



The Return of the Militants: Violent Dissident Republicanism

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ABOUT ICSR

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Prologue

Since the Belfast Friday Agreement of 1998, the security situation in Northern Ireland has improved immeasurably. The Provisional IRA and the main loyalist terrorist groups have called an end to their campaigns and their weapons have been decommissioned under an internationally monitored process.

In recent years, however, dissident republican groups in Northern Ireland – such as the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA, who continued to oppose the peace process – have grown stronger.

Given the understandable focus on Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism in recent years, much less attention has been given to such groups. However, in the government's National Strategic Defence and Security Review, published in October 2010, 'residual terrorism linked to Northern Ireland' was identified as a Tier One risk to national security:

'There is a calculated campaign of violence from small dissident republican groups. Despite continuing political progress, their activities have increased in the last 18 months and the security situation is unlikely to improve in the short-term. There have been 37 attacks this year, compared with 22 in all of 2009. The ongoing recruitment of experienced terrorists and a younger generation will contribute to a continued high level of threat in Northern Ireland, as well as in Great Britain where the threat level was recently raised from Moderate to Substantial, meaning that an attack is a strong possibility.'

This report, by Dr. Martyn Frampton, the first of its kind in the public domain, analyses the origins and the nature of the threat posed by violent dissident republicans over the last two years. Dr. Frampton – an expert on the conflict in Northern Ireland and Irish republicanism in particular – has just published an important monograph about the history of dissident Irish republicanism in all its forms, which places such groups in their wider context, called *Legion of the Rearguard: Dissident Irish Republicanism* (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2010).

The aim of this pamphlet is to take these findings further and offer insight into the current security situation. It provides a timeline of dissident activity, an introduction to each dissident group, examines the relationships they have with each other, and asks what their aims are. Drawing on the expert testimony of former security service personnel, Dr. Frampton looks at some of the problems faced by those whose job it is to deal with the threat – in a greatly altered security environment – and discusses possible responses to the revival of violent republicanism.



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Executive summary

Increased threat from dissidents

- The danger posed by violent, dissident Irish republicans is now at its greatest level in over a decade. MI5 has raised the official threat level from these groups from 'moderate' to 'substantial' and warned against the real possibility of a strike on the British mainland.
- Violent dissident republicans are committed to the conduct of an armed campaign in Northern Ireland. Their aim is to prevent 'normalisation', undermine the province's peace process and foment political instability – to show that the 'Irish Question' has not been solved. In their view, that question can never be solved for as long as there is no united Ireland.
- Their lethal potential was shown with the triple murder of security force members in March 2009. Since that time, there has been a constant drum-beat of dissident attacks, with varying levels of success. One policeman has been critically injured; several others have received less serious wounds and had 'lucky misses'. It appears to be a matter of time – of when, not if – dissident republicans will kill again.

Recent history of dissident activities

- There is an important pre-history to the current escalation in violence. Dissident republicanism, the creed of those committed to the path of 'armed struggle', survived the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. It also survived the catastrophe of the Omagh bomb of August 1998. Since that time, there have been intermittent but continual attempts to de-rail the peace process. For a long time, these were mostly unsuccessful, or low-level in nature. Consequently, they were largely ignored by the mainstream media, giving a false impression of stability in Northern Ireland.
- The most recent surge in violence is led by the Real IRA and dates back to late 2007, when two off-duty policemen were shot and injured in separate attacks.
- The Real IRA (RIRA), formed in 1997 by members of the Provisional IRA opposed to the peace process, is today composed of two distinct factions. One of them has become increasingly prominent, operating under the banner of 'Oglaigh na hEireann' (ONH).

Other splinter groups also active

- There have also been other groups committed to the use of violence against the status quo in Ireland. These include the Continuity IRA (CIRA), and a short-lived Strabane-based splinter group, which – confusingly – also operated under the name of 'Oglaigh na hEireann'. The former was responsible for the murder of a police officer in March 2009; the latter for a civilian murder in

February 2008. This branch of ONH no longer exists and the banner 'Oglaigh na hEireann', in dissident republican terms, is now principally associated with the Real IRA.

- Alongside organised forms of violent dissident republicanism, there has been a fragmentation of other republican sub-set organisations, producing groups of unaligned republicans, whose loyalties are often promiscuous.
- Whatever their affiliation, dissidents of one hue or another appear to enjoy increasing control in 'republican areas' across Northern Ireland: south Fermanagh, Derry city (Bogside and Creggan), south Derry, north Armagh (Lurgan-Craigavon), east Tyrone, south Armagh and Belfast (north and west).

Weakening of the Provisional IRA and local police

- The growth in dissident strength has been paralleled by the retraction and withering of the Provisional IRA, as well as other structures of social support for the broader Provisional movement (Sinn Féin offices, community groups etc.).
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has struggled to respond to the challenge posed by dissident republicans. Senior officers have admitted the existence of a skills-gap. This is a product of a hoped for peace 'dividend', which saw the dismantling of the Royal Ulster Constabulary's (RUC) counter-terrorist infrastructure and wider budgetary cuts.
- The ability of the PSNI to deliver 'community policing' has been seriously weakened by dissident violence, with various reports of 'go-slow' and 'no-go' policing areas.

Effectiveness of dialogue?

- It has been suggested that dialogue might help diminish the dissident threat. But the dissident groups themselves, unsurprisingly, reject such propositions. Their *raison d'être* is to oppose the political process and the parameters around which it is based.
- Dissidents believe that the mistake the Provisional IRA leadership made in the 1990s was to engage in a flawed negotiation process. In their view, there can be no negotiations until the British agree to leave Ireland. Until such time, they insist the violence must continue.
- Note: 'Dissident republicanism', as a broad phenomenon, includes some who are still committed to the path of violence – but also some who are not. The term 'dissident' is in that sense used as a catch-all, to encompass those of an Irish republican persuasion who have broken with the 'mainstream' movement of Sinn Féin and the Provisionals. It is by their opposition to the peace process and/or the political status quo in Northern Ireland that they have come to be labelled 'dissidents', though they dispute that very term.

Glossary

32CSM (32 County Sovereignty Movement) Dissident Irish republican political organisation opposed to the peace process. Led by Francie Mackey, it was created in 1997 by republicans unhappy with Sinn Féin's acceptance of the Mitchell Principles on non-violence. It is said by the government to be 'inextricably linked' to the Real IRA, though they have denied this

CIRA (Continuity IRA) Dissident Irish republican paramilitary organisation, created in 1986 by republicans unhappy with (Provisional) Sinn Féin's decision to abandon abstentionism. It became active only after the 1994 Provisional IRA ceasefire. It is opposed to the peace process and appears to be closely linked to Republican Sinn Féin

DPP District Policing Partnerships

DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) Unionist party in Northern Ireland led by Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley until May 2008 and currently by Peter Robinson

An Garda Síochána (known colloquially as the Gardaí)
Irish police force

IICD (Independent International Commission on Decommissioning)

IMC (International Monitoring Commission) Set up by the British and Irish governments' 'Joint Declaration' of 2003, to monitor paramilitary activity

INLA (Irish National Liberation Army) Socialist Irish republican paramilitary organisation formed in 1974 out of a split within the 'Official' republican movement. Though opposed to the peace process it declared a ceasefire in 1998 and formally decommissioned all weaponry in 2010

IRA (Irish Republican Army) Title claimed by a variety of Irish republican organisations

IRLA (Irish Republican Liberation Army) Small dissident Irish republican organisation that, according to the IMC, emerged in the Strabane area

MI5 (Military Intelligence Section 5) The British internal security service

MLA Member of the Legislative Assembly (in Northern Ireland)

NIO Northern Ireland Office

Óglaigh na hÉireann 'Volunteers of Ireland'. The title claimed by various forms of the IRA, from the PIRA to ONH itself (it is also the official title of the Irish defence forces)

Glossary

ONH (Óglaigh na hÉireann) The acronym ONH is taken to refer to a small dissident Irish republican paramilitary organisation that emerged from the Continuity IRA in the Strabane area in 2006. It is not to be confused with the Real IRA faction that also began using the title 'ONH' from 2009 and is referred to here as Real IRA/ONH

PIRA (Provisional IRA) Irish republican paramilitary organisation, created 1969–70 after a split with the 'Officials', linked to (Provisional) Sinn Féin. For most of the 'Troubles' it was known simply as 'The IRA'

PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) Successor police force to the RUC, established in 2001

RAAD (Republican Action Against Drugs) Small dissident Irish republican organisation, engaged in paramilitary violence against alleged 'drug dealers' in Derry and the surrounding area

RIRA (Real IRA) Dissident Irish republican paramilitary organisation, opposed to the peace process. It was created in 1997, by those unhappy with Sinn Féin's acceptance of the Mitchell Principles on non-violence

Real IRA/ONH Faction of the Real IRA that began to operate simply under the banner of ONH from 2009 onwards. Not to be confused with the smaller group that used the same name after splitting from the Continuity IRA in the Strabane area in 2006

RSF (Republican Sinn Féin) Small Irish republican political party formed in 1986 by those opposed to Sinn Féin's decision to abandon the policy of abstentionism from the Irish Dáil. Until 2009 it was led by Ruairí Ó Brádaigh; the current president is Des Dalton

RNU (Republican Network for Unity) Irish republican political organisation created in 2007 as a successor organisation to the 'Concerned Republicans' movement. Opposed to the direction of Sinn Féin and the Good Friday Agreement

RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) Northern Irish police force, superseded in 2001 by the PSNI

SNH (Saoirse na hÉireann) Small dissident Irish republican splinter group that, according to the IMC, emerged briefly in Belfast

SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party) Constitutional nationalist, Northern Irish political party, formerly led by John Hume, currently led by Margaret Ritchie

Sinn Féin Irish republican political party, led by Gerry Adams. Created 1969–70, after a split with the 'Officials'; linked to the 'Provisional' IRA

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1 Introduction

The summer months of 2010 saw Northern Ireland return to the world's media headlines for all the wrong reasons. Life in the province was punctuated by periodic bomb attacks, shootings and serious rioting – phenomena once thought to have been consigned to the past. There has, it should be made clear, been no return to 'the Troubles'. At the time of writing, thankfully, no-one has been killed in 2010 and it would be a major mistake to assume that Northern Irish life is about to dissolve once again into sustained conflict. Nevertheless, the peace process does appear to be facing a serious challenge from those who reject its fundamental parameters. Thus, for all the talk – much of it appropriate – about the successful nature of that peace process and the Good Friday (or Belfast) Agreement of 1998, it should be recognised that Northern Ireland is not quite yet at peace.

The principal threat to the future stability of the province emanates from within the world of dissident Irish republicanism. The brutal truth of this was made clear in March 2009, when three members of the British armed/security services were murdered inside forty-eight hours. The 8 March assault on Massereene Army Barracks in Co. Antrim, which took the lives of two British soldiers – Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimcar – was claimed by the 'South Antrim Brigade of the Real IRA'.¹ When Police Constable Stephen Carroll was shot dead in Craigavon on 10 March, it was the 'Continuity IRA' that declared culpability.²

Even prior to those lethal attacks, it was clear that there remained a significant minority of Irish republicans for whom the peace process did not represent a satisfactory end to their 'long war'. There was a growing recognition too of the potential for such people to resort to violence. On 5 November 2008, for instance, the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Sir Hugh Orde, declared that the level of threat posed by the dissidents was the highest it had been for six years. In evidence to the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, he said, 'Without question, the intensity has increased. The determination of the main groups, Continuity IRA [CIRA] and Real IRA [RIRA], is clear by the evidence of the level of attacks and variety of attacks.' Presciently, Orde claimed that their primary objective was to kill a police officer and thereby fuel political instability.³ Such warnings were even repeated in March 2009 – on the eve of the murders that were claimed by the CIRA and the RIRA.

Since that time, the energy exhibited by violent dissident republicanism, suggests a creed that, far from dissipating, is growing in strength. In November 2009, the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) had judged that the 'seriousness, range and tempo' of violent republican activities had 'changed for the worse' over the previous six months. The threat level was described as 'very serious' and higher than at any time since the formation of the

¹ S. Breen, 'The week the funerals returned', *Sunday Tribune*, 15 March 2009.

² 'Continuity IRA shot dead officer', BBC News Online, 10 March 2009.

³ *Oral Evidence of Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde OBE, Assistant Chief Constable Judith Gillespie and Chief Inspector Sam Cordner*, House of Commons Northern Ireland Select Committee (HC 1174-i), 5 November 2008, available at, <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmniaf/c1174-i/c117402.htm>.

IMC in 2003.⁴ This assessment was confirmed by the organisation's twenty-third report in May 2010.⁵ More arresting still was the warning issued by MI5 in September that dissident republican groups posed an increasing security challenge, including to the British mainland. In the wake of this, the estimated 'threat level' from Irish terrorism was raised from 'moderate' to 'substantial'.⁶

Earlier this year, it was reported that MI5 was actually tracking more 'threat to life' plots from dissident republicans than from Islamist extremists – a stark statistic, given general public perceptions as to where the terrorist threat lays.⁷ Equally striking was the verdict of Dermot Ahern, the Irish Justice Minister, who said in February that the danger posed by the various arms of violent dissident republicanism was now as great as that associated with the Provisional IRA during the 'Troubles'.⁸

That month, a 250lb car bomb detonated in Newry, in Co. Down, outside the town court house, seventeen minutes into a half hour warning, as police were still evacuating the area. Remarkably, no-one was hurt, but the attack generated international headlines. On 12 April 2010, some twenty minutes after the midnight transfer of policing and justice powers from London to Belfast, a 50lb 'portable' car bomb in a hijacked taxi, exploded near MI5's regional headquarters just outside Belfast. This was followed by further attempted bomb, gun and mortar attacks in Derry, Co. Tyrone, Co. Down and Co. Armagh.

