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7 A nasty victory: the importance of force in the British campaign against the Provisional IRA

With 1,822 deaths attributed to it, almost twice the number of ETA's deadly victims, the Provisional IRA is by far the most lethal terrorist group that Europe ever knew.¹ The group developed impressive operational capabilities and impressed experts with their ability to fabricate new weapons that would, if only temporarily, outwit the British security forces.² Furthermore, the group had so much support of the population that it managed to maintain strongholds that were effectively no-go areas for the British police and Army. In the early years of the Northern Ireland conflict, the Provisional IRA practically controlled several neighbourhoods in Belfast and Derry, but the most important, and enduring, stronghold was South Armagh, a region on the southern border with Ireland. Even after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, which in retrospect can be said to have put an end to the Troubles, British Army units were reluctant to enter what they called the Bandit Country. Another factor that contributed considerably to Provisional IRA's group's notoriety, was the group's ability to carry out 'out-of-area' operations. Its attacks were not limited to Northern Ireland, the six counties that the Provisionals wanted to become part of the Republic of Ireland. The group carried out several high profile attacks on the British mainland. The estimated damage of attacks in Manchester and London ran into the billions, and on one occasion, the group even came close to wiping out the British cabinet of Prime Minister John Major. Of all six terrorist actors examined in this dissertation, the Provisional IRA is probably the one with the most critical mass in terms of manpower, popular support, safe havens, financial resources and firepower.

¹ See the statistical summary in M. Sutton, *Bear in Mind These Dead ... An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993*, updated and revised edition, 2002 (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994) at <http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/book/index.html#append>.

² A.R. Oppenheimer, *IRA: The Bombs and the Bullets - a History of Deadly Ingenuity* (Dublin and Portland: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 199; M. Ranstorp and H. Brun, *Terrorism Learning and Innovation: Lessons from PIRA in Northern Ireland* (Stockholm: Swedish National Defence College, 2013), 10 and 25.

But what makes the British counterterrorism against the Provisional IRA an interesting case study for a comparative analysis of counterterrorism effectiveness is not only severity of the threat, but also the wide variety of measures that have been levelled against it. Almost all counterterrorism principles that have been identified in chapter 2 have at some point been applied by the British in an attempt to quell the Provisional IRA. But this does not mean that they were all effective. What is interesting about this case, widely hailed as a success story of dialogue and negotiation, is that the record of the hard line in British counterterrorism against the Provisional IRA is much better than that of the more accommodating strands. As will be explained in the second section of this chapter, the group suffered heavily from the application of the more kinetic counterterrorism principles, such as intelligence gathering and direct action.

A third reason why the fight of the British government against the Provisional IRA is a rewarding subject for any student of counterterrorism concerns the richness of the available source material. The literature on the Northern Ireland conflict, generated by scholars as well as journalists, is vast and diverse. In fact, there are few terrorist organisations whose inner workings have been exposed as thoroughly as those of the Provisional IRA. It is probably no exaggeration to say that our knowledge about terrorist group behaviour is based to a considerable degree on case studies about the Provisional IRA.³ Moreover, many members of the Provisional IRA, senior-level as well as rank-and-file,

³ Studies that generate general insights on terrorism on the basis of case studies of the Provisional IRA include M. Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movement*; D.K. Gupta, *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The Life Cycle of Birth, Growth, Transformation, and Demise* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2008); R.J. Art and L. Richardson, eds., *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007); Bjørgo and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism behind*; Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*; B.W. Mobley, *Terrorism and Counter-Intelligence: How Terrorist Groups Elude Detection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); K. Cragin et al., *Sharing the Dragon's Teeth: Terrorist Groups and the Exchange of New Technologies* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007); and B. A. Jackson et al., *Aptitude for Destruction II: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005).

have written memoirs or have been interviewed for TV-documentaries or academic research projects, as have some people who acted as moles inside the organisation. The British government, too, contributed to the wide array of sources, as it published a wide array of strategy papers, investigative reports and review documents. While the records of Cabinet meetings are not yet available for the entire duration of the conflict, the pillars of British counterterrorism during the Troubles, as the Northern Ireland conflict is also called, can be clearly discerned from the available source material.

7.1 The Provisional Republican Army

7.1.1 Origins

The Provisional IRA always asserted that their resistance against British rule in Ireland was part of a tradition that goes back to the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen, a group of nationalists who fought for Irish independence from the UK.⁴ While the Provisional IRA could claim this lineage with some justification, the group was spawned by a protest movement with demands that were very different from those of the Irish Republicans of the late eighteenth century. Theobald Wolfe Tone, the leader of the United Irishmen, took part of his inspiration from the French Revolution and Thomas Paine, and acted on Enlightenment ideals.⁵ The civil rights movement that eventually and inadvertently brought the Republican movement back to life, fought for causes that were altogether more prosaic.

The magnitude of the problem was later disputed and their situation was favourably compared to South Africa, but Catholics in Northern Ireland

⁴ T. Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2009), 32.

⁵ D. Dickson, D. Keogh, and K. Whelan, *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), 125; J. Smyth, "Wolfe Tone's Library: The United Irishmen and 'Enlightenment,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 425 and 430, doi:10.1353/ecs.2012.0023.

in the 1960s suffered several forms of discrimination.⁶ First of all, Catholics had much higher unemployment rates than Protestants, and Catholics who were employed often had unstable and menial jobs that paid poorly.⁷ Furthermore, Catholics were practically excluded from senior government jobs. There were Catholics who worked for the government, but they were significantly underrepresented in higher-ranking and better paid positions in the civil service and staff of administrative bodies.⁸ Another problem was housing. Many Catholic families found themselves crammed together in narrow and poorly constructed flats. As they were discriminated against in the allocation of public housing as well, they generally stood little chance at finding more appropriate accommodation.⁹ But there was also a more political dimension to the housing issue. Concentrating the Catholic part of the population in relatively small areas helped the local governments guarantee the position in power of Protestant political parties. Elections for local councils in Northern Ireland were held through a district system, and although Catholics outnumbered Protestants in some cities, like Derry, their elected representatives always found themselves in the minority.¹⁰ These were the problems that triggered the emergence of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, which was led by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). Inspired by the civil rights movement in the US, NICRA and its allies organised protest

⁶ For claims that Catholic discrimination has been exaggerated, see C. Hewitt, "Catholic Grievances, Catholic Nationalism and Violence in Northern Ireland during the Civil Rights Period: A Reconsideration," *The British Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 3 (1981): 364–369; R. Rose, *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 289; for a comparison with South Africa, see G. Gudgin, "Discrimination in Housing and Employment under the Stormont Administration," in *The Northern Ireland Question: Nationalism, Unionism and Partition*, ed. P.J. Roche and B. Barton (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 98–99.

⁷ J. Whyte, "How Much Discrimination Was There under the Unionist Regime, 1921–1968?," in *Contemporary Irish Studies*, ed. T. Gallagher and J. O'Connell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ D. McKittrick and D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 12 and 28; *Londonderry: One Man, No Vote* (Dungannon: The Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland, 1965), 5–6, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/pdfs/csj84.pdf>.

¹⁰ J. Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 30.

marches to claim equal rights. At this stage, in 1967 and 1968, participants in NICRA's protests did not have a Republican agenda, and merely wanted to redress the grievances of the Catholics.¹¹

Notwithstanding the relative modesty of these demands, Protestants were alarmed by the Catholics' newly-found assertiveness and organised counter demonstrations, which often ended in violent confrontations and rioting. Also, this period saw the emergence of the first Loyalist¹² vigilante groups. Afraid that the Protestants would be trampled underfoot by Catholic mobs, the Loyalists carried out attacks against Catholic civilians in an attempt to cower them back into subservience.¹³ Unsurprisingly, this only increased the level of violence. Another crucial factor in the escalation of protests was the performance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the B Specials, the RUC's elite unit. Dominated by Protestants, both forces reacted viciously to the protest marches. They beat up protesters, sprayed CS gas and used ammunition that was much too dangerous for use in densely populated cities like Belfast and Derry, where much of the rioting took place. This resulted in many casualties, and severely antagonised the Catholic population against the police.¹⁴ The response on the political level did not help much, either. Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, Terence O'Neill, tried to calm the situation down by introducing some reforms to the RUC and firing Protestant hard-liners from his cabinet. The Protestants took these measures as a sign

¹¹ T.P. Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 67.

¹² In the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict, the term 'Loyalism' is used as a label for the radical, militant version of unionism. Both strands wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Similarly, Republicanism is the radical, militant strand of nationalism. Both Republicans and nationalists wanted Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland.

¹³ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 65; Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace*, 333.

¹⁴ J. Cameron, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969), para. 179.

of betrayal, and O'Neill's measures only fed the polarisation on the streets.¹⁵

With the Catholic population under siege, there was a niche for an organisation that could provide protection, but in the early stages of the Troubles there was little to suggest that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) might take up such a role. The IRA scored its biggest success in 1922, when it took part in the War of Independence and forced the British to withdraw from Ireland, save the six counties that make up Northern Ireland.¹⁶ In the following decades, it waged some ill-fated campaigns to force the British out of Northern Ireland, but by the time of the Troubles the IRA was becoming a radical leftist political party rather than an armed insurgent group.¹⁷ The organisation was more interested in participating in elections and in forming a front with other radical leftist forces, than in physically protecting the Catholic population.¹⁸ The IRA's limited role during the initial phase of the Northern Ireland conflict even led some jesters to suggest that the group's name stood for 'I Ran Away'.¹⁹ This sense of humiliation bothered some in the IRA, for instance Martin Meehan, who later joined the Provisional IRA: "There was a terrible, terrible indictment on the republican movement at that stage, because people were saying IRA, I Ran Away, and there was a stigma attached to the Irish Republican Army."²⁰

Meehan and others in the IRA who wanted to throw themselves into the turmoil in a bid to protect the Catholics, were convinced that the IRA

¹⁵ S. Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders: Loyalists and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984), 49 and 65.

¹⁶ Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA*, 27.

¹⁷ R. English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 94 and 106.

¹⁸ J. Horgan and Max Taylor, "Proceedings of the Irish Republican Army General Army Convention, December 1969," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 4 (1997): 152.

¹⁹ J. Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1992), 675.

²⁰ P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part I: Born Again* (BBC, 1997), 12:01 – 12:11, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gua3WJKdoSg>.

would not return to the armed struggle. Therefore, they, a group of IRA veterans from Ireland and a group of young members from Northern Ireland, decided to leave the IRA to form a new organisation. The Irish veterans had experience in waging armed campaigns and could thus credibly claim the leadership of the new IRA branch.²¹ The younger generation accepted this, if only for the time being. The alliance would prove to be uneasy at times, but it did form the basis of incarnation of the IRA that was the nemesis of the British from 1970 until the group's decommissioning in 2005. The first meetings of the new IRA were dubbed 'provisional', on the assumption that more definite organisational structures would be set up at a later stage. The label 'Provisional' stuck, and after a while the group officially adopted the name 'Provisional IRA'.²² The IRA from which the Provisionals, or Provos, had broken away, then became known as the Official IRA. The 'Officials' sporadically carried out attacks against British security forces, but announced a permanent ceasefire in 1972.²³

Meanwhile, on the streets of Derry and Belfast, the RUC was so overwhelmed by the rioting that O'Neill decided to call in the British army. The Catholics, and even some later Provisional IRA members, welcomed the British soldiers, but it soon became clear that they were not the neutral mediators the Catholics had taken them for.²⁴ Like the RUC, the Army violently repressed demonstrations and protest marches, and quickly lost the sympathy they had when they first arrived. A particularly important incident was the Falls Road curfew of July 1970. In a desperate attempt to find those thought to be responsible for the violence and

²¹ A. Garfield, "PIRA Lessons Learned: A Model of Terrorist Leadership Succession," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 11, no. 2/3 (2002): 277–278.

²² Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 71.

²³ "Terrorist Organization Profile: Official IRA," *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*, accessed June 17, 2013, http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=3748.

²⁴ S.P. O'Doherty, *The Volunteer: A Former IRA Man's True Story* (New York: Strategic Book Publishing, 2008), 38–39; Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part I: Born Again*, 13:49 – 13:55.

rioting, British soldiers blocked and shut down the neighbourhood around Falls Road in Belfast to carry out house searches. Many people's houses and furniture were destroyed, and Catholic symbols were violated. Several civilians died in the ensuing skirmishes.²⁵ Some recent assessments of the Falls Road curfew downplay its importance as a turning point in the Troubles and put more emphasis on the weapons that were found and the intelligence that was gathered, but there is little doubt that it did much to alienate the Catholic population from the British Army.²⁶ It still stands out as one of the pivotal events that drew the Northern Ireland conflict's fault lines, which would remain unchanged throughout the next three decades. By 1970, less than two years into the Troubles, it had become clear that it would be the Provisional IRA against the police, the Army and the Loyalist militias.

7.1.2 Ideology

The leadership of the Provisional IRA in the first years after the organisation's founding were staunch, rural Catholics with traditional and conservative beliefs.²⁷ The IRA's radical leftist leanings were one of the reasons why they had formed their own organisation, and they had little sympathy for this line of politics. Sean MacStiofáin, born John Stephenson, the Provisional IRA's first Chief of Staff, expressed this disdain as follows: "The European communist parties were a ridiculous example for national revolutionaries, being completely dominated by another country, taking part in capitalist parliaments, and dodging the issues with half-hearted reformist programmes."²⁸ It was thus not only the political content, but also the methods of communist parties and their subordination to another country, the Soviet Union, that turned MacStiofáin against communism.

²⁵ K. Kelley, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland and the IRA* (Kerry: Brandon Book, 1982), 147.

²⁶ G. Warner, "The Falls Road Curfew Revisited," *Irish Studies Review* 14, no. 3 (2006): 326 and 337.

²⁷ Kelley, *The Longest War*, 127; R. White, *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 34–35.

²⁸ S. MacStiofáin, *Revolutionary in Ireland* (London: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975), 52.

Instead, he and the other Provos started out from a fairly simple notion: Ireland should be an independent nation, which meant that the British government had to give up all territorial claims on its former colony. In more concrete terms, the Provisional IRA posed five demands to the British: first, the British government should stop all violent activities against the Irish people; second, it should dissolve the Stormont parliament, the Northern Irish parliament to which the British Crown had delegated some of its powers; third, it should release all Irish prisoners; fourth, it should make damage payments to make up for centuries of colonial misrule; and, fifth, it should organise elections for a Northern Ireland parliament that would guide both parts of Ireland through the transition to a fully independent and united Ireland.²⁹ Everyone in the Provisional IRA agreed on these points, but views began to diverge when it came to the question as to what an independent Ireland would look like. The Irish leadership suggested a federal republic, with Ulster, i.e. Northern Ireland plus the three adjacent Irish counties as one of the four states. The Provos in Belfast rejected this plan, since they felt such an arrangement would give the Protestants an unduly dominant position.³⁰ After the Belfast-based part of the Provisional IRA had taken over the movement, the plan for a federal republic disappeared from the group's official statements.

Another shift that was associated with the rise of the Belfast faction, led by Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, later the public faces of the radical Republican party Sinn Féin, was the growing importance of socialism in the Provisional IRA's views. During the early to mid-1970s, many Belfast and Derry Provos were in jail, which gave them the opportunity to reflect on the nature of the armed struggle.³¹ The Long Kesh prison, where the Republican inmates were kept, was disparagingly labelled a 'university of terrorism', because it provided all reading materials and other facilities that were necessary for the Republican

²⁹ T.P. Coogan, *The IRA* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 375.

³⁰ L. Macfarlane, "The Right to Self-Determination in Ireland and the Justification of IRA Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 1 (1990): 37.

³¹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 182.

inmates' political education.³² From their studies and discussions, many Provisional IRA members drew the conclusion that their struggle was similar to that of, for instance, the ANC, the Vietcong and the PLO.³³ Also, the Provisionals outside the prisons began to target Irish businessmen to punish them for exploiting the Irish people.³⁴ In line with this practice, the 1979 edition of Sinn Féin's party programme *Eire Nua* (New Ireland) contained the following passage, a clear indication of radical leftist leanings: "[W]e believe that the present system of society is based upon the robbery of the working class and that capitalist property cannot exist without the plundering of labour; we desire to see capitalism abolished and a democratic system of common or public ownership erected in its stead. This democratic system, which is called socialism, will, we believe, come as a result of the continuous increase of power to the working class".³⁵ From this passage, however, it should not be concluded that the leftist views had entirely eclipsed the more traditionally Catholic views and values. The *Eire Nua* document was a compromise, and while radical leftist ideas had gained in importance, it is more accurate to see the two strands as co-existing within the Provisional IRA.³⁶ Units in Belfast were more open to socialist ideas, whereas units in more rural areas, like South Armagh, were more likely to stick to the conservative brand of Catholicism they grew up with.

