Barker, *Shadows,* 233-240.
[354] Moloney, *Secret History*, 14-34.
[355] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 1/14, Typescript transcript of rolls 94-96 with Charles Powell.
[356] O'Callaghan, *The Informer,* 178-185; Barrett with Ferris, *Ferris,* 122-159.
[357] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.

MI5 agreed.[358] The landing and hiding of various weapons consignments from Libya perfectly demonstrates that the higher-echelons of the IRA were not infiltrated to any great extent. Indeed, Lord Powell emphasised: 'it's only when you get very hard intelligence about specific shipments can you actually do anything…and it was very rare that we got that hard intelligence'.[359] For O'Callaghan, this lack of 'hard intelligence' about weapons shipments resulted from: 'a gap that was unbridgeable ... You can more or less trace the group of people from around 1975 onwards that ran the [IRA]'.[360] It is impossible to know who sat on the Army Council, despite speculation.[361] Military events though suggest that there was continuity in leadership, since major operations and weapons shipments were not prevented on a regular basis after 1975. The decision by the IRA to stop Army Council members from participating in operations after 1975 helped to ensure continuity.[362] Indeed, an MI5 legal adviser commented in the 1980s, 'the upper terrorist echelons have become a bedrock' because 'the Provisionals' leadership was effectively beyond the reach of the law' by not participating in operations.[363]

In light of this evidence, any suggestion that there was extensive infiltration in the highest levels of the IRA seem inaccurate. As Danny Morrison argued:

> If the IRA was so well infiltrated are we suggesting that in order to protect an informer the British allowed the IRA to plant the bomb at the Grand Hotel in Brighton? Are we saying that they allowed the IRA to mortar-bomb Downing Street in order to protect an agent? If the IRA was so badly infiltrated, how come these things took place? Clearly they did not have anybody big informing.[364]

This is a conclusion that Sean O'Callaghan leans towards:

> People do believe that the IRA was infiltrated everywhere by pointing to…operations and shipments of arms that were stopped. But the Brighton bomb was not stopped; the Canary Wharf bomb wasn't stopped; the Libyan weapons shipments were not stopped. There is a legion of activities that anybody would have stopped if they could have done.[365]

Despite having completely opposing views about the conflict, both interviewees agree that as major IRA operations frequently occurred, the organization did not experience significant infiltration at its highest levels. It seems inconceivable that British intelligence allowed major

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[358] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 738.
[359] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 1/14, Typescript transcript of rolls 94-96 with Charles Powell.
[360] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.
[361] For example see Moloney, *Secret History*, 380-386.
[362] Moloney, *Secret History,* 157-158, 375.
[363] Andrew, *Defence of the Realm,* 750.
[364] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.
[365] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.

IRA operations to threaten the lives of British Prime Ministers in order to protect senior agents or informers.[366] The regularity of high-profile attacks in England and the arrival of various weapon shipments from Libya also challenges any argument that Denis Donaldson provided specific details about IRA activities. Moloney does point out that Donaldson disrupted IRA activities in the USA from 1988. During his time in the Bronx, for instance, Donaldson apparently introduced Gabriel Megahey, a leading republican in the US, deliberately to a man that the IRA had expelled from Ireland. Donaldson told the leadership, leading to Megahey being demoted.[367] In addition, Donaldson's role from the late 1980s involved acting as a spokesperson for the republican movement across the world, such as in the Middle East or US. McKittrick argues that this role also involved finding potential arms deals.[368] It is possible, therefore, that Donaldson restricted arms supplies. Nonetheless, he did not prevent major Libyan weapons from entering Ireland. It was these weapons that enabled the IRA to maintain its small-scale conflict. Donaldson clearly had restricted information on IRA activities.

Conclusion

The majority of British state personnel no longer believed that the IRA would settle for a political compromise after 1975. Rees believed that the IRA leadership's willingness to continue negotiating showed that the IRA faced permanent decline. As a result, *The Way Ahead* document in 1977 stipulated that the British state should no longer engage in talks with republicans. Creating an 'acceptable level of IRA violence' was seen as being conducive to potential political agreements between constitutional nationalists and unionists.

In terms of dealing with the IRA, the British state first attempted to rely primarily on the courts to contain the organization through convictions, as they did not want to target and antagonize constitutional nationalists. A series of factors, though, encouraged the British state to place greater emphasis on a secret intelligence battle against the IRA from the late 1970s. First, the smaller cellular structure adopted by the IRA in the cities and the organization's counter-intelligence methods made it difficult to apprehend and convict volunteers; second, criminalization had not prevented various high-profile IRA attacks by 1980; and the supergrass trials proved unpopular with Irish nationalists and eventually failed to meet

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[366] *The Times,* 'Was MI6 behind the Brighton bomb?', 2 June 2006.
[367] Moloney, *Secret History,* 580-582.
[368] McKittrick in *The Independent,* 'The spy's tale', 6 April 2006.

judicial standards. By the late 1970s a 'secret' intelligence campaign against the IRA was gaining momentum and aimed to help create an 'acceptable level of violence'.[369]

The IRA, however, maintained a persistent and disruptive military campaign in many parts of Northern Ireland and in England right up until the 1994 ceasefire. In Belfast, there was a decline in IRA attacks in particular periods partly because of infiltration, but also because of a change in British Army equipment and the need to avoid civilian casualties on a regular basis to sustain Sinn Féin's vote. And yet in the 1990s, the Belfast Brigade recommended a commercial bombing campaign that caused extensive financial damage, and meant that security installations and patrols had to be maintained. In Derry city, the Provisionals' campaign was a mere nuisance by 1994. But informers and agents were not the main reason for the IRA's decline there. Rather, it was largely that the SDLP had begun rebuilding the city for nationalists. If the IRA recommended bombing the city, they risked the wrath of the nationalist electorate, and a substantial decline in electoral support.[370]

Various rural IRA units maintained the ability to persist in killing and bombing 'intended targets' after 1975, and resisted damaging infiltration. The South Armagh and Fermanagh IRA, in particular, were a constant threat to the security forces right up to the 1994 ceasefire. In fact, this chapter has detailed how the South Armagh IRA were so secure that they spearheaded the IRA's campaign in England by the 1990s. Although not as persistent in their military efforts, the IRA in north and mid-Down and south Derry presented a nuisance for the security forces in the 1990s. In addition, the IRA caused increasing destruction in smaller towns and cities, such as Portadown, Lurgan and Armagh by the 1990s. All of these units did suffer some infiltration. Yet there are a variety of reasons to explain why high-level infiltration of these units did not occur. These include the fact that these units operating in predominately rural areas could hide across the border to avoid arrest and 'turning'. What made rural units particularly deadly was their ability to use long-range weapons and substantial bombs. These tactics meant that they carried the added threat of potentially killing numerous people in single attacks. They also helped ferry weapons and explosives into the north. Admittedly, the Tyrone Provisionals and the South Down Brigade suffered operational difficulties by the 1990s, in part from infiltration. But other reasons accounted for the decline of these two units too, including, in the case of the East Tyrone IRA, the fact that they took risks making it possible for British intelligence to monitor and

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[369] Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga*., Talking to Terrorists,* 62-64, 72; *Operation Banner,* point 809.
[370] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites,* 260-263.

ambush their units. Nevertheless, this chapter has emphasized that similar success against other rural IRA brigades did not occur by August 1994. The IRA threat in rural areas was not reduced to an 'acceptable level'.

Finally, chapter three suggested that the IRA was *not* permanently infiltrated at its very highest levels. It was the IRA Army Council, GHQ staff and Chief of Staff who selected volunteers for English operations and importing weapons from abroad. The persistence of the IRA's campaign in England and the landing of the majority of weapons shipments from Libya strongly suggests that there was not permanent infiltration of the IRA leadership. The IRA's campaign in England is worthy of note because it disrupted the notion that republican violence by the 1990s had reached an 'acceptable level'. Based on this evidence, Danny Morrison seems accurate in arguing that 'the IRA was armed to the teeth … [and] called the ceasefire [in 1994] from a position of military strength'.[371] The next chapter argues that it was the IRA's lack of a political mandate across Ireland that hindered the organization, and encouraged the republican leadership to accept significant political compromises in 1998

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[371] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 18 May 2011.

Chapter four: A change in republican and British strategies, 1983 to 1998

The final chapter begins by explaining that Sinn Féin's small but sizeable minority of the nationalist electoral mandate in Northern Ireland, alongside the IRA's persistent military campaign, convinced the SDLP and Irish government to engage with republicans in the late 1980s. In part two, it is explained that the IRA's continuing military campaign, Sinn Féin's vote, and the pan-nationalist talks made the British state eventually realize that the Provisionals were not going to fade into obscurity by the 1990s.[1] If the British government wanted peace in Northern Ireland, they had to bring republicans into a political settlement. As a result, the British state re-introduced the dual-approach in trying to end IRA violence. The security forces would use intelligence to set-up operations against the IRA to quickly force that organization into a ceasefire. At the same time, the British state attempted to persuade the Provisionals to politically compromise.[2]

Section three argues that security force pressure did not succeed in getting the IRA to call a ceasefire in August 1994. Nor did it push the IRA to return to a ceasefire in July 1997. Essentially, the peace process strategy and the IRA cessations during the 1990s reflected the republican leadership's realization since the mid-1980s that Sinn Féin was unable to win considerable electoral support whilst the conflict continued. But the republican leadership only agreed to ceasefires in 1994 and 1997 because of the political limitations and opportunities at that time.[3] It is true that authors such as Bew and Frampton have noted the key role that political factors played in encouraging an IRA cessation. But when placed against the background of the IRA's formidable military capacity by 1994, the importance of political factors compared to the intelligence-war becomes more apparent. Furthermore, their accounts understate how political opportunities on offer for republicans by the 1990s were crucial in convincing republicans to end their armed campaign.[4]

The final part of the chapter examines the view that the Provisionals' decision to opt for a peace process was heavily influenced by informers and agents operating within Sinn

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[1] Although not in relation to the intelligence conflict, see similar views in Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6-13, 16-17; O'Brien, *Long War,* 13, 118-119, 195-200, 240, 284-285, 301; O'Donnell, *Fianna* Fáil, 51-116, 150-154, 190-197.

[2] McKearney believes that a 'dual approach' strategy operated in the early 1970s and returned as the centerpiece of British policy against republicans from the early 1980s. In contrast, this chapter argues that this strategy only returned from 1989. McKearney, *Provisional IRA*, 138-139.

[3] O'Brien, *Long War,* 196-199, 319-324.

[4] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 107-138, 244-259; Bew and Frampton, 'Don't mention the war!', 294-300; Frampton, *Long March,* 22-102, 183-186; see similar views in Moloney, *Secret History,* 219-585.

Féin. The discovery in 2005 that Denis Donaldson had informed for British intelligence for two decades provided the catalyst for the recent argument that British and RUC intelligence 'helped to shape' the peace process in various ways, including removing opponents of the peace process from Sinn Féin and the IRA.[5] But the evidence present below suggests that informers and agents had very little access to the long-term strategic thinking and plans of the republican leadership.[6] Furthermore, the relative autonomy of republican units in various areas across Ireland meant that they could not be manipulated into the peace process against their will.[7]

The 'Irish Peace Initiative'[8]

In 1987, John Hume and Charles Haughey received letters from Father Alec Reid on behalf of Gerry Adams promoting dialogue to find if there was a political alternative to the IRA's military campaign.[9] Until this point, Martin Mansergh, the go-between for the Irish government with republicans for much of the peace process, remembers 'the orthodoxy' of the Irish government was 'that there should be no contact with terrorist groups, who would…take encouragement from being treated as equal'.[10] The SDLP was also not keen to engage with republicans because they were their political rivals in northern nationalist communities, and talking to republicans risked appearing as if the SDLP condoned IRA activity. Nonetheless, in 1988, senior SDLP members led by John Hume met with Sinn Féin for talks that debated the rationale behind the IRA's continuing campaign and potential peaceful alternatives. Talks continued in private between Gerry Adams and John Hume thereafter.[11] In March and June 1988, a delegation secretly sent by the Irish government, including Fianna Fáil TD Dermot Ahern and historian Martin Mansergh, also met with Gerry

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[5] Cf. Moloney, *Secret History,* 579-583; McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142-143.

[6] Brian Rowan, 'Spy killing, a dirty war, and Denis Donaldson's death', 24 April 2012: at http://eamonnmallie.com/2012/04/spy-killing-a-dirty-war-and-denis-donaldsons-death-by-brian-rowan/; and David McKittrick in *The Independent, '*The spy's tale: The life and death of Denis Donaldson', 6 April 2006: at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/the-spys-tale-the-life-and-death-of-denis-donaldson-472992.html <accessed 7 January 2013>.

[7] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 13-14.

[8] This term is used by Martin Mansergh, the Fianna Fáil government's chief advisor on Northern Irish policy and part of their negotiating team meeting Sinn Féin. See Martin Mansergh, 'Mountain-climbing Irish-Style: The Hidden Challenges of the Peace Process', *in* Marianne Elliott (ed.), *The Long Road To Peace In Northern Ireland* (Liverpool, 2002), 105-114, at 106.

[9] Moloney, *Secret History,* 269, 277.

[10] Mansergh, 'Mountain Climbing', 108-109.

[11] Moloney, *Secret History,* 277-279.

Adams, Mitchel McLaughlin and Pat Doherty. The Irish government continued to engage with republicans into the 1990s.[12]

There are various reasons to explain why the constitutional nationalists began to actively draw the Provisionals away from conflict in this period. A primary reason was that John Hume and Fianna Fáil realised that British counter-insurgency policies had failed to significantly damage the IRA, and had failed to isolate Sinn Féin from the nationalist electorate in Northern Ireland.[13] Indeed, John Hume later admitted that he had to involve the Provisionals in a political settlement because: 'five British governments and twenty thousand troops had failed to stop the violence'.[14] Sean Farren, a fellow SDLP member who engaged in talks with republicans in the late 1980s, agrees: '[E]fforts to end the violence by counter-terrorist measures had not offered any signs of early success...military stalemate had been reached. A new strategy was required'.[15] Martin Mansergh also argues that by the late 1980s, the Dublin government realised: '[attempts] to defeat the IRA by military or security measures had failed'. Mansergh says that the Irish government knew: '[p]aramilitary violence on both sides represented a form of political veto .... capable of prolonging the stalemate and frustrating political initiatives'.[16] Furthermore, Albert Reynolds, former Taoiseach who gave further momentum to pan-nationalist talks in the 1990s, recalled a 'vicious circle' and that: '[n]o one believed the IRA could be stopped … The British army could not defeat them…more people would die unless an alternative solution could be found'.[17] Chapter three supported the view that the IRA were not facing terminal decline in the 1990s.

The SDLP also realized that Sinn Féin had become a 'permanent fixture' in northern nationalist politics by the late 1980s.[18] Despite a slight decline in votes during the 1980s, Sinn Féin repeatedly obtained at least ten per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland, representing a sizeable minority of the northern nationalist vote. They held the majority of seats in Belfast, Fermanagh, Cookstown and Omagh councils at various points during the

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[12] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 70-71, 87-102, 106-114.
[13] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil*, 59-60.
[14] John Hume, *Personal Views: Politics, Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland* (Dublin, 1996) 109.
[15] Sean Farren, 'The SDLP and the roots of the Good Friday Agreement', *in* Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds.), *A farewell to arms? From 'long war' to long peace in Northern Ireland* (Manchester, 2000), 49-61, at 52.
[16] Martin Mansergh, 'The background to the Irish peace process', *in* Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen (eds.), *A farewell to arms? From 'long war' to long peace in Northern Ireland* (Manchester, 2000), 8-23, at 12-14.
[17] Albert Reynolds with Jill Arlon, *My Autobiography* (London, 2009), 215, 236, 280.
[18] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 59-61; O'Brien, *Long War,* 13.

conflict.[19] In the late 1980s, Gerry Adams remained the west Belfast MP. In 1998 Farren suggested: 'the SDLP is aware…that Sinn Fein…does represent a section of the people in Northern Ireland…political progress would be much more likely if that section of the community was able to join with other sections of our society'.[20] In other words, the exclusion of a considerable minority of the northern nationalist electorate who were heavily armed, would not bring about peace.

Sinn Féin polled very poorly in southern elections. Neither had the party beaten the SDLP in northern elections. Yet the 'threat' remained that Sinn Féin could erode their rivals' electoral base in the north and south because they had a similar 'ethos', outside their support for the IRA. O'Donnell notes that Charles Haughey remained wary of Sinn Féin during the 1980s. Indeed, after IRA prisoners were elected to the Dáil in 1981, Haughey failed to form a majority government. It is true that the 'threat' from Sinn Féin almost disappeared in the Irish Republic by the late 1980s. Yet Mansergh observes that the Irish government remained aware of the continued 'risk after particular incidents and at times of high tension that the situation might get completely out of hand.'[21] The burning down of the British Embassy in Dublin following Bloody Sunday in February 1972, and support for IRA hunger-strikes in the Irish state, supports his argument. For O'Donnell: '[t]he decision by Fianna Fáil to engage in dialogue with the republican movement was…the realization that Sinn Féin's ability to maintain, while not necessarily extending, its support in Northern Ireland necessitated a process inclusive of Sinn Féin'.[22] Persistent IRA activity and Sinn Féin electoral performances in Northern Ireland encouraged the SDLP and Irish government to talk to Sinn Féin. As David McKittrick explains:

> [i]t was always the thinking that it was going to be the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists settling matters ... [But] the Provisionals would keep on bombing. Continuing instability was guaranteed because you would have people who were outside of the settlement, attacking it all of the time.

For the SDLP and Irish government, talking to Sinn Féin was 'the only show in town' by the late 1980s, if they wanted peace.[23]

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[19] See appendix two.
[20] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/213, SDLP Newsline, May 1998, p.1-2.
[21] Mansergh, 'The background', 13.
[22] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 67-68.
[23] David McKittrick, interview with author, 22 May 2012, Belfast.