Amidst this latest flurry of dissident-related attacks in Northern Ireland there has been growing speculation that one or other of the dissident organisations would seek to bring their 'war' to the British mainland. Memories of the Canary Wharf or Manchester bombings of 1996 were evoked by those who feared that a new bombing campaign here might target the 2010 British General Election or subsequently, the party conference season.⁹ At the Conservative Party Conference in 2010, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, made it clear that the danger emanating from dissident republicans ranked alongside that arising from radical Islamist/jihadist groups, declaring: 'I also want to talk today about the fight against extremism and terrorism – a threat we face not just from al-Qaeda but from Irish-related terrorism.'¹⁰ In fact, the post-Massereene comment from the then PSNI Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, that dissident republican violence, though 'very dangerous', was 'in its death throes', seems wholly misplaced.¹¹

Who are the dissident republicans? What is it that inspires them? How great is the threat they pose? And what can be done about them? This report hopes to provide the beginnings of answers to some of these questions. It will do so by taking a look at the world of violent dissident republicanism as it is today and the ability of the state

⁴ *Twenty-Second Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationary Office, May 2010).

⁵ *Twenty-Third Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*

⁶ 'MI5 warns of dissident threat', *Irish Times*, 17 September 2010; 'Irish terror attack a 'strong possibility'', BBC News Online, 25 September 2010.

⁷ J. Kirkup, 'MI5: More terrorist plots from Irish Republicans than Islamic extremists', *Daily Telegraph*, 1 January 2010.

⁸ 'Ahern in warning over dissident threat', RTE News, 28 February 2010.

⁹ H. McDonald, 'Irish dissidents discuss ferry plan to carry bomb to England', *Guardian*, 23 April 2010; D. Sharrock, 'Real IRA may be planning fresh bombing campaign on the UK mainland', *The Times*, 24 April 2010; M. Townsend and T. Helm, 'Irish terror groups target Conservative party conference in Birmingham', *Observer*, 22 August 2010.

¹⁰ Speech of Theresa May to Conservative Party Conference, 5 October 2010, available at, <http://www.epolitix.com/latestnews/article-detail/newsarticle/speech-in-full-theresa-may/>.

¹¹ Cited in 'Northern Ireland terrorists are like a 'cornered animal', claims Sir Hugh Orde', *Sunday Times*, 15 March 2009. See also, H. Orde, 'Evil of a wicked minority', *News of the World*, 15 March 2009.

to respond to it – using both open source material and the views of former senior security officers tasked with defeating Irish republican terrorism.

What is not covered here is the history of this phenomenon as it has evolved over the last decade and more. There is not the space to do that story justice; and a fuller exposition of that subject lies elsewhere.¹² Equally, little direct consideration is given within these pages to those who practice, or claim to practice, a ‘non-violent’ form of dissident republicanism. What this omission raises, though, is the question of terminology; for the term ‘dissident republicanism’ is a necessarily broad one. As a phenomenon it includes some who are still committed to the path of violence – but also some who are not. The term ‘dissident’ is in that sense used as a catch-all, to encompass those of an Irish republican persuasion who have broken with the ‘mainstream’ movement of Sinn Féin and the Provisionals. It is by their opposition to the peace process and/or the political status quo in Northern Ireland that they have come to be labelled ‘dissidents’, though many within their amorphous ranks would insist that it is they who have stayed true to their beliefs, where others have not.

While such a definition may, at first glance appear a broad one, what immediately becomes clear from an even cursory examination of dissident republicanism is the extent to which certain key beliefs are shared across the spectrum of violent and non-violent organisations and individuals. Ideologically speaking, there is a corpus of mutually-held propositions, which brings a degree of homogeneity to this otherwise amorphous sphere. Dissident republicans of various hues share certain ways of thinking about the world; they draw on a common political-cultural heritage and use similar modes of expression.

Nevertheless, it is to the most militant exemplars of the creed that this study now turns. The next section will briefly surmise the backgrounds of the various armed dissident republican formations currently in existence down to 2008. This will be followed by an overview of the last two years, which have witnessed a surge in violent activity; the actions of the dissidents themselves will be examined, but so too will the responses of the security services, particularly the PSNI.

¹² See, M. Frampton, *Legion of the Rearguard: Dissident Irish Republicanism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), forthcoming October 2010.

2 Violent Dissident Republicans I: Who are they?

The Continuity IRA (CIRA)

The CIRA was created in 1986, by a group of traditional-minded Irish republicans opposed to the trajectory of Sinn Féin. The latter party, under Gerry Adams had opted to abandon the long-standing republican position of abstentionism, the policy by which the party refused to take up any seats that it won in the Irish parliament (the Dáil). At the same moment, a new political party, Republican Sinn Féin (RSF) was also formed by those republicans who disagreed with the move away from abstentionism. Since that time, RSF has been closely linked with the CIRA.

In the years that followed the CIRA's creation, the group remained almost entirely dormant – largely out of fear that the larger Provisional IRA would move to crush any rival organisation. Nonetheless, as the Provisionals moved towards engagement with the Northern Irish peace process, so the CIRA became more active.

In July 1996, a CIRA spokesman claimed responsibility for the bombing of a hotel in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. Further acts of violence and attempted attacks followed over subsequent years – with major bombs uncovered, for example, in Belfast (September 1996), Derry (November 1996), Lisbellaw in Co. Fermanagh (July 1997) and Markethill in Co. Armagh (September 1997).

In the 1996–8 period there were repeated reports of cooperation between the CIRA, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and the Real IRA (see below). It has thus been suggested that the CIRA played a significant, if unattributed, role in the Omagh bombing of 1998. Whether or not this is true, even after the catastrophe of the Omagh attack, the CIRA pledged in December 1998, that it would not end its campaign.¹³

Since that time, CIRA, with RSF ideological support, has attempted to maintain a campaign of violence, albeit with sporadic results. In March 2000, for example, it bombed a hotel in Irvinestown, and a couple of months later, it was judged responsible for a failed mortar attack on the RUC station in Rosslea – incidents which suggested the group's organisational hub lay within Co. Fermanagh. Nevertheless, it was occasionally able to reach further afield, with CIRA units also believed to be operational in parts of Co. Tyrone and Belfast. Lurgan in north Armagh has also come to be seen as a focus of CIRA activity.

Over the last two decades, the CIRA has consistently refused to countenance any cessation of violence, so long as the British remained in Ireland. Nevertheless, the capacity of the group to impact the wider political agenda seemed to be steadily deteriorating, along with its organisational cohesion. In line with this, the first report of the International Monitoring Commission (the IMC, set up to monitor paramilitary activity), in April 2004, claimed that the CIRA leadership had only 'tenuous' control over its units, with the latter acting 'in

13 'Continuity IRA pledges attacks', *Irish Times*, 16 December 1998.

the main autonomously'. Equally, the IMC's October 2005 report described CIRA as being only 'intermittently active'.¹⁴

In June–July 2010, against a background of wider dissident escalation, there were reports of serious unrest within the Continuity IRA. A group of younger, northern-based members of CIRA claimed a fresh army council had been elected, replete with a new Chief of Staff and GHQ staff, after a 'convention' in Bettystown, Co. Meath.¹⁵ This meeting was subsequently described as 'unauthorised' by those already *in situ*.¹⁶ However, the representatives of the 'new army council' then gave an interview to the *Irish Times* in west Belfast in which they asserted the legitimacy of their position and denounced their predecessors as 'tired, weary old men and women who want to think that they are generals but don't do anything'; the latter were said to have effectively run down the military campaign of the CIRA. The spokesmen admitted that they lacked the capacity for a sustained campaign of violence at that stage, but affirmed their determination to pursue a militant path from the fundamental position of 'Brits out'. In addition, they insisted that the vast majority (some 95%) of CIRA volunteers backed them.¹⁷ Inevitably, the veracity of such claims are impossible to prove (and they were again rejected by the original CIRA leadership), but it does seem clear that there has been some form of split within the 'Continuity movement' in both Limerick and Belfast.¹⁸

What is more, the impulse towards this rift appears to have come from those within CIRA who wished to see their organisation adopt a more aggressively violent stance.

Óglaigh na hÉireann (Strabane)

In February 2006, the IMC pointed to the emergence of a new group in the Strabane area of Northern Ireland (west Tyrone), which was said to have splintered away from the Continuity IRA: **Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH/S)**.¹⁹ Initial assessments questioned the long-term viability of this new entity, yet by January 2007 it was being reported that ONH/S had become 'more dangerously active' and was engaged in the targeting of PSNI officers.²⁰ Further attacks followed, with the targeting of DPP members and a PSNI officer in the vicinity of Strabane in April 2007; the organisation was also blamed for pipe bombs that were thrown at that town's PSNI station in July and December 2007.²¹ In February 2008, the first murder attributed to ONH/S was believed to have occurred with the killing of a former Real IRA member, Andrew Burns, in Co. Donegal.²²

¹⁴ *Third Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission; Fifth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: Stationary Office, May 2005); *Seventh Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: Stationary Office, October 2005).

¹⁵ J. Mooney, 'CIRA vows to step up terror spree', *Sunday Times*, 6 June 2010.

¹⁶ G. Moriarty, 'Divisions in CIRA after meeting of dissenters', *Irish Times*, 9 June 2010.

¹⁷ G. Moriarty, 'They are tired old men and women who want to think they are generals', *Irish Times*, 28 July 2010; G. Moriarty, 'Militant faction claims it has taken over leadership of CIRA', *Irish Times*, 28 July 2010.

¹⁸ See, 'CIRA outcasts started riots', *Andersonstown News*, 15 July 2010. See also, F. Ryan, 'Oh no, it's yet another splinter group!', *Andersonstown News*, 9 August 2010; G. Moriarty, 'CIRA leaders deny ousting claim', *Irish Times*, 29 July 2010.

¹⁹ *Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

²⁰ *Thirteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

²¹ *Seventeenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission; Eighteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

²² *Eighteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*. See also, S. Breen, 'Small, splinter dissident group behind murder', *Sunday Tribune*, 17 February 2008.

Thereafter, however, the level of group activity appeared to decline and by the beginning of 2009, it had effectively ceased to operate according to the IMC. Confusingly, in the period that followed one faction of the Real IRA would increasingly lay claim to the banner of ONH – and would actually displace the original, Strabane-based ONH as the group most associated with the term.²³

The Real IRA

After the split that created Republican Sinn Féin and the Continuity IRA, the mainstream republican movement remained united for a further eleven years. As the Northern Irish peace process developed during the 1990s, however, it became apparent that many members of the Provisional IRA were less than pleased with the direction in which the leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness was taking them. Discontent focused, in particular, on the not-insignificant matter of the IRA ceasefires – and subsequently on whether Sinn Féin could endorse the ‘Mitchell Principles’ and enter peace talks.

Opposition to the Adams-McGuinness line crystallised around the Provisional IRA’s ‘Quartermaster General’, Michael McKevitt. Eventually, according to Ed Moloney, as well as John Mooney and Michael O’Toole, McKevitt and allies such as Seamus McGrane and Liam Campbell resigned from the Provisionals, resolving to create a new organisation that would continue the ‘war’.²⁴

In October 1997, a founding ‘convention’ for what would become known as the ‘Real IRA’ (RIRA) was held at Falcarragh in Co. Donegal. The immediate aim was to initiate a campaign that could put serious pressure on the peace process and reduce the mainstream republican movement’s room for manoeuvre. With Sinn Féin party to the negotiations then under way, the hope was that a fresh surge in republican violence would place intolerable pressure on their unionist interlocutors.

In addition to the effort to unleash a campaign of violence, republicans opposed to the peace process sought to open a political front against Sinn Féin. The result was the 32 County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM).

In January 1998, the RIRA announced its appearance with an attempted 500lb bomb attack in Banbridge, Co. Down, which was thwarted by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Other more successful operations followed, with the immediate focus on the destruction of urban centres within Northern Ireland. The towns of Moira, Portadown and Banbridge in counties Down and Armagh were all devastated. On each occasion, people were injured (some seriously), but there was no loss of life; attempts were also made to bomb the British mainland and by the autumn of 1998, the RIRA

23 For an explanation of this see, *Twenty-First Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationary Office, May 2009). By the time of the IMC’s twenty-second report in November 2009, the group declared that it ‘had no further matters to report in respect of the Strabane group styling itself Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH)’. From that time, when it referred to ONH, it was principally describing a faction of the Real IRA. See, *Twenty-Second Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationary Office, November 2009).