A final element of the Provisional IRA's worldview that should be mentioned, is its sectarianism. Whether or not the Provisional IRA waged a sectarian campaign, in which it targeted Protestants because they were Protestants, is still a matter of scholarly debate.³⁷ IRA-spokespersons

³² K. Bloomfield, *A Tragedy or Errors: The Government and Misgovernment of Northern Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 37.

³³ R. Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle* (New York and Milton Park: Routledge, 2007), 24–26; G. Adams, *Free Ireland: Towards a Lasting Peace* (Dingle: Brandon, 1995), 129.

³⁴ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 184–185.

³⁵ *Eire Nua, the Sinn Féin Policy: The Social, Economic and Political Dimension* (Dublin: Sinn Féin, 1979), <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/sf/sinnfein79.htm>.

³⁶ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 188.

³⁷ R. W. White, "Provisional IRA Attacks on the UDR in Fermanagh and South Tyrone: Implications for the Study of Political Violence and Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political*

always denied they were fighting against Protestants as such and claimed they wanted to win them over to the Republican camp. For instance, Sinn Féin-man Mitchell McLoughlin once wrote about the Protestants in Northern Ireland: "We must convince them of the rightness of our cause and the benefits accruing to them from advocacy of our cause."³⁸ Furthermore, the majority of deadly IRA victims were either policemen or soldiers.³⁹ Regarding these victims, a case can be made that they were targeted because of the role they played in maintaining British rule in Ireland.

Against this, it has been argued that these targeting preferences constituted masked sectarianism. Many of the victims who were 'legitimate targets' were at the same time Protestants.⁴⁰ Also, to uphold its status as protector of the Catholic community, the Provisional IRA engaged in retaliatory attacks against the Protestant community.⁴¹ For instance, in the counties Armagh and Fermanagh, the Provisionals carried out attacks against Protestant retailers. The group's official reading was that such attacks would raise the costs of the occupation to the British Exchequer, but it is difficult to deny that, with actions like these, at least some of the Provisional IRA's violent actions had a decidedly sectarian undertone.⁴²

Violence 23, no. 3 (2011): 329–49; H. Patterson, "Sectarianism Revisited: The Provisional IRA Campaign in a Border Region of Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (2010): 337–53.

³⁸ M. McLoughlin, "Protestantism, Unionism and Loyalism," *The Starry Plough: The Theoretical Magazine of the Republican Struggle* 1/2 (1992): 13–16.

³⁹ B. O'Leary, "The IRA: Looking Back; Mission Accomplished?," in *Terror, Insurgency and the State: Ending Protracted Conflicts*, ed. M. Heiberg, J. Tirnan, and B. O'Leary (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 211.

⁴⁰ S. Bruce, "Victim Selection in Ethnic Conflict: Motives and Attitudes in Irish Republicanism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 1 (1997): 64.

⁴¹ A. Guelke, "Loyalist and Republican Perceptions of the Northern Ireland Conflict: The UDA and the Provisional IRA," in *Political Violence and Terror: Motifs and Motivations*, ed. P. Merkl (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), 106–107.

⁴² Patterson, "Sectarianism Revisited," 347.

Part of the explanation for the persistence of the scholarly debate on sectarianism in the IRA is perhaps that there is simply no unequivocal answer. Some Provos undoubtedly acted out of hatred against Protestants, but there were also those who protested the sectarian killings as an embarrassment to the Republican cause. For instance, in 1976, Brendan Hughes, the commander of the Provisional IRA's Belfast Brigade, signed a petition to the leadership to complain about the nature of the Provisionals' campaign, which was at the time being directed against Protestant citizens rather than against security forces.⁴³ The Provisional IRA's ambiguous stance towards the Protestants is another example of two contradictory tendencies that existed side by side within the organisation. The Provisional IRA, although held together by iron discipline, was by no means of one mind on several major strategic issues, including, as will become clear below, the ones that would eventually decide on the outcome of its campaign.

7.1.3 Organisational structure and culture

7.1.3.1 Command and control

For a clandestine organisation, the Provisional IRA reached a remarkable degree of organisation. From the very beginning, it had a strict hierarchy, an elaborate division of labour, and a decision-making process that was – considering the circumstances – surprisingly formalised. The ultimate authority in the Provisional IRA was the General Army Convention, which was supposed to meet every two years, but, given the difficulties of organising these meetings in secret, met much less frequently. At the Convention meetings, representatives of the rank-and-file voted on major strategic issues and elected the twelve-man strong Army Executive. The Executive in its turn elected the seven-man Army Council, the Provisional IRA's leadership and its most powerful body.⁴⁴ The Army Council was presided by the Chief of Staff, a position held by, among others, Sean

⁴³ E. Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010), 194.

⁴⁴ J. Horgan and M. Taylor, "The Provisional Irish Republican Army: Command and Functional Structure," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 3 (1997): 4.

MacStiofáin, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.⁴⁵ Under the Army Council functioned the General Head Quarters (GHQ), which had a separate department for each line of IRA activity, i.e. finance, security, intelligence, publicity, training education, logistics, operations, foreign operations, and engineering.⁴⁶

Particularly important for British counterterrorism efforts was the security department. This 'nutting squad', as it was ominously nicknamed, meted out the sentences for betrayal and other breaches of discipline, such as selling weapons for personal gain.⁴⁷ The department was known for its brutal punishments and frequent resort to kneecappings and the death penalty. According to Provisional IRA-defector Eamon Collins, himself once a member of the nutting squad, "IRA members feared the security branch more than any enemy unit."⁴⁸ Part of the security department's work was the evaluation of failed operations. Its intention was to find out whether the failures were deliberately caused by informers or infiltrators. The department was also in charge of the screenings of new members. With these responsibilities, the nutting squad knew all members and knew who had been involved in which operations. This made it a particularly interesting target for British infiltration efforts, a point we will return to later on.

⁴⁵ P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997), 66; B. O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (New York and Dublin: Syracuse University Press and The O'Brien Press, 1999), 109; P. Bishop and E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London: Corgi Books, 1988), 241 and 315. Martin McGuinness denied ever having been the Provisional IRA's Chief of Staff, and Gerry Adams denies ever having been a member of the Provisional IRA. See L. Clarke and K.M. Johnston, *Martin McGuinness: From Guns to Government* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 2001), 249; and G. Adams, *The Anthony Clare Interviews: Gerry Adams*, interview by A. Clare, August 6, 1995, 11:14 – 11:15, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CLWyGgU3xI>.

⁴⁶ B. A. Jackson, "Provisional Irish Republican Army," in *Aptitude for Destruction II: Case Studies of Organizational Learning in Five Terrorist Groups* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), 96.

⁴⁷ E. Collins and M. McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

7.1.3.2 Active Service Units

Below the GHQ were the units that carried out the actual operations. These units were part of either the Northern or the Southern Command. The Northern Command was responsible for operations in Northern Ireland and the five Irish counties that border on Northern Ireland. The Southern Command was in charge of operations in Ireland. With much of the action taking place in Northern Ireland, the Northern Command carried more weight within the movement.⁴⁹ Each of the two commands controlled a number of brigades and battalions, but this structure was reformed in the late 1970s in response to successful British infiltration attempts. The brigades and battalions were replaced with Active Service Units (ASUs), small cells of three to ten operatives. The ASUs knew nothing about operations carried out by other cells and had to operate in areas where their members were unknown. This organisational structure was introduced to make the organisation less vulnerable to British intelligence.⁵⁰ It should be noted, though, that not all Provisional IRA units adopted the ASU-structure. In rural border areas like South Armagh and Tyrone, for instance, the Brigade structure remained largely intact.⁵¹ Outside of the ASUs, there was a circle of Provisional IRA sympathisers in supporting roles, which are thought to have numbered into the low hundreds. Support to the IRA took many forms, from hiding and transporting weapons to signalling operatives on their way to carry out an attack that there were no security forces around.

7.1.3.3 Loyalty and discipline

The introduction of the ASUs coincided with the enforcement of more demanding rules of discipline, which were laid down in the *Green Book*, the Provisional IRA-manual to which members of the ASU were held. One of the cornerstones of the organisational discipline outlined in this document was secrecy. There was to be no more singing of Republican folk songs in well-known Republican pubs, and the Provisional IRA's

⁴⁹ Horgan and Taylor, "The Provisional Irish Republican Army," 8–9.

⁵⁰ Coogan, *The IRA*, 466.

⁵¹ Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 83.

operatives had to stay away from marches and parades.⁵² The *Green Book* also contributed to the political education of Provisional IRA members. Many Provos joined the organisation not primarily out of ideological commitment to Republicanism, but out of anger, or out of a desire to protect friends and family against Protestant or state violence.⁵³ As Brendan Hughes observed, “Most of us at the time did not have a great deal of ideology. It wasn’t until later that we really began to learn what Republicanism meant. We were motivated by the fact that Catholic homes and streets had been burned down, [that] Catholics had been forced out of their homes.”⁵⁴ With such a politically unsophisticated rank-and-file, the Army Council found it expedient to cultivate the history of armed resistance against British rule in Ireland.⁵⁵ In doing so, the Provisional IRA effectively created a culture of violence.

The group always claimed that the armed struggle was a necessary evil that was forced upon it by the British government. For instance, in their 1984 Easter Statement, the Provisionals claimed that the violent campaign “result[ed] from the inescapable fact that we are left with no peaceful or democratic alternative by which to achieve the national rights of our people”.⁵⁶ There is, however, more to the group’s use of violence than this seemingly utilitarian argument. Part of the political discipline introduced with the *Green Book*, was the cultivation of the Republican tradition. As Eamon Collins remembers it: “The IRA would trace their roots back through the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Fenians, Wolfe Tone and beyond, to the earliest times when Irish people had used violence to resist invaders. We had a whole mythology of resistance through violence. I would even tell my IRA comrades that the

⁵² Coogan, *The IRA*, 465 and 545; Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 65–66; K. Fulton, *Unsung Hero: How I Saved Dozens of Lives as a Secret Agent inside the IRA* (London: John Blake, 2008), 31; R. Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA* (London: Little & Brown, 1988), 100.

⁵³ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 38–43.

⁵⁴ Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 47.

⁵⁵ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 47–49.

⁵⁶ G. O’Boyle, “Bombings to Ballots: The Evolution of the Irish Republican Movement’s Conceptualisation of Democracy,” *Irish Political Studies* 26, no. 4 (2011): 601.

people who espoused political violence were Ireland's warrior class, the true aristocracy, regardless of their birth."⁵⁷

By stressing the history of the armed struggle in Ireland and the sacrifices that had been made in the distant as well as the recent past, the Provisional IRA not only lent a sense of heroism and prestige to the carrying out of terrorist attacks, but also created a certain path dependency.⁵⁸ An important reason to carry on the armed struggle, so the Provos were told, was that it would be unacceptable if the fallen movement members who had given their life to the cause would have done so to no avail.⁵⁹ In an IRA brochure published in 1973, this point was made quite explicitly: "It is the duty of all to ensure that the suffering and losses of families and friends of the dead, injured and jailed is not in vain."⁶⁰ Deviation from the norm of armed struggle, for instance in the form of suggesting the use of non-violent political instruments, was easily associated with betrayal.⁶¹

7.1.4 Support organisations

For a full understanding of the roles and instruments that were at the disposal of the Provisional IRA, mention should also be made of two branches that operated outside of the group, but were controlled by it: the Auxiliary and Sinn Féin.

7.1.4.1 The Auxiliary

Throughout the Troubles, the Provisional IRA attracted considerable numbers of new recruits, but not all of them were fit for service in the ASUs. Aspirant members who were thought to be unruly, mentally

⁵⁷ Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 208.

⁵⁸ J. Dingley, "Terrorist Strategy and Tactics," in *Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. J. Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 59.

⁵⁹ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 68.

⁶⁰ *Freedom Struggle by the Provisional IRA* (Dublin: Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, 1973), 9.

⁶¹ M. Von Tangen Page and M.L.R. Smith, "War by Other Means: The Problem of Political Control in Irish Republican Strategy," *Armed Forces & Society* 27, no. 1 (2000): 92.

unstable, or not yet ready for participation in real operations were placed in the Provisional IRA's Auxiliary. The Auxiliary units served several purposes. First, they were active in Republican neighbourhoods and carried out kneecappings and punishment beatings in order to put a stop to joy riding, drug dealing and other forms of crime. In doing so, they fulfilled a real need in poorly policed Republican areas, which were torn apart by drug use and where the Provisional IRA was for many people the only chance at getting at least a semblance of criminal justice.⁶² Thus, the Auxiliary's work served the purpose of ingratiating the Provisional IRA with the local population, but their actions could also cause resentment. Two infiltrators who later went public with their stories both recount how they decided to work with British intelligence out of anger with the Provisional IRA over punishment beatings and kneecappings against their friends and family.⁶³

The Provisional IRA also had more selfish reasons to deploy the Auxiliary, an important one being the maintenance of political discipline in Republican areas. Informers and others who were suspected of collaboration with the police were brutally beaten, kneecapped or, as in the case of Eamon Collins, murdered by members of the Auxiliary.⁶⁴ The Auxiliary was also used to keep potentially volatile elements in check. Some Republican sympathisers might be unfit for service in the ASUs, but barring them entirely from the organisation would create a risk that they might become involved in crime or become disgruntled and turn against the Provisional IRA.⁶⁵ This latter risk was particularly relevant for

⁶² A. Silke, "Rebel's Dilemma: The Changing Relationship between the IRA, Sinn Féin and Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 1 (1999): 81.

⁶³ Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA*, 38–39; M. McCartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking: The Heroic True Story of a British Secret Agent inside the IRA* (London: John Blake, 2009), 80–81.

⁶⁴ K. Sarma, "Defensive Propaganda and IRA Political Control in Republican Communities," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 12 (2007): 1079–1083.

⁶⁵ J. Horgan and M. Taylor, "Playing the 'green Card' – Financing the Provisional IRA: Part 2," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 2 (2003): 49; J. Horgan, "Militant Irish Republicanism: An Overview of the Historical and Strategic Development of the Provisional IRA," in *Pathways out of Terrorism and Insurgency: The Dynamics of Terrorist Violence and Peace Processes*, ed. L. Sergio Germani and D.D. Kaarthykeyan (Elgin, Slough and New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2005), 223–224.

Provisionals who returned from prison. They were known to the police and would constitute a security risk to an ASU, but cutting them out of the organisation entirely could easily lead to hard feelings.⁶⁶

While the Auxiliary thus served several functions for the Provisionals, its members were being frowned upon by the rest of the organisation. Sean O'Callaghan, a Provo who later became an informer, called them "the dregs of the organisation, people who aren't any good at anything else but beating people up".⁶⁷ Members of the Auxiliary were widely considered not good enough to become real operatives. Many in the Provisional IRA questioned the Auxiliary's professionalism, and not entirely without reason. Members of the Auxiliary frequently boasted about their ties to the Provisional IRA while openly brandishing their guns. They had a thuggish image, partially because, in their eagerness to prove their worth to the Provisional IRA, they resorted to violence very quickly.⁶⁸ Another reason for the reservations that many had about the Auxiliary was the grounds on which the latter selected their victims. The members of the Auxiliary sometimes attacked people for no clear reason, or to settle personal scores.⁶⁹ Afterwards they would accuse the victims of collaboration with British intelligence, usually by spreading flyers or spray painting slogans on walls.⁷⁰

7.1.4.2 Sinn Féin

While the Auxiliary was the Provisional IRA's ugly face, the group also had an instrument to convey a more respectable image. This was the political party Sinn Féin. Until 1981 Sinn Féin was little more than a mouthpiece of the Provisional IRA, responsible for issuing statements

⁶⁶ Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 81–84.

⁶⁷ Silke, "Rebel's Dilemma," 62.

⁶⁸ R. Monaghan, "'An Imperfect Peace': Paramilitary 'Punishments' in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 3 (2004): 443.

⁶⁹ McGartland, *Fifty Dead Man Walking*, 111.

⁷⁰ Sarma, "Defensive Propaganda and IRA Political Control in Republican Communities," 1082–1083.

explaining the group's terrorist attacks.⁷¹ The party became more important as a result of the hunger strikes by a group of incarcerated Provisional IRA members, who objected against the withdrawal of the 'special category status' for IRA-prisoners. Up until 1976 IRA prisoners were not required to wear prison uniforms and did not have to participate in prison labour. When this special status was withdrawn and incarcerated Provos received the same treatment as non-political prisoners, they started a series of protests, which culminated in the hunger strikes of 1981. When the hunger strikers started getting national attention, the Army Council decided to let Bobby Sands run for a Westminster seat in a by-election. Sands won, and after he died in the hunger strike, his seat was won by a Republican candidate who ran on Sands' behalf. These successes made clear that there was an electoral support base that the Provisional IRA could tap into.⁷² To make the most of this opportunity to demonstrate popular support for the armed struggle, the Army Council, pushed by Gerry Adams, decided in 1982 that Sinn Féin should participate in all elections.⁷³ Initially the party did not allow elected candidates to take their seats, as that would amount to a *de facto* recognition of British rule in Northern Ireland. Only three years later Sinn Féin dropped this abstentionist position and Gerry Adams became the first Sinn Féin MP in Westminster.⁷⁴

From then on, Sinn Féin became more and more important as a vehicle for Republican politics, as it was crucial for the mobilisation of community support and the formation of a pan-nationalist front with other parties who wanted to see Northern Ireland independent from the UK.⁷⁵ The Provisional IRA expressed this shift by labelling its two-pronged

⁷¹ I. McAllister, "'The Armalite and the Ballot Box': Sinn Féin's Electoral Strategy in Northern Ireland," *Electoral Studies* 23, no. 1 (2004): 126.

