

BELEAST TELEGRAPH

ADVERTISEMENT

Belfast Telegraph - IPR Website of the Year

Search Site

Advanced Search

- Loadzajobs.co.uk
 - Propertynews.com
 - Belfast Telegraph TV
 - Family Notices
 - Ads For Free
- Belfast Telegraph**
- Home
 - News**
 - Local & National
 - World news
 - Politics
 - Environment
 - Education
 - Letters
 - Opinion**
 - Technology
 - Breaking News
 - Northwest Edition
 - Business
 - Business Telegraph
 - Sport
 - Health
 - Features
 - Columnists
 - Entertainment
 - Homefinder
 - Weather
 - Archive
 - Calendar 2008
 - Telegraph Travel
 - Shopping Directory
- Inside Belfast**
- Jobs
 - Training
 - Dating
 - Casino
 - Bingo
 - Reader Offers
 - Diners' Club
- Services**
- RSS
 - Media Kit
- Other Titles**

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Opinion](#)

Opinion

All just another sop to terrorists

Saturday, January 12, 2008

By Lindy McDowell

A war of words this week - over the word war. Is this an accurate description of the Troubles? Or just a blatant attempt to rewrite history? Maybe the answer would be clearer if you ask that same question another way:

Was Johnny 'Mad Dog' Adair a committed freedom fighter battling for a genuine cause? Or just a murderous, sectarian scumbag?

This week's debate has been raised following leaks from a report being drawn up by a body called the Consultative Group on the Past.

Set up by Peter Hain when he was here, the organisation's remit is apparently "to look at how best to deal with the legacy of the past". (Interestingly the word Troubles is not used on the CGP website. Why so? After all, that's the past we're talking about.)

The fact that this week's leaks (including the suggestion that there should be an amnesty for paramilitaries) has rubbed further salt in the wounds of victims would imply that the feelings of victims are not paramount when it comes to considering how to deal with the aforementioned legacy.

The impression given (rightly or wrongly) is that once again it's all about a sop to the paramilitaries.

For this is not just an argument over a word. After all the dictionary definition of 'war' and its common every day usage cover a very wide range of situations. There's George Bush's War on Terror. There's also Sharon Osborne's war with Dannii Minogue ? No, this is not about language.

It is about justification. It is about legitimising the terror campaigns of republicans and loyalists alike and seeking to sanitise the savagery, the sectarianism and the crimes against humanity of which they are guilty.

So a question: If terrorists who massacred innocent men, women, children and babes in arms are to be regarded as 'soldiers' and their terror gangs regarded as legitimate 'armies' does it follow that, retrospectively, their commanders might be subject to prosecutions for war crimes?

Not a chance!

Pursuing the perpetrators is not how the British Government envisages "dealing with the legacy of the past" in Northern Ireland. What the British Government wants is to wrap up once and for all the 'anomalies' of that legacy.

So how will an amnesty help? What's being proposed apparently is that paramilitaries will come forward, offer an apology and tell what they did in return for getting off scot free.

But why would they come forward? We all know - they know - that if they haven't been nailed for their crimes hitherto, the chances of future conviction is zilch. So why put themselves in the frame?

The answer is that this amnesty may actually be aimed at a very specific group of terrorists. Our old friends the On The Runs for whom it could provide a Get Out of Jail Free card. While the 'war' description would, of course, enable them to claim that their crimes were not crimes as such. But standard soldiering.

Shameful, despicable? Undeniably.

But what about the precedent this sets? After all if terrorist can claim that they fought a legitimate war in Belfast - and thus qualify for amnesty - then surely the same rules might apply to those currently fighting a

- Email Article
- Print Version
- Search
- +Most Emailed
- +Most Read

Don't Miss . . .

Belfast Fashion Week



City prepares for some catwalk glamour

Video: Healy's hat-trick



David scores at Belfast Telegraph Sports Awards

John Laverty



Kevin Keegan will win nothing at Newcastle

Net success



Young web designers honoured at ceremony

Video: Waxing Lyrical



Liam Neeson bids a fond farewell to Belfast theatre

Gerard McCarthy



Maureen Coleman meets Belfast's own Hollywood star

The Great Pretenders



Gary Grattan with Queen tribute band Flash Harry

ADVERTISEMENTS

ADVERTISEMENTS

Sunday Life

Ireland's Saturday Night

Community Telegraph

'holy war' in Britain.

That bloke who got put away in London this week for 'planning terrorist acts' - shouldn't he now be accorded proper prisoner of war status?

Osama - is he a terror chief? Or a legitimate military commander?

And come the day he decides to deal with the legacy of his past, will a quick apology and a brief outline of operations be enough to accord Brigadier Bin Laden an amnesty too?

Could Hillary be the real McCall?

Glancing at magazines in a newsagents the other day I caught the headline, 'Davina McCall: Real Woman Not Superwoman'.

Given that Ms McCall is a leading star of reality TV it is indeed encouraging to see her being described as 'a real woman'. But what is a 'real woman'? Real women are remarkably well catered for in magazines these days. There are features on fashion for real women. One firm has made a great deal and enormous profits out of offering beauty products for real women. What appears to set real women apart from their super sisters is that they might have lumps and bumps, spots, frizzy hair, bingo wings, thunder thighs, dodgy noses, flabby tummies ? in short the sort of flaws that the average airbrushed super-female does not.

Here's the thing though - and it's inferred in that headline about Davina (pictured above). Real women are seen as also really nice. Much more human and approachable and, well, real. The message is that women like real women. So was Hillary Clinton being real when she sniffled a bit this week on US prime time telly? We may never know for sure. But this apparent glimpse of Hillary showing real emotion appears to have swung the New Hampshire primary (57% of voters in the area are female) in her favour.