Another important reason for the constitutional nationalists talking to the Provisionals was the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 to create multi-party talks with unionism.[24] Unionists rejected the agreement as they were outraged at the involvement of Dublin in Northern Irish affairs without their consent, especially since the Irish government had not amended articles two and three of the Irish constitution claiming sovereignty over Northern Ireland. Many unionists took to the streets in protest, and the Unionist parties refused to talk with the British for a number of years. Despite the British government resisting calls to terminate the Anglo-Irish Agreement, unionists' reaction to the agreement did not offer constitutional nationalists much hope that unionists were ready to compromise.[25] Instead, constitutional nationalists and Catholic Church representatives involved in pan-nationalist talks felt that unionists might be more willing to compromise politically if an IRA ceasefire was on offer. Father Reid, for instance, informed Haughey in May 1987 that reconciliation and political agreement 'cannot properly begin…while…[unionists] feel that they are under actual physical attack from the nationalist community'. Thus Reid believed that an IRA ceasefire was fundamental to political progress.[26] Sean Farren also wrote in 1998: 'the SDLP is convinced…that the consent of Unionists cannot be effectively worked for as long as the Provisional campaign of terror continues to murder members of that community'.[27]

John Hume and Fianna Fáil also had similar objectives to Sinn Féin in terms of Irish unity. Hume's desire for a united Ireland was evident during the peace process. The Hume-Adams document, for example, argued that whilst 'peaceful, political means' was the only way forward, the future of Northern Ireland should be decided in an Irish Convention. Following a Convention, it argued that an exercise of self-determination as a single geographical unit should take place.[28] If implemented, this plan fulfilled the Provisionals' demand that the 'unionist veto' ended. Whilst Hume did eventually compromise, there is no doubt that as an Irish nationalist he sought to extract maximum concessions from the British towards a united Ireland. Of course, Hume did not want a sudden military withdrawal in response to a republican military victory, which he predicted would cause civil war by provoking unionist defiance.[29] Hence he did not sign up to the republican demand for a set

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[24] Mansergh, 'The background', 12-14.
[25] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 100-103.
[26] Reid letter to Haughey, May 1987 in Moloney, *Secret History,* 629.
[27] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/213, SDLP Newsline, May 1998, p.1-2.
[28] 'Hume-Adams Document', 1992-1993, in O'Brien, *The Long War,* 424-425.
[29] Hume, *Personal Views,* 70-71.

date for British withdrawal.[30] Nonetheless, Hume wanted to move forward with a non-violent Irish republicanism partly because he also wanted a united Ireland.[31]

Fianna Fáil shared a common objective of Irish unity with Sinn Féin too. Created in 1926 by former members of the anti-treaty IRA, Fianna Fáil disagreed with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1921 for various reasons including its denial of all-Ireland self-determination.[32] For many commentators, this historical background meant that it was always possible for Fianna Fáil to accommodate Irish republicanism. For example, Martin Mansergh believes that Fianna Fáil responded to the Provisionals' requests for talks in the 1980s partly as the two parties had 'ideological common ground'.[33] Catherine O'Donnell observes that Fianna Fáil always had a 'natural affinity' towards northern nationalists because they agreed that: 'the self-determination of Northern Ireland can only be exercised within the confines of the republican definition of the nation, the island as a whole'. In fact, O'Donnell believes that Fianna Fáil sought to ensure that there was endorsement of any northern agreement by both parts of the island, so that: 'the right of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to self-determination…no longer operates independently of the island as a whole'. 'Taking a literal interpretation', she explains, 'would suggest that the unionist community has no right to self-determination except when it enjoys majority status within Northern Ireland'. The benefit for Fianna Fáil was that by talking to Sinn Féin and ending IRA violence, they could promote self-determination and consent being placed together into a settlement, which did not ultimately contradict their definition of one nation on the island. But Fianna Fáil felt that IRA activity prevented self-determination by antagonising unionism. In 1980, Charles Haughey declared that no minority had the right to opt out of the Irish nation. Yet he added that unity could only came about through agreement with unionists.[34] Later, Albert Reynolds describes how he'd 'like to have seen 'unity'', during his time in office, despite admitting it was a 'long-term aim'. Nevertheless, Reynolds says that he focused on creating the conditions whereby Irish determination and Northern Irish consent could occur simultaneously, replacing the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.[35] Drafts of the Joint-Declaration created by

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[30] Moloney, *Secret History,* 411.
[31] O'Brien, *The Long War,* 173-176.
[32] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* xv, 1-10.
[33] Mansergh, 'The background', 16.
[34] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 65-102, 106-109, 190-203.
[35] Reynolds, *Autobiography,* 13, 216, 360.

Hume, republicans and Reynold's close advisors also initially sought to get the British to argue in favour of Irish unity.[36]

It would be unfair, however, to argue that John Hume and Fianna Fáil primarily engaged with republicans because they wanted to confront the British with a united Ireland agenda. According to Danny Morrison, one of the Sinn Féin representatives who met with the SDLP in 1988, 'The SDLP…were pretty hostile to the talks'.[37] Gerry Adams concurs, although he notes that Hume had more interest in further dialogue.[38] Hume argues that he listened to Sinn Féin because: 'if the killing…could be ended by direct dialogue, then it was my duty to attempt to do just that'.[39] It does seem that a humanitarian instinct to end the violence largely motivated Hume, especially as he would have been aware that Sinn Féin could challenge his party for votes once the IRA disappeared. Indeed, Laurence McKeown believes: '[Hume]...sacrificed his party for the peace process.'[40] A former British civil servant agrees.[41]

In terms of Fianna Fáil, whilst they did desire a 'republican' settlement, the party had not proactively sought to end partition for many years. In fact, their relationship with militant republicanism was based largely on repression until the late 1980s.[42] Following the Irish Civil War, the Irish government was primarily concerned with the preservation of its own state. Fianna Fáil and other parties in Ireland's Dáil agreed to repress the republican movement because the latter did not recognise the Irish government until 1986.[43] Up until 1986, the Provisionals preached that the Irish government was illegitimate because it betrayed the promise to uphold the Republic across the entire Ireland as stated in the 1916 proclamation and during the first Dáil.[44] Consequently, the Irish state felt that the IRA were a direct threat to their existence, despite the IRA issuing General Order eight, declaring: '[v]olunteers are strictly forbidden to take any military action against 26 County forces'.[45] Yet there were incidents where the IRA did engage southern state forces. A Garda officer, for instance, was shot dead by republicans in County Wexford in October 1980 after a robbery. Later, on 16

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[36] Eamonn Mallie and David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story Behind the Irish Peace Process* (London, 1996), 380.

[37] Danny Morrison, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.

[38] Gerry Adams, *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland* (Kerry, 2003), 78-79.

[39] Hume, *Personal Views,* 109.

[40] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.

[41] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014.

[42] For example, see Moloney, *Secret History,* 47-52; O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 1-80.

[43] Moloney, *Secret History,* 74-79, 287-288.

[44] Taylor, *Provos,* 64-66; See also General Order eight in the *Green Book* in Dillon, *Dirty War,* 487.

[45] See *The Green Book* in Dillon, *Dirty War,* 488.

December 1983, another Garda officer and a member of the Irish Army were killed during a shootout with the IRA in County Leitrim, whilst attempting to free a kidnapped business executive.[46]

The importing of various weapons from Libya into southern Ireland also increased Dublin's fears surrounding the Provisional movement.[47] As David McKittrick observes:

> [Dublin's] first priority was to protect their state…and prevent the possibility of their worst case scenario of an IRA rebellion there. The Libyan arms seizure...spread a lot of panic in Dublin because the guns were enough to keep a minor army going.

In the long-term, there was a fear that the IRA could turn their guns against the southern state. Such fears had some justification. The IRA's *Green Book* stated that the Irish government was not legitimate.[48] In addition, the author was given documents by a former member of the Irish government in the early 1980s kept by the Department of Foreign Affairs. These detail various speeches by Sinn Féin leaders on their future plans for the southern Irish state. The fact that the southern state collected these speeches shows that they were suspicious about republican intentions towards the south. For example, a *Time* magazine article in November 1979 notes Gerry Adams saying, '[t]he [Provisional] movement wants…a decentralised socialist state … the government…in the Republic must come down'.[49] Former Sinn Féin MP Owen Carron's speech in late 1982 is also recorded. He told an audience in London that socialists in the UK and Ireland needed to 'intervene to destabilise the South'.[50] Of course, most of these speeches were political propaganda aimed at gathering support in the Irish Republic. Nevertheless, the fact that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Irish government noted them suggests that they were taken seriously. Gerry Adams certainly recognised that the southern government claimed to be under threat from the Provisionals. In *Politics of Irish Freedom* in 1986, Adams tried to relieve any fears of southern Irish people by saying that the Provisionals posed them no military threat.[51]

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[46] Reference numbers 2268, 2589-2590 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[47] David McKittrick, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[48] Dillon, *Dirty War,* 487.
[49] Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Remarks by Sinn Fein spokesmen which indicate that destabilisation of the South is a Sinn Fein/IRA objective, p.2.
[50] Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, Remarks by Sinn Fein spokesmen which indicate that destabilisation of the South is a Sinn Fein/IRA objective, p.5.
[51] Gerry Adams, *The Politics of Irish Freedom* (Kerry, 1986), 66-67.

By the 1980s, there was also the threat of political instability being caused by Sinn Féin in the Irish Republic.[52] Once Sinn Féin agreed to contest elections in 1981 and to take their seats in the Dáil in 1986, the potential remained that if enough people voted for Sinn Féin they could block the formation of coalition governments. The worst case scenario for constitutional nationalists was that the Provisionals might gain a majority and take power, as Tommy McKearney explains:

> [t]here was no chance ever of a revolutionary government fronted by the Provisional IRA sitting in London ... The same cannot be said of the Republic of Ireland. As time went by that possibility was much less ... [But] it was possible to envisage a much more stridently pro-nationalist government being set-up in Dublin.[53]

The proportional representation system in the Irish Republic meant that sufficient votes for Sinn Féin posed the possibility that Sinn Féin could force a nationalist agenda in Dublin, even if they did not win the election. Dublin acted accordingly to this political threat by signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement in an attempt to 'isolate' republicans and show that diplomacy was the best way forward for nationalists.[54] Yet Sinn Féin retained its electoral presence in the North, and, therefore, could prevent political settlements from creating stability.[55]

The southern Irish state was also keen to alleviate the negative effects of the IRA's campaign on the southern Irish economy. Albert Reynolds felt: 'bombings…were losing us all business'; economic prosperity could only emerge once peace returned to the island.[56] He was not alone. A former Fianna Fáil TD told the author that 'Dundalk was terribly affected' by cross-border IRA activities, and 'nobody wanted to come here', harming the local economy.[57] IRA activity and British checkpoints drove investment away from borderlands. On top of this, the decision by the British state to close particular border-crossings disrupted local economic activities. Having said that, Nash *et al.* in their excellent study of border life point out that partition and the closure of some railways before the Troubles disrupted the economy in border regions anyway. Nonetheless, they point out that Troubles clearly damaged any regeneration efforts.[58]

A change in British strategy, 1989 to 1998

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[52] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil*, 51-52.
[53] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012.
[54] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 94-100.
[55] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 59-60.
[56] Reynolds, *Autobiography,* 174, 215.
[57] Former Fianna Fáil TD, interview with author, 31 August 2013.
[58] Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives,* 6-123.

Ó Dochartaigh has convincingly argued that 'In 1989 and 1990 the ship of state changed course'. Whilst British state policy shifted 'only a single degree', it was significant because it enabled a peace process inclusive of Irish republicanism.[59] Whilst various factors influenced this change in policy, there is no doubt that republican strategy impacted upon British policy-makers. IRA and Sinn Féin strategy influenced an alteration in British policy by 1989 in three primary ways. First, costs relating to the conflict remained high for the British state partly because as many armed security force personnel were needed to try to contain the IRA as there had been at the height of the Troubles in 1972. Whilst IRA activity had declined since 1972, republicans knew that their killings would decrease once they adopted the cell-structure in urban areas in the late 1970s. With the support of rural IRA units, the organization maintained a disproportionate low level of activity into the 1990s in many areas, when compared to its small number of actual operators after 1975. Security costs also remained high because of the commercial bombing campaign by the IRA, which increased in intensity during the 1990s. Since the IRA remained heavily armed with Libyan weapons by the 1990s, there was little prospect that these costs were going to decrease in the short-term either. The second way that republicans influenced British strategy was Sinn Féin's electoral mandate. From the early 1980s, Sinn Féin secured approximately ten per cent of the vote in Northern Ireland, making it difficult for the British government to ignore a sizeable minority of the nationalist electorate.[60]

The decision by the constitutional nationalists to search for a political settlement including the Provisionals was also crucial: it resulted in the British state being unable to create a political agreement without republican consent by the 1990s.[61] True, the pan-nationalist talks were not part of an official alliance between the Sinn Féin, the SDLP and Fianna Fáil. On the contrary, a former Fianna Fáil TD involved in these talks recalled: 'The Shinners [Sinn Féin]…clearly wanted…a 'Pan-nationalist front' … a stronger voice against the Brits. To a certain extent we went along with that, but we certainly weren't going to be drawn into an alliance'.[62] Neither did the SDLP agree to any electoral pacts with Sinn Féin. But the pan-nationalist talks did convince the SDLP and Fianna Fáil that the republican movement should at least be given the opportunity to negotiate a political settlement with other parties following an IRA ceasefire. Efforts by the British state to leave Sinn Féin on the

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[59] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 13.
[60] See similar points in Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 9-10, 16; O'Brien, *Long War,* 13, 301-302.
[61] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* xvii,52, 58, 72-73, 102.
[62] Former Fianna Fáil TD, interview with author, 31 August 2013.

side lines were no longer going to be supported by Hume or Fianna Fáil. John Major, for example, argues that the Brooke-Mayhew talks with the constitutional parties in 1991 and 1992 failed to produce a political settlement partly because John Hume, '[wanted] to wait until the Provisionals were ready to move forward'.[63] Jonathan Powell also commented that Tony Blair's threat to leave republicans behind unless they resumed a ceasefire in 1997 was somewhat idle:

> we had no way of going ahead without [republicans] as…the…SDLP was not prepared to do so, [which] would mean we had no Catholic component to a cross-community consensus … SDLP reluctance to move without Sinn Féin was a problem that was to bedevil us throughout the process.

Powell added that creating a constitutional party settlement without republicans was not possible in 1997, because: 'the SDLP and Irish government would only countenance that option if Sinn Féin had been given a chance and walked away from it'.[64]

These factors led to a small but decisive shift in British policy under Peter Brooke in 1989.[65] He publicly stated that the British could not militarily defeat the IRA in November 1989.[66] His speech influenced republicans to believe that reaching a compromise with the British government was possible. Séanna Walsh, for instance, saw Brooke's speech as 'the beginning of the end' because 'they understood that they could not defeat the IRA'.[67] A year later, despite the IRA killing Ian Gow MP, Brooke was authorized to make another speech promising 'a role in the peaceful political life' in Northern Ireland for republicans following a cessation. He added that the: 'British Government has no selfish or strategic or economic interests in Northern Ireland'. Instead, Brooke explained that the British state wanted a cross-community agreement.[68] Brooke's speeches marked 'a defining moment in Britain's approach to Ireland'. The British state now sought to encourage republicans to give-up violence and join a political settlement, rather than seeking to leave them outside of political agreements.[69] Further evidence that Brooke was serious about engaging with republicans was the fact that he authorized MI6's Michael Oatley to meet Martin McGuinness in October 1990, with contact continuing to varying degrees until late 1993.[70]

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[63] Major, *Autobiography*, 439.
[64] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 14, 17.
[65] O'Brien, *Long War,* 297; Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 8-13.
[66] Bloomfield, *Political Dialogue,* 15-18.
[67] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.
[68] Taylor, *Provos,* 315-319.
[69] O'Brien, *Long War,* 297.
[70] *Setting the Record Straight,* 12.

There were further shifts in British strategy between 1989 and late 1992, albeit minor. Despite Brooke's public statements and the reopening of back-channel contacts with republicans, little progress was made in talks. The British state did not trust republican leaders who talked peace whilst the IRA continued 'war'. According to Sinn Féin's record of back-channel contacts with the British government in the 1990s - which are generally said to be more accurate than the British government's version of events -[71] little happened in back-channel conversations up to late 1992. In November 1991, for example, Sinn Féin record a message from the British representative from the intelligence services talking about possible means of communication. In reply, the republican leadership said 'we [are] more interested in the substance of communications than the means'. A few months later, on 19 May 1992, the British representative 'urged Sinn Féin to be more proactive in using the line of communication'. In the meantime, the British government proceeded with exploratory multi-party talks without Sinn Féin under Brooke and Mayhew in 1991 and 1992, whilst British intermediaries informed the republican leadership via the back-channel about progress in the talks.[72]

In a letter to David McKittrick from prison, Danny Morrison suggested that the constitutional party talks showed that Peter Brooke had 'given up on [republicans]'.[73] Michael Cunningham agrees that the British state did not seek to involve republicans in a settlement by early 1992. For Cunningham, the Brooke-Mayhew talks aimed at isolating Sinn Féin and the IRA from political life because continuing IRA activity made the British government wary of trusting republican peace overtures.[74] But the evidence firmly suggests that the British state did want a settlement inclusive of Sinn Féin even during the Brooke-Mayhew talks. By showing republicans that political discussions would move forward without them, the British government hoped to encourage republicans towards a cessation.[75] This tactic, however, failed. As detailed, the SDLP and Irish government would not proceed to create a settlement without the Provisionals. In their view, such an approach was a recipe for continued conflict and instability. Martin Mansergh, for example, notes: 'For Albert

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[71] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 120.
[72] *Setting the Record Straight,* 18-21.
[73] See Danny Morrison letter to David McKittrick, 29 September 1991, in Danny Morrison, *Then the Walls Came Down: A Prison Journal* (Cork, 1999), 234-236.
[74] Cf. Michael Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969-2000* (Manchester, 2001) 88, 160.
[75] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 11-12.