⁷² A. Richards, "Terrorist Groups and Political Fronts," in *Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. J. Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 84–85; B. Feeney, *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2002), 290–291.

⁷³ L. Weinberg, A. Pedazhur, and A. Perliger, *Political Parties and Terrorist Groups*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 132.

⁷⁴ Feeney, *Sinn Féin*, 331.

⁷⁵ Dingley, "Terrorist Strategy and Tactics," 64–65.

approach 'the Armalite and the ballot box – strategy'.⁷⁶ With its newly-gained prominence, Sinn Féin became more independent and more assertive vis-à-vis the Provisional IRA. As the party had to pay the electoral price for accidental civilian casualties or politically inexpedient attacks, it began to put demands on the way the armed struggle was waged.⁷⁷ Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin's leader, even became openly critical of some botched Provisional IRA operations in which innocent bystanders were killed. In response to some such attacks in 1988, he told the media he was "considerably annoyed", and "was unable to condone" the actions.⁷⁸ He also called on the Provisional IRA "to get its house in order", something that only six years earlier would have been impossible for a Sinn Féin leader to say.⁷⁹

Sinn Féin became more important over the years, and even reached the point where the threat of force by the Provisional IRA was used to back up the party's political demands.⁸⁰ But although this was a striking turning of the tables, Sinn Féin's dominance was never complete. Even at the pinnacle of the party's power, in the late nineties, the Army Council's political forays, which had to be carried out through Sinn Féin, always had to be explained as supportive of the armed struggle. The importance and prestige of the armed struggle even brought Adams and McGuinness to tell the militants in the organisation that Sinn Féin's peaceful posturing was insincere and was only intended to deceive the enemy about the movement's intentions.⁸¹ Many militant Provos who accepted this explanation and believed that the electoral approach was only temporary, felt betrayed at the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Belfast Provo Gerry Bradley, for instance, later said: "The best people joined the IRA

⁷⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, 224–225.

⁷⁷ P.R. Neumann, "The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Case of the IRA," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 6 (2005): 957.

⁷⁸ "SF Leader Refuses to Support Bomb Attack," *Irish News*, June 30, 1988; "Adams 'Shocked' by IRA Killing of Family," *Irish News*, August 1, 1988.

⁷⁹ "Provos Must Get Organised, Says Adams," *Irish News*, July 7, 1988.

⁸⁰ Richards, "Terrorist Groups and Political Fronts," 88.

⁸¹ Neumann, "The Bullet and the Ballot Box," 967–968.

and were IRA operators. Then they got pushed aside for people who never lifted a finger. (...) I just can't take in the betrayal – the way the leaders of the IRA actually pushed the IRA out of the way, for it was them who did it.”⁸² The role of the ballot box is another issue on which the Provisional IRA was internally divided, and the tension between the Armalite and the ballot box was never fully resolved. On this point, too, the Provisional IRA was far from a monolithic bloc.

7.1.5 Modus operandi

The Provisional IRA's violent campaign had a clearly defined goal: the constant stream of attacks was to undermine the will of the British government to stay in Northern Ireland. As an anonymous Provo told journalist Tim Pat Coogan in the mid-1980s: “Our aim is to create such psychological damage to the Brits that they'll withdraw, sick of the expense, the hassle, the coffins coming back to England. But we know that we can't defeat them in a military sense.”⁸³ The group was, in other words, waging a war of attrition. This was the strategy from the beginning, but in the first years of the armed struggle the Provisionals were more optimistic about the time it would take to fight the British to the breaking point. Until 1974 many in the movement believed that the British were about to give in, and that one big, final push would be enough to force them out.⁸⁴ Gradually, however, it became clear that the British would stand their ground. In response, the Provisional IRA adopted the 'Long War'-strategy. As was the case with many of the Provisional IRA's strategic reversals, Gerry Adams played a crucial role in the movement's adoption of this new approach.⁸⁵ He argued that the armed struggle would be a long-term project, for which a looser and more secretive organisational structure was needed. The strategy would still be

⁸² G. Bradley and B. Feeney, *Insider: Gerry Bradley's Life in the IRA* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2009), 334.

⁸³ Coogan, *The IRA*, 479.

⁸⁴ M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 111.

⁸⁵ P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part II: Second Front* (BBC, 1997), 08:51 – 10:11, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmjIXV9VZV4>.

one of inflicting as much casualties and financial and economic damage on the UK as possible.⁸⁶

By the time the 'Long War' strategy was adopted, the Provisional IRA had some partners it could rely on for weaponry, but this had not always been the case. When the Provisionals first started organising in August 1969, even before they became the Provisionals, they had few weapons beyond stones, petrol bombs and ten guns.⁸⁷ As this was clearly not enough to take on the British Army and the RUC, there was a desperate need to acquire weapons. The solution was found in the Irish diaspora in the US, which supplied the Provisional IRA with explosives and the Armalite, the gun that would become a symbol of the group's armed struggle. When the shipments of arms from the US started coming in, the Provisional IRA could launch its offensive.⁸⁸

Another problem in the early stages of the Provisionals' campaign was the lack of expertise. Many Provos had little experience in handling weapons of any kind, and had to learn how to use guns and explosives before they could be of any operational use to the organisation. Tommy McKearney, in 1981 one of the hunger strikers protesting the withdrawal of the special status of Provisional IRA-prisoners, later recalled how several Provos died by their own hands as a result of mistakes they made while trying to assemble explosives.⁸⁹ In 1973 the Provos lost 31 men this way, but the number dropped to seventeen in 1974 and to one or two in the second half of the 1970s, which suggests a steep learning curve.⁹⁰ The group's operational efficiency took a turn for the better as well. In 1970 it took the

⁸⁶ Kelley, *The Longest War*, 284; Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 156.

⁸⁷ Coogan, *The IRA*, 367.

⁸⁸ D. Byman, *Confronting Passive Sponsors of State Terrorism*, Analysis Paper (Washington, DC: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institute, 2005), 23.

⁸⁹ T. McKearney, *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 113.

⁹⁰ Jackson, "Provisional Irish Republican Army," 99.

Provisionals 191 attacks to kill one soldier, against eighteen in 1984.⁹¹ The group also learned to take into account the operating procedures of the British security forces. Brendan Hughes later related that, when carrying out a gun attack on an army patrol, he always aimed for the radio operator, as units whose radio operators were wounded or killed, would have difficulties calling for backup.⁹² The development of the Provos' operational expertise was made possible partially by the reluctance of the Irish police to put a stop to Provisional IRA activity on Irish territory. The Republic of Ireland was a safe haven where group members could train and practice, and where the group's explosives specialists could develop increasingly sophisticated remote-controlled explosives and automatic detonation mechanisms.⁹³

Provisional IRA violence often came in the form of shootings and bombings against the RUC, the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR, a reserve regiment of the British Army stationed in Northern Ireland) and other army units. Car bombs were often used as well. Each ASU was to specialise in a particular kind of operation, the four main categories being sniping, execution, bombing, and robbery.⁹⁴ Most attacks took place in Northern Ireland, but, acting on the belief that "one bomb in London is worth ten in Belfast", the organisation also tried to take the fight to the British mainland, especially London.⁹⁵ In the 1990s the Provisionals tried to disrupt the British capital by a constant stream of small explosives and false alarms in combination with so-called 'spectaculars', large-scale attacks that caused considerable damage. Examples of successfully executed spectaculars are the bombings of Bishopsgate in 1993 and the

⁹¹ A. Irwin and M. Mahoney, "The Military Response," in *Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. J. Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 211.

⁹² F. Martin, *Behind the Mask*, 1991, 6:54 – 7:30, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=CWp4YkRtffI>.

⁹³ B.A. Jackson, "Training for Urban Resistance: The Case of the Provisional Irish Republican Army," in *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes*, ed. J.J.F. Forest, vol. II (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 128–129.

⁹⁴ C.J.M. Drake, "The Provisional IRA: A Case Study," in *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*, ed. J. Horgan and K. Braddock (New York: Routledge, 2012), 177.

⁹⁵ *Notes for Revolutionaries* (Belfast: Republican Publications, 1983), 52.

Baltic Exchange in 1992. The former caused more than a billion pounds of damage, the latter some 800 million according to some accounts, and more than one billion according to others.⁹⁶ The intention was to impose economic and financial costs on the British government. These costs would not only result from the damage of the attacks and ensuing disruption of daily life, but also from the security measures the City of London had to take and which, so the IRA hoped, would undercut the city's status as financial centre of Europe.⁹⁷ In 1996, there were also plans to attack London's electricity grid, but they were thwarted before they could be executed.⁹⁸

Wherever Provisional IRA operations were carried out, the Army Council insisted that only 'legitimate targets' would be attacked. The *Green Book* stressed that operatives always had to make sure that it was clear why a certain target was attacked.⁹⁹ The Army Council tried to maintain consistency between the IRA's goals and its operations by directly ordering and sanctioning attacks.¹⁰⁰ It also made sure that the GHQ was in charge of weapons caches and intelligence flows.¹⁰¹ ASUs only received weapons and intelligence after an attack had been ordered or sanctioned, and operatives had to hand in their weapons after the operation had been carried out. The ASUs could make suggestions for operations, but were

⁹⁶ W.E. Schmidt, "1 Dead, 40 Hurt as a Blast Rips Central London," *New York Times*, April 25, 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/04/25/world/1-dead-40-hurt-as-a-blast-rips-central-london.html>; C. Wheal, "Baltic Exchange Injured Commemorated," *PostOnline*, April 2, 2012, <http://www.postonline.co.uk/post/news/2165376/baltic-exchange-injured-commemorated>; L. Richardson, "Britain and the IRA," in *Democracy and Counterterrorism: Lessons from the Past*, ed. R.J. Art and L. Richardson (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 71.

⁹⁷ P. Rogers, "Political Violence and Economic Targeting - Aspects of Provisional IRA Strategy, 1992-97," *Civil Wars* 3, no. 4 (2000): 8.

⁹⁸ T. Craig, "Sabotage! The Origins, Development and Impact of the IRA's Infrastructural Bombing Campaigns 1939-1997," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 3 (2010): 324-325.

⁹⁹ Coogan, *The IRA*, 552.

¹⁰⁰ G.J. Iardi, "IRA Operational Intelligence: The Heartbeat of the War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 334.

¹⁰¹ Cralley, Garfield, and Echeverria, *Understanding Terrorism*, III-31.

not supposed – and hardly able – to carry out attacks without permission from the Army Council, but this was no guarantee against mishaps.

The Provisional IRA did on occasion kill or wound people by accident. Sometimes operatives acted on flawed intelligence, sometimes they were held up after placing a bomb and were unable to call in warnings in time, and sometimes bombs exploded prematurely. Particularly risky was the use of set timers on detonation devices. It happened that operatives were delayed, or got lost in neighbourhoods they didn't know. In such cases, they were too late to call in a warning once the bomb was placed. Sometimes they were even forced to flee, leaving their bombs behind. When operations ended in such disarray, the operatives involved had little inkling as to the effect the explosion would have, and collateral damage was likely.¹⁰²

Operational failures of this kind could generate lots of bad publicity to the Provisional IRA. This happened in 1972 on the day that became known as Bloody Friday, when the Provisionals killed several innocent civilians in a string of bombings in downtown Belfast. When it became clear what damage the bombings had done, the Provos were reduced to accusing the authorities of deliberately ignoring the group's telephoned warnings and purposefully failing to clear the areas where the bombs had been placed.¹⁰³ Even years later, Sean MacStiofáin still claimed that the British government had not acted on the warnings because they had wanted to use the opportunity to discredit the Provisional IRA.¹⁰⁴ In the 1980s and 1990s, operational misfires like these caused considerable embarrassment to Sinn Féin, and particularly to Gerry Adams, who was trying to convince the British government of the movement's sincere desire for peace. Such incidents showed that the bullet and the ballot box were not always easily reconcilable.

¹⁰² Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 230; Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, 112–113.

¹⁰³ Coogan, *The IRA*, 384.

¹⁰⁴ "Bloody Friday: What Happened," *BBC*, July 16, 2002.

7.2 Counterterrorism principles and the Provisional IRA

7.2.1 Restraint in the use of force

At the beginning of the conflict, even before the Provisional IRA had been founded, the police in Northern Ireland antagonised the Catholic population with an overly violent and repressive response to the unrest. Due to the unfamiliarity of the operating environment and the lack of background knowledge on the Northern Ireland conflict, the Army initially made the same mistake. For instance, on 3 July 1970, British troops entered the neighbourhood around Falls Road in Belfast, looking for weapons. As many in the Falls district were ardent Republicans, the Army was met with ferocious resistance. After several hours of rioting, Ian Freeland, the military commander in charge of the operation, imposed a curfew, during which some 3,000 British soldiers aggressively carried out house searches.¹⁰⁵ Because of the force that was used, the property that was destroyed and the innocent civilians who were threatened and abused, this episode went down in Republican history as 'the Rape of the Falls'.¹⁰⁶

Then, in the early morning of 9 August 1971, the Army launched Operation Demetrius, a wave of violent house searches in Derry and Belfast aimed at the apprehension of members of the Provisional IRA. The action was an operational failure – the Provos had been tipped off and had left the areas¹⁰⁷ – as well as a political disaster. In the ensuing riots, twenty civilians were killed, of whom seventeen by British soldiers.¹⁰⁸ Another high-profile mishap occurred on Sunday 30 January 1972, when British troops, who later claimed they spotted protesters carrying nail

¹⁰⁵ A. Sanders and I.S. Wood, *Times of Troubles: Britain's War in Northern Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 26–27; Kelley, *The Longest War*, 147.

¹⁰⁶ For instance, in 2010, the West Belfast branch of Sinn Féin listed on its website a series of events to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Falls Road curfew, which was explicitly referred to as the 'Rape of the Falls'. See <http://www.westbelfastsinnfein.com/news/16916>.

¹⁰⁷ Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace*, 126.

¹⁰⁸ M. Sutton, "An Index of Death from the Conflict in Ireland," *Conflict Archive on the Internet*, accessed February 15, 2013, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/chron/1971.html>.

bombs, opened fire on a Catholic protest march, killing fourteen protesters.¹⁰⁹ Bloody Sunday, as this day is now called, has been the subject of various government investigations, the first of which – carried out by the Widgery Commission – largely exonerated the soldiers, and only added to the anger of the Catholics.¹¹⁰ The latest – and probably last – government report, released in 2010 by the Saville Commission, was decidedly more critical, stating that “there was a serious and widespread loss of fire discipline”.¹¹¹ Incidents like these cost the security forces the goodwill of the population, which sided *en masse* with the Provisional IRA. Many Catholics felt that the Provos were the only force on which they could count for protection. Furthermore, fear or a thirst for revenge were important factors in the motivation of new members who joined the Provisional IRA in the first years of the Troubles.

The large-scale actions that badly affected the population, like the Falls Road curfew and Operation Demetrius, were a thing of the past by 1974, but the use of force by the police and the military still mobilised part of the population against the Provisional IRA. Although a big blow for the Provisional IRA and an operational success for the British, the ambush at Loughgall, in which a crack unit of eight Provisional IRA operatives was killed by the RUC, badly affected the legitimacy of the British security forces. Amid accusations of a shoot-to-kill policy (see the section on ‘The rule of law’), the funerals of the operatives killed at Loughgall were attended by thousands of mourners who sympathised with the Republican cause.¹¹² The Loughgall ambush drew much attention because of the scale and the heavy blow it dealt the Provisional IRA, but there were more such incidents. The reputation of the security forces was badly tarnished by several smaller shooting incidents about which it later

¹⁰⁹ For the claims about the nail bombs, see J. Widgery, *Report of the Tribunal Appointed to Inquire into the Events on Sunday, 30 January 1972, Which Led to Loss of Life in Connection with the Procession in Londonderry on That Day* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1972), para. 37–39.

¹¹⁰ English, *Armed Struggle*, 153.

¹¹¹ M. Saville, W. Hoyt, and J. Toohey, *Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry Volume I* (Norwich: TSO, 2010), 99.

