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The latest instalment in a whole series of damaging disclosures

([Irish News](#))

Nuala O'Loan's findings about Special Branch and the Mount Vernon UVF follow a series of other damaging disclosures on collusion between loyalist killers and the security forces.

Information uncovered by bereaved families is being combined with evidence from official probes to shed more light on one of the darkest aspects of the Troubles.

Files recently unearthed in the National Archives in London provided the first documented evidence of large-scale collusion and confirmed successive prime ministers were made aware of it.

The Irish News revealed last May that a key military intelligence file from 1973 entitled 'Subversion In The UDR' estimated 5-15 per cent of Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers were linked to loyalists.

The document added that the "best single source of weapons, and only significant source of modern weapons, for Protestant extremist groups, has been the UDR".

A memo of a briefing in September 1975 involving Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Tory leader Margaret Thatcher records: "Unfortunately there were certain elements in the police who were very close to the UVF, and who were prepared to hand over information, for example, to Mr (Ian) Paisley. The army's judgment was that the UDR were heavily infiltrated by extremist Protestants."

In the 1980s, when loyalist paramilitaries were condemned for targeting innocent Catholics, killers sought to defend their actions by releasing large numbers of intelligence files passed to them by police and soldiers.

Inquiries investigating the RUC in the 1980s led by John Stalker, pictured, of the Greater Manchester Police and Colin Sampson of the West Yorkshire Police were followed in 1990 by the first of three collusion inquiries by Lord Stevens.

The series of reports were never made public, but Lord

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Stevens confirmed evidence of collusion in the loyalist murder of solicitor Pat Finucane.

In 2001 the British and Irish governments appointed retired Canadian judge Peter Cory to investigate allegations of security force collusion in a series of notorious murders.

Mr Cory recommended public inquiries into the loyalist murder of Mr Finucane in 1989 and Lurgan solicitor Rosemary Nelson in 1999, the killing of Portadown Catholic Robert Hamill in 1997, and the INLA murder in prison of loyalist leader Billy Wright in the Maze prison same year.

The judge also recommended an inquiry into allegations of Garda involvement in the IRA murder in 1989 of senior RUC officers Harry Breen and Bob Buchanan.

While the Irish government has launched an inquiry into the double-killing, there was no evidence to suggest Irish state collusion with republicans on the scale now emerging of British involvement in loyalist activity.

The most serious allegation against an Irish administration came at the outbreak of the Troubles when an unsuccessful plot to import arms for northern nationalists saw two Irish government ministers sacked.

The findings yesterday (Monday) of Mrs O'Loan come two months after an Oireachtas committee concluded British security forces colluded in acts of terrorism in the 1970s.

The committee investigated a series of loyalist bomb and gun attacks, concluding: "We now have enough information to be fully satisfied not only that it (collusion) occurred, but that it was widespread."

An international panel of legal experts also reported last November that members of the RUC and UDR colluded with loyalist paramilitaries in 74 murders between 1972 and 1977.

January 24, 2007

This article appeared first in the January 23, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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