Reynolds, securing an IRA cease-fire was more important than a talks process ... a successful agreement from which republicans were excluded offered no guarantee of an early end to violence.'[76] A former British civil servant involved in the peace process also commented that the Brooke-Mayhew talks:

> in the early 1990s breaks down. Why? Because of John Hume … he thought there was a growing chance in his dialogue with Gerry Adams of bringing the republicans around … Hume did not want a conclusion and an all-party agreement excluding Sinn Féin.[77]

In the words of Neumann, '[g]iven the SDLP's and the Irish government's veto, the British government's indirect approach of integrating Sinn Fein into the political process had thus become untenable'.[78]

Thereafter, there was a slight reorientation in British strategy in order to draw republicans towards a political compromise and a ceasefire. The focus switched to more proactive dialogue primarily through back-channels. Proactive dialogue between the British state and republicans began with Sir Patrick Mayhew's speech given at the University of Coleraine in December 1992, shortly after the Brooke-Mayhew talks failed. Mayhew stated that, 'there can be no proper reason for excluding any political objective from discussion'. He also promised that republicans had a role to play in Northern Irish society if the conflict ended.[79] A text of the speech was handed to the Provisional movement beforehand in back-channel meetings, illustrating that the British state sought a positive reaction from republicans.[80] Thereafter, back-channel contacts between the British government and the Provisionals increased in intensity by 1993. According to Sinn Féin's record of back-channel contacts with the British government in the 1990s, there were ten messages passed between the republicans and the British between October 1990 and October 1992; after the Brooke-Mayhew talks failed, there were twenty-one messages passed between both sides from 4 December 1992 to 25 May 1993. This figure included meetings between senior Sinn Féin members and the British government's representative from the intelligence services.[81]

It is therefore inaccurate to argue that the impetus for increased contact between the Provisionals and the British state was the so-called 'conflict is over' message. On 22

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[76] Mansergh, 'Mountain-climbing', 111.
[77] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014
[78] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 166-168.
[79] See a copy of this speech at CAIN, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/pm161292.pdf <accessed on 30 July 2011>.
[80] 'Report of a meeting with British Government Representative', December 14 1992, in *Setting the Record Straight,* 22.
[81] See *Setting the Record Straight*.

February 1993, John Major says that he was given a message from the Provisionals that read: 'The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close'.[82] It has since been established that this message was a forgery. The British intermediary 'Fred' altered the words of a message by republican intermediaries in the hope that it would provoke the British government into commencing intensive dialogue with republicans.[83] Whilst Bew and Frampton accept that the message was fake, they argue that it explains why the British state increased dialogue with the republicans by 1993.[84] But British policy had already shifted beforehand, and not in relation to republicans supposed 'plea' for help in the made-up message in February 1993.[85] Mayhew, for instance, had already made his important speech discussed above, and forwarded a copy to republicans in December 1992. The February 1993 message merely reassured the British state that it was right to engage with Sinn Féin before a ceasefire and that republicans were not playing games. Since IRA attacks continued, though, there was no reason for the British state to trust republicans any more than previously. But the failure of the Brooke-Mayhew talks to produce a settlement, continuing IRA violence, and the pan-nationalist talks encouraged the British to take a leap of faith and increase contact with the Provisionals by late 1992.[86]

With IRA activity continuing, however, the British state adopted a 'dual-approach' strategy that they had previously followed between 1974 and 1975.[87] First, the British would try to erode the IRA's military capacity partly via intelligence from agents and informers. In the meantime, British representatives would talk to the republican leadership before and during a ceasefire to try to persuade them to accept an internal power-sharing settlement.[88] Indeed, a former British civil servant from this period described the rationale behind British policy towards republicans in the 1990s in the following terms: 'the harder you lean down successfully in containing the security threat, and the more you open the door with the bright sunshine behind it, that's the dynamic'.[89] Yet chapter three has shown that IRA activity was not reduced to an 'acceptable' and ineffective level by August 1994. So why did the IRA call a ceasefire in 1994?

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[82] Major, *Autobiography,* 431.
[83] Owen Bennett-Jones, 'What Fred did', in *London Review of Books*, vol. 37, No. 2, 22 January 2015, p.3, 6.
[84] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 117-119.
[85] Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Go-Betweens', in *London Review of Books,* vol. 37, No. 3, 5 February 2015.
[86] Cunningham, *British Government Policy,* 88, 160.
[87] Taylor, *Provos,* 328-329.
[88] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 138-139.
[89] Former high-level British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014.

The influence of political factors on IRA strategy, 1983 to 1998

The increase in loyalist violence towards the nationalist community has been cited by various authors as being partly responsible for a rethink in republican strategy in the 1990s. By 1993, loyalist paramilitaries were killing more people than the IRA. Most of their victims were innocent nationalists, but they targeted at least 26 republicans between 1989 and 1993 too. An upsurge in loyalist attacks against republicans and innocent nationalists would have caused a 'strategic dilemma' for republicans. On the one hand, republicans would want to strike back because their movement was partly created to defend nationalist areas from loyalist attacks. On the other hand, the republican leadership recognised that retaliating against loyalism would enable the British state to depict the IRA's campaign as merely sectarian.[90]

Too much weight has been attributed to this factor. First, there had always been loyalist activity and violence throughout the conflict. In fact, between 1975 and 1976, the loyalists killed 126 people each year. Loyalist killings in 1993 and 1994 were much lower, at 48 and 39 people.[91] Second, increasing loyalist attacks do not appear to have damaged Sinn Féin's electoral prospects. The party's voting percentage and share of seats on local councils went up between the 1989 and 1993 local council elections.[92] Third, republican leaders were already seeking a political compromise before the loyalist onslaught of the 1990s, as discussed in chapter three. Finally, the IRA remained capable of killing loyalists. For example, they shot dead leading UDA figures Joe Bratty and Raymond Elder on 31 July 1994 in Belfast.[93] Gerry Bradley claims that the IRA were also approached by a man from a north Belfast loyalist district too, who was sickened by loyalist violence. Bradley feels that this man's information was not acted on for 'political reasons'.[94] Indeed, since the peace process was moving forward in the mid-1990s, any action against loyalists risked sparking tit-for-tat republican and loyalist attacks, and could derail the progress made by Sinn Féin in gaining backing from the SDLP, the British government and the Irish government for an inclusive peace process. The Shankill fish shop bombing in October 1993 is a prime example, as it sparked a loyalist retaliation against innocent nationalists.[95] The IRA's decisive action against the Irish People's Liberation Organization in October 1992, apparently for criminality and

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[90] Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 108-109; Moloney, *Secret History,* 414-415.
[91] See table 3 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives,* 1554.
[92] See appendix two.
[93] Reference numbers 3508 and 3509 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[94] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 237-241.
[95] Taylor, *Provos,* 338-340.

threats to IRA members, shows that the organization was capable of acting against paramilitary rivals.[96] The political repercussions, however, made regular action against loyalists too problematic.

Various external factors to Ireland also played a small role in convincing republicans to accept a ceasefire in 1994.[97] By the 1990s, for example, various paramilitary allies for the IRA across the world, including the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, ended their armed struggles. Gerry Adams admits that Irish republicans had a 'deep affinity' with the ANC and that 'Republicans learned from struggles in other countries'.[98] In addition, Danny Morrison also wrote an article entitled 'Bitter Pill' whilst in prison in April 1992. Although never published in *An Phoblacht*, it argued that Republicans needed to look at their allies elsewhere in places such as Nicaragua, where the Sandinistas renounced armed struggle in 1990 and went into opposition. Morrison praised this as realistic as the Sandinistas' military campaign could achieve no more. He argued that republicans should also think about ending their armed campaign whilst they had enough political support from which to create political momentum to move forward without conflict.[99] Nevertheless, external factors were not crucial in encouraging republican leaders to search for a political compromise. Other armed struggles that the IRA supported, such as ETA's campaign in Spain, continued. Consequently, the IRA would not have been completely isolated. What can be said is that the example of other paramilitaries compromising with former enemies provided a source of legitimacy for the actions of the republican leadership during the 1990s.[100]

Internal factors to Ireland had the greatest baring on the formation of the republican leadership's peace process strategy.[101] More specifically, the inability of Sinn Féin to outpoll the SDLP or nationalist parties in the Irish Republic in the early 1980s was a crucial factor leading to republican leaders moving towards a political compromise.[102] Sinn Féin were repeatedly outpolled by the SDLP in local district council, Westminster and European elections up to 1984. In some areas, such as Belfast city council, Sinn Féin did match, and at times, even surpassed SDLP totals. But overall they were not dominating nationalist politics

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[96] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 241.
[97] For a comprehensive discussion of external influences, see English, *Armed Struggle,* 303-306.
[98] Adams, *Before the Dawn*, 281.
[99] The article was never published because the republican leadership feared that their enemies would see it as a sign of weakness. Morrison, *Then the Walls,* 287-292.
[100] Frampton, *Long March,* 81-82.
[101] English, *Armed Struggle,* 307.
[102] O'Brien, *Long War,* 195-200; Frampton, *Long March,* 84-85.

in Northern Ireland.[103] In southern elections, Sinn Féin performed very poorly, producing no TDs between 1985 and 1996.[104] Gerry Adams recognised this electoral stagnation in the 1980s. Referring to the republican leadership's decision to engage with constitutional nationalists in the 1980s, Adams writes:

> [t]here was a military and political stalemate. While Irish republicans could prevent a settlement on British government terms, we lacked the political strength to bring the struggle to a decisive conclusion. Military solutions were not an option for either side.[105]

As far as Adams was concerned, republicans could maintain their level of activity, but so too could British forces. He also realized that republicans did not have a strong enough political mandate to sway a political settlement towards fulfilling the republican objective for Irish unity.

What inhibited Sinn Féin's electoral growth? One factor was IRA attacks that killed innocent civilians. Despite chapter three pointing out that the organization, particularly in Belfast, was aware of the damage that civilian casualties had on republican support levels, they were never completely prevented. The previous chapter detailed, for example, how the Patsy Gillespie 'human-bomb' killing in Derry city and Enniskillen bombing had a negative impact on republican support. Indeed, in the Irish Republic, Gordon Wilson, the father of twenty-year old Marie Wilson who was killed in the Enniskillen bombing, was made a member of the Irish Senate. This action signalled the rejection of the IRA by the southern Irish state.[106]

The IRA had to apologise for further civilian deaths resulting from IRA attacks and bombings thereafter, including the Warrington bombing on 20 March 1993 which killed two children. That particular incident encouraged a mother from Dublin, Susan McHugh, to arrange a peace rally in Dublin.[107] Former republican prisoner, Ó hAdhmaill, recognises the impact such killings had on republican support:

> Events such as the Warrington bombing had a massive impact in the south of Ireland. People would have been coming over from England with connections to Ireland, and they…had children. Everybody sees this whole incident…where these kids are killed, and that it was totally unnecessary. Not that any life is necessary to take, but I am just saying that that particular incident had a big impact on support for republicanism within the 26 counties.[108]

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[103] See appendix two.
[104] O'Brien, *Long War,* 198-199.
[105] Adams, *Hope and History,* 38.
[106] Reference number 2893 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives*.
[107] Reference numbers 3383 and 3390 in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives.*
[108] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.

Following the Enniskillen bombing, Adams also admitted: 'our efforts to broaden our base have most certainly been upset ... This is particularly true for the south and internationally'.[109] Further attacks leading to innocent deaths, even if by accident as republicans claimed, put the party beyond the pale for some voters across the island. Thus statistics concerning IRA 'legitimate targets' must be viewed in parallel with the fact that the IRA were on occasion killing civilians. The implications of this argument are that even if the IRA escalated its campaign, it was unlikely to succeed in fulfilling its objectives. More attacks would have undoubtedly increased civilian deaths from collateral damage, which the evidence suggests would have seen Sinn Féin's vote, at best, stagnate, and at worse, decline.

Innocent killings were not the only reason explaining the stagnant Sinn Féin vote by the late 1980s. Very few Protestants in Northern Ireland would ever vote Sinn Féin as they believed that the IRA's shooting of the predominately protestant RUC and UDR was sectarian. Henry Patterson describes how in the border areas of Fermanagh and south Tyrone where security force killings were high, the local Protestant population viewed the IRA's campaign as ethnic cleansing. Patterson admits that whilst the IRA did not target these individuals because of their religious affiliation, because so many protestants joined the security forces for historical reasons, they were convinced that the attacks were sectarian.[110] Tommy McKearney supports this assessment. In his opinion, the knowledge of the local area that local security force personnel had meant that the IRA had to target them. But he acknowledges: 'many Protestant people viewed this campaign as a sectarian assault on their community'.[111] The republican community was therefore fighting against at least fifty percent of the population of Northern Ireland.

As a result, it was imperative that republicans gained significant support from the Irish Republic. If Sinn Féin wanted a strong electoral mandate to pressurise the British government to return to talks and grant significant concessions, they needed support across the island.[112] The need for greater electoral support from southern Ireland led to Sinn Féin dropping abstention to the Dáil in 1986, to see if it would increase their vote. In 1986, for instance, Gerry Adams argued that it was a sensible move because there was, in his view,

[109] See Adams in McKittrick *et al., Lost Lives,* 1096.
[110] Patterson, 'Sectarianism Revisited', 337-356.
[111] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 117-118, 140.
[112] O'Brien, *Long War,* 124.

'instinctive republicanism' in the Irish Republic.[113] Nonetheless, a series of reasons unique to the Irish Republic meant that Sinn Féin support levels remained low. Censorship of the Provisionals from the early 1970s restrained their ability to gain support. The Dáil's Offences Against the State Act in the 1970s enforced that anybody associated or known to be supportive of the Provisionals in publicly funded work could lose their job. There was also a broadcasting ban against members of Sinn Féin and the IRA until 1994.[114] Republicans believe that both acts hampered their efforts to gather support. Gerry Adams, for example, recalls how an RTÉ reporter was sacked after interviewing Martin McGuinness when the three coffins from Gibraltar came back to Northern Ireland in the late 1980s.[115] Joe Cahill also found that promoting the hunger-strikes in the south was difficult between 1980 and 1981 because of 'the censorship laws'.[116] And McKearney suggests that the 'anti-Provo witch hunt' initiated by the Irish government made many southern Irish citizens fear to vote for Sinn Féin.[117]

O'Brien reminds us, however, that the IRA's campaign in Northern Ireland offered few practical benefits for citizens of the Irish Republic: 'in the Republic, there were no British soldiers on the streets, no memories of street conflagrations in [19]69 ... interest faded'.[118] In addition, there was some anger towards the IRA in border counties such Donegal, where business and life was disrupted because of the Troubles.[119] Fears that the conflict might spread increased following incidents such as the Dublin-Monaghan bombings in 1974. Both were brutal reminders that loyalism was not going to accept any united Ireland settlement. Most Irish citizens were therefore either morally offended by the IRA, too scared to support it for fear of loyalist violence being regularly visited on the South, or felt indifferent to a 'war' that did not directly involve them.

The lack of support in the Irish Republic was a crucial factor leading to a re-evaluation of republican strategy in the 1980s.[120] Ó hAdhmaill argues:

> I think that Adams and others thought by standing for the Leinster House elections that they were going to do a lot better than they actually did … this would have been a

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[113] Adams, *Politics,* 46.
[114] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 102-103.
[115] Adams, *Hope and History,* 64.
[116] Anderson, *Cahill,* 323.
[117] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 102-103.
[118] O'Brien, *Long War,* 106.
[119] Nash, Reid and Graham, *Partitioned Lives*, 79-80.
[120] Frampton, *Long March,* 7, 45-46.

much bigger factor [than the intelligence conflict] in influencing the leadership to try and move away from [armed struggle].[121]

Without considerable support from the Irish Republic, the Provisionals lacked the negotiating muscle from which to acquire substantial concessions from the British in negotiations. In the words of McKearney, support in the south was vital because:

> Unionism had a majority in Northern Ireland and for as long as the 26-county state [the Irish Republic] and its population insisted that unity could only come by consent of a majority in the Six Counties, Britain was under no political pressure to accommodate the IRA demands.[122]

The IRA was locked in stalemate situation, unlikely to acquire considerable political concessions. 'We had fought the British almost to a standstill', observed Eamon Collins, but 'I had always known that the IRA could only win the war if the people in the Republic of Ireland became involved in the struggle'.[123] With little prospect of increasing the republican vote south of the border whilst the Troubles continued in the north, the republican leadership knew there was little negotiating muscle to gain from further conflict by the mid-1980s.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement also impacted on Sinn Féin and the IRA's appeal to the nationalist electorate across the island. Essentially, the agreement provided the Dublin government and the SDLP the ability to consult and influence British government policy in Northern Ireland via the joint Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield. This factor could partly explain why thereafter Sinn Féin's vote declined in Westminster elections from 13.4 per cent in 1983, to 11.4 per cent in 1987, and to ten per cent in 1992.[124] The agreement convinced many nationalists that the Irish Republic's government could remedy their grievances through diplomacy, challenging the rationale for the IRA's campaign.[125] In addition, since the agreement saw constitutional nationalists accept that Northern Ireland could only unify with the Irish Republic if a majority of citizens there gave their consent, the British government 'didn't look imperialist' as the IRA claimed.[126] Consequently, the IRA would struggle to undo the 'unionist' veto thereafter.[127] Admittedly, the agreement did not improve the security situation to any great extent on the border, but it did see the British government enforce the McBride Principles and the Fair Employment Act by 1989 under Dublin's influence. These

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[121] Féilim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.
[122] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 103-105.
[123] Collins with McGovern, *Killing Rage,* 177.
[124] See 1983, 1987 and 1992 Westminster General Election statistics for Northern Ireland, CAIN: at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/elect.htm, <accessed 20 April 2013>.
[125] Moloney, *Secret History,* 241.
[126] David McKittrick, interview with author, 22 May 2012, Belfast.
[127] Hume, *Personal Views,* 42-48, 92-93, 112.

measures aimed to regulate the composition of employees within businesses to curtail sectarian discrimination. The implementation of such measures meant that constitutional nationalists could directly point to progress for the nationalist community as a result of the agreement.[128]

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, where Sinn Féin had become a permanent electoral presence, republicans were behind the SDLP in district councils and parliamentary elections. If republicans wanted to maximise concessions in future negotiations, they needed to overtake the SDLP. Laurence McKeown remembers how: '[e]ven in the jails we noticed that there were contradictions between trying to gain votes and waging a war. It was difficult for people out campaigning to get votes when bombs were doing damage to streets and buildings'.[129] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill also commented:

> On the one hand, you feel that you must keep the armed struggle going in order to get the British to even consider the situation: but on the other hand, the armed struggle is turning-off more and more of your potential support bases.[130]

It was not just potential supporters that were tired of the constant conflict. Some war-weariness was evident throughout northern republican communities.[131] David McKittrick explains:

> [republicans] could keep on their 'Long War', but there were no signs of it working … Republicans areas was where most of the violence was. Up in Ballymurphy and the Falls Road life was awful … by continuing their campaign they were just condemning their young people to more of the same.[132]

Indeed, Gerry Adams recalls that his family were distressed after his young nephew was arrested in the early 1990s.[133] During talks with Sinn Féin in the late 1980s, a former Fianna Fáil TD also claims: '[w]hen we had…tea after the first talks…Adams…said to me that this cannot go on, our children can't experience what we've suffered.'[134] Republicans recognised war-weariness in their community. Tommy McKearney recalls 'exhaustion within the Republican community'.[135] And Michael Culbert, a former republican prisoner from Belfast, found whilst on parole in 1991 that the republican community, 'wanted to have another look

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[128] Neumann, *Britain's Long War,* 142-145*; see also Jennifer Todd, 'Thresholds of State Change : Changing British State Institutions and Practices in Northern Ireland after Direct Rule', in *Political Studies*, 62 (3), (2014), pp.522-538.