¹¹² Shanahan, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Morality of Terrorism*, 182.

turned out that the victims, all Provisional IRA operatives, were unarmed. These shootings were widely perceived as liquidations, because it was clear that the security forces had been lying in wait, and had shown no intention to make arrests. In some cases, there were eyewitness accounts detailing the RUC's behaviour, in others there was forensic evidence suggesting physical abuse of victims just after they had been shot.¹¹³ In addition, the military lost much credit as a result of the mistaken killings that occurred occasionally. The Provisionals benefited greatly from, for example, the death of John Boyle, a sixteen-year-old boy who told the police about a weapons cache he found in a graveyard. Two Special Air Service (SAS)-men decided to stake out the cache, and, mistaking him for a Provo, killed Boyle when he came back to see whether the weapons were still there.¹¹⁴

The security forces, especially the RUC, also used excessive force in their attempts to curb riots during the marching season. During the spring and the summer, both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland commemorate important events in the history of their respective communities by organising marches to a place or along a route of some historical significance. The performance of the RUC at such events clearly showed a bias against Catholic marchers, who, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, were often physically attacked and beaten, or shot at with rubber bullets. Scores of peaceful protesters got wounded during these confrontations, and several died from wounds inflicted by the RUC.¹¹⁵ The RUC's distaste of Catholics is also borne out by numbers about its use of ammunition. Of the 6,000 rubber bullets that were fired during the marching season of 1995, only 500 were aimed at

¹¹³ M. Elahi, *Human Rights in Northern Ireland: Amnesty International Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights* (Amnesty International USA, 1997), 2–3.

¹¹⁴ P. Taylor, *Brits, Part II: Shoot to Kill* (BBC, 2001), 09:23 – 13:23, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJ9V3iO-Kiw&list=UUrX8_6xNsOJrvMKyjH2CSfQ&index=8.

¹¹⁵ J.A. Hill, *Statement of Julia A. Hill* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997), 1–2; Elahi, *Human Rights in Northern Ireland: Amnesty International Testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights*, 5–6.

Protestants.¹¹⁶ With the RUC so clearly pitted against them, the Catholic population was open to the alternative policing efforts of the Provisional IRA Auxiliary, which further undermined the police force's legitimacy.¹¹⁷ Other, lower-intensity kinds of violence caused problems as well. Human Rights Watch noted in 1993 and 1994 that Army misconduct was widespread. As one of the organisation's reports claimed, "[c]hildren under 18 and adults are frequently stopped on the street, kicked, hit, insulted and abused by security forces."¹¹⁸ Both the army and the police used verbal and physical violence when engaging the Catholic population in Northern Ireland, which obviously did not do much for the government's reputation among potential Provisional IRA sympathisers.¹¹⁹

With these instances of excessive use of force, and the memories of events like Bloody Sunday and Operation Demetrius still fresh, the British campaign was littered with violations of the rule regarding restraint in the use of force. The Provisional IRA owed it to the excesses described above that Gerry Adams had some ground to claim that "the IRA exists and operates with the active consent of a sufficient number of people to finance, arm, clothe, feed, accommodate and transport IRA volunteers and in every way build up around them a voluntary political infrastructure".¹²⁰ The estimates of the numerical strength of the Provisional IRA often also include estimates of the support network that the group had at its disposal. Like the numbers of active Provos, the size of the group's support network is not estimated to have declined. During the period 1979-1998 the Provisional IRA had by most accounts several hundreds to a thousand people ready to help them wage the armed struggle. Furthermore, even at the end of the conflict, there were still

¹¹⁶ Coogan, *The IRA*, 689.

¹¹⁷ Hill, *Statement of Julia A. Hill*, 3.

¹¹⁸ L. Whitman, *Northern Ireland: Continued Abuses by All Sides*, Helsinki Watch (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994), 7.

¹¹⁹ L. Whitman, *Northern Ireland: Human Rights Abuses on All Sides*, Helsinki Watch (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993), 5.

¹²⁰ Adams, *Free Ireland*, 61.

areas, like South Armagh, and several neighbourhoods in Belfast and Derry, with a reputation for being Republican strongholds. These were also the areas where the policing by the Auxiliary was the most salient. It was here that the Provisionals had their safe houses, could store their weapons and select their recruits. Given the tenacity of the support infrastructure, we can conclude that the insufficiently restrained use of force kept the support for the Provisional IRA alive. The group may not have regained the massive support of the early years of the armed struggle, but retained enough to keep its campaign going. Excessive force was one important factor, another was the disregard for their own rules that the British regularly displayed.

7.2.2 Rule of law

The British government made a point of conveying the impression that extraordinary measures were not needed to fight the Provisional IRA (see also the section on counter narratives), but in practice took many actions that were clearly beyond what was normal and legally permissible in the maintenance of public order. Throughout the conflict, both the RUC and the Army frequently violated the rules and regulations that were supposed to govern their campaign against the Provisional IRA, thus sustaining the latter's support base.

For one, the RUC was allowed to detain suspects for seven days before having to charge them with a concrete criminal offence. The RUC freely used this pre-charge detention to gather intelligence, and often arrested people not with the intention of charging them, but only to extract information from them. This was not only misuse of the right to arrest suspects went against the European Convention of Human Rights, which states that suspects have to be brought before a judge as soon as possible. Holding suspects for more than four days and six hours, a considerably shorter period of time than the seven days allowed in the Prevention of Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Act, constitutes a derogation.¹²¹

¹²¹ Whitman, *Northern Ireland: Human Rights Abuses on All Sides*, 6.

The rule of law was also undermined by what happened during the seven day-detention of Provisional IRA members or sympathisers. In the early seventies many accusations of torture were levelled against the RUC and the Army. Most of the criticism was aimed at what became known as 'the five techniques': wall-standing (detainees were made to lean with stretched arms against a wall for long periods of time), hooding, sleep deprivation, subjection to noise, and deprivation of food and drink. The British government set up a commission to look into the matter. In 1972 the commission presented its report and concluded that there was no reason to ban or morally disapprove of the way information was being extracted from internees.¹²² But this did not put the matter to bed. Although both shied away from branding the application of the five techniques as torture, both Amnesty International and the European Court of Human Rights condemned the way the detainees were treated. Research by Amnesty International showed that prisoners were physically abused, whereas the European Court for Human Rights called the treatment of detainees "inhuman and degrading".¹²³ Finally, another government report noted that the numbers of complaints about the treatment of detainees were increasing, and that no one was held accountable.¹²⁴

In spite of these indictments of the ways detainees were treated, heavy-handed interrogation did not abate. In the early 1990s Human Rights Watch wrote that "adults and children under 18 were threatened, tricked, insulted and on occasion physically abused by police during interrogation."¹²⁵ Also, many detainees were not allowed to contact their

¹²² H. Parker, *Report of the Commission of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorised Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972), 7.

¹²³ *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Northern Ireland (28 November 1977 - 6 December 1977)* (Amnesty International, 1978); Coogan, *The IRA*, 483.

¹²⁴ H.G. Bennett, J. Haughton, and J. Marshall, *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Police Interrogation Procedures in Northern Ireland* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1979), para. 338-339.

¹²⁵ Whitman, *Northern Ireland: Human Rights Abuses on All Sides*, 5.

lawyers, even though they were entitled to legal representation.¹²⁶ When detainees were granted contact with their lawyers, the latter were often harassed and intimidated by RUC officers, a practice that was strongly criticised by the UN.¹²⁷

Another way in which the British chipped away at the rule of law was the manipulation of evidence in court cases. On several occasions evidence was fabricated or withheld in order to secure convictions. Practices like these led to travesties of justice, like the six innocent men who spent more than a decade in jail for the bombing of a pub in Birmingham in 1974. Evidence was also withheld in the case of the Guildford Four, who were falsely convicted for the bombing of a pub in Guildford, a town southeast of London. Three of the four men had alibis, but their witnesses were not called on during the trial. Also, it later turned out that the notes of the interrogations had been edited or even completely made up to make a conviction for terrorist offences more likely.¹²⁸ A similar case concerned the Ballymurphy Seven, a group of boys and young men who had been arrested, five in 1991, two others in 1992, on suspicion of involvement in IRA attacks. They were charged with murder, but were released because the prosecution withheld evidence from the defendants, and because police interrogators had used physical force to get the suspects to sign false confessions.¹²⁹

Yet another cluster of illegal activities on the part of the security forces is usually referred to as collusion. Several Provos remember threats from the RUC that they would pass on their name, picture and address to Loyalist militias.¹³⁰ While one can discard this as mere bluff or intimidation, there

¹²⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁷ Ibid.; Whitman, *Northern Ireland: Continued Abuses by All Sides*, 7–8.

¹²⁸ R. Holt, "The Guildford Four: In the Name of Justice," *Telegraph*, June 4, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/7795117/The-Guildford-Four-in-the-name-of-justice.html>.

¹²⁹ C. Walker and K. Starmer, *Miscarriages of Justice: A Review of Justice in Error* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 299; "Bid to Halt 'Ballymurphy 7' Fails," *BBC News*, June 1, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-18292514>.

¹³⁰ Fulton, *Unsung Hero*, 109; O'Doherty, *The Volunteer*, 102.

are several known instances in which security forces passed on intelligence to Loyalist militias.¹³¹ Also, in January 1988 the UDR turned a blind eye on an arms delivery to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), the most prominent of the Protestant militias. The delivery could have been intercepted, but the UDR chose not to do so to protect an informer, who later turned out to know very little about the operation.¹³² Similarly, there was a certain laxity among the security forces to act on intelligence about impending Loyalist operations. As we will see below, one of the cornerstones of the success of the British campaign against the Provisional IRA was the ability of British intelligence to uncover and disrupt the group's terrorist plots. Information about plans for Loyalist attacks was not treated with the same sense of urgency. In several cases, the RUC allowed murder plans to be carried out, or later consciously failed to follow up on clues or information that could lead them to the perpetrators.¹³³ Even more serious cases concerned active participation of members of the security forces in Loyalist bombings and in the killing of known Republican sympathisers.¹³⁴

What goes for all forms of collusion is that it is doubtful whether they were structural, that is, whether they were part of a secret policy of the Army or the RUC. Rather, it appears that such practices were the result of personal overlap between security forces and loyalist militias. As early as 1973, a secret British intelligence report noted that "a fair number of UDR soldiers have been discovered to hold positions in the UDA/UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force, TvD]".¹³⁵ The incidents described above demonstrate

¹³¹ J. Stevens, *Stevens Inquiry 3: Overview and Recommendations* (London: Metropolitan Police Service, 2003), 10.

¹³² *Pat Finucane Review: An Independent Review into Any State Involvement in the Murder of Pat Finucane*, 2012, para. 6.44, <http://www.patfinucanereview.org/report/index.html>.

¹³³ Stevens, *Stevens Inquiry 3*, 16; Richardson, "Britain and the IRA," 88–89.

¹³⁴ *Final Report on the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Bombing of Kay's Tavern, Dundalk* (Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights, 2006), 23; *Final Report on the Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Murder of Seamus Ludlow* (Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence & Women's Rights, 2006), 51.

¹³⁵ "Subversion in the UDR," 13, accessed February 14, 2013, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/publicrecords/1973/subversion_in_the_udr.pdf.

that this problem remained unsolved until long after this report was drawn up, making collusion one of the major sources of distrust towards the British government during and even after the Troubles.

Finally, there were several forms of violence actively perpetrated by the security forces that amounted to breaches of the law. The most dramatic of these were the incidents that gave rise to suspicions that the Army was secretly working according to a shoot-to-kill policy. The killing of three unarmed Provisional IRA operatives at Gibraltar (see the section on law enforcement and direct action), was one such incident. The European Court for Human Rights ruled that the right to life had not been adequately protected, and that the incident amounted to a liquidation, not to an escalated attempt to arrest the three victims.¹³⁶ The Loughgall ambush, too, fed suspicions that the security forces were shooting to kill, and not to arrest. These concerns were only aggravated by the British unwillingness to carry out an investigation to clear up the circumstances under which the eight victims had died.¹³⁷ The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2001 that this amounted to a violation of the operatives' human rights and ordered the UK to pay £10,000 in compensation to the families of each of the victims.¹³⁸

The effects of the violations of their own laws by the British are hard to separate from the effects of the lack of restraint in the use of force. Probably the most important element to the illegitimate or illegal activities listed in this section was the partiality they suggested. The harsh interrogations, the ties between the security forces and the Protestant militias and the tampering with evidence used in criminal cases all gave

¹³⁶ B. Dickson, "Counter-Insurgency and Human Rights in Northern Ireland," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009): 489.

¹³⁷ In 2011, the Police Service of Northern Ireland's Historical Enquiry Team (HET) concluded that the Provisional IRA unit had opened fire before the SAS and could not have been stopped in another way. According to the HET, the SAS unit had not violated the rights of the eight victims. See "Report Says IRA Opened Fire First in 1987 Loughgall Attack," *BBC News*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-15998043>.

¹³⁸ "UK Condemned over IRA Deaths," *BBC News*, May 4, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1311724.stm.

the impression that British counterterrorism was not about bringing stability and justice to Northern Ireland, but about securing the position of the Protestants. On some occasions, such as the ones described in the previous sections, the security forces clearly acted as if they were a side in the conflict, which obviously fuelled the mistrust of parts of the Catholic population towards the state.

7.2.3 Law enforcement and direct action

Although it can be argued that the performance of the police and the army resulted in ongoing support for the Provisional IRA, they were also instrumental in the containment of the group and the limitation of the Provisionals' operational capabilities. They were crucial for the creation of the strategic context in which the Provisional IRA had no way out of the conflict except through negotiations or defeat. It is true that repressive measures by the police and army only exacerbated the conflict in the early years, but the British army started making headway in July 1972, when they carried out Operation Motorman. Frustrated over the pockets of Republican resistance in which the Provisional IRA could thrive, the British Army drove bulldozers into the no-go areas to remove the barriers that had kept the security forces at bay.¹³⁹ After several years of escalation and setbacks, Operation Motorman was a welcome success in more than one way. First, British troops re-established the dominance of the security forces in areas that for years had been out of the reach of the police. During the first years of the Troubles, Republican citizens in neighbourhoods like Free Derry, a self-proclaimed Republican zone in Derry, had thrown up barricades and had organised citizen patrols to keep out the RUC.¹⁴⁰ These urban Republican strongholds were now again within the grasp of the law.¹⁴¹ Second, British troops managed open up the no-go areas without causing many civilian casualties. There were civilian deaths, but overall Operation Motorman was carried out with

¹³⁹ *Operation Banner: An Analysis of Military Operations in Northern Ireland* (Chief of the General Staff, 2006), 2–9.

¹⁴⁰ "1,500 Arm to Defend Their Area," *Irish Times*, January 6, 1969.

¹⁴¹ M.L.R. Smith and P.R. Neumann, "Motorman's Long Journey: Changing the Strategic Setting in Northern Ireland," *Contemporary British History* 19, no. 4 (2005): 425–426.

much greater restraint than Operation Demetrius, and did not generate the same amount of negative publicity for the British.¹⁴² Third, due to the hundreds of arrests that were made during Operation Motorman, the British now began to learn more about the Provisional IRA.¹⁴³ Making full use of the newly acquired intelligence, the security forces manage to seize the initiative. In the period from May to December 1973, no less than 1,798 Provos were arrested, including 39 men from the GHQ.¹⁴⁴ The pressure on the Provisional IRA did not let off, and by 1974 the group was close to being defeated. During the ceasefire of 1975 (see the section on 'Offering non-violent alternatives), the Provisional IRA's leadership in prison decided that something had to be done, and began to think of ways to restructure the organisation to make it less vulnerable to infiltration and arrests. The result of these strategic reflections was the introduction of the ASUs, but it was not until 1977 that these reforms were implemented. Until then, the RUC kept arresting large numbers of Provisional IRA members. Some 3,000 arrests were made in the period 1976-1979.¹⁴⁵ In 1980, the Long Kesh prison alone held about 800 Provos.¹⁴⁶

The new structure proved to be a more sustainable organisational model for the Provisionals. One important shift was that the group became a lot smaller. Recognising the need for secrecy and stealth, and forced by the many arrests of the preceding years, the leadership decided to reduce the organisation's membership to a core of two hundred to three hundred men, which later increased to five to seven hundred. Consequently, the group could also do with a smaller support network. With these smaller numbers, the Provisionals left fewer traces and could go deeper

¹⁴² *Operation Banner*, 2-11.

¹⁴³ H. Bennett, "From Direct Rule to Motorman: Adjusting British Military Strategy for Northern Ireland in 1972," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 6 (2010): 521-524.

¹⁴⁴ *Operation Banner*, 2-12.

¹⁴⁵ Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, 321.