24 For an account of all this, see E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), pp. 473-9; J. Mooney and M. O’Toole, *Black Operations* (Ashbourne, Co. Meath: Maverick House, 2003), pp. 21-42.

appeared to have developed real momentum; all of this was changed, however, by the Omagh bombing of 15 August 1998.

The near universal condemnation that came in the wake of the 500lb car bomb, which took the lives of 29 people, including the mother of unborn twins, forced the Real IRA to first suspend 'military operations' and then call a ceasefire altogether.²⁵ McKevitt, though, never intended the cessation to be permanent; rather, it was viewed as a tactical device by which to navigate the choppy waters post-Omagh. He was determined, as soon as the time was ripe, to launch a new campaign of violence.

In July 1999 at a meeting on the Inishowen peninsula, in the Irish Republic, to which former members of the RIRA, CIRA, INLA and PIRA were invited, it was decided that a new IRA, or second Real IRA, should be created.²⁶

In January 2000, the leadership of this revived Real IRA released a statement announcing its existence; a month later, a bomb partially exploded outside Shackleton barracks in Ballykelly, Co. Londonderry.²⁷ The RIRA was back in business.

Thereafter there were further attempted bomb, mortar and gun attacks across Northern Ireland, aimed at army barracks, police stations, the Belfast-Dublin railway line, town centres and Belfast International airport. A fresh effort was also made to bomb the British mainland. On 1 June 2000, a bomb exploded underneath Hammersmith Bridge on the Thames in London. No one was hurt and the structure did not collapse, but the damage was sufficient to cause serious disruption. More importantly, Britain's capital had been hit by a successful terrorist attack for the first time since the second IRA ceasefire of 1997. Additional attacks came in its wake. In July, for instance, a bomb was left at Ealing Broadway tube station in west London, while a suspect package was also uncovered at Whitehall, the heart of British government. Two months later, on 20 September 2000, the group made international headlines when one of its operatives launched a rocket propelled grenade at the headquarters of the secret intelligence service, MI6.

In March 2001, a large car bomb detonated in a taxi that had been left outside the BBC's television centre in west London – the Real IRA's response to John Ware's October 2000 *Panorama* exposé of the men behind Omagh.²⁸ That same year, a postal sorting office at Hendon in north London was twice targeted with incendiary devices; and in August, a 100lb car bomb exploded at Ealing Broadway in west London, injuring seven people after only a short and vague telephone warning had been given.

This second Real IRA campaign also carried a human cost – one often neglected by those reviewing the period. At the start of November 2000, a policeman in Castlewellan was seriously injured

25 For more on Omagh, see R. Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath: The Omagh Bombing and the Families' Pursuit of Justice* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), pp 1-42; for the Real IRA cessation see, 'Second statement of Real IRA, 18 August 1998', available at CAIN, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/rira18898b.htm>.

26 Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, p. 112; Mooney and O'Toole, *Black Operations*, p. 189.

27 'For immediate release: Statement by Óglaigh na hÉireann', 32CSM, January 2000.

28 S. Tendler, 'Attack was 'revenge for naming Real IRA' *The Times*, 5 March 2001. See also, *Panorama: Who Bombed Omagh?*, BBC One, 9 October 2000; D. Sharrock, 'Real IRA scores propaganda coup with BBC bomb', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 2001; N. Hopkins and R. Cowan, 'Bomb threatens peace process: Real IRA blast rocks BBC studios: Warning of more attacks: Police fear two terror campaigns on mainland', *Guardian*, 5 March 2001.

by a booby-trap car bomb, which cost him a finger and thumb and forced the amputation of one leg.²⁹ On 14 February 2001, Stephen Menary, a 14 year-old cadet, was maimed by an explosive device hidden in a torch, on a London Territorial Army base. In February 2002, the deadly potential of dissident republican violence was demonstrated when the RIRA was reported to be responsible for the murder of Matthew Burns in Castlewellan.³⁰ Later that month, a civilian security guard, Peter Mason, lost his arms, hearing and sight, when he picked up a booby-trapped flask near an army training centre in Co. Londonderry. Then on 1 August 2002, David Caldwell became the first man killed by the Real IRA since the Omagh bombing, when he picked up a booby-trapped lunchbox at a Territorial Army base in Derry.³¹ In a subsequent statement to the media, the 'Derry brigade of Óglaigh na hÉireann' claimed responsibility for the 'execution' of Caldwell.³²

The Caldwell murder, though, proved less a springboard for greater RIRA escalation, than an indictment of a campaign that was quickly losing direction. Even as it was possible to paint a picture of growing RIRA confidence, cracks in the edifice were also showing as the group came under increasing security force pressure. The perception grew that the RIRA was fatally compromised by agents and informers. Key figures such as McGrane and Campbell were arrested, convicted and imprisoned in 1999 and 2000 respectively. Ultimately, McKevitt himself was arrested in March 2001 and later found guilty on charges of directing terrorism.

Also damaging was the May 2001 decision of the US State Department to designate the Real IRA officially as a 'foreign terrorist organisation', along with any organisation operating under the banner of the 32CSM, 32CSC, RIRA or IRPWA [Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Association].³³ Thereafter, access to key funding from Irish American support groups across the Atlantic became harder to obtain.

As a result of such setbacks, criticism of the Real IRA's campaign developed within the organisation itself, fuelled by the increasingly sharp divide in outlook between those incarcerated by the authorities and those still at liberty. As 2002 progressed, this division hardened, as members disagreed on the best way forward. Finally, in October 2002, it emerged that there had been a split in the ranks, when a group of RIRA prisoners (close to the incarcerated Michael McKevitt), together with their supporters on the outside, had issued a statement urging the Real IRA leadership (allegedly linked to Liam Campbell), to stand down 'with ignominy'. That leadership was said to have neglected the prisoners, fraternised with criminals and failed to develop a meaningful strategy for the future.³⁴

This was rejected, with the outside leadership refusing to call a halt and promising that the struggle would go on. Thereafter, the split

²⁹ 'RUC believe dissident Republicans responsible for Down attack', RTE News, 1 November 2000.

³⁰ 'Group claims it ordered five men to leave NI', *Irish Times*, 5 March 2002; A. Wallace, 'Man gunned down in car ambush after personal feud', *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 November 2004.

³¹ 'Horrific last moments of Real IRA bomb victim', *Londonderry Sentinel*, 6 March 2007.

³² 'Real IRA admits role in army base murder', *Irish Independent*, 22 August 2002; G. Moriarty, 'Real IRA admits murdering civilian worker in explosion', *Irish Times*, 22 August 2002.

³³ 'Press Statement: Office of the Spokesman: Northern Ireland: Designation of the 'Real IRA' as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation', US Department of State, 16 May 2001.

³⁴ 'Statement from Republican Prisoners', *Forum Magazine*, February 2003; T. Harding, 'Real IRA men tell 'corrupt' leaders to wind up group', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 2002; L. Walsh, 'Corruption brings down terror group', *Sunday Independent*, 20 October 2002.

would remain, with the IMC later pointing to the existence of ‘two distinct factions’ within the RIRA.³⁵ The continued existence of this division was also evident in reports of physical in-fighting between the two sides in prison.³⁶

The overall impression of the RIRA in the period 2002–6, was of an organisation experiencing internal trauma. These years proved fallow for those who remained committed to the path of ‘armed struggle’. And yet the flame of violent Irish republicanism endured – and though its light might have dwindled to unprecedentedly low levels, it continued to burn.

From April 2003, a group operating under the name of the RIRA reappeared, with a foiled attempt to detonate a bomb outside the Laganside courts complex in Belfast. Further attacks followed, albeit intermittently, against commercial premises, Orange halls, members of the security services and the new civilian infrastructure for Northern Ireland’s police service. With regard to the latter, a favourite target proved to be the members of the new District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) in Northern Ireland.³⁷ In August 2003, meanwhile, the RIRA was responsible for the murder of Daniel McGurk in the lower Falls area of Belfast.

In late 2005, the IMC described the Real IRA as being ‘potentially a very dangerous terrorist group’.³⁸ And a year later, the monitoring commission could report a small ‘escalation’ in RIRA activity based on incendiary attacks and the attempted launching of a mortar bomb against a police station.³⁹ This ‘mini-surge’ petered out in early 2007, but a fresh, more sustaining, and ultimately more dangerous, escalation in RIRA activity appeared to follow from late that year. This brought the attempted murder of two off-duty Catholic police officers in November 2007: Constable Jim Doherty in Derry and Constable Paul Musgrave in Dungannon.⁴⁰ In the wake of the attacks, the Real IRA promised to ‘continue to target Crown forces at a time and place of our choosing’.⁴¹ A ‘new year statement’ also pledged that attacks on the ‘British police in Ireland’ would go on, with ‘repercussions’ threatened against anyone helping the police.⁴²

In February 2008, a Real IRA spokesperson gave a high-profile interview to the Sunday Tribune and declared a resumption of violence after a three year period of ‘reorganising’.⁴³ That this uncompromising message could not be ignored was confirmed within a couple of months, by another near-lethal attack on a police officer. In May 2008,

35 *First Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: Stationary Office, April 2004); *Third Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: Stationary Office, November 2004). The continued existence of this division was also evident in reports of physical in-fighting between the two sides in prison.

36 See, for instance, T. Brady, ‘Seven hurt in prison brawl between Real IRA factions’, *Irish Independent*, 18 January 2005.

37 One of the most high-profile incidents saw a brutal attack on the Deputy Chair of the Policing Board, Denis Bradley in 2005 (not the first time he had been targeted). See *Seventh Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*. Bradley’s home had previously been targeted with petrol bombs in February 2004. See, ‘Petrol attack on vice-chairman’ BBC News Online, 13 February 2004.

38 *Seventh Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

39 *Twelfth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*; *Thirteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*. See also, ‘The afterlife of the IRA: The dissident groups bent on shattering the peace in Northern Ireland’, *Independent*, 8 November 2008.

40 *Eighteenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*; ‘The afterlife of the IRA: The dissident groups bent on shattering the peace in Northern Ireland’, *Independent*, 8 November 2008; M. McCreary, ‘Shooting of off-duty officer condemned’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 November 2007.

41 ‘Real IRA’ issues threat to North police’, *Irish Times*, 28 November 2007.

42 ‘Attacks on police will go on in New Year’ – Real IRA’, *Derry Journal*, 8 January 2008.

43 S. Breen, ‘War Back On – Real IRA’, *Sunday Tribune*, 3 February 2008; A. Mullan, ‘Mackey slams Provos as RIRA vows resumption of violence’, *Ulster Herald*, 7 February 2008.

another Catholic member of the PSNI, Ryan Crozier, was seriously injured by an under-car bomb in Spamount, near Castlederg in Co. Tyrone.⁴⁴

Since that time, the level of activity associated with the Real IRA has appeared only to increase. In 2009, it was the RIRA that claimed responsibility for the attack on Massereene Barracks, Co. Antrim.

Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH)

As already described, the Real IRA split in 2002, when a section of the organisation's prisoners called for a ceasefire and demanded that the leadership on the outside stand down 'with ignominy'. From that point there were two distinct factions within the RIRA orbit.

From 2009, it became clear that a faction of the Real IRA had begun increasingly to claim the mantle of ONH – and would become the organisation most associated with the term.⁴⁵

In September 2009, the group was linked to a 600lb roadside bomb that was discovered near Forkhill, south Armagh. The device had a command wire running across the border into the Irish Republic.⁴⁶ A month later, ONH was blamed for two major attacks. The first saw a bomb explode under the car of a woman in east Belfast, less than a mile from Police HQ. The device was intended for her partner, a PSNI dog handler, to whom she often gave a lift to work; it was placed under the passenger seat and detonated by a mercury tilt-switch device, a marked increase in sophistication.⁴⁷ Less than a week later, another explosion occurred inside a Territorial Army base in north Belfast, though no-one was hurt.⁴⁸

In January 2010, ONH claimed a car bomb attack on a Catholic police officer, Peadar Heffron, from Randalstown, Co. Antrim. As a result of the attack, Heffron would later have his leg amputated and bowel removed.⁴⁹

In April, ONH claimed the high-profile car bomb that exploded outside the rear of MI5's regional headquarters just outside Belfast; the symbolic timing and location of the attack (occurring at almost the exact moment policing and justice powers were devolved to Northern Ireland), suggested the growing confidence and sophistication of the group. The same *modus operandi* (involving the use of a 'portable' bomb that was placed in a hijacked taxi, with the driver forced, at gunpoint, to deliver the device to its target) was then used for another ONH attack in August, this time against Derry's Strand road police station.

Such attacks may suggest that ONH might just be emerging as a possible unifying force around which the different dissident

⁴⁴ D. Rusk, 'Dissident violence has to stop: A wave of near misses for PSNI', *Irish News*, 17 November 2008.

⁴⁵ See, *Twenty-First Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationary Office, May 2009); *Twenty-Second Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationary Office, November 2009).

⁴⁶ 'Splinter group' behind road bomb', BBC News Online, 9 September 2009.

⁴⁷ G. Moriarty, 'PSNI partner was target of dissident republicans – police', *Irish Times*, 17 October 2009;

A. Morris, 'We planted car bomb: ONH', *Irish News*, 17 October 2009.

⁴⁸ 'TA explosion 'could have killed'', BBC News Online, 22 October 2009.