Now that's a real result.

Where are police when you need them?

The PSNI. What does it stand for anymore? Police Simply Not Interested?

That might seem to be the case following this week's shocking story from Antrim where a teenage girl alone in the house with her young brother and sister had to barricade herself and her siblings in a room and telephone the cops TWICE before they sent someone to deal with the six foot seven inch intruder who'd broken into their home.

The girl's parents (her father is the mayor of Antrim) actually made it home from church where she'd texted them in terror, before the police arrived. The mayor makes the point that the officers who responded (eventually) were excellent. But the thought of what could have happened in the meantime is beyond chilling.

Half an hour to answer a 999 call about kids at risk from an intruder?

If ever a case called for a thorough investigation it is this one. And what the investigation should be about is not the specifics of this one incident. But the wider questions.

Just how many police officers are available to help the public when emergency strikes these days? Is the PSNI actually fit for purpose? Or to put it in more straightforward terms, just where are the police when you need them?

McCanns not helping own cause

The strange case of Madeleine McCann continues to command the headlines. This week Gerry's been telling a US glossy mag how he regrets he left his little girl in the apartment that night while he and his wife wine and dined with friends in a tapas bar.

The theme of the interview is that he has regrets but doesn't feel responsible. The McCanns say they believe a paedophile was stalking the family and that they could not have foreseen the abduction.

Actually most parents, I suspect, would at least have considered such a possibility.

But there are other dangers in leaving three infants under the age of three unsupervised in a holiday apartment that would worry them too.

And it intrigues me that these less dramatic but nonetheless dangerous scenarios do not appear to have occurred at all to this pair of health service professionals.

The sort of dangers I have in mind is the possibility of one of the children sticking their fingers in a light socket ... breaking something and cutting themselves ? ingesting something ? choking on something ? climbing up and falling down ? pulling something heavy down on top of themselves ? fighting with each other ? wandering off ? or just the very, very obvious - waking up, finding mummy and daddy gone and becoming very distressed and frightened indeed.

The McCanns' seeming dismissal of all these and many more hazards is just one of the aspects of this case that makes it difficult for some of us to empathise with them.

Then there's the constant clamour about how to make money to "keep the campaign in the headline" .

Why this requires money given the publicity the case continues to attract is beyond me. Latest 'marketing ploy' - to borrow a phrase from Gerry - is said to be a movie.

The couple have denied this. But it doesn't help dislodge the sense that the couple at the centre of this case, and the team who advise them, have an odd way of looking at things.

I try to maintain sympathy for Team McCann - I really do.

But a lot of the criticism that's directed at them, surely they're helping bring it upon their own heads.

Not least the latest sneering internet jibes about the movie proposal - that if they are to make a film, it'll be called Home Alone Three.

More articles in Opinion

- [Viewpoint: New drink tax needed](#)
- [Viewpoint: Hitting the north-south jackpot](#)
- [Sparkle dims on star-spangled America](#)
- [Sharon Owens: Why India's feisty Gulabi women are really in the pink ...](#)
- [Preaching a much quieter word of God after Paisley](#)

Best of 2007 . . .

Records



Music stars reveal their pick of this year's tunes

Gigs



The pick of this year's finest concerts and performances

Films



Our experts reveal their pick of the year's movies

Books



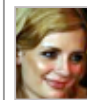
Authors reveal their pick of this year's finest writing

2007 In Pictures

- [Jan & Feb](#)
- [March](#)
- [April](#)
- [May](#)
- [June](#)
- [July](#)
- [August](#)
- [September](#)
- [October](#)
- [November](#)
- [December](#)

Video

A taste of tinseltown



Mischa the belle of Belfast city for movie premiere

What's the big Ikea?



The iconic Swedish superstore opens

BT Woman of the Year



Applauding Ulster's most exceptional women

Omagh blaze tragedy



Special report on Northern Ireland's worst house fire

Belfast Telegraph Property Awards



Celebrating excellence at the inaugural awards gala

Best view in town



Special multimedia report on Belfast Wheel

Big Man's big fry



First Minister's vision is outlined over breakfast



Ulster's boy wonder



Watch our interview with golf sensation Rory McIlroy

In Pictures . . .

News

- [Ulster Fry event](#)
- [The Twelfth](#)
- [Bull Run](#)
- [Award-winners](#)
- [Flooded Ulster](#)
- [Sunny Northern Ireland](#)
- [Devolution Day](#)
- [Assembly Elections](#)
- [Maze tumbles](#)
- [Blair quits](#)
- [Last watchtower](#)
- [Carrick-a-rede](#)

Events

- [Derry Xmas](#)
- [Boss is back](#)
- [Xmas: what a turn on](#)
- [Property Awards](#)
- [50 Cent](#)
- [Enrique Iglesias](#)
- [Halloween](#)
- [Fantasy Fest](#)
- [Rolling Stones](#)
- [Oxegen 07](#)
- [Beach Party 07](#)
- [Balmoral Show](#)
- [Razorlight](#)
- [St Patrick's Day](#)
- [Mardis Gras](#)
- [Justin Timberlake](#)
- [Brit Awards 07](#)

Sport

- [Spain 1 Norn Iron 0](#)
- [Win over Denmark](#)
- [Windsor win](#)
- [Golf: Rory McIlroy](#)
- [British Open](#)
- [Copa America Final](#)
- [N Ireland v Sweden](#)
- [Six Nations](#)
- [World in Sport](#)