¹⁴⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, 191.

underground. Furthermore, their support base was still large enough to replace arrested operatives.¹⁴⁷

But while the introduction of the ASUs was a wise move on the part of the Provisional IRA leadership, their organisation again suffered great losses in the 1980s. One widely publicised defeat occurred in 1987 in the Northern Irish village of Loughgall. The Provisional IRA had made plans for an attack on an RUC base, unaware that the British Army had been briefed on the operation by intelligence sources inside the group. The RUC knew that the Provisionals were coming, and a 25-man SAS unit set up an ambush. All eight Provisional IRA operatives participating in the attack were killed. This was a major blow to the organisation, especially to its East Tyrone Brigade, of which the eight operatives had been members. The East Tyrone Brigade was one of the Provisional IRA's most active and skilled units, but was badly affected by the ambush at Loughgall. In 1986, 21% of all Provisional IRA operations were carried out in East Tyrone, against only 9% in 1993. This decline is hardly surprising, given that the Brigade's losses were not limited to the eight men killed at Loughgall. Of the 53 men from the East Tyrone Brigade that were killed or captured before 1993, 28 were taken out in the period 1987 – 1992.¹⁴⁸

Another one of the confrontations in which the Provisional IRA suffered heavy losses took place in Gibraltar, where the organisation lost three men who were preparing a terrorist attack on British military personnel. They were gunned down by British soldiers, even though they were unarmed at the time of the incident.¹⁴⁹ The three men, like the team assembled to attack the RUC station in Loughgall, had been chosen because of their expertise, so here, too, the Provisional IRA lost some of its most skilled operatives.¹⁵⁰ Another crack unit that ran into trouble prior to a major operation was the group's flying column, a group of operatives

¹⁴⁷ P. Taylor, *Brits: The War against the IRA* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001), 219–220.

¹⁴⁸ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 328–330.

¹⁴⁹ J. Tweedie and T. Ward, "The Gibraltar Shootings and the Politics of Inquests," *Journal of Law and Society* 16, no. 4 (n.d.): 464.

¹⁵⁰ Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA*, 597.

who would come together on an *ad hoc* basis to carry out complex operations. Shortly after it was set up, its members were arrested, after which this way of working was abandoned.¹⁵¹ The final example of direct action against the Provisional IRA's top operatives was the arrest of the ASUs who were preparing bomb attacks against critical infrastructure in England in the 1990s. The Dockland Bombing in Manchester in 1996 had been successfully carried out, but soon afterwards, two ASUs in the UK were arrested. Labelled "the A-Team" by one of the police officers involved in the investigation, both units consisted of specially selected operatives with more than fifteen years of experience.¹⁵²

Apart from British success in apprehending or killing the most highly skilled members of the Provisional IRA, there was also a steady stream of arrests of ordinary Provos. Each year in the period 1984-1989, some 450 to 650 charges for terrorism-related offences were made. Also, every year several hundred fire arms were confiscated, as well as several thousand pounds of explosives.¹⁵³ These data are not broken down into separate numbers for Loyalist and Republican groups, but given the group's prominence in the Northern Ireland conflict, a sizeable part of the charges and weapons confiscations must have concerned the Provisional IRA. In sum, one can safely say that law enforcement and direct action brought the British many operational successes.

The effectiveness of these efforts, however, is less clear-cut. On the one hand, operational success did not lead to a decrease in the number of members in the Provisional IRA. As with any terrorist organisation, it is difficult to tell exactly how many members the Provisional IRA had, but most estimates put the number at two hundred to five hundred.¹⁵⁴ There

¹⁵¹ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 333-334.

¹⁵² "IRA Blitz on Gas and Water Plants Foiled," *Times*, July 16, 1997.

¹⁵³ J.M.A. Colville, *Review of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1978 and 1987* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1990), para. 1.8.

¹⁵⁴ O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, 161; "Estimates of the Strength of Paramilitary Groups," *Conflict Archive on the Internet*, accessed February 9, 2012, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/paramilitary2.htm>; Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 445; Bishop and Mallie, *The Provisional IRA*, 12; O'Leary, "The IRA," 209; *Patterns of*

are no sources that mention a significant reduction of the number of Provos after 1979, and one source that gives an estimate of the Provisional IRA's size over time claims that the group's size remained more or less constant after the 1970s.¹⁵⁵ This would mean that the Provisional IRA managed to replenish its ranks in spite of the constant losses of personnel to the RUC and the Army. Furthermore, the Provisional IRA was able to carry out attacks, even in England, right up until the ceasefire that would lead to the Good Friday Agreement. Less than two weeks before the ceasefire was announced, the Provisional IRA became involved in violent protests in Portadown, a city in county Armagh, and showed that its operational capabilities were still intact. The British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, allowed the Orange Order, a Protestant and unionist society, to march through the town's Catholic areas. The population responded to Mowlam's decision with violence, and during the first two days of the ensuing riots, the Provisional IRA launched no less than nine attacks against the police and the army.¹⁵⁶

But in spite of the Provos' ability to muster people and resources needed to keep up the violent campaign, the arrests and liquidations did make them realise that their operational capabilities had reached their limit. As early as the mid-1980s, some members began to feel that they had done everything they could, but were not getting any closer to the group's political goals. As one Provo later remembered, "[i]t wasn't breaking the will of the British, no matter what you were throwing at them, they were standing firm."¹⁵⁷ In fact, as will be seen in the section on intelligence gathering, carrying out operations was becoming more difficult. Much of the organisation's resources were spent on the preparation of attacks that had to be called off at a later stage. Against the pressure from the RUC

Global Terrorism 1996 (Washington, DC: State Department, 1996), Appendix B, <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1996Report/appb.html>.

¹⁵⁵ *Operation Banner*, 3–2.

¹⁵⁶ S. Pogatchnik, "Anarchy Reigns in Catholic Parts of Northern Ireland," *Daily Union*, July 7, 1997, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=q7tQAAAAIABJ&sjid=nbYMAAAAABJ&pg=3918,385270&dq=grenade+west-belfast+1997&hl=en>.

¹⁵⁷ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 145.

and the Army, the Provisionals lacked the means to escalate their campaign. The leadership had promised that a new offensive would be launched once weapon deliveries from Libya came in, but in 1987 a major arms shipment was intercepted, leaving the plan for an offensive in tatters.¹⁵⁸ The Army Council tried to make up for the cancelling of the offensive by ordering 'spectaculars' in England. These were difficult to carry out, though, and, even if successful, some Provos doubted whether the group could ever carry out such attacks with the frequency required to bring the British to their knees.¹⁵⁹ There was, in other words, not much the Provisional IRA could do beyond what they were already doing, which was clearly not enough. In the second half of the 1980s, the reality that the armed struggle was going nowhere, slowly began to sink in.

For example, Danny Morrison, before his arrest in 1990 the Provisionals' director of publicity, began to urge his fellow Republicans in 1992 to acknowledge the sobering fact that they would never get more of out of the British than they were able to get at that time. The armed struggle could be continued, but it had become a dead-end street, so Morrison argued. Somewhat bitterly, he went on to state that the Provisional IRA needed to consider other options if it was to avoid either "an unpopular, unseemly, impossible-to-end armed struggle" or "brave exhaustion – another one of the glorious defeats with which our past it littered".¹⁶⁰ Gerry Adams agreed with Morrison. His position was that the Provisionals would do wise to strike a deal, because waiting meant that the group would take the risk that its bargaining position would deteriorate.¹⁶¹

Summing up, it is clear that the law enforcement pressure on and direct action against the Provisional IRA contributed to the containment of the terrorist threat posed by the group. The arrests and killings drained the

¹⁵⁸ O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, 142; Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 20–23.

¹⁵⁹ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 190.

¹⁶⁰ D. Morrison, *Then the Walls Came down: A Prison Journal* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1999), 292.

¹⁶¹ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 112–113.

Provisionals of human resources, and their campaign would doubtlessly have been more intensive had the Provisionals not lost so much expertise and manpower. The output that goes with the programme theory on law enforcement and direct action was certainly there, as literally thousands of group members were arrested during the conflict. Nevertheless, the Provisional IRA was never decisively defeated and maintained operational capabilities as well as its numerical strength in the face of constant law enforcement pressure and direct action. The Provisional IRA's operational capabilities were not reduced, but were kept at a level where it was clear to the group's members that they would not win. In other words, the success of the police and military operations against the Provisional IRA lay not in the reduction, but in the containment of the group's operational capabilities. Attacks were not necessarily decreasing in numbers or sophistication, but the Provisionals' inability to step up their campaign made it clear that the conflict was a dead-end street. The arrests and liquidations made the Provisional IRA realise that they had to run to stand still, a notion that was augmented further by the group's extensive infiltration by British intelligence.

7.2.4 Gathering intelligence and offering exits

Initially the British troops in Northern Ireland operated from a very poor intelligence position. Several government officials later freely admitted that they lacked even the most basic knowledge about Northern Ireland and the conflict that was brewing there. Frank Cooper, Deputy Under-Secretary for Defence and Permanent Under Secretary in the Northern Ireland Office, said about the initial phase of the campaign: "There was a fear that you were going into an unknown mire, that you didn't know what was there, you didn't know what was going to happen to you when you were there and how you were going to get to out of the other side of the bog."¹⁶² This lack of actionable intelligence severely hamstrung the security forces' operations in the first years of their fight against the Provisional IRA. Arrests were made on the basis of outdated

¹⁶² P. Taylor, *Brits, Part I: The Secret War* (BBC, 2001), 05:38 – 05:49, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wplQ75JVIXQ>.

information, as a result of which people were mistaken for Provos and had to spend two or three months in jail merely because they lived in a house that was previously owned or rented by a Provisional IRA-man.¹⁶³ Also, the police and the army had a hard time putting faces to the names of the people they were after. Brendan Hughes and Gerry Adams were among the most wanted men in Northern Ireland, but until 1972 they could freely walk the streets, as no one in the security forces knew what they looked like.¹⁶⁴ Valuable intelligence was gained from 1972 to 1974 from interrogating arrestees during internment, and one former intelligence official claimed the Provisionals were “on their knees” by 1974. The ceasefire of 1975 and the subsequent reorganisation saved the Provisional IRA, and British intelligence units had to rebuild their knowledge base.¹⁶⁵

There were three main ways in which the RUC and the British Army tried to learn about their enemies. The first source of intelligence was the interrogation of terrorist suspects, or people who were arrested because they might know something about the Provisionals. As we have seen above, the five interrogation techniques (wall-standing, hooding, sleep deprivation, subjection to noise, deprivation of food and drink) were legally questionable, but they did form the basis of this strand of intelligence gathering in the first half of the 1970s.

A special category of interrogated prisoners were the ‘supergrasses’, Republican or Loyalist terrorist suspects who gave information about their organisations in return for a reward. Unable to collect evidence due to the inaccessibility of crime scenes and people’s unwillingness to cooperate, the RUC had hoped to secure more convictions against Provisional IRA operatives by offering rewards to suspects, like

¹⁶³ A. Edwards, “Misapplying Lessons Learned? Analysing the Utility of British Counterinsurgency Strategy in Northern Ireland, 1971–76,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 308.

¹⁶⁴ Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 38–39.

¹⁶⁵ Taylor, *Brits, Part I: The Secret War*, 40:11 – 40:34.

immunity, sentence reduction or even for new lives, new identities.¹⁶⁶ In some cases, they were also offered considerable sums of money. One supergrass, for example, was offered £300,000 for testimonies against Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison.¹⁶⁷

The practice was introduced in 1978 and abandoned in 1985, the year of the last trial in which testimonies provided by supergrasses were used as evidence. In these seven years 27 suspects – of whom fifteen were members of the Provisional IRA – were persuaded to become supergrasses.¹⁶⁸ However, the information gained from supergrasses was, as one government report noted, often unreliable, and many convictions gained through supergrass testimonies later had to be revoked.¹⁶⁹ Also, of the fifteen Republican supergrasses, nine withdrew their statements and broke off their cooperation with the RUC.¹⁷⁰

The usefulness of supergrass system in court cases may have been questionable, but one could also view it as a way to lure Provisional IRA members out of the organisation. In this respect too, however, the supergrass system cannot be considered an unqualified success. Its record, although not entirely bad, does not allow for the conclusion that it was an effective application of the counterterrorism principle ‘offering exit’. It is true that the supergrasses were indeed unsettling to the Provisional IRA leadership¹⁷¹, fearful as they were of informers and infiltrators, but the organisation managed to draw many of the supergrasses back in. There was always the threat of violent retaliation, of

¹⁶⁶ I. Kearns, “Policies towards Northern Ireland,” in *British Security Policy: The Thatcher Years and the End of the Cold War*, ed. S. Croft (London: Harper Collins, 1991), 111; D. Bonner, “Combating Terrorism: Supergrass Trials in Northern Ireland,” *Modern Law Review* 51, no. 1 (1988): 25.

¹⁶⁷ Coogan, *The IRA*, 519.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ T. Gifford, *Supergrasses: The Use of Accomplice Evidence in Northern Ireland, a Report* (London: Cobden Trust, 1984).

¹⁷⁰ Bonner, “Combating Terrorism,” 30.

¹⁷¹ M. Urban, *Big Boys’ Rules: The SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 135; Bonner, “Combating Terrorism,” 33.

course, and one supergrass' wife was kidnapped in order to force him to retract his statement.¹⁷² Interestingly, though, the Provisional IRA also maintained unity by issuing amnesties of their own. The group informed the supergrasses that there would be no penalties against them if they would quit cooperating with the RUC. Together, these countermeasures were enough to make sure that most supergrasses went back to the organisation.¹⁷³ Thus, few Provisional IRA members were truly 'turned', let alone that the organisation fell apart as a result of the supergrass system. This being the case, the supergrass system, while it may have gained the British some useful intelligence, should be considered an ineffective application of the counterterrorism principle 'offer exits'.

But while the supergrass system drew much public attention, it was by no means the most important source of intelligence to the British security forces. Rather than count merely on the testimonies of captured terrorists, British police and intelligence agencies deployed an extensive network of informers and infiltrators. Both the RUC's Special Branch and the Force Research Unit (FRU), part of the British military intelligence apparatus, had so-called 'handlers', who secretly instructed and guided their moles inside the Provisional IRA. Infiltrators and informers supplied their handlers with the intelligence needed to disrupt terrorist plots. Kevin Fulton, an infiltrator who made it into the Provisional IRA's internal security department, recalls in his memoirs how on the basis of his intelligence army patrol routes were changed and intended victims would be transferred to jobs in other locations. Moves like these were meant to disrupt an operation without blowing the covers of the informers, as they made it seem to the Provisional IRA as if operations failed as a result of bad luck.¹⁷⁴ Sometimes moles took on more pro-active roles. In such cases,

¹⁷² K. Sarma, "Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism: A Review of 30 Years of Conflict," *Police Practice and Research* 6, no. 2 (2005): 170.

¹⁷³ Bonner, "Combating Terrorism"; Urban, *Big Boys' Rules*, 135–136.

¹⁷⁴ Fulton, *Unsung Hero*, 144; McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, 178 and 184; Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA*, 117 and 121.

they removed detonation devices, or led the ASU-members to places where the SAS would be waiting.¹⁷⁵

The third source of British intelligence was surveillance, mostly through technological means. At first, the technological tools the British had at their disposal were poorly suited for use in urban environments, but the R&D projects that were set up to address this problem soon paid off. The British could now pick up signals sent by devices planted in downtown Belfast, and the increasing use of these new tools forced the Provisionals "to talk in bathrooms with the water running".¹⁷⁶ Rooms and weapons were bugged, and surveillance towers were equipped with powerful binoculars and other state-of-the-art surveillance equipment. Perhaps the most important surveillance tool was the helicopter.¹⁷⁷ These too were equipped with high-tech surveillance technologies. According to Gerry Bradley, "they could read the newspaper over your shoulder."¹⁷⁸

In the program theory for intelligence gathering, the output is measured by numbers of informers and infiltrators and the amounts of actionable intelligence that are gathered. Much of the British intelligence activity in Northern Ireland is still shrouded in secrecy, but the Provisional IRA was by all accounts heavily infiltrated. According to one estimate, between 1976 and 1987 one in every thirty or forty Provisional IRA-members was working for one of the security forces involved in the conflict.¹⁷⁹ Ian Hurst, a former military intelligence official who leaked information about army misconduct in Northern Ireland, has an even more spectacular assessment. Speaking from his experience as a handler in Northern Ireland in the late 1980s, Hurst claims that about one in every

¹⁷⁵ Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, 270–271.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁷⁷ *Operation Banner*, 5–9 and 5–10; P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part III: Secret War* (BBC, 1997), 10:00 – 10:47, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/may/28/northernireland.uk>.

¹⁷⁸ Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, 254–255.

