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## Questions haunt probe into loyalist collusion

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

A distinguished and independent panel of international lawyers yesterday (Monday) reported on its two-year inquiry into 25 incidents involving the murders of 76 people. These were sectarian murders carried out by loyalist paramilitaries from mid-Ulster between 1972 and 1977.

The panel found strong evidence of collusion between members of the British security forces, mainly the RUC and the UDR, in 24 out of the 25 incidents, and therefore 74 out of the 76 murders. The evidence came from credible statements and forensics.

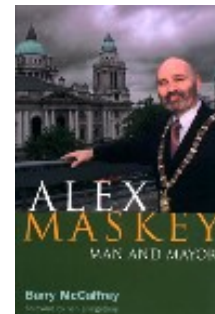
Policemen and soldiers helped paramilitary gangs to murder men, women and children, most of them Catholics. In some cases, policemen and soldiers were part of the loyalist paramilitary gangs. In some cases, they donned masks to murder, then RUC uniforms to investigate.

They stole, lent, used and hid weapons provided to them for the protection of the people, to murder civilians. They destroyed and covered up evidence. The report includes a chart which shows the way that the same guns were used over and over again.

There were car bombs, grenade attacks, and shootings. Pubs were sprayed with gunfire. Several families were massacred. The Dublin and Monaghan bombings left 34 dead, the largest number killed on any single day during the Troubles. Other cases under investigation did not lead to deaths. Many other people were injured.

Investigations failed even in the face of overwhelming evidence. In one case, a widow identified the killer, the notorious Robin Jackson, only to see charges against him dropped by order of the DPP. Jackson was a special branch agent. Evidence of collusion was provided by several former members of the security forces, but was not acted on. Ballistics evidence linking killings was ignored.

"Credible evidence indicates that superiors of violent extremist officers and agents were aware of their sectarian crimes yet failed to act to prevent, investigate or punish them as early as 1973, senior officials of the United Kingdom were



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by Barry McCaffrey

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put on notice of sectarian violence by UDR soldiers. At least by 1975, senior officials were also informed that some RUC officers were very close to extremist paramilitaries." Confessions in 1978 by former RUC officers John Weir and Billy McCaughey "should have blown the lid off RUC and UDR involvement in murdering Catholics".

Those who take the view that these things happened back in the bad old days and that all has changed now, and changed utterly, will find no comfort in this report. Weir's allegations, made public in 1999, were not properly investigated even then.

The inquiry panel met the Chief Constable of the PSNI, Sir Hugh Orde, in 2004. "We thought we received assurances of his co-operation," its chairman, Professor Douglass Cassel, said yesterday. "Since then we have received not a single piece of paper."

He said Orde had subsequently informed them that he was referring all relevant material on these matters to the body which preceded the Historical Enquiries Team. He already knew about that body before he met the panel, Cassel said. Why did he appear to change his mind?

This is not the first time that the activities of the so-called "Glenanne Gang" of loyalist paramilitaries, soldiers and policemen, have been exposed. Mr Justice Henry Barron looked at some of its murderous activities. The Pat Finucane Centre, which invited the Cassel team to carry out this latest investigation, has carried out excellent and painstaking work on behalf of some of the bereaved families. Last year it uncovered documents revealing high-level knowledge of collusion in the UDR in the early 1970's.

However, all attempts to get the full truth about these murders – and many others – have been thwarted by the refusal of the British government to make available crucial intelligence records. This report is yet another appeal to it to do the right thing before it is forced to under international law.

Pat Finucane's widow, Geraldine, was at the launch. She found the report "very encouraging".

It was scary to think, she said, that people in authority in London knew about these things back in 1973. "I am sure their skills were well-honed by 1989 when they murdered my husband," she said.

She is right. This fine report isn't just about the 76 awful murders it has studied. It is about hundreds of others that followed.

A question haunts the report, as it haunted the work of Mr Justice Barron, Lord Stevens and Judge Peter Cory. How high up the chain did knowledge of and complicity in these atrocities go?

It is a question which won't go away.

November 8, 2006

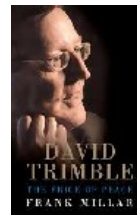
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This article appeared first in the November 7, 2006 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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