[129] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 16 May 2011.

[130] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.

[131] Taylor, *Provos,* 317.

[132] David McKittrick, interview with author, Belfast, 19 April 2011.

[133] Adams, *Hope and History,* 103.

[134] Former Fianna Fáil TD, interview with author, 31 August 2013.

[135] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 158.

at what was going on'. Culbert says that the IRA had to listen because 'you can't carry on an armed campaign without support'.[136] Furthermore, the restriction of funding to Sinn Féin community initiatives potentially harmed republican support levels too. As Kevin Bean has convincingly argued, the demands of the nationalist electorate for economic improvements were difficult for Sinn Féin to provide whilst the British state withheld funding for republican community projects after 1985. IRA violence had to end in order to receive funding.[137]

These factors give us an insight into the reasons for Sinn Féin's static electoral performance by the late 1980s. The argument here is that political factors were crucial in encouraging republican leaders to seek a political settlement, leading to major concessions on their part, from at least 1983. This view challenges accounts by authors such as Frampton that suggest, alongside other political and military factors, republican leaders partly switched towards wanting an end to the conflict following the electoral setbacks of 1992, where Gerry Adams lost his position as MP for west Belfast; and because of the Brooke-Mayhew talks made Sinn Féin fear that they would be left in political isolation.[138] The majority of evidence suggests that republican leaders were willing, if necessary, to accept considerable concessions from at least 1983. Chapter three outlined how Father Alec Reid felt from his talks with leading republicans in the early 1980s that by 1983 they were ready to consider an alternative. Reid's letter to Haughey in 1987 also emphasised that the talks between the various nationalist groups aimed to find conditions and common goals leading to an end in IRA activity.[139] From the moment that Sinn Féin engaged with the SDLP and Fianna Fáil they also knew that an IRA ceasefire was crucial. Other nationalists would not tolerate any understanding and consensus in talks with republicans without an end to IRA activity. Reynolds, for instance, says: '[b]efore any [peace] talks I wanted the guns silenced … Then and only then could the talks start and inclusion begin'.[140] Republican leaders also recognised that other nationalists had a stronger electoral mandate supporting their alternative evaluation of events, as Pat Doherty's comments noted in chapter three demonstrated. It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that the republican leadership ever really imagined that the SDLP and Fianna Fáil would back republican demands to any extent whilst conflict continued, as Frampton implies.[141] Of course, republican leaders would try to persuade constitutional

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[136] Michael Culbert, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[137] Kevin Bean, *The New Politics of Sinn Féin,* (Liverpool, 2007) ,27-30, 84-85, 88.
[138] Cf. Frampton, *Long March,* 63-64, 74-77, 82-87, 184.
[139] Moloney, *Secret History,* 615- 630.
[140] Reynolds, *Autobiography,* 279.
[141] Cf. Frampton, *Long* March*,* 58-65, 73-75, 184.

nationalists towards their position. In a draft declaration for the Irish and British governments that republican leaders sent to Hume and Dublin in February 1992, for example, republicans argued that all democratically mandated parties could engage in peace talks. Their view was rejected in a later draft completed by Hume and the Dublin officials in June 1992, who wanted the conflict halted before any multi-party talks. The message got through: in the Hume-Adams draft of June 1992, it was decided that only parties that abided 'exclusively by the democratic process' could take part in future talks.[142] By engaging with constitutional nationalists from 1987, republican leaders knew that they were taking part in a process that would require a political compromise and an end to the IRA's campaign.

There are many signs that the republican leadership were considering alternatives to conflict before Gerry Adams lost his west Belfast seat in 1992. Frampton, for example, cites Danny Morrison's unpublished *An Phoblacht* article written in prison after the 1992 election, where Morrison called for republicans to rapidly 'cash in the chips' of the republican struggle before their electoral mandate declined further. Frampton argues that this is a clear demonstration of a change in republican thinking about an IRA ceasefire and political compromise.[143] But in an interview, Morrison recalled:

> [w]hen I was in jail … I was coming to the conclusion that we needed to be heading down the road towards a ceasefire, and that was my position in 1992. I didn't know that that [thinking] was actually happening on the outside too. I remember…[I was in] Crumlin Road jail in December 1990…[and] there was a Christmas ceasefire … That was the first Christmas ceasefire in sixteen years. Because I knew the ins and outs of the Republican Movement, I strongly suspected that…the ceasefire did not come out of thin air. So they [the leadership] were thinking about the Struggle on the outside as well.[144]

A Christmas ceasefire was a clear indication to Morrison that the movement were considering alternatives to the IRA's campaign *before* Adams lost his west Belfast seat in 1992. There are other signals showing that republicans were contemplating a political compromise before 1992, not already outlined here or in chapter three. Reid's letter to Haughey in 1986 was based on conversations he had had with Gerry Adams and suggested that the IRA's campaign would end if 'the nationalist parties would make an ad hoc agreement to…act in unison…for reconciliation and peace'.[145] In 1986, Adams stressed the need for talks between nationalists

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[142] Mallie and McKittrick, *Fight for Peace,* 373-377.
[143] Cf. Frampton, *Long March,* 84-86.
[144] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 20 January 2014.
[145] See Letter from Father Alec Reid to Mr Haughey, May 11 1987, in Moloney, *Secret History,* 618-619.

across the island;[146] and in November 1991, Adams told an audience at University College Dublin:

> I am quite convinced that the conditions are going to be created where people will sit down. *I think we'll have to compromise. I think we'll have to give and take. I think we will have to come to an arrangement which won't necessarily fulfil the republican objectives.*[147]

There were plenty of signs that republican leaders knew that political compromises were needed before the loss of Adams' west Belfast seat in 1992. The latter event merely vindicated the republican leadership's chosen strategy of searching for an alternative political compromise.

Of course, hard line republican objectives were still professed by republican leaders before and after the Good Friday Agreement. The joint declaration drafts in the early 1990s, for example, saw republicans and constitutional nationalists call for the British to promote Irish unity to unionists.[148] Chapter three also revealed that Pat Doherty says republicans always wanted a united Ireland as the optimum outcome of talks. But he admits that they realized they had to compromise because they lacked the mandate needed to force such terms on other groups. As Gerry Adams puts it, republican leaders wanted 'to get the optimum position'.[149] Continuation of IRA attacks can be viewed as part of the bargaining process. As emphasised in chapter three, republican leaders feared that if the IRA called a cessation before a political pathway and concessions were mapped out, the British would repeat the 'trick' of 1975 and provide little in return.[150] Brendan Duddy, for instance, records a meeting in May 1993 between the British intermediary and republicans. 'Walter' (Martin McGuinness) is recorded as feeling that the failure to engage in face-to-face dialogue showed that the British were attempting another 'stretching out exercise ... this is…dangerously unsustainable as it follows the tactics of the 74/75 ceasefire…a very bitter…experience'.[151] Sinn Féin's records of that meeting present a similar picture.[152] Maximalist statements and IRA activity continued until republicans believed that a viable political alternative was on offer. In parallel, republican leaders also gave signals that they were willing to compromise

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[146] Adams, *Politics,* 154.

[147] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/234, *Irish Times,* 'Compromise is needed to end the conflict, says Adams', 14 November 1991.

[148] See joint declaration drafts in Mallie and McKittrick, *Fight for Peace,* 371-380.

[149] Adams, *Hope and History,* 117-118.

[150] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 5.

[151] NUIG, Brendan Duddy Papers, Pol 35/266, Meeting between British intermediary and Republicans, May 17 1993.

[152] *Setting the Record Straight,* 31-32.

too in order that the British government did not neglect opportunities to intensify dialogue. Alongside warnings of no permanent ceasefires, for instance, Jim Gibney and Martin McGuinness told republicans at Bodenstown in 1992 and 1993 that they needed to settle for interim settlements for a prolonged period before the British withdrew.[153]

It is plausible that continuing IRA attacks right up to a ceasefire could have also been sanctioned in order to keep the movement united. Bradley, for instance, says that whilst he accepted talks, keeping the IRA's campaign going ensured the best possible settlement.[154] At the very least, republican leaders may have felt the need to follow this line of thinking so that they could later argue that the IRA had done everything possible to get concessions. It is also feasible that the republican leaders shared Bradley's assessment. This did not mean the IRA and Sinn Féin were not prepared to negotiate. Instead, a continuation of IRA attacks and hard line demands in talks were part of the negotiating process. Ó Dochartaigh makes the point that: 'Parties to negotiation carefully guard information about their negotiating…positions … It is simply bad negotiating practice to let it be known how much you are willing to concede'.[155] From his experience with negotiating with republicans, Jonathan Powell supports this assessment. He found that 'Republicans were addicted to over-negotiating … hoping that they could squeeze out one final thing'. This meant that 'we had to make a best guess as to the real bottom line' of the republican movement'.[156]

Ultimately, the republican leadership only called a prolonged ceasefire in August 1994 once they felt that the maximum concessions had been achieved before ending the military campaign and engaging in extensive multi-party negotiations.[157] The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993 represented the 'bottom line' of the British government: the status of Northern Ireland could only change with the consent of the Northern Irish people.[158] Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Dublin government had agreed in their final draft of a Joint Declaration in May 1993 to try and get the: 'British Government [to] use all their influence and energy to win the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland', and argue for Irish unity.[159] Yet factors including the fear of a violent unionist rebellion, and a determination not to bow to IRA pressure, made the British government reject this idea. Since the constitutional

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[153] Frampton, *Long March,* 76.
[154] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 14, 194-196.
[155] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 2.
[156] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 162-163.
[157] O'Brien, *Long War*, 319-322.
[158] Frampton, *Long March,* 93.
[159] Mallie and McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace*, 380.

nationalists agreed with the Downing Street Declaration, the IRA was under pressure to ceasefire.[160]

Equally important was that the Provisional leadership recognized the achievements and potential of the 'pan-nationalist alliance' by 1994.[161] The May 1993 draft of the Joint Declaration proved that different nationalist groups could reach a consensus on aims from which to negotiate with the British government, including trying to get the latter to convince unionists towards Irish unity in the long-term.[162] The constitutional nationalists had also ensured that no political settlement went ahead without Sinn Féin by the 1990s, as seen throughout this chapter. For the republican leadership, the prospect of acquiring further concessions via pressure on the British government from the pan-nationalist alliance, and indirect pressure from Irish-America and potentially increased European integration, seemed greater than what could be achieved by continuing the IRA's military campaign by 1994. The TUAS document, circulated to volunteers shortly after the 1994 ceasefire, highlights the hope that the leadership placed in the pan-nationalist alliance.[163] Volunteers were informed that '[t]he [Downing Street Declaration] … does not hold a solution … Republicans are not prepared to wait around for the Brits to change'. The way that the leadership envisaged 'forcing' the British government's 'hand' was to build a 'consensus' on republican objectives with the Dublin government, the SDLP and the Irish-American lobby. A cautious note was sounded, reminding volunteers that '[t]here are…differences of opinion on how [nationalist] principles are interpreted … In particular…what veto and consent mean'.[164] Neither the SDLP or Fianna Fáil agreed to any electoral pacts with Sinn Féin either.[165]

Nevertheless, at the very least, the pan-nationalist alliance ensured that constitutional nationalists supported Sinn Féin's inclusion in any multi-party talks, provided that there was an IRA ceasefire beforehand. The republican leadership therefore declared in the TUAS document:

> the leadership believes there is enough in common to create a substantial political momentum which will considerably advance the struggle at this time … There is potentially a very powerful Irish-American lobby … [And] [i]t is the first time in 25 years that all the major Irish nationalist parties are rowing in roughly the same

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[160] O'Brien, *Long War*, 319-322.
[161] O'Brien, *Long War*, 319-322.
[162] See draft ten in Mallie and McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace,* 380.
[163] This either meant the Tactical Use of Armed Struggle or Totally UnArmed Strategy. Moloney, *Secret History,* 423.
[164] See the TUAS document in Mallie and McKittrick, *Fight for Peace,* 381-384.
[165] Adams, *Hope and History,* 273.

direction. These combined circumstances are unlikely to gel again in the foreseeable future.[166]

The pan-nationalist alliance had provided some benefits for republicans already. For instance, O'Donnell suggests that they insisted on self-determination being implemented in the Downing Street Declaration and later the Good Friday Agreement. She convincingly argues that this principle was important because it meant that unionists could only opt out of a united Ireland provided they remained a majority in Northern Ireland. Technically, there was no unionist veto anymore.[167] Of course, republicans wanted any exercise of self-determination to be held across the island as a single unit. In the Anglo-Irish Agreement, though, there had been no provision for self-determination at all across the island, so the Downing Street Declaration and Good Friday Agreement were an advance on this principle for republicans helped by the pan-nationalist alliance.[168] Ó hAdhmaill agrees that the pan-nationalist alliance was a key factor influencing republican leaders towards peace: 'Adams believed that with Hume and Irish America and Albert Reynolds, he had an alliance, a pan-nationalist front going into negotiations with the British. I think he would have seen that as a coup'.[169] Adams certainly did feel that the pan-nationalist talks created a viable alternative. He argues: 'The Irish Peace initiative…was confronting the British government for the first time with a consensus – shaky and at times superficial perhaps – but it was putting London on the defensive'.[170] The fact that the Downing Street Declaration followed the Hume-Adams statements and draft declarations was evidence that the pan-nationalist effort was at least moving the process forward.[171]

Other positive factors for republicans encouraged a cessation by 1994. On the political front, Sinn Féin experienced a small, but noticeable electoral renaissance by 1993. The party won the majority of nationalist seats on Belfast and Omagh district councils, and increased their council seats across the north from 43 in 1989 to 51 in 1993.[172] It seemed that efforts aimed at ending conflict helped increase nationalist support for Sinn Féin. Albert Reynolds also aimed to show republicans that 'an end to violence could have its own rewards' through concessions in early 1994. These included an end to the broadcasting ban, lobbying the US government for visas for Adams and Joe Cahill to promote peace and raise

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[166] See the TUAS document in Mallie and McKittrick, *Fight for Peace,* 381-384.
[167] O'Donnell, *Fianna Fáil,* 75-77.
[168] Adams, *Hope and History,* 354.
[169] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013
[170] Adams, *Hope and History,* 164-165.
[171] Frampton, *Long March,* 93-94.
[172] See appendix two.

funds in the US, the early release of prisoners, and the immediate entry to talks in Dublin after a cessation.[173] But the IRA had to end their military campaign to enhance their political prospects and the pan-nationalist alliance by 1994, because other nationalists demanded it.[174] 'There was always a pressure on the movement to [ceasefire]', McKeown explained in reference to 1994, 'because…the southern government and supporters in the US…would support you only so far without a ceasefire'.[175]

Why did the IRA break its ceasefire in 1996, but resume it in July 1997? According to Bew and Frampton, the IRA wanted to alter preconditions to talks in 1996, including the British demand for the decommissioning of weapons beforehand and the Mitchell principles of non-violence. They believe that the IRA returned to a ceasefire in July 1997 for reasons including the improved electoral performances for Sinn Féin across Ireland, and because Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair entered office in 1997 and agreed to decommissioning occurring in parallel with talks. They emphasise, however, that a principal factor was that the 'Adams-McGuinness leadership was forced by the objective realities of the IRA's declining position'.[176] Admittedly, west Belfast commentator Ciaran De Baroid does say: 'In…1997, IRA attacks [in Belfast]…were foiled, bombs were disarmed, rockets and mortars missed their targets, and several volunteers were captured.'[177] The fact that 'attacks were foiled' could mean that major informers and agents were constraining the Belfast IRA by 1997. Elsewhere, there was a period of decline of the South Armagh Brigade after 1996, following the arrests of eleven IRA volunteers who had operated on the British mainland and south Armagh. By 1997, the British Army also worked out the patterns of the sniper in south Armagh, arresting him and his team.[178] According to Harnden, one IRA operator in south Armagh arrested in April 1997 broke under interrogation. Although not from south Armagh, he was a rare exception of an outsider being accepted into that brigade after operating with other border units. He was from Castleblayney across the border. His information apparently complemented forensic evidence and led to the convictions of the sniper team.[179] A former British soldier also commented that the 'erosion of the South Armagh PIRA' between 1996

[173] Reynolds, *Autobiography,* 366-410.
[174] O'Brien, *Long War*, 318-322.
[175] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 16 May 2011.
[176] Cf. Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 130-141; Frampton, *Long March,* 95-107.
[177] De Baroid, *Ballymurphy,* 362.
[178] Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 347, 418-425.
[179] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 313-320; Taylor, *Brits,* 356.

and 1997 was 'very significant' in leading to a renewed IRA ceasefire.[180] These examples could imply that the British dual strategy was successful by July 1997.