¹⁷⁹ G.J. Ilardi, "Irish Republican Army Counterintelligence," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 23, no. 1 (2010): 4.

four Provos and one out of every two senior Provos was working for British intelligence.¹⁸⁰ While such claims are difficult to verify, it is safe to say, as several Provos later did, that British intelligence was well-established within the Provisional IRA.¹⁸¹ Another useful indicator of the British ability to penetrate the Provisional IRA is the fact that it managed to get information from the 'nutting squad'. As has been explained above, the Provisional IRA's internal security department was a prized target for British intelligence because of the unit's knowledge gained from vetting potential new members and evaluating failed operations. If the available media reports are anything to go by, attempts to get a mole into this unit met with success at least five times: Kevin Fulton successfully infiltrated, and four others (John Joe Magee, Freddie Scappaticci, Patrick 'Mooch' Blair and Terence Clarke) were 'turned'.¹⁸² A related success was the arrest of Eamon Collins, who also worked in the Provisional IRA's security department. He did not act as an informer while in the Provisional IRA, but he did become a supergrass after his arrest in 1985 and gave an elaborate testimony, although he later withdrew it.¹⁸³

Now that we have established that the various agencies involved, especially the FRU and the Special Branch, managed to generate the output of the intelligence gathering activities in accordance with the program theory, we can turn to the question whether these efforts were effective. Here too the evidence is somewhat patchy, but it is clear that

¹⁸⁰ "Statement of Ian Hurst" (Smithwick Tribunal of Enquiry, June 2011), 13, <http://cryptome.org/0005/hurst-fru.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ See e.g. Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 180-181.

¹⁸² See respectively Fulton, *Unsung Hero*; N. Mackay, "IRA Torturer Was in the Royal Marines," *Sunday Herald*, December 15, 2002, http://www.prisonplanet.com/news_alert_mi5terror_6.html; R. Cowan, "He Did the IRA's Dirty Work for 25 Years - and Was Paid £80,000 a Year by the Government," *Guardian*, May 12, 2003, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/may/12/northernireland.northernireland1>; "Convicted IRA Bomb-Maker 'Was Also Secret Informer,'" *Irish Examiner*, December 16, 2011, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/convicted-ira-bomb-maker-was-also-secret-informer-532527.html>; H. McDonald, "The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Handler: Chauffeur Revealed as MI5 Agent," *Guardian*, September 2, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/feb/09/uk.northernireland>.

¹⁸³ E. Moloney, "Why Collins Died," *Sunday Tribune*, January 31, 1999, <http://www.nuzhound.com/articles/mal13-31.htm>.

British intelligence took a heavy toll on the Provisional IRA's operational capabilities two main ways. First, the realisation among the Provos that there were informers in their midst fuelled a deep mistrust in the organisation.¹⁸⁴ According to Eamon Collins, "there was a new paranoia afoot in the IRA as a result of the supergrass trials. Everyone suspected everyone else." Others who were active in the Provisional IRA, like Kevin Fulton and Cathal Crumley, a Provo who in 2000 became mayor of Derry for Sinn Féin, also remember a distinct sense of suspicion.¹⁸⁵ In order to protect itself against infiltrators and informers, the Provisional IRA spent much time and effort on internal security.¹⁸⁶ The evaluation of failed attacks, the interrogation of suspects and the security measures that were introduced, some as innocuous as the wearing of ski masks in meetings with new members, all took up resources that otherwise could have been used for offensive operations against the British.¹⁸⁷ Also, part of a Provisional IRA – tactic to identify moles was leaving operatives out of operations to see whether failures in operations could be attributed to them: "Everyone in turn found themselves not included in certain operations to see what happened in their absence."¹⁸⁸

The second main effect of British intelligence gathering efforts was the increasing number of Provisional IRA operations that had to be called off. The leadership wanted to maintain the IRA's scarce human resources, and sanctioned attacks only if they met certain criteria, one of which was that the risk to the operatives involved should be minimal.¹⁸⁹ Plans had to be aborted once there were indications that the security forces knew an attack was coming, like increased police or army presence around an

¹⁸⁴ Sarma, "Informers and the Battle against Republican Terrorism," 177.

¹⁸⁵ Fulton, *Unsung Hero*, 77 and 154; Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part III: Secret War*, 24:14 – 24:24.

¹⁸⁶ B.W.C. Bamford, "The Role and Effectiveness of Intelligence in Northern Ireland," *Intelligence and National Security* 20, no. 4 (2005): 592.

¹⁸⁷ Collins and McGovern, *Killing Rage*, 200.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁸⁹ Jackson, "Provisional Irish Republican Army," 112–113; Ilardi, "IRA Operational Intelligence: The Heartbeat of the War," 348–349.

intended target. Gerry Bradley recalled how difficult it was to meet this demand in the face of British surveillance, especially the helicopter: "The chopper destroyed us. If the chopper was up, you weren't allowed to move out of a house: army orders. You stayed in whatever house you were in. Op[erations]s were cancelled regularly because of it."¹⁹⁰ With such a high standard of operational security and with the FRU's and the Special Branch's ability to discover terrorist plots, fewer and fewer attack plans reached the stage of execution. One operative even estimated that nineteen out of the twenty operations had to be aborted.¹⁹¹ Similarly, less than half of the attacks that were planned as part of the Provisional IRA's campaign in England reached the state of execution. In the other half of the cases, the attack was either thwarted or called off.¹⁹² Thus, the infiltration of the Provisional IRA was not merely an output, but also yielded the desired effect: the Provisional IRA became operationally crippled. This did not mean that they never successfully carried out an attack plan, but it does mean that it became increasingly difficult to maintain a level of violence high enough to break the will of the British. This not only limited the operational risk of the Provisional IRA, but also increased its susceptibility to options other than the armed struggle.

7.2.5 Addressing root causes

When looking for the root causes of the Northern Ireland conflict, it is tempting to turn to the factors that gave rise to the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. As has been outlined in the first part of this chapter, Catholics were discriminated against. They were poorly housed, were more likely to be unemployed, and saw little improvement in their situation throughout the conflict. In the 1970s and 1980s Catholics were two and a half times more likely to be without work than Protestants.¹⁹³ Also, Catholics who were employed often held low or semi-skilled jobs

¹⁹⁰ Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, 254.

¹⁹¹ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 157-158.

¹⁹² Rogers, "Political Violence and Economic Targeting," 25.

¹⁹³ *Religious and Political Discrimination and Equality of Opportunity in Northern Ireland - Report on Fair Employment* (London: Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights, 1987), para. 5.2.

that brought them little social status.¹⁹⁴ Even in 1998, the year in which the Good Friday Agreement was signed, Catholics owned fewer cars per capita than Protestants, were less educated, had higher premature mortality rates and suffered more often from chronic illnesses.¹⁹⁵ But while the differences in living conditions were salient and the government's attempts to solve the conflict by addressing socio-economic problems were ineffective, the extent to which these problems were root causes of the armed struggle waged by the Provisional IRA is questionable.

Republican interviewees and memoirists rarely mention socio-economic deprivation as a reason to join the Provisional IRA. The repressive stance of the RUC and the Army appears to have played a much more important role in this respect. Many Provos and former Provos, including Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, later said that Bloody Sunday, the Falls Road curfew, Operation Demetrius and the repression of the civil rights marches in the late 1960s made them decide to take up arms against the British.¹⁹⁶ This fairly anecdotal evidence can be backed up by quantitative research, which shows that increases and decreases in employment rates had little effect on the intensity of political violence in Northern Ireland. Politically charged events like Bloody Sunday, the Battle of the Bogside – a massive riot in Derry in August 1969 – and internment, on the other hand, clearly correlate with peaks in the numbers of shooting incidents.¹⁹⁷ Also, there was little overlap between the civil rights movement and the Provisional IRA. The group attracted a new following, and was not a vehicle for civil rights protesters looking for a new form of political action

¹⁹⁴ P.A. Compton, "Employment Differentials in Northern Ireland and Job Discrimination: A Critique," in *The Northern Ireland Question: Myth and Reality*, ed. P.J. Roche and B. Barton, 2nd ed. (Tonbridge: Wordzworth Publishing, 2013), 77–78.

¹⁹⁵ D. O'Reilly and M. Stevenson, "The Two Communities in Northern Ireland: Deprivation and Ill Health," *Journal of Public Health* 20, no. 2 (1998): 161–68.

¹⁹⁶ Adams, *The Anthony Clare Interviews: Gerry Adams*, 16:32 – 17:01; Hamann, *At the Edge of the Union*, 15:01 – 15:23.

¹⁹⁷ R. W. White, "From Peaceful Protest to Guerrilla War: Micromobilization of the Provisional Irish Republican Army," *American Journal of Sociology* 94, no. 6 (1989): 1288–1289.

to achieve their goals.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, in their public statements, members of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin stressed political repression as the main reason to fight. Much less attention was paid to socio-economic deprivation. The Republican movement did have an egalitarian economic agenda, especially after the more anti-imperialist course was adopted in the late 1970s, but socio-economic themes were eclipsed by the more political aspects of British imperialism. The rhetoric of Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA was strongly focused on British state repression and the subservience of the Irish people.¹⁹⁹

This being the case, dissatisfaction with the way Northern Ireland was governed should be considered the root cause of the conflict between the Provisional IRA and the British government rather than the socio-economic deprivation and discrimination of the Catholics. The attempts to address this root cause were aimed at the creation of a governance structure through which the Republicans could pursue their political ambitions peacefully. Therefore, it has been decided to discuss these efforts in the next section as the application of the counterterrorism principle 'Offering non-violent alternatives'.

7.2.6 Offering non-violent alternatives

Both Margaret Thatcher and John Major claimed they would never talk to or negotiate with the Provisional IRA. In 1993, during a debate in the House of Commons, one MP asked Major about the possibility of talking to the Provisional IRA, to which the Prime Minister retorted that it "would turn my stomach over and that of most people in this House, and we will not do it".²⁰⁰ In stating their unwillingness to talk, Thatcher and Major spoke the truth, but only in the narrow sense that neither Prime

¹⁹⁸ Alonso, *The IRA and Armed Struggle*, 58–59; Horgan, "Militant Irish Republicanism," 230.

¹⁹⁹ J. Gibney, "Annual Bodinstown Speech 1992 Address by Sinn Féin's Jim Gibney" (Sinn Féin, June 1992), 3; M. McGuinness, "Annual Bodinstown Speech 1993 Address by Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness" (Sinn Féin, June 20, 1993), 1; G. Adams, "Presidential Address to Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 1994" (Sinn Féin, 1994), 18.

²⁰⁰ P. Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part IV: Endgame* (BBC, 1997), 28:13 – 28:30, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUcP25Mb-bQ>.

Minister ever personally engaged the Provisionals in dialogue. Both, however, had people talking to the Provisional IRA on their behalf.²⁰¹ In fact, at various stages during the Troubles, representatives of the British government were in touch with representatives of the Provisional IRA. Many of the contacts were kept secret, and were maintained through intermediaries, but on three occasions the British government and the Provisional IRA, or Sinn Féin, engaged in direct negotiations.

The first direct contacts took place in 1972. Sean MacStiofáin gave a press conference in June 1972, at which he presented the organisation's demands (self-determination for the Irish, amnesty for Republican prisoners and a British statement indicating the intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland). He then went on to invite Northern Ireland Secretary William Whitelaw to discuss them in one of the Republican no-go areas. In return for the meeting, the Provisionals would respect a ceasefire.²⁰² During this ceasefire, in July 1972, Provisional IRA and British government representatives met, albeit not in a Republican no-go area, to discuss possible ways to end the conflict. The Provisionals, however, refused to talk about anything but the withdrawal of the British from Northern Ireland. According to Frank Steele, an MI6 agent who was part of the British delegation, the Provisional IRA delegation was convinced that victory was within reach. This was especially clear in the way in the demeanour of MacStiofáin, about whom Steele remembers: "He proceeded to read out his demands. I mean, he behaved like the representative of an army that had brought the British to a standstill and that we British wanted out. He behaved like Montgomery at Lüneburg Heath, telling the German generals what they should and shouldn't do if they wanted peace."²⁰³ As the British did not want to go along with the

²⁰¹ "Margaret Thatcher 'Negotiated with IRA,'" *BBC News*, December 30, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-16366413>.

²⁰² D. Mullane, "Three Point Peace Offer by the IRA," *Irish Times*, June 14, 1972.

²⁰³ Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part I: Born Again*, 43:52 – 44:12.

demands of their interlocutors, the talks broke down before anything had been achieved.²⁰⁴

While the failure of the first series of talks between the Provisional IRA and the British government can in part be attributed to the lack of experience of the Provisional IRA's leadership, it is also important to take the strategic context into account. First, as a government centre, Stormont had collapsed, and the British were forced to take over the administration of Northern Ireland, which was subjected to so-called 'direct rule' from Westminster. The Provisional IRA perceived this as a great success. They calculated that British imperialism, now that it had to be present on the ground in Northern Ireland, would be forced to show its true face while managing the conflict. In the minds of the Provisionals there was little doubt that the repressive measures that the British would inevitably take, would turn the population further away from the government and would generate support for the idea of a unified Ireland.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the numbers of RUC and Army personnel killed and wounded were on the rise, and showed that the Provisional IRA was capable of inflicting heavy damage on the security forces.²⁰⁶ Against this background the Provisional IRA, convinced that 'one big push' would be enough to force the British out of Northern Ireland, did not treat the talks as negotiations, but rather as meetings to discuss the terms of the British surrender.²⁰⁷

When the second series of talks were initiated, the Provisionals' tide had turned. By 1975 the Provisional IRA was badly affected by arrests that had taken place in the two preceding years. Army Council member Billy McKee assessed the situation of the Provos before the second series of talks, held in 1975 and early 1976, as follows: "You have to have operators, you have to have men with arms, and you have to have plenty

²⁰⁴ F. Cowper-Coles, "'Anxious for Peace': The Provisional IRA in Dialogue with the British Government, 1972-75," *Irish Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (2012): 226.

²⁰⁵ G. Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (Kerry: Brandon, 1996), 111-112.

²⁰⁶ T. Craig, "From Backdoors and Back Lanes to Backchannels: Reappraising British Talks with the Provisional IRA, 1970-1974," *Contemporary British History* 26, no. 1 (2012): 104-105.

²⁰⁷ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 40.

of money to keep it going. There was very little of any of it.”²⁰⁸ Their backs against the wall, the Army Council decided on a new ceasefire, which came into force in February 1975 and lasted until January 1976. Again the group sent a delegation to meet with representatives of the British governments. But again, it became clear that the positions taken by the two sides were incompatible. By September 1975, the British has lost faith in the initiative, and no more meetings were planned. The Provisionals made one more proposal to discuss “structures of disengagement” of the British from Northern Ireland, but the British rejected this plan out of hand.²⁰⁹

It is true that the Provisional IRA was in a poor shape when these talks were held, but this time, too, there were factors in the strategic context that can explain why the Provisionals chose to stick rigidly to their far-reaching demands. For one, they believed they could capitalise on the weariness and despair of the British government after the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement.²¹⁰ In May 1973 the Westminster parliament had adopted the Northern Ireland Assembly Bill. The proposed Bill had largely been based on a White Paper by Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees, and identified three main pillars for the future administration of Northern Ireland. First, Northern Ireland would be governed according to a power sharing arrangement, which guaranteed government representation of parties of both communities. This meant that, irrespective of the election results, nationalist and unionist parties had to form a government together.²¹¹ Second, Northern Ireland would get its own parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, to which the Westminster parliament would devolve some – not all – responsibility for the administration of Northern Ireland.²¹² Third, the Bill created room for the involvement of the Republic of Ireland in the governing of Northern

²⁰⁸ Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part II: Second Front*, 12:55 – 13:05.

²⁰⁹ Cowper-Coles, ““Anxious for Peace,”” 230–231.

²¹⁰ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 53.

²¹¹ W. Whitelaw, *Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1973), para. 51–53.

²¹² *Ibid.*, para. 39 and 56–57.

Ireland.²¹³ The exact arrangements for this point were negotiated in December 1973, after the Northern Ireland Assembly had been elected and various political parties had agreed on a power-sharing arrangement. The governments of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK and a group of moderate political parties from Northern Ireland signed the Sunningdale Agreement, which contained provisions for a two-level Council of Ireland, the platform that would give the Republic of Ireland an advisory role in some policy areas. The Council's first level was reserved for government representatives from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the second level for parliamentarians.²¹⁴

Expectations were high, but the arrangements would prove to be short-lived. The Loyalists and some Unionists felt betrayed and thought that the British government had sold out the interests of the Protestants in Northern Ireland. Their opposition to the three pillars of Northern Ireland's governance structure was fierce and well-organised. Several loyalist political parties formed an umbrella organisation, the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC), to wage opposition against what they believed was a gradual transfer of Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland.²¹⁵ In the 1974 elections for the Westminster parliament, the UUUC managed to win 51.1% of the vote and eleven of the twelve seats for Northern Ireland, which demonstrated that Northern Ireland's governance structure lacked legitimacy.²¹⁶ The death blow for Whitelaw's vision, however, came in the form of a massive strike in May 1974, which brought Northern Ireland to a standstill. Under the leadership of the Ulster Workers Council (UWC), roads and ports were blocked, electricity supplies were cut off and factories were shut down. Violence frequently

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 110.

²¹⁴ "The Sunningdale Agreement: Tripartite Agreement on the Council of Ireland," 1973, para. 7, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/sunningdale/agreement.htm>.