⁴⁹ 'Officer critically ill after bomb', BBC News Online, 8 January 2010; H. McDonald, 'Northern Ireland dissidents use remote control bomb in attack on PSNI officer', *Observer*, 17 January 2010.

organisations might gravitate. Though often described as small in number, it is reputed to comprise of former senior Provisionals, as well as RIRA members. Furthermore, despite its short-lived existence it has already demonstrated a capacity for successfully carrying out major attacks.

The Alphabet Soup: Fragmentation and Regional Division

It has been possible, as has been described, to discern the broad outlines of groups acting under the various banners of 'Continuity IRA', 'Real IRA' and 'Óglaigh na hÉireann'. And yet, the boundaries across these entities often appeared fluid. It was not always easy to tell where one ended and another began. The problems of identification were further compounded by the readiness of the groups to utilise names of convenience for 'false flag' operations. The IMC and newspaper reports have referred to the appearance (and often, rapid disappearance) of several 'groups' of varying substance: Saoirse na hÉireann (SNH) in Belfast, the Republican Defence Army (RDA) in Strabane, the Irish Republican Liberation Army (IRLA) in Belfast and Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) in Derry.⁵⁰

In the face of this confusing array, the IMC itself acknowledged that it was often impossible to attribute an action to one specific group. This difficulty was exacerbated still further, it asserted, because, 'one feature of dissident republican groups is a tendency for things sometimes to be personality-driven or dependent on family or local allegiances, rather than on ideology'.⁵¹ The consequences of this phenomenon were at first sight somewhat incongruous: a tendency towards both ever 'more fragmentation', with the erosion of formal hierarchies of command and control; and, at the same time, a greater capacity for co-operation and group-overlap at the local level.⁵²

Different regions brought different levels of dissident activity, with certain key 'hotspots'. South Fermanagh has seen repeated attacks on the police over previous years. The same could be said of Craigavon in north Armagh, the place where Constable Stephen Carroll was killed in March 2009. The years prior to his death saw repeated disturbances, which included the throwing of stones and petrol bombs and the firing of shots at the police.⁵³

Indeed, the whole north Armagh region emerged as an area of real concern to the security services at this time. Lurgan, for example, just a couple of miles from Craigavon, was another place to experience a series of dissident-related incidents.⁵⁴ There, the Kilwilkie estate served as the effective hub of militancy – the site of repeated unrest, with attacks targeted against the police.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission; Twelfth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*. See also, 'Ex-Provos swell RAAD ranks', *Derry Journal*, 18 August 2009.

⁵¹ *Eighth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

⁵² See, for example, the *Seventeenth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission*.

⁵³ See, for example, D. McAleese, 'Dissidents 'behind' recovered explosives', *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 August 2007.

⁵⁴ S. O'Neill, 'RIRA gunmen 'fired shots during riot'', *Irish News*, 26 April 2001.

⁵⁵ See, for example, 'Gangs seize vehicles on nationalist estate', BBC News Online, 20 March 1999; 'Dissident republicans blamed for hijacked car bomb', *Breaking News.ie*, 10 August 2005, available at <http://breaking.tcm.ie/2005/08/10/story215484.html>; B. Fatogun, 'Community relations 'ruined' after dissident bomb attack', *Irish News*, 11 August 2005; C. Morrison, 'Dissident republicans keep town in the past', *Irish News*, 26 April 2007.

Elsewhere, there were signs that dissident groups of various hues appeared to be strengthening and extending their control over key 'republican' districts across Northern Ireland. Within that sub-culture, the power of the Provisional movement (Sinn Féin and the PIRA) seemed to be waning. Hitherto, attempts to challenge the hegemony of mainstream republicanism had been met with decisive, often violent, riposte. Now, there were clear signs that a power shift had been affected. The removal of the Provisional IRA as an active force in the 2005–6 period appeared to have created something of a vacuum in republican 'heartland' areas, into which dissidents could move.

For example, there were reports, by the end of 2008, that a 'revived IRA' had come into existence in Dungannon, in Co. Tyrone and was taking action against suspected drug dealers. With other dissident activity registered in Coalisland and Cookstown, there were suggestions that 'republican east Tyrone' was moving, *en masse*, into the dissident camp.

Similarly, in South Derry, Derry itself, north Armagh and parts of south Armagh, there were signs that the Provisionals had, in terms of the republican sub-culture, conceded ever greater swathes of the province to the dissidents. A growing number of reports, for instance, testified to burgeoning levels of dissent within and defections from the Provisional IRA.⁵⁶ In Derry, for example, reports began to emerge that the Real IRA was taking a more active role in policing 'crimes against the community' in the city, expelling those accused of anti-social behaviour or drug dealing.⁵⁷ In 2009–10, there was a noticeable surge in paramilitary attacks in republican areas of Derry.⁵⁸ Many of these were claimed by the afore-mentioned Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD), which was said to include former PIRA members in its ranks.⁵⁹

According to the well-informed journalist, Suzanne Breen, the dissident groups enjoyed regionally fluctuating levels of support. The CIRA was said to enjoy pockets of support in north Armagh, Fermanagh and Belfast. By comparison, one faction of the Real IRA was judged to be strongest in Co. Londonderry, south Down, east Tyrone and Fermanagh; while those more associated with the ONH banner had a foothold in Belfast and south Armagh.⁶⁰

By early 2009, newspapers were reporting that the ONH faction of the Real IRA had claimed responsibility for several paramilitary-style shootings in west Belfast – employing the violent methods of social control that were previously the near-exclusive preserve, in that area, of the Provisional IRA.⁶¹ This group would grow in prominence over the course of that year. In April 2009, the BBC noted that there had been some twenty 'punishment attacks' over the preceding twelve month period (as compared to just seven in the previous year), the vast majority in republican areas and fifteen of them claimed by

⁵⁶ See, for instance, S. Breen, 'South Derry IRA breaks away from leadership', *Sunday Tribune*, 23 July 2006; L. Clarke and J. Mooney, 'Why the killers are back', *Sunday Times*, 15 March 2009; J. Mooney, 'Terror groups unite in 'new IRA'', *The Times*, 13 December 2009; J. Mooney, 'IRA 'master terrorist' defects to dissidents', *Sunday Times*, 4 April 2010.

⁵⁷ 'Real IRA condemned', *Belfast Telegraph* (North-west edition), 18 May 2004; E. Houston, 'Real IRA in cartel claim', *Daily Ireland*, 20 May 2005.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, 'Derry on brink of 'IPLD style' feud', *Derry Journal*, 22 April 2009.

⁵⁹ 'Ex-Provos swell RAAD ranks', *Derry Journal*, 18 August 2009.

⁶⁰ S. Breen, 'Unshakeable believers in the power of the bullet', *Sunday Tribune*, 15 March 2009.

⁶¹ M. L. McCrory, 'Paramilitary style attack was work of dissidents', *Irish News*, 7 March 2009.

ONH.⁶² Across the board, statistics collated by the PSNI revealed a reversal of the pattern whereby such ‘punishment attacks’ had been growing less frequent. Between 2001 and 2007, there had (with the exception of 2003) been a steady fall in the numbers of these occurring each year. In 2007, only 12 shootings and assaults had been attributed to republican paramilitaries (as compared to the post-1998 ‘peak’ of 199, which was recorded in 2001). The equivalent figure for 2009 was 56: an almost five-fold increase. Early indications were that 2010 was likely to replicate this – suggesting that the events of 2009 were no anomaly.⁶³ Moreover, data produced by the PSNI shows that the rise in paramilitary activity of this nature was centred on specific communities – with the Foyle and Belfast West Area Commands recording comparatively higher numbers of incidents than occurred elsewhere.⁶⁴

There have been other signs too that the ‘social control’ of the Provisionals has slipped in Northern Ireland’s capital, an area where they were once hegemonic. The most potent expression of this was the violence that attended the marching season there in both 2009 and 2010. On each occasion, leading members of Sinn Féin, such as Gerry Kelly and Bobby Storey, attempted to calm tensions in Ardoyne in north Belfast, but to no avail. There, the ‘battle for control of the streets’ between Sinn Féin and alternative expressions of republicanism could clearly be observed. It was made manifest, for instance, in the attempts of rival ‘community organisations’ to establish themselves as the authentic ‘voice’ of Ardoyne. Such groups were once the sole preserve of the Provisionals, but not any more.

Thus, ahead of the parades scheduled to pass by Ardoyne on 11 July 2010, Paul Carson, speaking for the ‘Greater Ardoyne Residents’ Collective’ (GARC) – though themselves non-violent – called on republicans from across Northern Ireland to ‘come to Ardoyne and stand shoulder to shoulder with its inhabitants’.⁶⁵ Given that Sinn Féin was pushing for a calm response to the parades, Carson was clearly aligning both himself and the GARC with those ready to challenge the authority of Sinn Féin in the local community. It is this erosion of the authority of mainstream republicanism, within a social/communal context, which forms the background to the rise of actually violent dissident republicanism.

So it proved. On 12 July the GARC led a sit-down protest in opposition to Orange parades, which were described by another of their spokesmen, Martin Og Meehan, as ‘coat-trailing acts of bigotry’. Meehan, the son of perhaps the most famous IRA man to emerge from Ardoyne during the ‘Troubles’, had previously been highly critical of Sinn Féin’s efforts to reduce friction in the area.⁶⁶ It was not insignificant that he should now align himself with the non-Provisional GARC.

In response, the GARC analysis of the situation was bitterly criticised by the ‘Crumlin Ardoyne Residents’ Association’ (CARA) and their

⁶² ‘Surge’ in paramilitary shootings’, BBC News Online, 9 April 2009.

⁶³ Statistics taken from the Police Service of Northern Ireland website, available at, http://www.psni.police.uk/ps_attacks_cy.pdf.

⁶⁴ Statistics provided by the PSNI to the author on ‘paramilitary assaults attributed to republicans’. Of some 50 attacks noted for 2009–10, 16 occurred in Foyle and 14 in Belfast West.

⁶⁵ S. Breen, ‘Fears mount in Belfast ahead of Orange march in Ardoyne’, *Sunday Tribune*, 11 July 2010.

⁶⁶ M. Og Meehan, ‘Aggressive attitude of PSNI triggered violent reaction’, *Irish News*, 15 July 2009. See also, S. Breen, ‘The fresh face of rioting is nothing new in Ardoyne’, *Sunday Tribune*, 19 July 2009.

spokesman, Joe Marley.⁶⁷ The outlook of CARA was much more in line with that of Sinn Féin, which called for restraint in the face of the marches; and the disagreement between the CARA and the GARC seemed to reflect the wider struggle for authority over the north Belfast republican community.

In the event, the GARC protest, which also involved members of political republican groups such as éirígí and the Republican Network for Unity (RNU), degenerated into major riots (éirígí and RNU spokespeople later insisted that they were not involved in any violence).⁶⁸ These were replicated on three successive nights in Belfast, with additional disturbances in Derry and Lurgan, during the course of which over eighty police officers were injured and some £1million damage caused.⁶⁹ The pleas of Sinn Féin for calm had clearly fallen on deaf ears.

More striking still was the symbolic exchange captured on camera between Bobby Storey and a masked young rioter in July 2010. The prominent Provisional was seen to challenge and berate the younger man, calling him 'ridiculous' and a 'disgrace' to the district. In response, the would-be rioter delivered a clenched fist and a shout of 'yeehaw'. Storey replied, 'yeehaw, that's some answer...', only to be met with a defiant, 'what's your f*cking answer?'⁷⁰ As an intellectual exchange, it perhaps fails to translate to the written word, but the masked man's scornful insolence in the face of the chairman of Belfast Sinn Féin (who also happened to be one of the most renowned IRA men from 'the Troubles') was hugely telling. The episode reflected how far the ground had moved from under the feet of Sinn Féin in what was once considered a staunch Provisional heartland. In such locales, the voices of dissident republicanism appeared now to carry more weight; a shift that reflected their growing ascendancy over the republican sub-culture within Northern Ireland.

⁶⁷ A. Madden, 'Ardayne sit-down protest group is defiant', *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 July 2010.

⁶⁸ G. Moriarty, 'Woman due in court over Belfast seizure of firearm', *Irish Times*, 19 July 2010.

⁶⁹ M. Simpson, 'Theme park' rioting raises old fears', BBC News Online, 14 July 2010; 'Cynical godfathers' behind NI violence', BBC News Online, 14 July 2010; 'Rioters 'tried to firebomb' Lurgan train', UTV, 15 July 2010; G. Moriarty, 'PSNI overtime for July riots tops £1m', *Irish Times*, 3 September 2010.

⁷⁰ For the actual confrontation see the video at, 'The King is dead...', Slugger O'Toole, 15 July 2010, available at, <http://sluggerotoole.com/2010/07/15/the-king-is-dead/>. For an account of the exchange, see 'Yeehaw', *The Pensive Quill*, 3 September 2010, available at, <http://thepensivequill.am/2010/09/yeehaw.html>.