There is not sufficient evidence to suggest that these arrests between February 1996 and July 1997 resulted from informers and agents. In south Armagh, the security force members had partly worked out the patterns of the snipers during the ceasefire and subsequent shootings there in 1996, and also benefitted from bugging the premises of one IRA suspect.[181] A former British soldier added that careful forensic work can explain the south Armagh arrests:

> [i]n the early nineties, the PIRA carried out a number of bombing attacks from south Armagh...this provided a huge opportunity for the security forces to exploit … the minute they started coming out of south Armagh, the IRA became far more vulnerable ... The security forces were able to cordon-off [areas where they had been] and get every single piece of forensic evidence.[182]

Nevertheless, no convictions arose for attacks such as the Manchester bombing. Thus the South Armagh IRA was still able to get away with attacks partly because the police had to find conclusive evidence for convictions, which remained hard to gather with a lack of informers and agents in this unit advising when IRA teams were about to attack.[183] The lack of convictions for the Manchester bombing also shows that the volunteer who broke, but apparently retracted his statements, in April 1997, did not know everything about South Armagh IRA activities.[184]

In addition, it is important to remember that the IRA still carried out major operations in this period that inflicted substantial physical and financial damage. On 10 February 1996, for instance, the IRA ended its 1994 ceasefire with a bomb made in south Armagh which exploded in the Docklands area of London, inflicting an estimated £150 million in damage.[185] Later, on 15 June 1996, an IRA bomb exploded injuring many civilians in Manchester and created £100 million worth of damage. IRA units also managed to get inside and detonate two car bombs at British Army Headquarters at Thiepval Barracks in October 1996.[186] The barracks attack supports Sean O'Callaghan's argument: that the IRA had a 'complexity' about it, which saw certain parts of the organization remain inaccessible for informers and

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[180] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 June 2012.
[181] Taylor, *Brits,* 353-356; Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 416-425.
[182] Former British soldier one, interview with author, 26 May 2011.
[183] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 345-346.
[184] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 313-320; Taylor, *Brits,* 356.
[185] Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 5-10.
[186] Bew and Gillespie, *Chronology,* 330, 333.

agents that may have been disrupting other attacks in Belfast during this time.[187] And whilst the IRA did face setbacks in south Armagh and England by 1997, these arrests came *after* the 1994 ceasefire. The ceasefire in 1994 shows that a majority within the republican leadership and many grassroots activists had already accepted the need to compromise in talks *before* the south Armagh arrests occurred in 1997. Indeed, Laurence McKeown suggests:

> [e]ven when the ceasefire broke down, people knew it would only be temporary and that we would quickly be back to a situation where we would be looking to participate in a solution. That was the way that politics was going at the time.[188]

Séanna Walsh agrees that by 1994: 'Republicans would have been very clear...that...once you move into negotiations...you don't have an alternative ... [Y]ou have accepted that the armed struggle can only take you so far'.[189] The arrests in south Armagh in 1997, therefore, had little impact on the republican leadership's decision to search for a political compromise, which had already been decided by 1994. Indeed, Gerry Adams says the 'the easy bit' in getting another cessation in 1997 was 'engagement with the Army Council people' because '[e]ssentially the same people who had authorised the 1994 cessation' remained. True, there was some opposition within republicanism from a 'minority' on the IRA Executive to a further cessation.[190] Senior republicans on the Executive attempted to place their supporters onto the Army Council in 1996 to prevent further cessations. These individuals felt that only a British declaration of intent to withdraw could justify peace.[191] But the majority of republican leaders, and grassroots activists as will be discussed, agreed with another ceasefire and a political compromise, provided that guns were not handed in before talks.

Thus IRA attacks after 1996 were designed only, in the words of Jonathan Powell, to act as a 'short sharp shock' to break the deadlock over the British demand for decommissioning before talks.[192] It did not represent a full resumption of the IRA's campaign. There was, for instance, very little IRA activity in Northern Ireland. Rather than this being a symptom of British security successes against the IRA, it actually appears to be deliberate. As Taylor suggests, the IRA conducted what he calls 'focused terrorism', particularly hitting commercial targets in London. The idea was to try to provoke a response from the British government towards breaking the logjam over decommissioning, whilst

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[187] Sean O'Callaghan, interview with author, 12 July 2011.
[188] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 16 May 2011.
[189] Séanna Walsh, interview with author, Belfast, 21 May 2012.
[190] Adams, *Hope and History,* 300-301.
[191] Moloney, *Secret History,* 440-507.
[192] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 85.

trying to avoid further civilian casualties that might tarnish Sinn Féin's image, or which could prevent a renewed understanding with the SDLP and Fianna Fáil.[193]

The IRA refused to decommission any weapons or explosives before talks because they felt that it would look like surrender.[194] Albert Reynolds agrees that decommissioning was the primary issue that broke the ceasefire in 1996, especially as republicans had not been included yet in the political talks towards a settlement that they believed they had been promised in return for a ceasefire.[195] Reynold's successor as Fianna Fáil leader, Bertie Ahern, agrees. Ahern feels that 'parliamentary arithmetic in Westminster' meant that 'Major's government was becoming increasingly dependent on the support of Ulster Unionist MPs', explaining the British demand on republicans to decommission some weapons before talks. Ahern also believes that Major's rejection of the Mitchell Report's suggestion that decommissioning should happen in parallel with political talks further offended republicans. Ahern concludes: 'the failure to get all-party peace negotiations started 16 months after the initial ceasefire was indefensible' and caused the resumption of IRA activity.[196]

Jonathan Powell agrees that the demand for decommissioning before talks and the failure to bring about multi-party talks played a major part in breaking the ceasefire. He adds that John Major's decision to ignore the Mitchell suggestion for parallel talks and decommissioning in January 1996 made republicans conclude 'that the Brits were messing about and had no intention of letting them into all-party talks except at an impossible price'. '[T]he fact that Major was depending on Unionist votes', suggests Powell, led to obstacles being created to multi-party talks.[197] It is principally for these reasons that the IRA returned to its armed campaign, to make a restatement of their bottom line for another cessation: multi-party talks promptly following a ceasefire.[198] Once that precondition was permanently dropped by the new British Prime Minister Tony Blair and new Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in 1997, the IRA promptly called a second ceasefire in July 1997.

Calling a ceasefire in July 1997 was also an opportune moment for the Provisionals following an increased Sinn Féin electoral mandate in the 1997 UK elections. Both Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams were elected to parliament. And in elections in the Irish

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[193] Taylor, *Brits,* 348.
[194] Taylor, *Provos,* 349.
[195] Reynolds, *Autobiography,* 362, 483-495, 506.
[196] Bertie Ahern with Richard Aldous, *The Autobiography* (London, 2009), 176-179.
[197] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 80-86.
[198] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 80-86.

Republic, Sinn Féin also gained a seat in Cavan-Monaghan for Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin in 1997 and increased their electoral mandate. These results vindicated the leadership's quest to return to the peace process and demonstrated increasing support from the public for a political process inclusive of Sinn Féin to commence. Furthermore, the return of Fianna Fáil to political power in the Irish Republic suggested greater prospects of renewing the pan-nationalist consensus in talks, and potentially gaining greater concessions.[199]

Grassroots republicans and the peace process

Since 1998, various primary and secondary accounts have emerged that claim that many grassroots republicans were manipulated into ending the armed conflict against their will. For example, Moloney believes a small elite surrounding Gerry Adams secretly organised the peace process from the early 1980s. Following this line of argument, he suggests that Adams made it clear in back-channel conversations with Father Reid, John Hume, and the Irish and British governments that he would accept partition. In return, he wanted the British government to: accept any agreement emerging from talks with other parties; allow for Irish self-determination separately in both states on the island and sanction unification if the majority in Northern Ireland ever gave their consent. For Moloney, there were 'two peace processes' by the 1990s: the first was the one made public, where republican leaders were willing to talk only if republican objectives were fulfilled; the other 'secret' process was where Gerry Adams and his 'think tank' signalled to the British that they wanted to compromise. The 'think tank' consisted of key republican personnel including Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly, Danny Morrison, Tom Hartley and Jim Gibney. Moloney argues that this group carefully 'ushered' the IRA into a ceasefire with minimal internal debate beforehand. For Moloney, deception, the removal of opponents, and manipulation of key votes at an Ard Fheis or IRA convention played a key role in leading to the Good Friday Agreement.[200] A similar view is presented by Alonso. Whilst accepting that a majority of volunteers and activists backed the ceasefires, he agrees with Moloney that leadership manipulation was vital in bringing about the peace process. Alonso believes that because the republican movement was militaristic, the leaders could indoctrinate the grassroots and create 'groupthink', so that the leadership line was rarely questioned. Those who questioned orders were pushed aside and isolated.[201]

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[199] Frampton, *Long March,* 98-107.
[200] Moloney, *Secret History,* 393-405, 428, 516-520.
[201] Cf. Rogelio Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (Oxon, 2007), 3-9, 66-69, 124-126, 130-134, 158-159.

The above secondary accounts have been inspired by the views of dissenting republicans who departed the mainstream republican movement from the 1980s. After being released from prison in the mid-1980s, for example, Brendan Hughes returned to the IRA, and discovered that '[t]he IRA was in a very bad state'. 'But I believe now', Hughes summarises, 'that the Army was being run down purposely'. Controversially, Hughes believes that there was 'a great deal of collusion' by republican leaders and the British government to remove opponents to the peace process. He disagrees with the peace process because: 'all the IRA had done is just to become another SDLP … the British government … eventually…succeeded in turning a revolutionary movement into a conservative organization'. Hughes agrees with Alonso's point that: '[t]hanks to the loyalty factor in the IRA, Gerry [Adams] was able to control and manipulate people like myself and many others'.[202] Gerry Bradley echoes many of Hughes' complaints. For example, Bradley emphasises the lack of transparency over the peace process:

> I'd have kept the campaign and the political wing parallel. That's what the leadership was promising in 1981 … Didn't happen … The leadership 'conditioned' people right through the 1980s. Got them ready to accept the next step, and the next step was always the IRA taking a step back. I believed them when they said the campaign was moving up a gear after the Libyan gear came in ... I feel so betrayed … they lied to us over the years.

A specific example that Bradley says represents 'lying' is over the issue of decommissioning. 'There was to be no decommissioning', he remembers being told, but 'they were waiting for the right moment to destroy all the gear and put the IRA out of business'. Bradley feels that the leadership's approach was flawed because '[i]f they'd kept the IRA strong, they'd have got a lot more out of the Brits than they settled for in 1998'.[203]

Tommy McKearney agrees that strategies towards electoralism were not properly debated:

> When the Army Council and GHQ Staff of the IRA decided to adopt a parliamentary path, it was a relatively straightforward matter of placing people loyal to the Army Council and GHQ…in positions of influence … There was no open discussion about alternative options.

In his opinion, a lack of debate can partly be explained '[b]ecause of the IRA's clandestine and hierarchical structures'. He does dismiss the idea of 'outright duplicity' by the republican leadership, but certainly feels alternative suggestions were not debated or tolerated. Examples

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[202] Hughes with Moloney, *Voices,* 262-293.
[203] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 7-16, 188-189, 192-199, 221-222.

that McKearney uses to supplement his view include the dropping of abstention to the Dáil, where he believes the 'outcome' was determined by the leadership 'well in advance'.[204] Francie Mackey, a founding member of the 32-County Sovereignty Movement, who oppose the Good Friday Agreement and an internal settlement in Northern Ireland, explained to the *Endgame in Ireland* in 2001 that he also left the movement because of leadership manipulation. In Mackey's opinion, the years between Downing Street Declaration and second IRA ceasefire in 1997 produced an 'almost unbelievable situation [where] the leadership were moving ahead irrespective of what the base had said'. 'Deception…was taking place', he believes, because questions surrounding the prospect of heading towards the a reformed Stormont were not addressed. He added: 'no debate, no discussion that challenged the analysis of the leadership was going to be allowed', since he believes that any discussions would have seen the peace proposals on offer rejected by the grassroots, particularly from his experience of holding republican meetings in Strabane.[205]

There are important points to consider before reflecting on the merits of these dissenting voices. Brendan Hughes's account appeared in Ed Moloney's book, *Voices from the Grave*. As Ian McBride has noted in a recent article about Troubles memoirs, unsurprisingly, Hughes' views coincide with Moloney's presented earlier in *A Secret History of the IRA*. More importantly, McBride points out that Hughes was interviewed by Anthony McIntyre, a former republican prisoner who believes that the peace process was manipulated by the republican leadership. Hughes' interview was definitely influenced by 'leading' questions 'to an embarrassing degree'. McBride: 'There are 37 separate occasions in the text when…McIntyre, intervenes to pursue particular points; 27 of these are directly concerned with the role played by Gerry Adams, and a further seven indirectly so'. Since Hughes was once a close ally of Adams, his view may be blurred by their fallout.[206] In relation to Mackie and McKearney, both created and joined organizations opposed to the path mainstream republicanism was taking. McKearney supported a radical-Marxist reading of the situation in the 1980s, and suggested creating a broad-front movement on the streets outside of the political system. Otherwise, he felt participation in the democratic process would dilute the revolutionary attitudes of republicans. He left the movement in the latter part of the 1980s as

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[204] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 154-160.
[205] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 3/15, Typescript transcript of rolls 232-234 with Francie Mackie.
[206] Ian McBride, 'Provisional Truths: IRA Memoirs and the Peace Process', (unpublished paper, 2015), 9-10.

this position was not adopted.[207] Their views are doubtless shaped by current political disagreements.

There is also considerable evidence to suggest that the majority of Provisional republicans had thought about the prospect of an IRA cessation and political compromise prior to 1994. Séanna Walsh's and Laurence McKeown's views have already demonstrated that they saw the need for a negotiated political settlement in the 1990s. McKeown also suggested that there were discussions about future strategy in the prisons from at least the late 1980s.[208] Michael Culbert, another former republican prisoner from Belfast, also told the author: 'I initiated without any prompting a discussion within my wing of the H-blocks in 1991 about the prospects of the IRA calling a ceasefire', because of Brooke's statements and the subsequent public replies by republican leaders made it clear to prisoners that discussions were happening. Culbert was in favour of the pan-nationalist alliance strategy too, as he felt that the SDLP and Fianna Fáil 'were potential allies' as they wanted a united Ireland.[209] Other former republican prisoners report similar discussions. Ó hAdhmaill, for example, recalls from his prison experience that: '[t]here would have been people arguing for a political settlement in the jails in the late 1980s'. He continued:

> people were thinking…at that time … what was [armed struggle] actually achieving? How many people are we alienating from our own community? …. in the late 1980s…people like Adams were looking at the [republican campaign] rationally and thought how can we best progress our project. People like Hume … made it clearer…that you probably could advance your struggle more through unarmed struggle … Also, doors were opened. If doors had had been closed to republicans, that would have different.

Ó hAdhmaill admits that the republican movement was 'an alliance with…different ideas' and that not everybody agreed with the peace process.[210] Nevertheless, the views of Culbert, McKeown and Ó hAdhmaill show that there were discussions about ceasefires in the prisons in the late 1980s and 1990s, and that various republicans did support the peace process strategy.