²¹⁵ Nelson, *Ulster's Uncertain Defenders: Loyalists and the Northern Ireland Conflict*, 139.

²¹⁶ "Westminster General Election (NI) - Thursday 28 February 1974," *CAIN Web Service*, accessed June 21, 2013, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rw1974a.htm>. The scores of the parties in the UUUC (32.3% for the Ulster Unionist Party, 10.6% for the Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party and 8.2% for the Democratic Unionist Party) add up to 51.1%.

erupted during the two weeks that the strike lasted.²¹⁷ The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, saw no other option than to dissolve the Northern Ireland Assembly and reinstate direct rule from London.²¹⁸

The collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Sunningdale Agreement was an important factor in the strategic assessments of the Provisional IRA. The group's leadership estimated that, as the British were running out of options, they decide to withdraw from Northern Ireland altogether. It is this rationale that the Provisionals brought with them into the talks of 1975.²¹⁹ It is also important to note that these talks took place in February 1975, before the British government had implemented the 'normalisation' strategy in the fight against the Provisional IRA. From then on the British treated terrorism as a form of ordinary crime, and accordingly gave the RUC the lead role in the fight against the Provisionals.²²⁰ With this approach, the British signalled that they were going to ride out the conflict, but they had not yet done so when they met with the Provisional IRA in 1975.²²¹ Again, the Provos felt they were negotiating from a position of strength, and it took fifteen years of conflict change this.

In the early 1990s the Provisional IRA engaged in a third series of talks with their British enemies. Contacts were maintained through MI5 official Michael Oatley and several concerned civilians, notably businessman Brendan Duddy and Father Alec Reid. The British position was the same as it had always been: any solution had to have the support of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland (the 'consent-principle'), and disarmament of the Provisional IRA had to take place before negotiations

²¹⁷ "Ulster Workers' Council Strike - Chronology of the Strike," *CAIN Web Service*, accessed June 21, 2013, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/uwc/chr.htm>.

²¹⁸ F.N. Forman, *Constitutional Change in the United Kingdom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 66.

²¹⁹ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 57–58.

²²⁰ Kelley, *The Longest War*, 234.

²²¹ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 61–62.

could start.²²² Again, the conditions of decommissioning proved a stumbling block, but this time Gerry Adams and David Hume, leader of the nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) kept in touch to talk about a possible solution to the conflict they could propose jointly.²²³ This initiative came to an end when Adams and Hume presented a proposal that struck Prime Minister Major as so overwhelmingly nationalist, that he refused to respond to it, saying: "I have no intention of doing that and the people of Ulster would not want me to do so".²²⁴ Nevertheless, the Irish and British government seized the initiative and agreed with the moderate political parties on the Downing Street Declaration, which had been negotiated without Sinn Féin. In it, Prime Minister Major and David Reynolds, his Irish counterpart, committed themselves to the points that had earlier led to the cessation of talks between representatives of the Provisional IRA and the British government. A solution to the conflict had to meet the consent-principle, and could be negotiated only by parties that rejected political violence.²²⁵ The strength of the Declaration was thus that it made clear to the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin that they ran the risk of being marginalized, and that a settlement could be reached without them.

In the 1980s and 1990s, as we have seen above, it became increasingly difficult for the Provisional IRA to sustain the bombing campaign.²²⁶ The Provisionals suffered from arrests, and they saw many of their operations sabotaged by moles. Several Provisional IRA-leaders, especially Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, believed the armed struggle had run its

²²² Ibid., 119.

²²³ I. MacKinnon, "Hume's Claim of Peace in a Week Scorned by Unionists: IRA Ready to Review Position towards Loyalist Paramilitaries If Attacks Stop," *The Independent*, November 6, 1993, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/humes-claim-of-peace-in-a-week-scorned-by-unionists-ira-ready-to-review-position-towards-loyalist-paramilitaries-if-attacks-stop-1502360.html>.

²²⁴ Quoted in Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, 199.

²²⁵ J. Major and A. Reynolds, "Joint Declaration of Peace: The Downing Street Declaration," December 15, 1993, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/dsd151293.htm>.

²²⁶ P. Neumann, "Bringing in the Rogues: Political Violence, the British Government and Sinn Féin," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 3 (2003): 166; J. Smith, *Making the Peace in Ireland* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002), 176.

course and began looking for other ways to achieve a unified Ireland.²²⁷ Responding to the increasing willingness of unionist as well as nationalist parties to reach a negotiated settlement, they persuaded the Army Council to announce a ceasefire, which went into force in August 1994. The statement in which the ceasefire was explained, contained a thinly disguised expression of the Army Council's desire to join the peace process. A solution, so the statement held, could "only be found as a result of inclusive negotiations".²²⁸ However, the demand for disarmament was still a problem, and the contacts between Sinn Féin and the British reached a dead end when Major introduced the Mitchell principles, named after the American Senator who drew them up. The Mitchell principles were essentially conditions that all political parties had to meet before they were allowed to join the negotiations of the solution of the Northern Ireland conflict. They demanded from all parties involved a commitment to the disarmament of paramilitary groups, and to the cessation of punishment beatings and other forms of political violence.²²⁹ Frustrated by the lack of progress, the Provisional IRA broke the ceasefire in February 1996, when it carried out a 'spectacular' in the Canary Wharf district in London. Contrary to what many thought at the time, though, this was not a return to the armed struggle. Rather, it was the use of terrorist means to force the peace process ahead. In the statement explaining the resumption of violence, the Provisional IRA did not reject the peace process, but stressed again that a solution to the conflict "demands an inclusive negotiated settlement".²³⁰ After Tony Blair assumed office, he, more explicitly than John Major had done, threatened to close a deal without the Republicans.²³¹ At this point, and after a bitter

²²⁷ B. Rowan, *Behind the Lines: The Story of the IRA and Loyalist Ceasefire* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1995), 84–85.

²²⁸ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Ceasefire Statement, 31 August 1994."

²²⁹ "Report of the International Body on Arms Decommissioning, 22 January 1996," 1996, para. 20, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/gm24196.htm>.

²³⁰ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement Ending the Ceasefire, 9 February 1996," 1996, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira9296.htm>.

²³¹ M. Mansergh, "The Architecture of the Peace Process," in *Pathways out of Terrorism and Insurgency: The Dynamics of Terrorist Violence and Peace Processes*, ed. L. Sergio Germani and D.D. Kaarthikeyan (Elgin, Slough and New Delhi: New Dawn Press, 2005), 150.

struggle against the hardliners in the movement, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness won the permission of the Army Convention to let Sinn Féin subject itself to the Mitchell principles. One of the trump cards they used to get the Provisional IRA membership on board, was a concession on decommissioning. The British had agreed on an arrangement that was made to let disarmament take place during – as opposed to before – the negotiations.²³² The Provisional IRA restored the ceasefire in 1997, and Sinn Féin was involved in the negotiation of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, effectively the solution to the Northern Ireland conflict.

Like the Sunningdale Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement contained arrangements for a power sharing executive, a Northern Ireland Assembly and the involvement of Ireland in several policy areas. Also, it was agreed that the RUC was to be reformed, and that paramilitary prisoners were to be released. For his part, the Republic of Ireland's Taoiseach Bertie Ahern pledged to drop the second and third article of Ireland's constitution, which claimed Northern Ireland as Irish territory.²³³ In keeping with the consent-principle, referenda were held in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Provisional IRA always held that the right to self-determination only applied to Ireland as a whole, that is, to the Republic of Ireland plus Northern Ireland.²³⁴ They insisted that the consent-principle amounted to "a Unionist veto", as the population of Northern Ireland, where Protestants formed a majority, could block a proposal that had a majority in the whole of Ireland. But on this point, too, the Provisionals eventually gave in, allowing for the two referenda that decided on the ratification of the Good Friday Agreement. In Northern Ireland, the agreement won 71.1% of the vote, but the support was even

²³² Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 478–479.

²³³ J. Tonge, "From Sunningdale to the Good Friday Agreement: Creating Devolved Government in Northern Ireland," *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 3 (2000): 51–53.

²³⁴ "A Scenario for Peace: A Discussion Paper" (Sinn Féin, 1987), <http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2009/AScenarioforPeace.pdf>; Adams, *Free Ireland*, 211.

more overwhelming in Ireland, where 94.4% of the electorate voted in favour of ratification of the agreement by the Irish government.²³⁵

After the Good Friday Agreement was implemented, there were still some problems with Provisional IRA violence. The Auxiliary kept carrying out punishment beatings and kneecappings, and the hunt for informers was clearly on, as evidenced by the murder of Eamon Collins and the attempted murder of Marty McGartland, both in 1999.²³⁶ Also, some militant defectors formed their own organisations in order to keep up the fight. The most important one was led by Army Council member Michael McKevitt, who went on to form the Real IRA.²³⁷ This splinter group, involved in terrorist attacks and punishment beatings as late as 2010, is now thought to have merged with several Republican vigilante groups.²³⁸ Another reason for concern was the Provisional IRA's relation with the Colombian insurgent group FARC. These ties came to light in 2001 and gave rise to fears that the Provisionals were developing new, heavier weapons, far away from the hospitable environment that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland had become.²³⁹ It is not unreasonable to assume, as many did at the time, that the Provisional IRA wanted to maintain a degree of readiness for the resumption of the armed struggle, but it never came to this. In 2005 the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, which was to monitor the progress of

²³⁵ "Results of the Referenda in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland, Friday 22 May 1998," *CAIN Web Service*, accessed June 21, 2013, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/ref1998.htm>.

²³⁶ A. Silke, "Success and Failure in Terrorist Investigations: Research and Lessons from Northern Ireland," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 13, no. 3 (2005): 254.

²³⁷ J. Dingley, "The Bombing of Omagh, 15 August 1998: The Bombers, Their Tactics, Strategy, and Purpose behind the Incident," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 24, no. 6 (2001): 455–457.

²³⁸ H. McDonald, "Republican Dissidents Join Forces to Form a New IRA," *Guardian*, July 26, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jul/26/ira-northern-ireland-dissident-republican-groups>.

²³⁹ J.F. Murphy, "The IRA and the FARC in Colombia," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 18, no. 1 (2005): 80.

the decommissioning process, declared that it was confident that the Provisional IRA had handed over all its weapons.²⁴⁰

In terms of the programme theory formulated in the first chapter, we can conclude that effectiveness was achieved only the third time talks with the Provisional IRA were held. In the first two attempts, in 1972 and 1974, the British managed to bring about the output – peaceful engagement with the terrorists, and a ceasefire – but was nowhere near the desired effect, the pacification of the Provisional IRA. Several factors have been suggested to explain why attempts at a negotiated settlement were successful the third time around. Some authors, for example, have stressed the involvement of the US. In 1994, President Clinton invited Gerry Adams for a visit to the US, where Adams could lobby for the Irish cause among highly influential audiences like the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. This strengthened his position vis-à-vis the hardliners in the movement, who could now see what doors would open if the armed struggle was scaled down.²⁴¹ The most important factor, however, was the strategic self-assessment of the Provisional IRA in the early 1990s. As we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the Provisional IRA was operationally stretched to its limits, which understandably fed the notion that the Provos had been fought to a standstill. The prevailing sense was that a negotiated settlement was the only way to avoid total defeat or an indefinite and pointless campaign. Unlike in 1972 and 1975, the Provisionals were aware that armed struggle was not going to get them anywhere. In an attempt to achieve at least some of their political goals, the Army Council decided to join the moderate Nationalist camp in the peace process. The parties in this camp, notably the SDLP, were less radical than the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin, but they were the only chance the Provisional IRA had left.²⁴² This assessment was partially

²⁴⁰ T. Nieminen, J. de Chastelein, and A.D. Sens, "Report of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning," September 26, 2005, 2, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/decommission/iicd260905.pdf>.

²⁴¹ M. Cox, "Bringing in the 'International': The IRA Ceasefire and the End of the Cold War," *International Affairs* 73, no. 4 (1997): 687.

²⁴² Mallie and McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace*, 313 and 315.

informed by the British refusal to give in to the group's violent pressure, which brings us to the next counterterrorism principle.

7.2.7 Long-term commitment

After some three years into the Troubles the British government went through a strategic reappraisal that was quite similar to the Provisional IRA's shift from 'big push' to 'long war'. When the British Army arrived in Northern Ireland, no one expected them to stay for more than a year, but by 1973, the British government had come to realise that they would not be able to end the conflict with a few reforms and short and decisive army deployment.²⁴³ With this came the acceptance that a certain level of violence would have to be accepted as normal. After 1975, the British approach to the Provisional IRA was one of containment. The objective was not so much to wipe out the Provisionals, but rather to limit the scale of their violence for a prolonged period of time. This, so the underlying conjecture went, would convince the Provisional IRA of the futility of the armed struggle.²⁴⁴ There may have been differences in the approaches of the various British governments, with Margaret Thatcher taking a considerably less accommodating stance than, for instance, Tony Blair, but they all stuck to this line, knowing that the conflict was indeed a 'Long War'. And more importantly, all British governments stuck to a series of principles, in spite of the Provisionals' campaign to make them change their minds.

First, it was clear to all involved that the conflict could not be ended by military means alone. Even *bona fide* hardliners like Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Northern Ireland Secretary Roy Mason, who in 1977 boasted that he was "squeezing the IRA like a tube of toothpaste", knew that concessions to the Catholic population were necessary to deprive the Provisional IRA of the popular resentment it needed to keep

²⁴³ P.R. Neumann, "The Government's Response," in *Combating Terrorism in Northern Ireland*, ed. J. Dingley (New York: Routledge, 2009), 140–144; P.R. Neumann, "Winning the 'War on Terror'? Roy Mason's Contribution to Counter-Terrorism in Northern Ireland," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14, no. 3 (2003): 49.

²⁴⁴ Bew, Frampton, and Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists*, 72.

its campaign going.²⁴⁵ Second, in the formulation of such a solution, British policy makers were always open to participation of the Republican camp, albeit under certain conditions, most importantly the cessation of violence. Already in 1972, William Whitelaw expressed the hope that someday the Provisional IRA would be involved in regular, non-violent politics.²⁴⁶ In 1974 Merlyn Rees legalised Sinn Féin in the hope that the Provisionals would join the Constitutional Convention, a meeting of Northern Irish political parties to discuss the future political structure of Northern Ireland.²⁴⁷ Third, any solution could be acceptable, as long as it had the support of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland. This so-called 'consent-principle' was mentioned in all British government documents that put forth a solution to the conflict, including *The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion* from 1972, William Whitelaw's 1973 Green Paper *Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals* and the *Downing Street Declaration* from 1993.²⁴⁸ Fourth, the British were always willing to accept a role for Ireland in the administration of Northern Ireland, for instance by creating a body where Ireland and the UK could discuss administrative matters regarding Northern Ireland. The 'Irish dimension', too, was a constant feature of British proposals for the administration of Northern Ireland.²⁴⁹

The consistency of the British position regarding the Northern Ireland conflict is also clear from the similarities between the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Both agreements proposed a Northern Irish parliament, a power-sharing arrangement, and the incorporation of the 'Irish dimension' in the form of consultative intergovernmental bodies where Ireland was represented.

²⁴⁵ Neumann, "Bringing in the Rogues," 162.

²⁴⁶ I. Aitken, "Ministers Fight Rearguard Action on Ulster Policies," *Guardian*, July 15, 1972.

²⁴⁷ Neumann, "Bringing in the Rogues," 159-160.

²⁴⁸ *The Future of Northern Ireland: A Paper for Discussion* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1972), para. 76; Whitelaw, *Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals*, para. 112; Major and Reynolds, "Joint Declaration of Peace: The Downing Street Declaration," para. 5.

²⁴⁹ Tonge, "From Sunningdale to the Good Friday Agreement: Creating Devolved Government in Northern Ireland," 53.

While the two agreements differ in nuances, the similarities are such that Seamus Mallon, SDLP parliamentarian in the Northern Ireland Assembly, said the Good Friday Agreement was “Sunningdale for slow learners”, indicating that the Provisional IRA ended the armed struggle in 1998 for something they could have gotten in 1973. Some Provos, too, felt this way. Former Provisional IRA-member Marian Price was one of them. One-upping Mallon, she called the Good Friday Agreement “Sunningdale for retards”.²⁵⁰ The one issue where the British did eventually compromise was the decommissioning of the Provisionals. During the peace process, Prime Minister John Major often expressed the demand that decommissioning should take place before Sinn Féin would be allowed into the multi-party talks. Martin McGuinness shot down this demand by saying there was “not a snowball’s chance in hell” that the Provisionals would disarm before an agreement would have been reached.²⁵¹ As it turned out, they did not need to. In a last-ditch effort to convince Sinn Féin to participate in the peace talks, Tony Blair agreed to a parallel process, which meant that a commission would be installed to draw up a plan for decommissioning. The commission would have its meetings as the peace talks were going on.²⁵² Other than that, the British made few significant concessions that it had not wanted to make twenty-five years earlier.