3 Violent Dissident Republicans II: What do they want?

In April 2009, the Real IRA issued a statement on Easter Sunday in Derry and gave an interview to the *Sunday Tribune* newspaper, in which it threatened members of the PSNI and ex-IRA informers, and also pledged to carry out attacks in Britain. The group described itself as ready to 'engage in [the] tactical use of armed struggle'.⁷¹ Post-Massereene, the Real IRA felt that the 'idea of an unarmed civilian police force' had been exposed, thereby preventing a key part of the 'normalisation' agenda from moving forwards in Northern Ireland.⁷²

Similarly, the Continuity IRA used its 2010 Easter commemoration to warn of further attacks: 'As long as British occupation forces remain in Ireland, that will be the inevitable result of their presence here. The lessons of history are working out again in our time'.⁷³

Through such public utterances, and those of their political support groups, it is possible to determine the agenda of the dissident republican rejectionists:

- Opposition to the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement
- A desire to prevent 'normalisation' in Northern Ireland
- A determination to foment instability

Violent attacks are seen as a legitimate (and often essential) vehicle for the achievement of dissident aims. The utility of bombings and shootings is judged to lie in the reaction that they provoke from the state and others. They interfere, for example, with efforts to deliver 'normal community policing'; they challenge the legitimacy of the institutions in Northern Ireland, by refuting the idea that they might have brought peace to the province. At the larger level, the continuance of a campaign of politically-motivated violence is held to prove the lie of claims that the Northern Ireland question is somehow 'settled' – it forces Northern Ireland 'on to the agenda' and highlights the fact that there is no Irish unity.

In this regard, the point of departure for those so-minded is a belief that all of the problems of contemporary Ireland, whether north or south of the border, stem irreducibly from the partition of the island. The British-Irish settlement of 1920–1, which brought the birth of Northern Ireland, is on this reading viewed as something akin to the act of Original Sin; the division of the country assumed to be the product of diabolical British malignancy. Northern Ireland thus assured the British an 'imperial' foothold in Ireland, with the southern state often viewed as little more than a dysfunctional, 'neo-colonial', 'quisling' state.

71 S. Breen, 'Exclusive – Real IRA: We will take campaign to Britain', *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009; S. Breen, 'Massereene Murders Sets North Back Years', *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009; 'Statement from the Real IRA to be read out at the 32 County Sovereignty Movement commemoration in Derry tomorrow', *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009; S. Breen, 'How Real IRA killed Denis Donaldson', *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009.

72 S. Breen, 'Massereene Murders Sets North Back Years', *Sunday Tribune*, 12 April 2009.

73 H. McDonald, 'Continuity IRA issues warning of more attacks against police', *Observer*, 12 April 2009.

What is required, it is argued, is the completion of Irish 'national liberation', so as to achieve a united, independent Ireland, envisaged as a restoration of the Republic that was 'lost' in 1916. That Republic, it is said, was proclaimed in Dublin at the Easter Rising, suppressed by the British, but subsequently ratified by the first 'all-Ireland' parliament, Dáil Éireann, in 1919. Thereafter, it was repressed again by the British – first by force of arms and then by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 which confirmed partition and the fundamental constitutional parameters of contemporary Ireland.

These are the parameters that the modern-day dissidents, like their republican forefathers, reject. In so doing they are able to trace (if so inclined) an intellectual heritage that stretches back to the 1916–21 period. On this view, the cause of Irish republicanism has been handed down from one generation to another – by those who have 'stood by' the Republic, when others preferred to 'betray' it. A succession of such betrayals is judged to have occurred, each leading to a parting of the ways (the famous republican 'split'), with the flame of true republicanism guarded by an ever-diminishing minority of true believers.

It is this ideological legacy which, to a greater or lesser extent, underpins the existence of dissident Irish republican groups today. This is the thinking that leads dissident republicans to oppose the status quo in Ireland – and especially the Northern Irish peace process and Good Friday Agreement. They hold to a traditional interpretation of Irish republicanism, which posits 'armed struggle' against British 'occupation' in Ireland as morally legitimate; indeed, those still prepared to use violence to achieve Irish unity, view it as not just legitimate, but also necessary.

This is not to over-intellectualise the adherents of this creed; on offer here is a crudified, one-dimensional view of history, which has little space for complexity or nuance. Nor to assume that every contemporary 'dissident' is fully cognisant of this background. The average, teenage 'raw recruit' into dissident republican circles is as much (if not more) likely to be motivated by more immediate grievances, common to the working and under classes of any modern state: poverty, chronic unemployment, lack of affordable housing, poor social provision. And yet what elevates their sense of injustice over their lot in life into a political 'cause' – and separates them from the disadvantaged of Liverpool, Birmingham or London – is the existence of a republican narrative that offers both explanatory framework and solution. It is this uncomplicated, linear version of Irish history that endows dissidents with their sense of legitimacy; for it contains within it an easily comprehensible narrative that features (after a fashion), a sense of historic mission, comprising 'good versus evil', in which the path of righteousness falls to a small minority. In its most extreme manifestation that minority considers itself empowered to carry forth the 'unfinished' Irish national project by any and all means, including the use of violence.

4 Responses I: The Security Situation

Can the Police Cope?

In the face of growing dissident confidence and levels of activity there were various suggestions that the security services seemed to be struggling to keep pace. In late 2008, the Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde had admitted that, despite the fact the dissidents were 'well infiltrated both north and south', the police did not have a 'full intelligence picture' of the threat they faced.⁷⁴

In March 2010, the PSNI Area Commander for Londonderry, Chris Yates, would admit that,

Quite a sizeable majority of my officers at Strand Road, are only PSNI officers. A lot of the experience we would have had from the previous terror campaign have left the organisation, and undoubtedly left skills gaps.... These are not skills that you simply expect people to pick up off the shelf and do. These are all skills – including counter terrorism, that we are having to learn all over again.⁷⁵

Though Yates was quick to affirm that the process of re-training was, by that stage, complete, he also acknowledged that the RIRA shooting of Constable Jim Doherty back in 2007 had come like a 'bolt out of the blue'.⁷⁶ He thus appeared to admit that the upsurge in dissident activity from that point had caught the police off guard.

Furthermore, there were indications that irrespective of Yates' assurances, for much of 2009 the police were less than confident in dealing with the dissident threat. In May 2009, for instance, it was being suggested that parts of south Fermanagh, particularly Rosslea, Lisnaskea, Newtownbutler and Donagh had effectively become 'no-go-areas' for PSNI patrols because of CIRA activity.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, there were reports that concerns over police officers being lured into dissident-laid 'traps' were seriously impeding the PSNI's ability to respond to incidents. After a robbery in July, in which a cash machine was removed from a wall in south Armagh, for example, the police apparently took over twelve hours to respond.⁷⁸ In October 2009, residents in the village of Clady in Co. Tyrone had to seal off a road themselves after the police did not turn up to the scene of a suspect van.⁷⁹

In March 2010, after the Newry car bomb, much disquiet was voiced, not merely over the attack, but also over the fact that a vehicle, believed to have been used as the getaway car, lay abandoned in Drumintee in south Armagh for two days before

⁷⁴ D. McKittrick, 'The afterlife of the IRA: The dissident groups bent on shattering the peace in Northern Ireland', *Independent*, 8 November 2008.

⁷⁵ E. Sweeney, 'Yates gives views on dissidents', *Londonderry Sentinel*, 3 March 2010.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ J. Mooney, 'Gardai 'know identity' of dissident terrorists', *Sunday Times*, 24 May 2009.

⁷⁸ D. McAleese, 'How the terror threat is affecting policing in Northern Ireland', *Belfast Telegraph*, 2 December 2009.

⁷⁹ Former members of RUC Special Branch acknowledge that a cautious approach was often adopted in the past, because of the threat from the PIRA. However, there is a perception that the corporate response of the modern PSNI is far more risk averse, in part because the police are 'buried' in paperwork and forced to operate within the constraints of the Health and Safety at Work Act.

going missing, despite it having been reported to the police.⁸⁰ Similar concerns about a lack of police responsiveness were voiced in April 2010 when Newtownhamilton police station was targeted by dissident bombers for the second time in just over a week. After the latter attack, it was reported that police had failed to respond to a 50-minute warning, only arriving after the blast; fire-fighters had moved local families away from the blast.⁸¹ In the aftermath, the chairman of the Police Federation, Terry Spence, pointed to the fact that since the start of 2010, there had been 18 bomb and mortar attacks, 18 gun attacks, one police officer seriously injured and another 24 officers forced to leave their homes because of intimidation. Spence warned there was a danger that the security services would 'gradually sleepwalk into a renewal of a full-blown terrorist campaign'.⁸²

The resources being made available to tackle such a campaign were said to be inadequate. Already, in September 2009, Terry Spence contended that the police were 'dangerously under-resourced' to tackle dissident republicans and was fiercely critical of the decision to jettison the 500-strong full-time police reserve. By that stage, according to Spence, the police had dealt with some 420 'viable devices' in 750 security alerts in Northern Ireland over the previous two years.⁸³

Within days of the March 2009 murders, the then Minister of State for Northern Ireland, Paul Goggins stated that the PSNI would be given £28.7m additional funding, however later that year there were new reports that the police were being asked to cut £17m from their budget.⁸⁴ In 2008–9, the PSNI £1.2bn budget had been cut by £71m. A further £74m was scheduled to be lost in the two years from 2009–11.

In the wake of the Newry courthouse bomb of February 2010, the new Chief Constable, Matt Baggott insisted that the PSNI remained adequately equipped to deal with the dissident threat, pointing to the fact that they had arrested 130 people for dissident republican activity over the previous fifteen months.⁸⁵ It was also reported at that time that some 250 officers had been returned to active duty since the arrival of Baggott and his review of the administration he had inherited.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, in spite of the surge in dissident activity, there was no effort to amend plans to close various police stations in Northern Ireland's border region, such as that at Bessbrook.⁸⁷ Furthermore, reports continued to abound of security service limitations in the face of the dissident threat. In April 2010, for example, it was claimed that two undercover soldiers had narrowly escaped being killed by dissidents in a failed surveillance operation in west Belfast; the result, it was said of the police being 'intelligence blind'. Alan McQuillan, a former Assistant Chief Constable in the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) maintained that the PSNI were hampered by not playing the

⁸⁰ 'Police under fire as bomb car mystery deepens', *Newry Democrat*, March 2010.

⁸¹ D. McKittrick, 'Police "failed to respond to Armagh bomb warning"', *Independent*, 24 April 2010; 'Bomb response 'embarrassed PSNI'', BBC News Online, 27 April 2010.

⁸² 'Bomb response 'embarrassed PSNI'', BBC News Online, 27 April 2010.

⁸³ 'Police cuts 'hit dissident fight'', BBC News Online, 24 September 2009.

⁸⁴ 'Police cuts 'hit dissident fight'', BBC News Online, 24 September 2009.

⁸⁵ D. McAleese, 'Newry bomb: PSNI 'ready and able' to deal with terrorist threat', *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 February 2010.

⁸⁶ 'Intelligence failings hand initiative to the dissidents', *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 February 2010.

⁸⁷ D. McAleese, 'Be realistic' over police station closures, Baggott is urged', *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 May 2010.

lead role in intelligence. MI5, he argued, lacked the necessary local knowledge and networks to meet the challenge effectively; a divided system (with the police now divorced from intelligence analysis) was also said to be inherently more inefficient.⁸⁸

Elsewhere too there were continued concerns over the extent to which growing danger stemming from dissident republican violence was eroding the ability of the police to deliver 'community policing'. In June 2010, police in Londonderry refused to respond immediately to an emergency plea from a couple in the Shantallow area of Derry, whose house had been raided by armed men, threatening to execute them.⁸⁹ Then in the aftermath of the July Ardoyne unrest, and amidst concerns that the dissidents had successfully obtained 'heavy' weapons from south-east Europe, it was reported that a major review of patrolling schedules was underway in certain areas, such as Belfast, Tyrone and south Armagh. It was also said that PSNI officers had been warned to stay out of Ardoyne at night in soft-skinned patrol cars.⁹⁰

In August 2010, Terry Spence reiterated his earlier unease at the situation as it stood, claiming that the PSNI were 'potentially reaching breaking point' due to the reduction in officer numbers and budget cuts.⁹¹ The following month he claimed that the authorities were deliberately under-playing the level of dissident activity, with three times as many attacks having occurred in 2010, than the number suggested by official figures (over 90, as opposed to 34). In order to combat this threat, Spence urged the recruitment of a thousand extra police officers.⁹² Such calls found echo in the appeal of the Chief Constable, Matt Baggott, that the PSNI receive funding provision for five years to 'relentlessly pursue terrorists'.⁹³

How did it come to this?

The shortfalls in resources and the above-noted admission of PSNI Area Commander Chris Yates – that the police faced a skills deficit in responding to the dissident republican threat – are made all the more remarkable, given the pre-history of counter-terrorist policing in Northern Ireland.

The PSNI came into being in November 2001 as the successor entity to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – the latter being incorporated into the title deeds of the new organisation.⁹⁴ Over the previous decades it was the RUC that confronted the violent campaign of the Provisional IRA. This was particularly so from the mid-1970s, when the British government opted to pursue a three-pronged strategy of 'criminalisation, Ulsterisation and normalisation'. Whereas, during the early years of the 'Troubles', the British Army had been sent on to the streets of Northern Ireland and given much of the responsibility for dealing with IRA activity, the new approach rested on a policy of

⁸⁸ H. McDonald, 'Northern Ireland police left at risk by "intelligence gap"', *Guardian*, 16 April 2010.