In his book detailing the Maze prison experience during the 1980s and 1990s, McKeown records the views of other republican prisoners who recall debates about the peace process, and that the majority eventually agreed to the peace process. For McKeown, a lack

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[207] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 145-171, 207-214; see also Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (Belfast, 2001), 132-134, 147, 160-161.
[208] Laurence McKeown, interview with author, 16 May 2011.
[209] Michael Culbert, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012.
[210] Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, interview with author, Cork, 09 September 2013.

of opposition in the prisons was partly because prisoners 'retained close links with the leadership on the outside'.[211] Even republicans who believe that the grassroots' views were ignored, such as Mackie, do admit that there were 'meetings' about the peace process in the mid-1990s.[212] Moloney and Alonso also admit that there were 'controlled debates' within the prisons by the 1990s, so that the leadership could test their ceasefire proposal. Moloney also says that there were family meetings within republican areas shortly before the 1994 ceasefire. These debates meant that the republican leaders knew the general consensus towards a cessation.[213] In fact, the reason that it took so long for the ceasefire to be called in the 1990s was that the leaders could only move forward with the majority of the rank-and-file.[214] Jonathan Powell agrees that republican leaders moved in a 'crablike' fashion towards peace to ensure republican unity as much as possible.[215]

There were, of course, republicans who did feel betrayed by the peace agreement in 1998. Most of those against the subsequent Good Friday Agreement, however, did not disagree with political negotiations. It has already been noted that Hughes and Bradley agreed with negotiations to solve the conflict. Their disagreements with the Good Friday Agreement are its terms, which they felt did not solve republican grievances. But there are contradictions with their position. Bradley, for instance, argued that leadership could have kept the IRA strong, but also recognised that 'there's little support for starting [the IRA campaign] up again'. 'Guys who want to start it again', he argues, 'what are they going to do different from what we did and why do they think they'll do it any better?'.[216] More importantly, whilst dissenting views do exist, they do not represent the majority view within republicanism. In fact, one of the central difficulties with accepting the Alonso or Moloney analysis is that their accounts tend to base their opinions on interview material gathered from former IRA volunteers and Official IRA volunteers, who disagreed with the Provisional republican leadership's strategies.[217] Although Alonso did interview some republicans that supported the peace process, such as Danny Morrison, he is quick to dismiss their arguments, either

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[211] McKeown, *Out of Time,* 202-215, 227, 234.
[212] LHCMA, Endgame in Ireland 3/15, Typescript transcript of rolls 232-234 with Francie Mackie.
[213] Moloney, *Secret History,* 418; Alonso, *The IRA,* 145-146.
[214] Taylor, *Provos,* 355, 370-371.
[215] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 314.
[216] Bradley, *Insider,* 7-16, 192-199.
[217] Ian McBride, 'The Shadow of the Gunman: Irish Historians and the IRA', *Journal of Contemporary* History, 46 (3), (2011), 686-710 at 706.

because they are part of what he terms the leadership elite, or because he feels that their opinions were conditioned by the leadership.[218]

The influence of Sinn Féin informers and agents on the republican peace strategy

Following the exposure of Denis Donaldson as a British agent in 2005, an entirely different argument has appeared to suggest why republicans accepted the Good Friday Agreement. It involves the manipulation of grassroots republicans by Donaldson and other spies within Sinn Féin. Moloney, for example, implicitly suggests that Denis Donaldson was very influential in guiding the republican movement towards the peace process. According to Moloney, by 2002, Donaldson:

> was in the outer circle just beyond the Adams think tank, often charged with ensuring that leadership decisions were fully and properly enforced. His proximity to the inner circle was the reason for the widespread shock in the IRA and Sinn Féin since this *opened up the possibility that British intelligence not only knew about the Adams [peace] strategy but had helped to shape it.*[219]

Two former republican prisoners share Moloney's view. Anthony McIntyre claims that: 'Denis Donaldson was … [c]loser to the Sinn Féin leadership than…Stakeknife … Donaldson was never slow to berate those who dissented from the leadership'. In McIntyre's view, Donaldson enforced the leadership's peace process strategy, whilst exposing and pressurising dissenters.[220]

Tommy McKearney agrees that Donaldson was influential in ensuring that the IRA's armed campaign ended. Since Donaldson was one of 'leading members of the movement', McKearney argues, he 'undoubtedly inflicted considerable damage on the IRA and Sinn Féin'.[221] McKearney explained that Donaldson was an 'agent of influence':

> *agents of influence became very important in terms of steering IRA thinking in a direction that would be amenable to the British government's policy* ... [the British state] saw that there was a popular dimension to the IRA's insurgency. [Therefore] in the early 1980s...the British government decided that they had to have the IRA involved in [a political power-sharing] settlement.

McKearney believes that British intelligence aimed to promote politically-minded republicans within the movement to bring about a peace process from the 1980s. Donaldson and others could identify such individuals because they were 'close to the republican

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[218] Alonso, *The IRA,* 3-9, 66-69, 124-126, 130-134, 158-159.
[219] Moloney, *Secret History,* 580 (italics mine).
[220] *Irish News,* 'two masters', 17 December 2005.
[221] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142.

leadership', and could keep the British, 'reasonably well-informed of the thinking of the leadership of the senior IRA and Sinn Féin members'. In his view, 'agents of influence' would have been important in identifying opponents of the peace process to British intelligence, who, subsequently, could be removed. He hints at the removal of various East Tyrone IRA members as being an example. Ultimately, McKearney concludes:

> agents of influence...played a significant...role in persuading the IRA to follow a particular line. The important thing was to…make the IRA believe that…the Good Friday Agreement was not absolute and utter defeat … to present it as a very good bargain … The agents promoting this message would have been very influential.[222]

It is certainly plausible that Donaldson carried significant weight within the republican movement. He had, for example, been interned alongside republicans such as Bobby Sands during the 1970s.[223] In 1972, *An Phoblacht* praised Donaldson's 'republican spirit' whilst he was interned.[224] In particular, he was respected for helping to defend the Short Strand nationalist area from loyalist attack in 1970. In later years, he stood for Sinn Féin in the Westminster elections in 1983. Despite losing out, he was still highly regarded by republican leaders, as shown by the fact that he remained an important 'cog in the Sinn Féin machine' until late 2005. After 1998, he became Sinn Féin's office administrator at Stormont, where he would 'vet and discipline' electoral candidates, and aided negotiations with the IRA to disarm.[225]

Various sources also describe how Donaldson travelled to the US and beyond, canvassing support for the peace process in the late 1980s and 1990s. For example, McIntyre says that: '[e]arly in the peace process…[when Donaldson] was sent out to take charge of the party's New York operation, he began to undermine anyone thinking along traditional republican lines'.[226] Moloney agrees that during Donaldson's time in New York the latter helped remove IRA militarists. For instance, Donaldson allegedly undermined Martin Galvin, an Irish-American lawyer who ran the NORAID organization that funded IRA prisoners, for opposing the peace process. Galvin eventually quit the movement in 1994, allowing the US branch of Friends of Sinn Féin to form, which supported the peace process.[227] The previous

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[222] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 18 April 2011 (italics mine).
[223] Moloney, *Secret History,* 580.
[224] *An Phoblacht,* 'Prison Walls Cannot Conquer the Republican Spirit', 29 October 1972, p.5.
[225] *The Guardian,* 'Denis Donaldson', 6 April 2006; *The Telegraph,* 'Denis Donaldson', 6 April 2006; McKittrick in *The Independent,* 'The spy's tale', 6 April 2006.
[226] *Irish News,* 'two masters', 17 December 2005.
[227] Moloney, *Secret History,* 581-582.

chapter also detailed how Donaldson was involved in Sinn Féin work in the Middle East, where he may have interrupted arms supplies.

During my research, it also became clear that Donaldson was influential within republican ranks. One interviewee mentioned that Donaldson inspired young republicans in Belfast to join the Provisionals in the 1980s. Donaldson's republican background appealed to budding republicans.[228] No wonder *An Phoblacht* tried to reassure republicans after Donaldson's exposure that whilst it was disappointing, he was an exception.[229] But the revelations that Donaldson and others such as Roy McShane, a Belfast driver for Sinn Féin leaders exposed as an informer in 2008, left some republicans, such as Bradley, shocked. Feeney writes:

> Men and women like Bradley, who had given their lives to the IRA…were shocked, disgusted and depressed by these revelations. They had been risking their lives for years, confident in belief that the republican leadership, though they made mistakes, were immune from British influence … By the early years of this century, no one could be sure of any of that … It led many IRA members to question what they had been ordered to do during the campaign.[230]

Bradley's account demonstrate that revelations surrounding senior informers and agents after 2003 troubled some former volunteers.

The notion that British intelligence recruited informers and agents within Sinn Féin in order to remove opponents to the peace process has some support from other sources. Stephen Lambert from Derry, for instance, was already known to the security services after his time in jail before 1984. After release in 1984, Lambert worked for Sinn Féin. In 1988, he was approached on various occasions by a British intelligence officer to 'turn' informer, an offer he rejected and reported to Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin set him up as a double-agent, so that they could record and reveal British intelligence strategy. Lambert went as instructed to meet the intelligence officer, and was told that British intelligence wanted informers and agents to help remove those who opposed the peace strategy by 'discrediting and lifting'. Peter Taylor argues that the recording of the second meeting that Lambert had with the intelligence officer 'Steve', via a tape-recorder stuffed down his trousers and a microphone through his shirt, were identical to the first meeting notes Lambert made for Sinn Féin. Taylor has 'no doubt' that Lambert's account is 'genuine'.[231] Another example emerged in October 1998. Tony

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[228] Republican Activist one, interview with author, 21 May 2012.
[229] *An Phoblacht,* 'Donaldson admits role as British agents', 5 January 2005, p.3.
[230] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 7-9.
[231] See Lambert in Taylor, *Provos,* 291-297.

Deeney from Derry city admitted to *An Phoblacht* to being an agent for nine years, which partly involved infiltrating Sinn Féin and reporting attitudes towards the peace process.[232] Later, in August 1999, *An Phoblacht* reported that John McKeown from south Armagh had been working for British intelligence for ten years. Part of his role again included monitoring opinions towards the peace process held by local Sinn Féin activists.[233] These examples could support the idea that informers and agents within Sinn Féin were notifying British intelligence about dissenters to the peace process to set-up their 'removal'.

The majority of evidence currently at our disposal, however, contradicts the suggestion that 'agents of influence' within Sinn Féin played a significant role in persuading republicans to end the IRA's armed campaign. There is considerable evidence to suggest that Donaldson and other Sinn Féin informers had, at best, extremely limited access to the IRA. We have seen that the IRA was still continuing a fairly persistent campaign in Belfast, Armagh, Fermanagh and parts of England before 1994. In addition, the IRA received vast quantities of Libyan weapons successfully in the late 1980s. And despite SAS attacks in Tyrone, these were not repeated with the same regularity in Fermanagh or Armagh. These points support Brian Rowan's and Danny Morrison's assessment that '[Donaldson] was all about political espionage'.[234]

More importantly, current evidence strongly suggests that there was no clear British agenda of getting spies to remove those who might disagree with a peace process strategy within Sinn Féin. South Armagh republicans, for example, were not keen on the ceasefire and supported ending it in 1996 because of the lack of political talks. There was also growing opposition to further ceasefires in Belfast, Fermanagh and Tyrone in 1996.[235] Thus neither Donaldson nor other Sinn Féin spies had positioned pro-ceasefire personnel across the republican movement by the 1990s. Instead, there was clearly a debate between different sections of the IRA and Sinn Féin about a cessation. It was not a question of the leadership pushing each republican heartland into the peace process against their will. Adams and McGuinness, for example, repeatedly asked the British government to insist on demilitarisation in south Armagh after 1998.[236] Their actions show that Belfast and Derry city

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[232] *An Phoblacht,* 'Sinn Féin member admits he was informer', 8 October 1998, p.3.
[233] *An Phoblacht,* 'Informer Comes Forward', 19 August 1999
[234] Danny Morrison, interview with author, Belfast, 22 May 2012; Brian Rowan, 'Spy killing, a dirty war, and Denis Donaldson's death', 24 April 2012: http://eamonnmallie.com/2012/04/spy-killing-a-dirty-war-and-denis-donaldsons-death-by-brian-rowan/, <accessed 07 January 2013>.
[235] O'Brien, *Long War,* 277; Moloney, *Secret History,* 439; Harnden, *'Bandit Country'*, 410-411, 429-436.
[236] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 162-163, 176-177.

republicans could not simply manipulate or order rural republicans into the peace process without taking into account the latter's concerns and demands.[237] The reasons presented by some grassroots volunteers above for the IRA ending its campaign can also explain why many rural volunteers backed the peace process by 1998. Additional factors unique to each republican area included trust in local personalities promoting the peace process, the promise of demilitarisation, and the feeling that the IRA's campaign had made its point in their localities in preventing political, economic and social discrimination by unionists returning again.

The arrest of Danny Morrison, Sinn Féin director of publicity in 1990, raises further doubts about the idea that the British were using spies to manoeuvre republicans towards a ceasefire. Morrison was a key member of Sinn Féin in the 1980s, alongside Gerry Adams in Belfast.[238] For example, Morrison stood for Sinn Féin in European Elections against John Hume in 1984. He was also involved in the exploratory talks with the SDLP in 1988. Despite being 'initially pretty opposed' to these talks because he felt there were 'missing factors' that could lead to an understanding between Irish republicans and nationalists, his involvement displayed a willingness to consider alternatives to conflict.[239] Furthermore, Morrison later gave his support to the peace process as he felt that the IRA could achieve no more by the 1990s, despite being heavily armed.[240] Yet Morrison was allegedly set-up for arrest in 1990, and was held in Crumlin Road jail until 1995 because he was caught at the location where Alexander Lynch was being interrogated.[241] Lynch was allegedly being questioned by the IRA for informing at a house in Belfast. Harkin and Ingram say that Stakeknife informed the intelligence services about where the interrogation was taking place, so that they could raid the house. Morrison's conviction was later quashed.[242] Since supporters of the peace process where still being arrested, it does not appear that Sinn Féin informers were protecting those backing the peace process. A further example supporting this view includes when the British intelligence officer 'Steve' informed Stephen Lambert that they felt McGuinness was not going to lead republicans towards peace in 1988.[243] Yet McGuinness remained in position.

[237] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 13-14.
[238] Frampton, *Long March,* 14; Moloney, *Secret History,* 402-403.
[239] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 22 May 2012, Belfast.
[240] Morrison, *Then the Walls,* 287-292.
[241] See Statement of Offence in Morrison, *Then the Walls,* 11-12.
[242] Ingram and Harkin, *Stakeknife,* 136-159.
[243] Lambert in Taylor, *Provos,* 294.

Evidence provided elsewhere in this chapter also suggests that a majority of republicans were ready for an unarmed strategy and a political compromise by 1994 and again in 1997. Hence peace process opponents lacked support and did not cause a substantial split. Even McKearney admits:

> Ultimately…agents of influence can only take people where they want to go … It would be wrong…to suggest outright duplicity on the leadership's part … the vast majority of the membership remained content to accept the outcome.[244]

Donaldson does not appear to have provided detailed insights into the long-term strategic thinking of Sinn Féin leaders either. Danny Morrison suggested that Donaldson was outside the 'inner circle' of the republican leadership:

> [E]ven if Denis was privy to what was openly being said at a private meeting, the republican movement, being a revolutionary movement, would also have an inner revolutionary position which no one but the most trusted would know about ... This was one of the strengths of the struggle – the inability of the British or their informants to penetrate…the psyche of the leadership … That gap in knowledge meant the Brits never knew what really they were dealing with.[245]

Jonathan Powell's memoirs support this view. Powell recalls having to 'make a best guess as to the real bottom line of each side' in the peace process, including republicans. He also recalls republicans always demanding one final concession before talks closed. Powell's surprise at this tactic suggests that he lacked insight before the talks concerning what republican leaders would demand.[246] A former high-ranking British civil servant, who was engaged in the peace process in the 1990s, presents a similar assessment to Powell:

> we had through the long arduous years of the 1970s and 1980s, through the…intelligence agencies…an increasingly clear coverage. If something was done or said at an *Ard Fheis*…we would know the same day. *But what was harder to get was political intelligence. Because the republican leadership, essentially Adams, McGuinness…and others, were clearly reluctant to share very much with their own folk.*[247]

The above quote supplements Morrison's suggestion: that the republican leadership were a small, core-group whose long-term strategic vision was not known to those outside of their group, including behind-the-scenes personnel such as Donaldson. The analysis here can explain why the British government were so unsure about the intentions of the republican leadership even after 1998. Powell, for example, remembers that the British government even

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[244] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 143, 159.
[245] Danny Morrison, interview with author, 22 May 2012, Belfast.
[246] Powell, *Great Hated,* 162-163, 305.
[247] Former high-ranking British civil servant, interview with author, 25 March 2014 (italics mine).

commissioned work in early 1999 to plan for the IRA's campaign remerging, as devolution stalled over the issue of decommissioning.[248] What this suggests is that Donaldson could only report to the British what the Sinn Féin leaders were willing to disclose to the wider movement because he 'was not in the tight inner circle of Gerry Adams'.[249]

McIntyre suggests that Donaldson was exposed to protect other senior spies.[250] The previous chapter challenged this view because various high-profile IRA operations in the 1990s appear to indicate that leading republicans were not British spies. Evidence suggests that republican leaders felt that the movement could move towards their objectives much more quickly by ending the IRA's armed campaign. In the words of David McKittrick:

> Eventually [the republican leadership]...saw that they could keep on their Long-War, but there was no signs of it working ... Within this thought-process, maybe there were informers in the organization trying to confirm the IRA in that direction. *But when you look at the figureheads for the republican movement and the idea that informers were significantly planting ideas to move republicans towards non-violence, it does not seem to fit that the informers influenced these men ... The republican super-tanker was heading in a certain direction anyway. I do not think there was a cunning little guy in the engine room that was adjusting the direction.*[251]

Conclusion

The final chapter began by suggesting that whilst many factors influenced the SDLP and the Irish government to engage with Sinn Féin in the late 1980s, two primary factors were the most influential: Sinn Féin's ability to win a sizeable minority of the nationalist support in Northern Ireland; and the IRA's persistence in its military campaign. The second section identified that by the 1990s, continuing IRA violence, Sinn Féin's electoral mandate in Northern Ireland, and the pan-nationalist talks encouraged a change in British strategy towards trying to bring the Provisionals into a political settlement.[252] The British state realised that militant republicanism was too well-armed and supported to fade into obscurity. The pan-nationalist talks also hinted that republicans might compromise. The slight alteration in British strategy by the 1990s means that the term 'strategic defeat' is problematic. The IRA's 'armalite and ballot-box' strategy had not delivered all the concessions that they desired; but the British strategy of creating a 'middle-ground' settlement without the Provisionals had not succeeded either by the 1990s. Neither had majority-rule unionists

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[248] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 147-148.
[249] *The Independent,* 'The spy's tale', 6 April 2006; see also Rowan, 'Spy killing', 24 April 2012.
[250] *Irish News,* 'two masters', 17 December 2005.
[251] David McKittrick, interview with author, 19 April 2011, Belfast (italics mine).
[252] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 6-13.

achieved their aim. Instead, there was a strategic compromise by all sides because of the political and military stalemate that their leaders recognised; although a smaller electoral mandate meant that the Provisionals conceded more ground compared to many of their opponents.