The Provisional IRA was not impervious to the British intransigence. As we have seen in the paragraphs 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, the operational setbacks that the Provos suffered at the hands of the British security forces drove home the message that the British would not be moved. As the police and the army kept the Republican campaign in check and the British government seemed little inclined to compromise beyond what they had been willing to offer in 1972, the position of Adams and McGuinness, who believed that the Provisional IRA had better settle for what the British had

²⁵⁰ English, *Armed Struggle*, 317.

²⁵¹ “IRA Rejects British Demands over Handover of Weapons,” *Herald Scotland*, June 21, 1995, <http://www.heraldsotland.com/sport/spl/aberdeen/ira-rejects-british-demands-over-handover-of-weapons-1.674773>.

²⁵² Smith, *Making the Peace in Ireland*, 192–193.

to offer, began to gain credibility. The Good Friday Agreement, though, was by no means a foregone conclusion, and Gerry Adams had to wage a hard political fight within the Provisional IRA to get the organisation on board.²⁵³ At many stages during the peace process, events could have taken another course. Therefore, there is no straight line from the long-term commitment of the British to their campaign and the principles underlying it on the one hand, and the pacification of the Provisional IRA on the other. What we can say, though, is that it was one of the 'push factors' that contributed to the outcome of the Northern Ireland conflict. It made the leadership as well as some – though certainly not all – in the rank-and-file aware that there was not much point in carrying on the armed struggle.

As for the programme theory formulated for 'long-term commitment', the output was unmistakably there. The British did not give in and made it clear to the Provisional IRA that it would not be swayed by violence. This was one of the factors that brought the Provisional IRA to the acceptance of an arrangement that fell short of its ultimate political goals. Moreover, the British refusal to be moved did eventually translate into a weakening of the Provisional IRA's fighting spirit as evidenced by prominent members speaking out against a continuation of the armed struggle. Later on, this war weariness became visible in the General Army Convention, where a majority voted in favour of the peace process from the mid-90s on.

One of the main themes in the introductory part of this chapter is that the Provisional IRA was divided over a number of issues. One of these issues was the effectiveness and expediency of the armed struggle. Up until 1997 Gerry Adams met with fierce resistance against the abolishment of the armed struggle and the participation of Sinn Féin in the peace process. This means that for some in the Republican movement, the armed struggle still had enough *élan* to fight, recruit and join.

²⁵³ Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 476–477.

7.2.8 International cooperation

Various British governments realised that Ireland needed to be part of the solution to the Northern Ireland conflict, but there was also an acute awareness that Ireland was part of the problem.²⁵⁴ Throughout the duration of the conflict, the Provisional IRA used the Republic of Ireland, created by their predecessors of the original Irish Republican Army, as a safe haven. The most important function of 'the South', as Ireland was known in Republican parlance, was as a base for weapons training.²⁵⁵ Free from the law enforcement pressure from Northern Ireland, the Provisionals could practise the use of firearms and mortars in the Irish counties adjacent to Northern Ireland, knowing they were in an area where many people felt considerable sympathy for the Republican cause.²⁵⁶ Occasionally, however, the Republic of Ireland was also used as a base of operations. There are several instances of British army patrols coming under fire from Provos who had positioned themselves just on the other side of the Irish border.²⁵⁷ Also, Lord Mountbatten, naval officer and cousin to Queen Elizabeth II, was assassinated while on a boat near the Irish port town of Mullaghmore.²⁵⁸ Third, there have been reports of collusion between the Provisional IRA and the Garda, the Irish police. According to these allegations, Garda officers provided assistance by allowing Provisionals to escape into Irish territory, or by providing information on the whereabouts of members of the British security forces in Northern Ireland.²⁵⁹ A recent report by the Smithwick Tribunal, set up by the Irish government to investigate the involvement of the Irish police (*An Garda Síochána*) in the deaths of two RUC-men in March 1989,

²⁵⁴ H. Atkins and F. Pym, "Northern Ireland: Security. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Defence," August 30, 1979, para. 8.

²⁵⁵ Cralley, Garfield, and Echeverria, *Understanding Terrorism*, III-61.

²⁵⁶ Jackson, "Training for Urban Resistance," 128.

²⁵⁷ Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA*, 454; Ranstorp and Brun, *Terrorism Learning and Innovation: Lessons from PIRA in Northern Ireland*, 27.

²⁵⁸ S. Cook and J. Joyce, "IRA Bombs Kill Mountbatten and 17 Soldiers," *Guardian*, August 28, 1979, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2008/aug/28/3>.

²⁵⁹ T. Harnden, *"Bandit Country": The IRA and South Armagh* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), 214-216.

confirmed these suspicions. According to the Tribunal, Irish police officers informed the Provisional IRA that the two victims had planned a visit to a police station in Dundalk. The Provisional IRA then used this information to set up an ambush and kill both men.²⁶⁰

The Irish government had little incentive to clear the border areas of Provisionals. Ireland was hardly affected by Provisional IRA activity, and was, at least in the 1970s, generally on bad terms with the UK. Mention has already been made of the court case which the Republic of Ireland filed against the UK over the treatment of Republican prisoners. Further, in 1982, Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Charles Haughey refused to support European sanctions against Argentina, which was embroiled in the Falklands War against the UK.²⁶¹ Relations improved after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, in which both parties confirmed the consent-principle and agreed that Ireland should have an advisory role in the governance of Northern Ireland. But while Ireland may now have been more willing to put a stop to the use of its territory as a safe haven for the Provisional IRA, it was still unable to do so. There were few police and military units available for such operations. The army stationed only two infantry battalions in the border area, and even these were not available full-time. Also, cooperation with the British army, crucial to the disruption of cross-border Provisional IRA traffic, never materialised, and “joint Irish-British military operations along the Border, which might have done much to deny PIRA its safe havens in the Republic, were never conducted”.²⁶² Consequently, the Provisional IRA never fully lost the Republic of Ireland as a resort for training purposes or a haven to flee to after an operation had been carried out. This suggests that the program theory regarding international cooperation cannot really be tested on the basis of this case.

²⁶⁰ P. Smithwick et al., *Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Suggestions That Members of An Garda Síochána or Other Employees of the State Colluded in the Fatal Shootings of RUC Chief Superintendent Harry Breen and RUC Superintendent Robert Buchanan on the 20th of March 1989* (Dublin: The Stationary Office, 2013), 428–429.

²⁶¹ “State Archives: Day 1 - 1982,” *Irish Examiner*, December 28, 2012, <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/state-archives-day-1--1982-217988.html>.

²⁶² *Operation Banner*, 4–4 and 3–7.

7.2.9 Offering a counter narrative

As the group's name suggests, the Provisional IRA tried to portray its armed struggle as a military confrontation between the British and the Irish. This martial self-image as well as the group's claim to be fighting on behalf of the Irish people were intended to lend an air of legitimacy to the armed struggle.²⁶³ The British government, though, was not blind to the contradiction between the way the Provisionals presented themselves and the civilian deaths they caused. With this tension in mind, Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees consciously set about undermining the image of the Provisionals as selfless soldiers fighting for the independence of the Irish people. As has been outlined in a previous section, the idea behind the normalisation of the British approach against the Provisional IRA, introduced in 1975, was that the group's armed struggle would be treated as ordinary crime. This meant that the police would again become the lead actor, that terrorists had to be tried as much as possible through ordinary criminal law procedures and that the special status of incarcerated Provos would be revoked. An added advantage to this approach was that it also belied the notion that the conflict in Northern Ireland was a war.²⁶⁴ By treating the Provisional IRA as a group of criminals, Rees wanted British policy to send the message that the problem had been reduced to a scale where military intervention was not necessary. War suggests a high intensity confrontation between at least somewhat similar adversaries, whereas criminal justice is part of the day-to-day business of a state and clearly suggests that the state is dominant, if not always successful.

But logical as the British counter narrative may have sounded, it was contradicted by some clearly visible aspects of British counterterrorism policy. There was, for instance, the shoot-to-kill policy discussed in the section on the rule of law. Whether or not such a policy really existed, the impression that it did exist was enough to suggest that there was an

²⁶³ J. Wright, "PIRA Propaganda: The Construction of Legitimacy," *Conflict Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1990): 29 and 34.

²⁶⁴ Kelley, *The Longest War*, 234–235.

armed conflict going on. The wave of sympathy for the Provisionals who were killed in Gibraltar demonstrated that at least part of the public did not see the Provisional IRA as mindless criminals. Another contradiction between counter narrative and practice concerned the role of the army. Rees attempted to implement the normalisation strategy by putting the police in charge of the fight against the Provisional IRA, but there were regions where this was simply not possible. In rural Republican strongholds like South Armagh, the primacy of the RUC was largely a dead letter. The army led operations in those zones for the duration of the entire conflict.²⁶⁵ Similarly, the supposed normalisation was belied by the clear presence of the military in Belfast and Derry, where the army overlooked the city from watchtowers that were considerably higher than the flats that housed the local population.²⁶⁶ Finally, on one occasion, the Provisional IRA managed to win a direct confrontation with the British about the nature of the armed struggle waged by the Provisional IRA. As has been mentioned above, several imprisoned Provisional IRA men protested the withdrawal of the special status for Provisional IRA prisoners, and refused to be treated like ordinary criminals. In 1976, to avoid the association with crime, they took to wearing blankets instead of prison uniforms. In 1978 the 'blanket protest' turned into the 'dirty protest' when the prisoners stopped taking showers and started smearing excrement on the walls of their cells. The protests reached their climax in 1980, when several prisoners went on hunger strike. Eleven hunger strikers died, but they were hailed as martyrs, and their fate generated a massive outpour of sympathy for the Provisionals, as well as a stream of new recruits.²⁶⁷ The leader of the hunger strikers, Bobby Sands, was even elected as a member of the Westminster parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone while on his deathbed.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ *Operation Banner*, 4–3.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–7 and 5–8; Bradley and Feeney, *Insider*, 259.

²⁶⁷ Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin, Part III: Secret War*, 04:08 – 04:15.

²⁶⁸ "1981: Hunger Striker Elected MP," *BBC News*, April 10, 1981, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/10/newsid_2453000/2453183.stm.

Shortly after Sands' death, Sinn Féin started participating in elections. During the 1980s and 1990s, it scored around 10% of the vote in Northern Ireland. Towards the end of the 1990s, Sinn Féin's share of the votes grew to some 17%.²⁶⁹ While elections were more than opinion polls about the Provisional IRA, these scores do show that there was a sizeable part of the electorate for which it is highly unlikely that they were swayed by British attempts at depicting the Provisionals as common criminals. This is also borne out by the few opinion polls that were held during the Troubles. In 1978 46% of the respondents said they thought that the Provisional IRA "are basically patriots and idealists". In 1998 31% of the Catholic respondents indicated to have at least some sympathy for the Provisional IRA, and 13% said they were against the decommissioning of the Provisional IRA.²⁷⁰ It is difficult to discern trends from Sinn Féin's election results and a small number of different opinion polls, but it is clear that at least a part of the Catholics in Northern Ireland were not convinced by the British counter narrative, which therefore has to be considered ineffective, not because of any flaw in the principle itself, but because it was poorly implemented: the British counter narrative was contradicted in ways that deprived it of its credibility.

7.3 Conclusion

The first thing that is striking about the British campaign against the Provisional IRA (see figure 20 for an overview) is that it confirms the effectiveness of the counterterrorism principles that are on the 'harder' end of the spectrum. The intelligence gathering efforts were quite successful, as is clear from the above account of how deeply the Provisional IRA was infiltrated and how the various intelligence agencies successfully targeted the group's internal security department. Also, its law enforcement and direct action resulted in operational successes. The shooting incidents at Loughgall and Gibraltar were legally questionable

²⁶⁹ McAllister, "The Armalite and the Ballot Box," 129.

²⁷⁰ B. C. Hayes and I. McAllister, "Sowing Dragon's Teeth: Public Support for Political Violence and Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland," *Political Studies* 49, no. 5 (2001): 913–914.

and did little to win the trust of the Catholics in Northern Ireland, but certainly cost the Provisional IRA several valuable operatives.

What is also important is that the British government, while it scored these successes, stuck to a set of minimum requirements to a negotiated solution to the conflict. In doing so, they managed to break the will of the Provisional IRA to carry on the armed struggle. Furthermore, the success of these instruments was not limited to the operational level. The effective application of these three principles was also crucial for the outcome of the conflict. By infiltrating the group, arresting its members and not giving in to any demands, the British made the Provisional IRA realise that the Republicans' ability to wage the armed struggle was stretched to the limit, and that settling for what the British had to offer was the only workable option. In other words, the success of the negotiations depended on the success of law enforcement, direct action, intelligence and long-term commitment.

British performance on the more 'population centred' aspects of counterterrorism was decidedly less effective. We have seen that the Provisional IRA could maintain its numerical strength in the face of a constant stream of arrests, that it had a sizeable support network up to the very end of its armed campaign, and that a significant percentage of poll respondents expressed sympathy for the group and approved of its role in Northern Irish politics. In addition, while it is true that Sinn Féin suffered electoral defeats after botched Provisional IRA attacks, the party could usually count on some 10% of the vote, and scored even higher as the peace process was nearing its end. These failures can be attributed to largely the same actors that were responsible for the successes that were scored against the Provisional IRA.

The security forces frequently forfeited their legitimacy by getting involved in incidents that made it seem as if they were liquidating Provos instead of trying to bring them to justice. Attempts to convince Northern Irish citizens that the Provisional IRA were common criminals were blatantly contradicted by such shootings, and consequently yielded no

visible or meaningful effect. If anything, the shooting incidents that led to accusations of a shoot-to-kill policy showed that the Catholic population clearly sided with the Provisional IRA.

Also, there was no improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the Catholic part of the population. As early as the late 1960s a government commission clearly stated that the Catholics in Northern Ireland were discriminated against, and that this balance had to be redressed. But little came of this, and by the end of the conflict, the available parameters showed that the plight of the Catholics had not improved significantly. Protestants were still better educated, were working better jobs for higher salaries, and had more adequate housing than Catholics. In this respect, too, the British efforts to address the root causes of terrorism – if that is what they were, which is questionable – was a failure.

Which such variation in the effectiveness of the application of the various counterterrorism principles, it is not surprising that it is hard to tell whether the outcome of the conflict is an example of counterterrorism success or not. Judged purely by the outcome, the conclusion is clear: the British won, primarily as a result of the success of repressive means. This suggests that there are limits to the necessity of winning hearts and minds. The history of the Provisional IRA shows that counterterrorism can antagonise the population and still be successful in the long run. When applied with enough operational skill and for a prolonged period of time, pressure from law enforcement and intelligence agencies can bring about a desired end-state without having to win over the population. On the other hand, it can reasonably be argued that the application of the counterterrorism principles as described in this chapter sustained as well as contained the threat. The fact that the conflict went on for the better part of three decades can be considered a sign of failure. Nevertheless, fighting terrorist groups that are well-embedded in the population always takes time, even when root causes are adequately addressed and the hearts and minds of the population are won. At the very least, British counterterrorism against the Provisional IRA shows that

similar results can be achieved without the support of the population that is often considered crucial for success in counterterrorism.

	Outcome	Explanation
<i>Provisional Irish Republican Army</i>		
Restraint in the use of force	Violations counterproductive	Lacks of restraint in the use of force by the Army and the RUC, especially in the early days of the conflict, drove many Catholics to side with, or even join, the Provisional IRA
Rule of law	Violations counterproductive	Throughout the conflict, breaches of the rule of law (shoot-to-kill policy, mistreatment of prisoners) confirmed the notion among the Catholics that the British were the enemy
International cooperation	Flawed implementation	The government of the Republic of Ireland lacked the means and the political will to put an end to Provisional IRA activities on Irish soil (training, arms development and storage)
Long-term commitment	Effective	The British government refused to give in to the Provisional IRA's demands, which gave rise to a war-weariness among the Provos
Addressing root causes	Flawed implementation	Attempts to alleviate the poverty, poor housing and poor health of the Catholic population were unsuccessful; at the same time, it is doubtful whether these were really root causes
Law enforcement and direct action	Effective	The arrest and liquidation of several crack units, as well as an ongoing stream of arrests of regular Provos, contained the group's capability for violent action
Offering a counter narrative	Ineffective	There have been attempts to depict the Provisional IRA as ordinary criminals, but, especially around the time of the hunger strikes in 1980, the Catholic population clearly disagreed
Offering exits	Ineffective	Some Provisional IRA members were 'turned', and became supergrass but most were 'turned back' by the Provisional IRA, so the unity of the organisation's unity stayed intact
Offering non-violent alternatives	Effective	After having fought the group to a standstill, the British government got the Provisional IRA to agree to a governance structure for Northern Ireland
Intelligence gathering	Effective	The Provisional IRA was ridden with informers and infiltrators, which allowed the security forces to foil many of the group's attacks

Figure 20. Counterterrorism principles as applied against the Provisional IRA