⁸⁹ 'Police apology over response to armed raid', *Derry Journal*, 4 June 2010.

⁹⁰ P. McArdle, 'Dissident Irish republicans armed with new 'heavy' weapons', *Belfast Telegraph*, 19 July 2010.

⁹¹ 'PSNI at breaking point – Federation chairman', *News Letter*, 9 August 2010.

⁹² 'NI terrorist threat "down-played"', *UTV*, 15 September 2010.

⁹³ 'Baggott: I need funds to tackle dissidents', *News Letter*, 13 September 2010.

⁹⁴ Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

'police primacy'.⁹⁵ The RUC, refashioned as a more professional and modernised police force, was expanded (to around 8,500 officers, with an RUC Full-Time Reserve of another 3,750) and pushed to the front line of the conflict.⁹⁶

In this endeavour, it was joined by the locally raised Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) – a branch of the Army, created in 1970, to fill the security gap left by the standing down of the contentious 'B Specials' a year earlier. The UDR (comprised of around 3,000 full-time and 3,000 part-time soldiers) has itself been a source of some controversy over the years – with accusations that some members had strong ties to loyalist paramilitaries. Certainly in the early 1970s, such charges appeared to hold weight; and most infamously, the 1975 'Miami showband massacre' was carried out by loyalists in UDR uniform. Over the course of the 'Troubles' up to 100 members of the regiment were convicted of serious offences.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, this still accounted for a small minority of the over 40,000 who served within its ranks between 1970 and 1992. Also, as with the RUC, significant efforts were made to professionalise the UDR and increase the calibre of its members. The result was a force that played an invaluable role as the local 'eyes and ears' of the security forces in Northern Ireland. In the words of a former senior military intelligence officer,

The fundamental difference between 'home grown' [RUC/UDR] and mainland UK police/troops was this: when the former finished their duty policing the community at close quarters, they then went back home and lived within that same community. They knew their neighbours. This played havoc with the mind-set of the terrorist; he was being policed by them on and off duty, 24/7... In my opinion they were a dedicated, passionate and very brave group of people operating in an incredibly treacherous theatre... in the main, they were a good bunch and, if one were to take a look in the round, were actually extremely well disciplined. These were people who had ready access to intelligence, weapons and volunteers... Despite this, and in spite of their involvement in a close quarters campaign in which family members were being killed, the greater number never did retaliate or were open to persuasion to join the loyalist paramilitaries.⁹⁸

From the mid-1970s, then, it was the RUC and UDR, aided by specialised military units such as the Special Air Service (SAS) and 14 Intelligence Company, which led the way in pursuing an 'intelligence war' against the Provisional IRA. With the exception of certain republican 'heartlands' such as south Armagh's 'Bandit Country', or north Armagh's 'Murder Triangle', the regular British army was withdrawn from view – fulfilling a garrison and support

⁹⁵ Until 1976 the military had officially led the way on security issues in Northern Ireland, with the police consigned to a secondary role. The implementation of the 'Way Ahead' policy from 1976 formalised the shift that now took place. The police were given 'primacy' in operations, the military were reconfirmed as giving 'military aid to the civil power' – the latter being the Secretary of State, with the Chief Constable of the RUC as his principal security adviser. According to those subsequently involved in making the system work, this did produce a complex relationship that did settle down but was sometimes fraught with difficulty – usually driven by the personalities of individual officers. The bottom line, though, was that it was the police who were in charge (and within the police, it was RUC Special Branch who were responsible for leading on developing the intelligence that shaped the way the security forces tackled the terrorist threat) [Confidential interview with former senior member of RUC, October 2010].

⁹⁶ G. Ellison and J. Smyth, *The Crowned Harp: Policing in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 90. See also, Cabinet Committee on Northern Ireland, 12 May 1976, NRA (National Register of Archives), CAB 134/4040.

⁹⁷ M. Dillon, *The Dirty War* (London: Arrow Books, 1990), p. 220. For a different estimate see C. Ryder, *The Ulster Defence Regiment: An Instrument of Peace?* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. 150.

⁹⁸ Confidential interview with former military intelligence officer, Belfast, July 2006.

role.⁹⁹ Henceforth, according to one of those closely involved, '[RUC] Special Branch was the controlling influence – much to the annoyance of the British military'.¹⁰⁰

The principle aim of the security services was to interdict the IRA's campaign of violence, shutting down the space in which it could operate. Where possible, arrests were made, with detained IRA members interrogated, then sent for trial at specialised non-jury courts (the 'Diplock' system); those found guilty were imprisoned in high-security prisons such as the Maze, just outside Belfast. The aim was to return Northern Ireland, as much as possible, to a state of normality, with the police tackling republican violence as a specialised form of criminality, but criminality nonetheless.¹⁰¹ In the words of former, senior RUC member, Alan McQuillan, 'the policy was that we were fighting a long war against terrorism – with terrorism seen as crime in pursuit of political ends'.¹⁰² As Graham Ellison and Jim Smyth have highlighted, the RUC was therefore tasked with acting as the 'thin green line' between order and terrorist-induced chaos. It would combat the latter by treating people from both communities in Northern Ireland *without fear or favour* – and by making an appeal to the 'moral majority' of people to support its efforts to end the violence.¹⁰³

Unfortunately, there is not the space to explore this policy more fully here. Suffice to say, it was not without its problems; wider events threatened to derail the policy and the new approach took time to reach its potential. It is also clear that mistakes were made – some of them serious and with deeply troubling implications.¹⁰⁴

But the eventual results were unmistakable: by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, the scope for Provisional IRA activity had been drastically curtailed. By that stage, on one account, 8 out of 10 operations planned by the IRA's Belfast Brigade were being thwarted by the RUC. Consequently, no British soldier died on duty at the hands of the IRA in Belfast after August 1992; the last major commercial bombing in the city was in May 1993.¹⁰⁵ According to a former member of RUC Special Branch, these patterns were being replicated elsewhere in Northern Ireland – and it was this that forced the IRA leadership to call a ceasefire on 31 August 1994.¹⁰⁶ Though the Provisional IRA subsequently re-launched a brief campaign

99 M. Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland*, Revised edition (London: Arms and Armour, 1996), p. 147. See also, Frank Cooper, NIO, to Sir John Hunt at the Cabinet Office, 5 November 1975, NRA, FCO 87/442.

100 Confidential interview with former military intelligence officer, Belfast, July 2006.

101 For an overview of this subject, see J. Bew, M. Frampton and I. Gurruchaga, *Talking to Terrorists: Making Peace in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), pp. 63-72. See also, M. Frampton, 'Agents and Ambushes: Britain's 'Dirty War' in Northern Ireland', in S. Cohen (ed.), *Democracies at War against Terrorism: A Comparative Perspective* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 77-100.

102 Alan McQuillan, Interview with the author, October 2010.

103 Ellison and Smyth, *The Crowned Harp*, p. 90. The efforts of the RUC to stand as an impartial upholder of law and order could be seen in the growing antagonism it faced from loyalism, as attested to by Ian Phoenix in J. Holland and S. Phoenix, *Phoenix – Policing the Shadows: The Secret War against Terrorism in Northern Ireland* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), p. 88. Based on his diaries, Ian Phoenix's 'memoir' was written by his wife Susan together with Jack Holland, after his death in the Mull of Kintyre Chinook Helicopter crash on 2 June 1994.

104 Allegations had been levelled as to: the use of lethal force in a few instances of 'shoot-to-kill' encounters with republican suspects; the involvement of some police officers in 'collusion' with loyalist paramilitaries; the deadly activities of security service informers and agents inside paramilitary organisations; and the use of torture against some paramilitary suspects. At the individual level it seems incontrovertible that some security force members were involved in dubious practices and 'the line' was crossed on occasion. And yet, equally, the RUC as a corporate body appears to have developed as an increasingly professional organisation (especially in the period after Sir John Hermon became Chief Constable in 1980); it operated for the greatest part, to the highest possible standards, in an extremely challenging context.

105 Holland and Phoenix, *Phoenix – Policing the Shadows*, pp. 391-3.

106 Confidential interview with former member of RUC Special Branch, September 2010.

between February 1996 and July 1997, this faced all of the constraints in place in August 1994; indeed, these had been exacerbated by the hiatus. As a result, the resumed campaign never amounted to more than a 'pathetic, grubby little war', in the acerbic assessment of one RUC officer.¹⁰⁷ Senior republicans were only too aware of the declining context faced by the IRA: nothing had changed, in security/military terms since the first cessation. They thus opted for a second ceasefire in July 1997. The reality was, in the words of the former IRA informer, Sean O'Callaghan, '[Gerry] Adams and [Martin] McGuinness had looked down the road and seen slow defeat staring them in the face'; they therefore, opted to make peace while political concessions were still obtainable.¹⁰⁸

The success of the security services in bringing republicans to such a position, was achieved, in the estimation of those most closely involved with it, by 'intelligence-led' policing. A premium was placed on the interdiction of would-be terrorist incidents – rather than the production of evidence that could lead to the immediate prosecution and imprisonment of individuals. Whilst the latter was sought where possible, the key focus was on the containment and slow asphyxiation of the IRA's campaign.

To this end, significant resources were invested in surveillance and 'SIGINT' (Signals Intelligence). Large networks of specialist CCTV cameras were constructed in urban areas and in key rural locales (the famous 'watchtowers' of south Armagh being an example). At the same time, serious effort was directed to the infiltration of the IRA (and other paramilitaries) – with great success; indeed, the scale of that success is only now becoming apparent through intermittent revelations and exposures. Clearly, this process involved making difficult choices. And it raised certain moral/ethical issues – the precise contours of which are still being considered. There have been allegations of 'collusion' between elements of the security apparatus and loyalist paramilitaries. Likewise, there have been suggestions that those acting as security force agents or informers were themselves responsible for serious crimes, including murder. For the most part, though, it would seem that such instances tended to be very much the exception, rather than the rule. In the view of the former military intelligence officer already quoted, 'mistakes were made', but for the most part you had people 'making very difficult decisions... trying to save lives... in an incredibly complex situation'.¹⁰⁹

During the conflict, over 300 police officers were murdered and a further 8,500 injured.¹¹⁰ For its efforts, in 1999 the RUC was awarded the George Cross in 'exceptional recognition of the outstanding contribution made by the RUC to peace in Northern Ireland'.¹¹¹ A few years later, the UDR, despite having been merged into the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) in 1992, received the Conspicuous Gallantry Cross for its own 'unique' contribution to 'peace and stability in Northern Ireland'.¹¹² Almost 250 serving or former members had been

¹⁰⁷ Cited in E. Moloney, 'War and Peace', *Irish Times*, 5 February 2005.

¹⁰⁸ S. O'Callaghan, *The Informer* (London: Bantam Press, 1992), p. 337.

¹⁰⁹ Confidential interview with former military intelligence officer, Belfast, July 2006.

¹¹⁰ 'The RUC: Lauded and Condemned', BBC News Online, 31 October 2001.

¹¹¹ 'The Queen's Speech at the Presentation of the George Cross', The Royal Ulster Constabulary, available at, <http://www.royalulsterconstabulary.org/gc2.htm>.

¹¹² 'Queen awards Conspicuous Gallantry Cross to the Royal Irish Regiment', Ministry of Defence, 6 October 2006, available at, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/HistoryAndHonour/QueenAwardsConspicuousGallantryCrossToTheRoyalIrishRegiment.htm>.

murdered in its twenty-two year existence – and many thousands more injured.

It was these two organisations, with RUC Special Branch ‘calling the shots’, that helped bring about the *de facto* defeat of the Provisional IRA. Though still in existence, and still able to perpetrate serious acts of violence, the IRA had been forced into a strategic cul-de-sac, from which the only escape route was an end to violence. If one way of viewing the conflict was as a battle between RUC Special Branch and the IRA, it was the former that triumphed.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the RUC and especially Special Branch, were abhorred by most Irish republicans. Similarly, the UDR and its successor organisation, the RIR were despised – Sinn Féin’s newspaper *An Phoblacht* regularly referring to them as simply a ‘sectarian militia’.¹¹³ For this reason, a key republican goal on entering the peace process was to secure the abolition of, or major changes to, this security apparatus.

In demanding change, it should be emphasised, republicans were not alone. Indeed, some former RUC members such as Alan McQuillan would themselves acknowledge that the police were ‘badly in need of reform’, in the sense that ‘while in many ways it was at the forefront of policing skills and techniques, in others it had grown so quickly under such pressure that it had become both bureaucratic and sclerotic’.¹¹⁴ In McQuillan’s assessment:

in areas like intelligence gathering, dealing with disorder and counter-terrorism, it [the RUC] was superb, but the all-embracing focus on the terrorism threat also meant that it was easy to slip behind best practice in other areas. Ronnie Flanagan’s report of 1995 acknowledged that and set out a development plan, but then politics took over and we weren’t allowed to make the changes – we had to wait and let them be seen to be made to the organisation from outside.¹¹⁵

Perhaps more importantly, there was a broad consensus within the Catholic nationalist community in Northern Ireland (the key constituency that needed to be ‘won’ over to the police) that security reform was required – to make the police, in particular, more representative of the community and to encourage more of a ‘human rights’ oriented culture within the security services. Added to this was a broader expectation that the end of the conflict might bring a ‘peace dividend’, allowing for the reduction and streamlining of Northern Ireland’s extensive security infrastructure.