As IRA activity continued, the British state reintroduced the 'dual-approach' strategy to try to end the conflict as soon as possible. They would try to persuade the Provisionals to end their military campaign via secret talks using intermediaries, alongside public speeches. At the same time, the security services would use intelligence to disrupt IRA activity and quickly force the organization into a permanent ceasefire. The previous chapter demonstrated that the IRA persisted in disrupting life across many parts of Northern Ireland by 1994. And despite some setbacks in south Armagh and England by July 1997, the second ceasefire did not emerge to any great extent because of British security or intelligence successes. Instead, the IRA's decision to end its military campaign can primarily be attributed to internal political factors in Ireland.[253] Certainly by 1983, the republican leadership realized that without sufficient electoral support they had to make greater political compromises in negotiations than they would have wanted. In order to maximise their strength in future negotiations, they began trying to find common ground with the more popular constitutional nationalists in the late 1980s. After the Downing Street Declaration in 1993 it was clear that no further concessions were forthcoming before a ceasefire. At the same time, other nationalists in Ireland and America were willing to help Sinn Féin enter any political negotiations provided a ceasefire emerged. For these reasons, the republican leadership called a ceasefire in August 1994. The time lapse between December 1993 and August 1994 can be attributed to the leadership checking that most Provisionals accepted a ceasefire.[254] The second ceasefire was called in July 1997 principally because the demand for decommissioning of weapons before talks was dropped by the new Labour and Fianna Fáil governments in July 1997.

The last two sections of chapter four were dedicated to evaluating two arguments: first, that the republican leadership orchestrated the peace process without widespread consent from grassroots republicans. The main evidence against this view is that a range of republicans recall discussions in the late 1980s or early 1990s in the prisons about the prospects for an unarmed strategy. The leadership also are said to have checked the views of

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[253] English, *Armed Struggle,* 306-315.
[254] O'Brien, *Long War,* 195-199, 318-324.

the grassroots shortly before the 1994 cessation. Most republicans interviewed did believe that the peace process strategy was sensible at the time in order to increase their political support. It is true that a minority of republicans had deep misgivings about the peace process. It also may be the case that '[t]here was no open discussion' of policy options, and that the leadership tended to make decisions and check for a consensus afterwards.[255] But the leadership *did* investigate whether a majority of republicans favoured their strategies in the prisons and at public meetings before the Good Friday Agreement.

Chapter four also countered the view that informers and agents within Sinn Féin, such as Donaldson, were crucial in leading to the Good Friday Agreement by promoting the peace process, and by helping British intelligence to identify and remove dissenters. This opinion does not explain why particular individuals in favour of the peace process were nevertheless arrested and imprisoned. There was also a widespread consensus to settle for a political compromise amongst republicans by the 1997, for reasons other than Donaldson's 'enforcement'. Since Donaldson was outside the group of leading republican strategists, he only fed to British intelligence what the republican leadership wanted the rest of the movement to know. Former British state personnel agree that they lacked insight into the long-term strategic plans of leading republicans such as Adams and McGuinness. Donaldson and other spies within Sinn Féin were primarily promoting a strategy that the majority of republicans saw as the best alternative way to achieve their objectives by the 1990s anyway.

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[255] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 159.

Conclusion

This thesis began by outlining the revelations concerning senior IRA and Sinn Féin spies that emerged after 2003, including the cases of Stakeknife and Donaldson. Extensive analysis reveals that neither they nor other suspected informers and agents influenced republican military or political strategy to any great extent across the conflict. Admittedly, it remains unclear whether Stakeknife and Donaldson will be the last senior republican informers to be unmasked. Republicans themselves have mixed views. Tommy McKearney is convinced 'that other, well-placed Crown agents will have their identities revealed in the course of time'.[1] Political opponents of the republican movement from the unionist camp agree. During a recent debate at Stormont on collusion in June 2015, Edwin Poots, a DUP minister, said that informers 'didn't end at…Scappaticci or Denis Donaldson'. 'I suspect', he continued, 'some of those high level informers could be in places of high authority even as we speak'.[2] In contrast, Republican Activist one commented:

> we've always been given this line, which I think is a myth at this stage, about…the one [informer] at the very top … The whole idea [is] that Scappaticci…or Denis Donaldson was thrown to the dogs in order to protect a higher source … It's almost like a John le Carré novel.[3]

It is possible that dissenting republicans such as McKearney and unionists could promote the idea of future revelations concerning senior IRA informers to try to discredit Sinn Féin.[4] But we cannot say with complete certainty that other senior spies will not be discovered. Having said that, I am confident that my arguments will withstand any future revelations, for reasons stated below.

This thesis has shown that the use of informers and agents against the IRA was one of the persistent features of British strategy towards republicans throughout the Troubles. Informers and agents enabled British security forces to gather greater detail on republican underground military activities, which was particularly vital after 1975 when Belfast and Derry city IRA became, in theory, more secretive by adopting a smaller cell-structure. More importantly, covert means of tackling the IRA helped prevent any repeats of events such as Bloody Sunday for British forces, by gathering specific intelligence from which to target the

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[1] McKearney, *Provisional IRA,* 142-143.
[2] BBC News, 'Collusion Debate', 15 June 2015: at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-33140147 <accessed 20 June 2015>.
[3] Republican Activist one, interview with author, 21 May 2012.
[4] Ron Dudai, 'Informers and the transition in Northern Ireland', in *British Journal of Criminology,* (2012), 32-54, at 41-46.

IRA and not innocent nationalists. Increased infiltration of the IRA was seen by the British state as one method which could reduce republican military activity over time to an 'acceptable level'. The British state believed that fulfilling this aim would produce a more peaceful atmosphere conducive to the creation of a political settlement between constitutional nationalists and unionists. This objective was followed by the British state between 1969 and June 1972, July 1972 and mid-1974, and between 1976 and 1989. Even when the British state sought a peace settlement including Sinn Féin, the intelligence campaign continued as part of a dual-approach strategy against republicanism. Alongside back-channel talks, it aimed to get republicans to promptly end their military campaign, as attempted between mid-1974 and 1975, and 1989 to 1998.

The majority of evidence, however, suggests that informers and agents did *not* influence the IRA or Sinn Féin towards ceasefires to any great extent during the conflict. By June 1972, the intelligence services had made very little progress against the IRA. The IRA's decision to ceasefire in 1972 was based primarily on their belief that they held the military advantage and that the British government might grant considerable concessions. As chapter two outlined, infiltration of the IRA did increase in Belfast by 1975. Nonetheless, the IRA remained resilient and expanded its activities elsewhere across Northern Ireland and even across England between June 1972 and 1975. Thus the IRA's prolonged cessation between late 1974 and 1975 was mainly motivated by British intermediaries hinting that the British state was considering a form of political withdrawal from Northern Ireland.

Current historiography has also overemphasised the role of informers and agents in influencing IRA cessations in 1994 and 1997. Despite at times suffering significant infiltration, the Belfast Brigade persisted in causing instability within Northern Ireland's capital between 1976 and 1994. They were partly aided by the cellular structure after 1975, which helped unearth some informers and agents over these years. However, the fear of damaging Sinn Féin's electoral prospects by using heavy weaponry or substantial bombs on a frequent basis that could have killed many civilians in the narrow city streets, tied the hands of the Belfast IRA to some extent between 1981 and 1998.[5] In Derry city, the IRA did experience some operational difficulties because of infiltration. But the dominance of the SDLP in that area and their decision to attract investment into the city meant that the Derry city Brigade could not afford the political fallout that might emerge if they recommended a

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[5] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 409-412; Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 161-165, 209-225, 237-239.

bombing campaign by the 1990s.[6] There is some evidence that suggests that largely rural IRA units in south Down and east Tyrone may have suffered from crippling infiltration by the 1990s, reducing their military activity. Yet in places such as south Armagh, Fermanagh and north Armagh, the IRA's campaign persisted into the 1990s. So deadly and secretive were the South Armagh IRA that they even spearheaded the IRA's high-profile bombing campaign in England during the 1990s. Informers and agents had little impact on the decision of many IRA units to cease their campaigns in 1994 and 1997.

Various factors contributed to the IRA's 1994 and 1997 ceasefire decisions. But the most important factor was that the IRA lacked a majority of support from nationalists across Ireland, which prompted republican leaders to search for a political compromise from at least 1983. Whilst continuing IRA activity and Sinn Féin's electoral mandate in Northern Ireland helped convince the SDLP, the Irish Government, and, eventually, the British government to search for a political solution involving republicans, the inability of Sinn Féin to win a majority of the nationalist vote convinced republican leaders that there was no more to gain from armed conflict. Once it became clear by 1994 that the British government would concede no more concessions before an IRA cessation, the republican leadership sought multi-party talks and tried to primarily use the pan-nationalist alliance to extract the maximum concessions possible towards fulfilling republican objectives.

In terms of British policy, it was the *failure* to reduce IRA support and activity to an 'acceptable', nuisance level throughout the conflict that led to the British state eventually opting to see if republicans would join a political compromise. The implication of this argument is that the peace process was *not* solely about the British state pushing and pulling republicans into the peace process.[7] In fact, and this is the crucial point, it was the Irish people who gradually encouraged the Provisional republican movement towards peace. They did so by not voting for Sinn Féin in large numbers before the 1990s, and, during the peace process years they did so by increasing their support for Sinn Féin when the movement headed towards a permanent cessation.

Another key theme present throughout this thesis is that many academic and journalistic accounts inaccurately suggest that if the Belfast IRA struggled with infiltration, the entire organization faced military decline. This dissertation presents three challenges to this view. The first is that whilst the Belfast Brigade did face military difficulties caused by

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[6] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites,* 255–63.
[7] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 2-13, 16-17.

informers and agents at times, particularly between 1973 and 1975, and again between 1980 and 1991, this did not prevent that brigade running a persistent low-level campaign. The IRA kept the city on high-alert by the 1990s, preventing normality returning. The cell-structure was crucial to the IRA's survival in Belfast after 1975, and has been underestimated in its usefulness in many academic studies. Furthermore, the decline in military activities in Belfast from the late 1970s was not solely a result of infiltration. More influential factors included the IRA's need to avoid numerous civilian casualties damaging Sinn Féin's electoral prospects, a risk that was ever-present in heavily populated city areas.[8]

The third challenge is that whilst Belfast struggled at times, many rural units and the IRA in England regularly caused financial and physical damage to the British state. Outside Newry and east Tyrone, the rural IRA was a persistent menace to the security forces and remained very difficult to infiltrate, for reasons including the ability of rural units to evade arrest in the Irish Republic, and because units such as the South Armagh IRA were risk averse. English units were also very secure partly because of the secretive nature of the IRA leadership meant that those they selected for English units were unknown to most volunteers. An important point for further research therefore is that we do not underestimate how vital rural units were to the IRA's campaign. In fact, this thesis proposes that many rural units were fundamental in driving the organization's military efforts by the 1990s. Rural units allowed the IRA to evade containment elsewhere, supplied materials and volunteers for the mainland attacks in the 1990s, and provided the space needed to inflict numerous casualties in single attacks against the security forces, making them a persistent threat to British forces. Investigating the course of the conflict outside of Belfast is essential. Ó Dochartaigh emphasized in his study of the origins of the conflict in Derry in 2005, that 'the simple presentation of local detail can…puncture general assumptions. It can completely disrupt the accepted chronology of events and subvert theories which supposedly apply to the whole'. Understanding the local nature of the struggle between the IRA and British state can 'fill in many of the gaps in our understanding'.[9] This thesis, by its unique 'presentation of local detail' outside Belfast, has 'punctured general assumptions' about the success of the intelligence war against the IRA.

Whilst investigating how the intelligence conflict differed across Northern Ireland, this research has also discovered some specific reasons as to why each IRA brigade accepted

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[8] Mulholland, 'Politics and Violence', 409-412; Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 161-165, 209-225, 237-239.
[9] Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 1-6.

the peace process. Many Provisionals in Derry city, for example, recognized that the movement faced declining electoral support if they attempted to reignite their bombing campaign in the city by the 1990s. Further research on local reasons for the acceptance (or the rejection) of the peace process by most republicans is important. In the words of Ó Dochartaigh:

> The [republican] movement was always heavily dependent on strongly localized networks from which it drew both material support and legitimacy. The national leadership was not in a position simply to command ground-level activists to pursue a course of action that they strongly opposed.[10]

Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated that leading republicans (including informers such as Donaldson) did not have unrestricted access to all IRA units, and could not command them to pursue particular strategies.

The importance of researchers not relying solely on IRA killing levels to judge the movement's military strength has been highlighted throughout this thesis. By overlooking the chronology of IRA activities that did not lead to a loss of life, but still inflicted injuries or financial damage, we risk underestimating the military strength of various IRA units. I have attempted to compare suspected levels of infiltration within the IRA to republican military activity levels in various areas throughout the conflict to check for any correlation. Following this methodology, it became clear that the impact of particular informers and agents such as Stakeknife has been overestimated in places such as Belfast in the 1990s. Furthermore, investigating the range of IRA activities across Ireland throughout the conflict is extremely useful to help us understand the intensity and type of conflict that emerged in different geographical areas.

The final theme emerging from the chapters is the need to interview a variety of republicans on topics such as the influence of informers and agents. The evidence suggests that it is *not* only leading Sinn Féin personnel who disagree that informers and agents had a major influence on the republican peace process strategy. A number of grassroots republicans still affiliated in some way to the Provisional movement, and even those who have left the movement, do not agree with the McIntyre view: that Stakeknife and other senior spies can help explain the IRA's peace process strategy.[11] The views of these unheard republican voices are convincing because they are supported by some former security force members,

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[10] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 13-14.
[11] McIntyre, 'How Stakeknife', 11 May 2013.

IRA spies, and Troubles commentators. True, a few dissenting republicans interviewed do believe that informers and agents were crucial in guiding the Provisionals towards the peace process. But there is not enough evidence available to support their view. Dudai suggests that for some dissenting republicans: 'this mode of representing informers might be a coping mechanism…[for]activists who cannot come to terms with the leadership's political changes'.[12] On the other hand, we should recognise that the sight of one-time republican mentors being outed as informers, such as Donaldson, has made some republicans doubt the very foundations of republican strategy from the 1980s.[13] Nonetheless, the majority of republicans accept that the weight of evidence does *not* point towards informers and agents having a significant impact on IRA military and political strategy during the Troubles.

The conclusions within this thesis contribute towards the debate concerning when is it right to 'talk to terrorists'. After studying the Northern Ireland and Basque conflicts, Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga believe that whilst governments will continue to 'talk to terrorists', talks must be conducted at particular points in the conflict that favour the state. They argue:

> there is a qualitative difference between talking to terrorists who are on the crest of a wave – in terms of propaganda, confidence and momentum – and talking to terrorists who have been made to realise that their aims are unattainable by violent means (but who have also, been induced to believe…that an alternative path might lead them towards these objectives).

In regards to Northern Ireland, they mention various factors permitting peace talks with paramilitaries to eventually succeed in the 1990s. These include a generational shift in the republican and British leadership, Sinn Féin's electoral difficulties, and the focus in peace talks on the democratic parties. Ultimately, however, they emphasise that:

> [b]y the late 1980s, the IRA had been heavily infiltrated by informers and it was subject to a successful strategy of containment by the British security services … the highly effective [intelligence war]…had a decisive impact on what occurred subsequently.

In their view, 'talking to terrorists' succeeded in bringing peace to Northern Ireland by 1998 primarily because the IRA faced increasing military decline as a result of British security and intelligence pressure.[14] By briefly evaluating whether it was 'right' for the British state to talk to the IRA during each of their prolonged cessations, it is possible to point out the inaccuracies in the above argument.

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[12] Dudai, 'Informers', 45-46.
[13] Bradley with Feeney, *Insider,* 7-16.
[14] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 248-259; Jonathan Powell, *Talking to Terrorists: How to End Armed Conflicts* (London, 2014), 23-24.

Bew and Frampton suggest that 'it is not always 'good to talk'' and that Whitelaw's dialogue with the IRA in 1972 enhanced the Provisionals' sense that increased violence would force British disengagement.[15] Jonathan Powell, however, who is in favour of always trying to 'talk to terrorists', makes a crucial observation:

> it is not obvious that the meeting [with the IRA in June 1972] itself provoked the renewed IRA campaign by indicating weakness. In fact the attacks were probably triggered by Whitelaw's tough line in making it clear that the IRA's demands were completely unacceptable.[16]

A major contributing factor to the failure to reach a settlement in 1972 was that Whitelaw provided no alternative political solutions to the Provisionals. In fact, Sinn Féin were not even legalised as a political party at this point, limiting the Provisionals' options to move out of conflict. Powell argues that a key purpose of 'talking to terrorists' must be to 'convince them that a peaceful political way forward exists', and that they are likely to achieve greater success towards their objectives through political means in the long-term. If no political alternatives are on offer, it is not surprising that armed groups will not permanently ceasefire, especially if they maintain a robust military capacity.[17]

As chapter one made clear, there were some within the Provisional movement who did recognise the 'mutually hurting military stalemate' was present, and saw the need for politicisation in 1972, even if some hardliners in the leadership rejected it. These two points (a mutually hurting stalemate and realisation of the need to politicise) are said by Powell to be vital for peace as they show that the paramilitaries could be convinced to accept a political alternative. From that point, Powell believes that the government should try and help the 'moderates' who recognise the need for political mandates. Powell also argues:

> Armed groups always start with unnegotiable demands. If they didn't, they wouldn't have resorted to violence in the first place. The point about talking to them is to persuade them to moderate their demands so that they abandon their initial claims and settle for something else that can meet their interests. The government offers them certain compromises that persuade them they can pursue their aims politically.

The problem in 1972 was that Whitelaw never recognised the need for further negotiations and the requirement to bolster the 'moderates' within the Provisionals in 1972 by providing an attractive political alternative.[18] In addition, by not engaging insurgent groups, governments can prolong violence because it sends out a message that force is the only way

[15] Cf. Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 40-42, 252-255.
[16] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 25-26.
[17] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 13, 25-26, 32-40, 94, 114, 124-125, 167, 201-202, 210, 214, 252-256, 278.
[18] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 24-25, 75, 104, 172-181, 201-202, 214, 252-256, 312, 347-349, 363.

to achieve political aims.[19] The fact that IRA activities increased after the British government refused to engage with the movement when they released their five-point peace plan in September 1971 adds weight to this view. Moreover, peace processes can take a long time, and often do not succeed at first. Hence the sooner negotiations begin, the sooner that common ground might emerge.[20] Thus the 1972 talks at least began the process of both sides learning each other's positions.

It is important to stress, though, that the ceasefire of June 1972 also failed because the IRA lacked a political mandate. Powell convincingly argues: '[w]hen groups do not make that transition from being primarily military to being primarily political, peace is not possible'.[21] It is difficult for armed groups to know exactly what would be acceptable to 'their community' without a political mandate directly pointing out the settlement terms that would be acceptable. A lack of a political mandate undoubtedly makes it easier for hardliners within a military movement to scuttle attempts at a political compromise too, since there is no political mandate from which to contradict their views.

Frampton and Bew believe that talks with the IRA in 1975 did not succeed partly because the British government was unclear about its bottom line, which they feel encouraged further IRA activity in the belief that the British were showing weakness. Furthermore, they suggest that by talking to paramilitaries the British government was ignoring constitutional parties, encouraging the paramilitaries to stick to their hard-line demands.[22] They are right to suggest that 'constructive ambiguity' over British policy during the 1975 ceasefire was eventually anything but 'constructive' in terms of finding political compromises. Powell accurately states that whilst ambiguity may aid both sides to move forward without getting weighed down in areas of disagreement, 'sooner or later it will become destructive'.[23] In particular, chapter two demonstrated that the Provisional republican leadership worked out that the British state wanted an IRA and loyalist agreement, but republican leaders thought that comments by British mediators about 'structures of disengagement' meant that there could be at least a private declaration of British intent to withdraw *before* an agreement with loyalists. When this declaration was not forthcoming, the

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[19] Mumford, *Covert Peacemaking,* 642-643;

[20] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 2, 30-32, 78, 94, 101-102, 178-181, 201-202, 214, 226, 252-255, 272-278, 347-350, 363.

[21] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 252-255.

[22] Bew, Frampton, Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists,* 49-62, 242-243.

[23] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 261-262.

IRA lost faith and gradually slipped back to its military campaign, with some Provisionals convinced that they had been tricked.

Other important factors encouraging peace-making identified by Jonathan Powell *were* present in 1975: constant dialogue, gestures of good will by the state and paramilitaries, the need to bring in the 'extremes' for a settlement (republicans and loyalists), and no preconditions for talks other than a ceasefire.[24] For example, in terms of gestures, the British government relocated the Price sisters from an English prison, and, at least until August 1975, the IRA largely adhered to its cessation.[25] The British government also offered the IRA the chance to politicise and encouraged them to stand in elections. It seems that the significant missing ingredient for peace at the time was again the lack of a republican political mandate. From a British perspective, a small republican electoral mandate may have made the IRA accept greater compromises. On the republican side, a strong political backing may have convinced the British government to grant greater concessions. Furthermore, chapter two argued that whilst suffering damaging infiltration in Belfast, the IRA elsewhere was persisting and causing disruptive violence in many parts of Northern Ireland and in England. Without a political mandate in this period, and with the IRA remaining a formidable force, republicans saw no reason to accept considerable concessions. Republicans did learn from 1975 and began to actively organize politically by the 1980s. In this way, the talks made the republican movement realize that they needed visible political support in order to extract concessions from the British state.[26] This point is crucial because it supports Powell's view that negotiating can eventually bring about the politicisation of paramilitary groups, which can help both armed groups and governments have more realistic expectations about what is achievable in peace talks.[27] In addition, dialogue in 1975 showed the Provisionals that democratic options were not closed, which, if had occurred, could have made the violence worse.[28]

The overriding argument of this thesis is that 'talking to terrorists' worked in the 1990s to bring about a peaceful settlement primarily because of Sinn Féin's electoral mandate. On the one hand, it enabled the British government to allow the smooth transition for republicans from conflict to full participation in politics because republicans already had

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[24] Powell, *Great Hatred,* 309-322; Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 194, 210, 231-232, 291.
[25] Taylor, *Provos,* 187-188.
[26] Ó Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 4-7.
[27] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 94, 101-104, 214, 226, 252-256.
[28] Mumford, 'Covert Peacemaking', 642-643.

an electoral mandate to justify their participation in elected institutions.[29] Sinn Féin's modest but consistent performance in Northern Ireland also underlined for the Irish and British governments, and also the SDLP and unionists, that the party was too sizeable a minority to be ignored in political solutions. Equally, the inability of Sinn Féin to win a majority of the nationalist vote across the island made the republican leadership realise that whilst they could bargain for the best possible peace terms with the pan-nationalist alliance, ultimately they lacked the political strength to force an agreement on their terms. Powell is therefore accurate to conclude that 'talking to terrorists' who have at least a significant minority of community support is right. Talks between republicans, the SDLP and the Irish government, but also republicans and the British government, undoubtedly helped to fully politicise Provisional republicanism by lowering their expectations about what was achievable during conflict. At the same time, talks were crucial in encouraging republican leaders to see what could be gained in the future by a purely political approach.[30] Indeed, the increased vote for Sinn Féin during and after the peace process justified to its leaders the compromises made. Of course, other factors were important in bringing about peace in the 1990s, including a military stalemate (albeit to varying degrees on each side). But the pivotal factor influencing many Provisional republicans towards peace was the realisation that they could achieve more through purely political means, in terms of increasing their support levels and prospects of bringing about a united Ireland. Republican leaders eventually realized that even if the IRA had successfully carried out more attacks including at Loughgall, the republican movement would *still* have lacked the political support necessary to bring about a united Ireland.

Debates surrounding IRA informers and agents are yet to be consigned to history in contemporary Northern Ireland. It has recently emerged, for instance, that the families of some people that Stakeknife allegedly killed as spies are taking legal action in order to discover whether the state colluded in the killings.[31] In addition, pressure from some families has seen the IRA apologise for killing some suspected spies because they now admit that these specific people were not actually informers or agents.[32] A few former spies also continue to publicise their grievances against British intelligence for allegedly failing to keep

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[29] O Dochartaigh, 'Longest Negotiation', 10.
[30] Powell, *Talking to Terrorists,* 94, 101-104, 172-181, 214, 226, 252-256; Powell, *Great Hatred,* 309-322.
[31] *The Guardian,* 'Families demand justice over IRA victims 'executed' as informers', 1 June 2015: at http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/01/families-justice-ira-victims-executed-as-informers-british-army-agent-stakeknife, <accessed 21 June 2015>.
[32] For example, see *An Phoblacht*, '15-year-old Bernard Teggert was not an informer', 6 August 2009: at http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/20457, <accessed 11 December 2013>.

their promises in regards to relocation, protection or financial rewards.[33] And the recent arrests of former Provisionals allegedly linked to the Jean McConville killing further demonstrates that the topic of IRA informers and agents still influences current affairs in Northern Ireland. The pattern of IRA campaigns being influenced by informers and agents continues too. For instance, leading dissident republican Michael McKevitt was jailed partly on the information David Rupert, an informer, in the Irish Republic in 2003.[34] The fact is that there will always be informers and agents in Ireland and other small-scale conflicts because the mixture of motives influencing a person to 'turn' did not disappear with the Provisional IRA.

In relation to the Provisional IRA and the Troubles, on an everyday operational level, informers and agents were important in preventing particular republican attacks. Yet the complexity of the IRA prevented them from containing the entire organization. Nonetheless, the Provisional IRA still could not win because they lacked substantial electoral support from the Irish people. In the words of Tommy McKearney: 'The insurgency doesn't pose a threat in terms of its high-level of security … [and] how well it can prevent infiltration … the threat is from how many people it can mobilise rapidly to impact upon the state'.[35]

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[33] For example, see *The Guardian,* 'IRA mole Martin McGartland to have case against MI5 heard in secret', 8 July 2014.
[34] Kevin Connolly, 'Body blow to the Real IRA', Wednesday 6 August 2003: at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3127355.stm, <accessed 03 June 2011>.
[35] Tommy McKearney, interview with author, Monaghan, Irish Republic, 23 May 2012.

Appendix one: IRA 'intended target' killings by year in various geographical areas where the IRA operated.

	Belfast	Derry city	South Armagh	Tyrone	Co. Derry	Armagh	Fermanagh	Newry	Down
1969	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1970	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
1971	32	5	3	2	0	2	1	0	0
1972	58	18	12	5	5	6	11	1	1
1973	24	9	14	13	1	7	3	0	1
1974	12	7	12	13	2	4	3	1	2
1975	2	3	14	5	1	3	1	0	0
1976	10	8	8	6	7	2	3	0	0
1977	16	5	2	11	4	3	3	0	1
1978	6	3	10	5	2	0	1	3	0
1979	18	2	28	12	0	4	5	1	0
1980	7	2	6	1	1	1	8	0	3
1981	11	2	8	8	2	4	3	3	2
1982	6	6	1	4	0	7	2	2	0
1983	6	3	2	9	1	3	0	2	5
1984	2	2	5	10	0	2	5	1	1
1985	2	2	14	3	1	2	3	11	3
1986	2	1	5	5	1	2	3	5	3
1987	10	4	1	3	1	0	3	0	3
1988	11	1	2	13	0	2	3	0	2
1989	3	1	4	4	4	2	2	0	3
1990	5	0	3	5	7	11	0	0	5
1991	9	0	2	1	2	6	2	0	0
1992	2	0	2	8	0	2	1	1	0
1993	1	1	8	4	0	2	0	0	0
1994	2	1	1	0	1	3	0	0	1

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2529, 2537, 2541, 2586, 2612, 2658, 2693, 2705, 2769, 2783, 2807, 2819, 2852, 2854-2855, 2858, 2864, 2868-2869, 2875, 2905, 2908-2909, 2922-2923, 2951, 2960, 2964, 2980, 2992, 2995, 3009, 3018, 3076, 3116, 3118-3119, 3140-3141, 3196, 3199, 3201-3202, 3210-3211, 3235, 3246-3247, 3329, 3344, 3376, 3458 and 3461.

For county Derry (excluding Derry city) see reference numbers: 414-416, 679, 712, 787, 1001, 1163, 1490, 1618, 1656, 1766, 1809-1810,1839, 1864, 1901, 1911-1912, 1975, 1987, 2012, 2211, 2328, 2365, 2591, 2707, 2787, 2830, 3022-3023, 3044, 3069, 3146-3151, 3166, 3234, 3249 and 3468.

For Derry city see reference numbers 145, 159, 160, 178, 228, 256, 270, 317, 331,332, 396, 403, 412, 421, 449, 562, 571, 593, 597, 609, 659, 685, 720, 733-734, 820, 829, 832, 880, 946, 967-968, 1000, 1004, 1037, 1070, 1213, 1233-1234, 1374, 1548-1549, 1587, 1703, 1746, 1761, 1838, 1845, 1848, 1857, 1879, 1881, 1888, 1910, 1916, 2005, 2026, 2043, 2207, 2107, 2250, 2271, 2291, 2394, 2416-2417, 2426, 2428, 2435, 2465, 2515, 2564, 2567, 2615, 2625, 2718, 2722, 2774, 2816-2818, 2831, 2924, 3016, 3369 and 3463.

For Down and Newry see reference numbers 271, 420, 977, 1215, 1216, 1240, 1883, 1983, 2049, 2057, 2165, 2202-2204, 2283, 2307, 2332, 2337,2368, 2410, 2437, 2511-2512, 2519, 2525, 2561-2562, 2575, 2599, 2617, 2681-2689, 2694, 2695, 2700, 2714, 2724, 2739, 2743, 2747, 2755, 2757, 2764-2766, 2821, 2829, 2848, 2906, 3004, 3079-3081,3101-3104, 3108 and 3308. (Newry deaths include all killings by the South Down IRA, who primarily operated in Newry).

For Fermanagh see reference numbers 118, 389, 390, 528, 529, 531, 564, 565, 602, 654, 674, 682, 867, 931, 936, 1066, 1068, 1277, 1302, 1680-1682, 1869, 1899, 1909, 2036, 2103-2104, 2106, 2169, 2171, 2201, 2215, 2218-2219, 2234, 2243, 2265, 2275, 2335, 2387, 2393, 2427, 2476, 2614, 2628, 2629, 2656, 2665, 2671, 2691, 2708, 2733-2734, 2758, 2794, 2822, 2863, 2925, 2962-2963, 3084-3085, 3172, 3198 and 3354.

For north Armagh see reference numbers 177, 185, 286, 407-409, 666, 695, 780, 810, 818, 918, 930, 945, 973, 1036, 1146, 1180, 1242, 1407, 1497, 1516, 1825, 1859, 1890, 1951, 1970, 2090, 2096, 2127-2128, 2223, 2286-2287, 2303, 2386, 2453, 2473-2475, 2478, 2488, 2509, 2520, 2559, 2577, 2613, 2633, 2673, 2675, 2728-2729, 2989, 3003, 3036, 3078, 3092, 3099, 3122-3124, 3132, 3159-3162, 3168, 3176, 3182, 3197, 3203-3205, 3318, 3355, 3373, 3400, 3475, 3480 and 3486.

For south Armagh see Harnden, *'Bandit Country',* 467-507.

For Tyrone see reference numbers 126, 211, 306, 365, 586, 588 and 696, 732, 746, 766, 801, 813, 836, 848-851, 865, 881, 905, 996, 999, 1024, 1042, 1067, 1083, 1140, 1178-1179, 1203, 1224-1225, 1229,1300, 1423, 1525, 1534-1535, 1672, 1676, 1689, 1696, 1828, 1855, 1895, 1897, 1905, 1924, 1933, 1938-1939, 1940, 1948, 1966, 1967, 1986, 2014, 2037, 2040, 2050, 2091, 2099, 2101-2102, 2116, 2118, 2175, 2187-2191, 2252, 2336, 2351, 2353-2354, 2363-2364, 2392, 2395, 2431, 2436, 2464, 2489, 2521, 2530, 2543-2546, 2555, 2565, 2576, 2598, 2610, 2620, 2627, 2632, 2639-2640, 2646, 2649, 2651, 2690, 2726-2727, 2731, 2740-2741, 2768, 2782, 2798, 2832, 2847, 2870, 2901, 2926-2927, 2961, 2972-2979, 2999, 3025, 3042, 3056, 3077, 3088, 3095, 3129, 3143, 3156, 3223, 3277-3284, 3377, 3393 and 3448-3449.

Appendix two: Seats won by Sinn Féin and the SDLP in district council elections between 1985 and 1997

Sinn Féin:

	1985	1989	1993	1997
Antrim	1		1	1
Armagh	1	1	1	3
Ballymoney	1			1
Belfast	7	8	10	13
Cookstown	4	2	2	5
Craigavon	2	1	2	2
Derry	5	5	5	8
Down	2			2
Dungannon	4	3	5	5
Fermanagh	8	4	3	5
Limavady	2	1	1	1
Lisburn	2	2	3	4
Magherafelt	4	3	4	5
Moyle	2	1	1	1
Newry and Mourne	5	4	5	8
Omagh	6	6	6	6
Strabane	3	2	2	4
Total	59	43	51	74

SDLP:

	1985	1989	1993	1997
Antrim	3	4	4	4
Ards				1
Armagh	7	8	9	7
Ballymena	1	1	2	3
Ballymoney	2	3	3	3
Banbridge	3	3	3	3
Belfast	6	8	9	7
Castlereagh				2
Coleraine	2	2	3	3
Cookstown	3	5	5	4
Craigavon	5	6	6	7
Derry	14	16	17	14
Down	10	12	13	12

Dungannon	5	5	4	4
Fermanagh	4	5	5	4
Larne				1
Limavady	4	6	7	7
Lisburn	2	3	3	2
Magherafelt	4	4	5	5
Moyle	4	4	3	3
Newry and Mourne	14	17	15	12
Newtownabbey		1	1	1
Omagh	5	6	5	6
Strabane	3	3	5	5
Total	101	121	127	120

See CAIN, 'Results of elections held in Northern Ireland since 1968': at
http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/elect.htm, <accessed 10 July 2015>.

Appendix three: Other suspected agents and informers killed by the IRA (in some cases the IRA has recently apologised for falsely accusing a person of informing).

John Joseph Kavanagh, reference number 50.
Terence Herdman, reference number 866.
Hugh Joseph Slater, reference number 1233.
Leonard Winston Cross, reference number 1234.
Kieran McCann, reference number 1590.
Patrick Joseph Smyth, reference number 1840.
John William Lawlor, reference number 1964.
Michael Kearney, reference number 2121.
Michael Madden, reference number 2237.
John Torbett, reference number 2403.
Seamus Morgan, reference number 2409.
Patrick Scott, reference number 2419.
Brian McNally, reference number 2641.
John Corcoran, reference number 2692.
Damien McCrory, reference number 2719.
Thomas Emmanuel Wilson, reference number 2856.
Eamonn Maguire, reference number 2871.
Anthony McKiernan, reference number 2903.
Thomas Oliver, reference number 3217.
Christopher Harte, reference number 3375.
Michael Martin Brown, reference number 3476.

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Danny Morrison, Belfast, 22 May 2012.

Danny Morrison, 20 January 2014.

David McKittrick, (prominent Northern Irish journalist and author), 19 April 2011, Belfast.

David McKittrick, Belfast, 22 May 2012.

Dr Féílim Ó hAdhmaill, (former republican prisoner, lecturer and author), Cork, 9 September 2013.

Former British Soldier one, 26 May 2011.

Former British Soldier one, 26 June 2012.

Former Fianna Fáil TD, 31 August 2013.

Former high-level British civil servant, 25 March 2014.

Former RUC Officers two and three, 20 April 2011.

Dr. Laurence McKeown, (former republican prisoner and author), 16 May 2011.

Laurence McKeown, Belfast, 22 May 2012

Laurence McKeown, 4 February 2014.

Martin McGartland, (former Special Branch agent), 4 September 2011.

Republican Activist one, 21 May 2012.

Séanna Walsh, (former republican prisoner), Belfast, 21 May 2012.

Sean O'Callaghan, (one-time Irish police informer), 12 July 2011.

Sinn Féin representative, 10 March 2011.

Tommy McKearney, (former republican prisoner), 18 April 2011, Monaghan, Irish Republic.

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