This explains, in part, the cuts and changes that have occurred over the last decade and more. At the heart of this, as already indicated, was the evolution of the RUC into the PSNI – on the recommendation of the 1999 Patten Report. This called for, *inter alia*: a new, ‘human rights based approach’ to policing in Northern Ireland; changes in recruitment procedures to encourage greater Catholic participation; new structures of police accountability, both at a central level (the Policing Board) and locally (District Policing Partnerships); and the creation of a Police Ombudsman to investigate police practice and

¹¹³ See, for example, F. Lane, ‘Pay off’, *An Phoblacht*, 16 March 2006.

¹¹⁴ Alan McQuillan, interview with the author, October 2010.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

respond to complaints. The aim of this was to establish a civilian force of no more than 7,500 officers, dedicated to 'community policing', which could operate without military assistance.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, Patten decreed that Special Branch was to be effectively 'disbanded' – in the sense that it was to be merged with the Crime Branch into a new 'Crime Department'. There was, from this time forth, to be no self-sufficient unit dedicated solely to combating terrorism. The PSNI released a number of its informers inside the paramilitary world, as part of a broader scaling back of its reach. The numbers of officers engaged in 'security work' was also reduced, with many former Branch members taking early retirement under the generous terms provided for by Patten (and in light of what they saw as the denigration of their work); whilst the numbers involved in the full and part-time police reserves were to be significantly reduced.

Much of this was achieved with the passing of the Police Act in November 2000 (though not the abolition of Special Branch or the police reserve). This was not sufficient to secure broad Catholic/nationalist political support for the new PSNI. Instead, a further round of reforms were promised in the wake of the negotiations held at Weston Park in Wiltshire, in July 2001. It was pledged that the full-time police reserve was to be phased out altogether; while the part-time reserve was to be reduced to just 2,500 officers. In addition, there was to be a cull of some 50% of former Special Branch officers.¹¹⁷

As a result, the Catholic Church and the moderate SDLP (at the time, the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland) gave their support to the new dispensation.¹¹⁸ Sinn Féin, by contrast, remained opposed to the PSNI, claiming that the acronym better stood for 'Patten Still Not Implemented'.¹¹⁹ Republican leaders continued to press for further changes, as well as various measures of 'demilitarisation', such as the de-fortification of police stations, the reduction of troop numbers and the dismantling of security 'watch-towers' in rural areas of the province. Such reforms were to be the *quid pro quo* for Sinn Féin's full embrace of exclusively democratic politics and the IRA's completion of its own disarmament process. In so doing, republicans asserted the moral equivalence of the British army/RUC and the IRA.

In the event, the envisioned changes were accomplished – not, it should be said, entirely at Sinn Féin's behest (they were after all, anticipated in the Patten report). But the manner in which they occurred, as part of a drawn-out peace process was significant. (It was not until 2005 that the Provisional IRA announced a formal end to its campaign and concluded the decommissioning process; and it took until 2007 for Sinn Féin to endorse the PSNI). This encouraged

¹¹⁶ *A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland – The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland* (September 1999).

¹¹⁷ 'RUC plan at a glance', BBC News Online, 31 October 2001; see also, J. Moran, *Policing the peace in Northern Ireland: Politics, crime and security after the Belfast Agreement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 102-25.

¹¹⁸ 'Catholic bishops back policing plan', BBC News Online, 20 August 2001; 'SDLP defend support for policing plan', BBC News Online, 28 August 2001.

¹¹⁹ See, for example, "Patten Still Not Implemented": Mural 1681, Album 48', Dr. Jonathan McCormack's Mural Directory, CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet), available at, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/mccormick/album48.htm>.

the view that the British government was engaged in the making of, what one insider admitted were, 'sordid deals' with republicans.¹²⁰

Whatever the judgment on this, the result was that much of the security infrastructure, in terms of installations and human capacity, was dispensed with. The Special Branch was now reduced further in size and folded into a new 'Specialist Operations Branch', which included the previously separate CID. Elsewhere, the numbers involved in the full-time reserve were allowed to dwindle – from just under 3,000 at the time of the Belfast Agreement, down to around half that number by 2004, and less than 500 by 2009. In June of that year, Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde indicated that he would seek to phase out the force altogether by the end of March 2011 – a move (and timetable) embraced by his successor, Matt Baggott.¹²¹ Earlier this year, however, Baggott announced that the moves would be delayed, with 225 officers retained for nine months – on account of the dissident republican threat.¹²²

All of this has been accompanied by political progress – in the sense that institutions for devolved government have returned to Northern Ireland (though it is perhaps too early to tell whether the current dispensation of a Sinn Féin-DUP 'power-split' is sustainable in the long-term). The final step in the process of Patten-initiated security reform came earlier this year with the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Executive.¹²³

The purpose here is not to explore seriously the question of whether the price paid for this political compact has been too high; rather, it is to note that there do appear to have been security consequences of what one commentator has described as the 'lustration of the RUC'.¹²⁴ As early as 2002, there were suggestions – from the acting Chief Constable Colin Cramphorn – that the police were 'stretched to the limit' as they attempted to deal with ongoing security problems, such as inter-communal rioting in Belfast.¹²⁵ Clearly, as the more recent remarks of Terry Spence and others indicate, this over-stretch has not been resolved.

Indeed, in the face of a resurgent campaign of dissident republican terrorism it would seem likely that this problem has got worse. In the words of one former senior security practitioner, 'the reality is we were 'ramping down' our overall ability to deal with the threat whereas our enemies were 'ramping up''.¹²⁶ Thus, the kind of reforms described took place against a backdrop of ongoing violence. In the private estimate of one former, senior officer in Special Branch, between 2000 and 2009 there were some 1,721 shooting incidents and 962 bomb related incidents, attributed to the security situation in Northern Ireland.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ J. Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), p. 197.

¹²¹ V. Kearney, 'NI police reserve to go in 2011', BBC News Online, 6 November 2009.

¹²² 'Phase-out of PSNI Reserve officers may be delayed', BBC News Online, 28 April 2010; '225 reserve officers to stay on till March 2011', BBC News Online, 17 May 2010.

¹²³ For a rare academic analysis of the security changes to have been made in Northern Ireland – and their impact – see, Moran, *Policing the peace in Northern Ireland*.

¹²⁴ P. Bew, 'Terrorism is back in Northern Ireland', *The Spectator*, 9 September 2009.

¹²⁵ 'Police 'stretched to limit'', BBC News Online, 23 August 2002.

¹²⁶ Confidential interview with former military intelligence officer, London, September 2010.

¹²⁷ Confidential interview with former senior RUC Special Branch Officer, London, September 2010.

Moreover, the change in police culture was judged to have brought a loss of counter-terrorist 'corporate memory' – of the kind described by Commander Yates when he referred to a 'skills deficit' – a loss not paralleled on the other side:

The dissidents are not on a learning curve as the Provos were in their early years. These people have the accumulated knowledge of decades of terrorism – they know how to grind explosives, make a TPU, lay a command wire, do a doorstep shooting and escape, forensic clean up etc... they are already years ahead of their predecessors in terms of operational capability at this stage in their existence – and they are increasingly likely to become much more effective in the apparent absence of the necessary apparatus and infrastructures (up-scaled/properly resourced Special Branch) by which to suppress and thwart their activities.¹²⁸

The reality is that the counter-terrorist infrastructure that did the lion's share of the work to defeat the Provisional IRA – centred on RUC Special Branch and the UDR – has been dismantled. In its place, the PSNI is, to a significant degree untried and untested. Alongside it, much rests with the Security Service (MI5). In the last years of the IRA's campaign, MI5 had sought to extend its control over intelligence operations in Northern Ireland. In 1992, it was made responsible for all national security intelligence work relating to Northern Ireland; a position that was confirmed by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Paul Murphy, in 2005.¹²⁹ Today, from its new regional headquarters just outside Belfast, it bears central responsibility for conducting counter-terrorist operations. Based in Holywood, though, it is heavily reliant on 'on-the-ground' police units and their capacity to feed intelligence material to it – yet these are the same police units that were down sized and to some extent 'de-skilled' over the last decade. In the view of those centrally involved in the former system,

an intelligence hub is only as good as the information it can gather... for this, MI5 relies on others... it is not 'in the field' in the way that Special Branch was. The reality is that we now have a divided system – between the PSNI and MI5 – where once you had a unified set-up under the control, however imperfect, of RUC Special Branch.¹³⁰

It remains to be seen how the new MI5-led system will perform. To this point, though, it appears to have been slow to recognise the scale of the challenge it faces. In a recent speech, the Director-General of the Security Service admitted that in October 2007, 'our working assumption was that the residual threat from terrorism in Northern Ireland was low and likely to decline further as time went on and as the new constitutional arrangements there took root'. They had, he suggested, perhaps given 'insufficient weight to the pattern of history over the last hundred years which shows that whenever the main body of Irish republicanism has reached a political accommodation and rejoined constitutional politics, a hardliner rejectionist group would fragment off and continue with

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ 'The Security Service in Northern Ireland', MI5: The Security Service, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/the-security-service-in-northern-ireland.html>.

¹³⁰ Confidential interview with former senior RUC Special Branch Officer, London, October 2010.

the so called 'armed struggle'.¹³¹ The very fact that Evans felt compelled to make such a speech was indicative of the lapses made hitherto, but also signalled a new desire to make amends. Can MI5 replicate the past successes achieved by the RUC-led counter-terrorist apparatus? Only time will tell.

131 *Address at the Worshipful Company of Security Professionals by the Director General of the Security Service, Jonathan Evans*, 16 September 2010, available at <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/the-threat-to-national-security.html>.



5 Responses II: Talking to the Dissidents?

Against the background of increasing dissident related violence, there have been suggestions that a solution to the problem may be found through dialogue. The hope amongst those making such a case is clearly that the successes of the peace process can be replicated, with the part of the Provisional IRA/Sinn Féin now played by their dissident rivals.

Such conjecture received a boost on 8 August 2010, when the *Sunday Times* carried a report stating that the British government was itself seeking talks with dissident republicans via intermediaries – though these claims were rejected by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Owen Paterson.¹³² A couple of days later, the journalist Brian Rowan, writing in the *Belfast Telegraph*, added his voice to those calling for talks between the state and the dissidents, on the basis that a security solution ‘doesn’t work’: ‘These things never end in military victory or defeat. They have to be talked through, however unpalatable that is’.¹³³ Rowan was not alone in making the case, with the *Andersonstown News* and others arguing that ‘talking is sooner or later inevitable’.¹³⁴ More significant still was the contention of PSNI Chief Constable Matt Baggott who agreed that political dialogue would be needed with the dissidents.

Martin McGuinness subsequently claimed that both the British and Irish governments had held talks with the dissidents.¹³⁵ The allegations were rejected by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).¹³⁶ Owen Paterson also later said that the government was not engaged in ‘meaningful talks’ or ‘serious discussions’ with ‘people who are not absolutely committed to peaceful means of pursuing their goals’.¹³⁷ But subsequent reports indicated that talks involving intermediaries were ongoing.¹³⁸

Alongside this, Sinn Féin’s Gerry Kelly also claimed that his party had sought to initiate talks with the 32CSM. According to Kelly, he was intending to head a delegation that would meet with their erstwhile rivals, the implication being that the purpose of such a venture would be to discuss ongoing dissident violence. For its part, however, the 32CSM was quick to downplay the prospect of dialogue. A representative of the group referred the *Sunday Tribune* to a 2005 document sent to Sinn Féin, which had urged them to abandon the peace process, as a prelude to new intra-republican unity: ‘The only issue we wish to discuss with Sinn Féin is national sovereignty’.¹³⁹

Similar in nature was the response of the CIRA-aligned RSF, whose party President, Des Dalton, rejected the possibility of talks with Sinn Féin, stating, ‘Gerry Adams and his organisation are now fully

¹³² ‘Owen Paterson rejects government talks with dissidents’, BBC News Online, 9 August 2010.

¹³³ B. Rowan, ‘Time for dissidents to engage in war of words’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 August 2010.

¹³⁴ ‘Dissident Dialogue is to be welcomed by all’, *Andersonstown News*, 10 August 2010; D. Keenan, ‘Dissidents and politicians know talking is inevitable’, *Irish Times*, 10 August 2010.

¹³⁵ ‘Governments talking to dissidents: McGuinness’, BBC News Online, 12 August 2010.

¹³⁶ ‘Irish government denies having talks with Real IRA’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 August 2010.

¹³⁷ ‘Paterson coy on dissident republican contact’, BBC News Online, 20 August 2010.

¹³⁸ B. Rowan, ‘Truth behind secret terror talks with dissidents’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 13 August 2010; B. Rowan, ‘More than one process’ in talks with dissidents’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 August 2010. For the original 2005 document see, F. Mackey, ‘Irish Democracy, A Framework for Unity’, *The Blanket*, 27 June 2006.

¹³⁹ H. McDonald, ‘Real IRA says talks with Sinn Féin could still happen’, *Guardian*, 6 August 2010. S. Breen, ‘Republican dissident group pours cold water on SF talks’, *Sunday Tribune*, 8 August 2010.

absorbed into the apparatus of British rule in Ireland and we feel we have absolutely nothing to say to them on that basis'.¹⁴⁰ The party would, it was said, 'talk to the British only when their withdrawal from Ireland is on the table'.¹⁴¹

The Real IRA itself, meanwhile, denied being involved in any talks with anybody, stating it had 'no interest in talking to the British because the British have currently no interest in ending their occupation of Ireland'.¹⁴² Significantly, a representative for the ONH branch of the group later told the *Irish News* that there had been 'indirect attempts' by the British government to open up a line of communication between the two parties, however the ONH was not interested in dialogue along the lines proposed by the British state. The aim of the group was said to be instead 'to continually upset and expose this myth of normalisation [in Northern Ireland]... We intend to nick at the heels of the Brits to eventually force them into a situation where they open up negotiations on the issue of the British interference in Irish affairs'.¹⁴³

In the responses of the dissidents themselves to the notion of dialogue, therefore, one finds the flaw in the logic of those who believe that dialogue is at this time, or at any time soon, likely to act as a panacea for ongoing republican violence. The reality is that groups such as the RIRA, CIRA and ONH have set themselves against the existing political dispensation and the parameters upon which it is based. The 32CSM, for example, made this much clear back in the autumn of 2008, in responding to a suggestion that they might be engaged in dialogue. Talks, it was declared, could not be conducted on the same basis as the existing peace process. That process was judged to have created an agreement that was inimical to true Irish republicanism. The 32CSM view of the settlement in Northern Ireland was that 'the entry fee into the talks which created it was that republicans had to accept the legitimacy of partition as a predetermined outcome'.¹⁴⁴ Instead, the 'only' issue to be discussed was that of 'our national sovereignty and national self-determination'; it was, in other words, for the British state and others to come to them, to discuss their agenda, rather than vice-versa.¹⁴⁵ It is an approach shared, at the current time, by all of the groups committed to violence currently in existence. For the situation to change there would have to be a transformation in the thinking of the Real IRA or Continuity IRA, analogous to that which took place within the Provisional IRA. But it was precisely that evolution that caused the founders of the CIRA and RIRA to act as they did and create new organisations. Why would they themselves now repeat what they judge to be the major crimes/mistakes of the Provisionals? Until there is an answer to such questions the case for dialogue seems most unconvincing.

¹⁴⁰ 'Dissidents reject Sinn Féin talks offer', BBC News Online, 9 August 2010.

¹⁴¹ S. Breen, 'Real IRA deny they are in talks with UK government', *Sunday Tribune*, 15 August 2010.

¹⁴² S. Breen, 'Real IRA deny they are in talks with UK government', *Sunday Tribune*, 15 August 2010.

¹⁴³ *Irish News*, 23 August 'Dissident group claims members are former IRA', BBC News Online, 23 August 2010.

¹⁴⁴ 'Dialogue with Republicans – Setting the record straight', *The Sovereign Nation*, August–September 2008.

¹⁴⁵ 'Talks must be transparent', *The Sovereign Nation*, August–September 2008.

6 Conclusion

It would seem, therefore, that the period 2009–10 saw the confluence of various events and factors that brought the situation to a potential ‘tipping point’ in the history of dissident republicanism. Overall the impression was that violent dissident republicanism could draw on increased numbers of supporters, an expanding territorial base, and an ever-greater ‘skills set’. There were also suggestions of growing levels of cooperation across the various organisations.¹⁴⁶

To those involved with such groups, the reality of day-to-day life in Northern Ireland appears secondary, when set against the failure of the peace process to deliver Irish unity. They are therefore unconcerned with reforms to the way that Northern Ireland operates, such as changes to police or justice system to make it more palatable to Catholic-nationalist minority population. This line of thinking was encapsulated in March 2010 by Geraldine Taylor of the CIRA-aligned Republican Sinn Féin. She declared that the new Northern Irish Justice Minister would be as much ‘an enemy of the Irish people’ as police officers and British soldiers; the devolution of policing and justice powers from Westminster to the local Stormont parliament was said to be merely an ‘extension of British occupation’.¹⁴⁷

The dissidents oppose the political status quo, reject the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement. Those within the ranks of the CIRA, RIRA and ONH are determined to posit a violent challenge to the current dispensation in Northern Ireland.

Republican rejectionism, it should be noted, also ran wider than these purely militant organisations. The last decade has seen the birth of various new entities, all of which claim to embody the ‘truest’ form of Irish republicanism: from the New Republican Forum, to the Republican Network for Unity, to éirígí (and even more recently, to ‘Real Sinn Féin’). All of these view modern Ireland as tainted by the ‘injustices’ that stem from ‘British rule’.¹⁴⁸ It is for this reason that they use issues such as nationalist opposition to Orange Order parades, or the conditions faced by dissident republican prisoners in Maghaberry jail, to highlight the supposed ‘malignancy’ of the British state. In addition, they note the disparity between what they were offered through the peace process and what it delivered. It was meant, according to Sinn Féin and leaders like Gerry Adams, to be ‘a stepping stone or transition to a united Ireland’, but this has proved illusory. In the eyes of the dissidents all that has happened is that their former comrades have moved ‘to renounce core demands and principles’.¹⁴⁹

As a result, they see their role as being to stick true to the path of authentic Irish republicanism. As Francie Mackey of the 32CSM has put it,

¹⁴⁶ V. Kearney, ‘Dissident threat level increases’, BBC News Online, 22 April 2010.

¹⁴⁷ H. McDonald, ‘New NI justice minister will be ‘enemy of the Irish people’, says dissident’, *Guardian*, 8 March 2010.

¹⁴⁸ D. McBrearty, ‘Why label disillusioned Republicans as criminals?’, *Guardian*, 13 August 2010.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

History has shown that when many lost their nerve and threw up their arms in surrender, there were always the few and the brave to keep the faith and carry on the torch of republicanism on behalf of our future generations.¹⁵⁰

The 32CSM, together with other political expressions of dissident republicanism, as well as those more militant groups such as the Real IRA, CIRA and ONH now feel themselves to embody the 'few and the brave' of contemporary Ireland. For this reason there seems little prospect that the phenomenon of militant Irish republicanism will be disappearing any time soon.

In this context, what needs to be accepted is the fact that sometimes it is simply not possible to co-opt all of those with whom one disagrees. It seems unlikely that the modern day dissidents can be persuaded to accept current political realities. If the British state wishes to defend and preserve the peace process in Northern Ireland it must accept that the dissidents will not be joining that process. Consequently, to invert the old adage, those who will not join, must eventually be beaten.

¹⁵⁰ 'Press Release: New Year's Statement from Francis Mackey, National Chairperson', 32CSM, January 2001.

Appendix

Timeline of Violent Dissident Republican Activity 2009–10

2009

- 31 January** 300lb car bomb found in Castlewellan, Co. Down, after telephone warning; it is believed to have been destined for Ballykinler army base
- 5 March** RIRA faction utilising the name ONH claims responsibility for a paramilitary-style shooting in west Belfast – the fifth such attack since the start of the year
- 6 March** Sir Hugh Orde, Chief Constable of the PSNI, says that the threat posed by dissident republicans is at a 'critical' level and the highest since he became chief constable in 2002. Orde announces that he has requested the deployment of members of the Special Reconnaissance Regiment in Fermanagh
- 7 March** Sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimcar are murdered in a dissident republican attack on Massereene army barracks in Co. Antrim; two other soldiers and two pizza delivery men are seriously injured; the attack is later claimed by the 'South Antrim Brigade of the Real IRA'
- 9 March** PSNI Constable Stephen Carroll is murdered in a gun attack in Craigavon, Co. Armagh; CIRA claim responsibility
- 10 March** Martin McGuinness, standing alongside Hugh Orde and Peter Robinson, condemns those responsible for the murders, describing them as 'traitors to the island of Ireland'
- 14 March** Colin Duffy, a prominent former Provisional from Lurgan is arrested in connection with the Massereene barracks' murders; he would later be charged in connection with the attack. His trial is pending at the time of writing
- 30 March** Series of co-ordinated security alerts in Belfast because of hoax devices left near various police stations and prominent roads; a man is injured in a paramilitary-style 'punishment' shooting in Derry
- 31 March** A gang of masked men attack and attempt to hijack seven vehicles over a nine hour period in Lurgan
- 1 April** One man shot in Belfast and another in Derry in a further spate of paramilitary-style assaults

- 3 April** Bomb alert near Rosslea, Co. Fermanagh – turns out to be an elaborate hoax; IMC later attributes it to CIRA
- 6 April** Home of Mitchel McLaughlin, SF MLA, attacked in Derry
- 9 April** Another man is shot and injured in Belfast in paramilitary-style
- 9 April** Easter edition of *An Phoblacht*, for the first time, does not contain an Easter statement from the IRA; instead it merely carries a ‘Sinn Féin leadership Easter statement’
- 12 April** SF office in Derry shopping centre damaged in arson attack
- 12 April** RIRA statement on Easter Sunday in Derry; in an interview with the *Sunday Tribune* RIRA claims responsibility for the 2006 murder of British agent Denis Donaldson, threatens members of the PSNI and ex-IRA informers and pledges to carry out attacks in Britain
- 24 April** It is reported that Martin McGuinness has been warned by the PSNI of a threat to his life from dissident republicans; also that employees of Belfast City Council have received death threats and bullets in the post from dissident republicans operating under the name, ‘North Belfast Republican Brigade’
- 27 April** Home of SF MLA, Daithi McKay (also a member of the Policing Board), attacked in the village of Rasharkin, Co. Antrim
- 7 May** Latest report from the IMC describes the dissidents as being ‘highly dangerous’, though also notes they did not yet have the ‘capacity to mount a consistent and substantial campaign’
- 11 May** At a rally in Derry, Martin McGuinness calls on the 32 County Sovereignty Movement to condemn attacks on the home of Sinn Féin politician, Mitchel McLaughlin
- 12 May** A spokesman for the 32 County Sovereignty Movement condemns the attack on Mitchel McLaughlin’s home
- 22 May** Attack on Rasharkin Orange hall – repeated on 24 May
- 23 May** The car of Bobby Storey, a senior republican in west Belfast, is destroyed
- 2 June** Seamus Brady of west Belfast is shot in both knees in a paramilitary-style attack, claimed by RIRA/ONH

- 4 June** Two cars are set alight outside the home of Conor Murphy, Sinn Féin MP and Minister in the Northern Ireland executive; that evening another man is shot in the ankles and wrists in a paramilitary attack in west Belfast
- 5 June** Orange hall is burnt down in Keady, Co. Armagh; halls in Newtownhamilton and Newcastle had also been targeted over the previous two weeks
- 15 June** Semtex device left at Strand Road PSNI station in Derry – claimed by ONH
- 15 June** A DPP meeting in east Belfast is attacked by republican protestors, believed to be linked to the IRSP. Reports hold that prominent republican, Bobby Storey, remonstrated with the protestors
- 28 June** RAAD claim responsibility for shooting a man in the legs in the Rosemount area of Derry; in the aftermath, the then Minister of State for Northern Ireland Paul Goggins admits there is ‘no end in sight’ to dissident republican violence
- 3 July** Dissident republicans claim an explosive device that had been left in Newtownbutler
- 10 July** A series of hoax bomb alerts in Belfast and Derry cause widespread commuter disruption
- 13 July** Serious rioting breaks out in Ardoyne, north Belfast, during an Orange parade, and continues for three nights. Shots are fired at the police. Sinn Féin’s Gerry Kelly criticises those behind the Ardoyne rioting, while RNU and éirígí members are reported to have been present. Elsewhere, disturbances occur in Rasharkin (where an Orange hall is targeted), Wattlebridge near Newtownbutler (where another Orange lodge is attacked) and Derry
- 14 July** An Orange lodge is attacked with a petrol bomb in Dunloy, near Ballymoney – the latest in a series of attacks on the premises
- 15 July** Gerry Kelly says that police have warned him of a dissident threat against his life
- 20 July** RAAD tells the *Derry Journal* that an alleged drug dealer will be ‘executed on sight’ when they find him
- 21 July** Five men are jailed by the Special Criminal Court in Dublin for INLA-related activity
- 23 July** Brian Shivers, a former éirígí member from Maghera is charged in connection with the Massereene attack. His trial is pending at the time of writing

- 31 July** RIRA admits to sending six bullets in an envelope to relatives of police officers working in a bank in Derry; DPP meeting in Derry is called off by protests from 32CSM
- 19 August** INLA shoot man in the leg, in Derry's Waterside
- 21 August** Armed and masked men set up a road block in Meigh, near Newry in south Armagh and distribute leaflets warning people not to co-operate with the police or Sinn Féin. A police patrol that approaches the block withdraws, rather than force a confrontation
- 8 September** 600lb roadside bomb with command wire running across the border into the Republic is discovered near Forkhill in south Armagh; attributed to RIRA/ONH
- 11 September** RIRA in Derry claims responsibility for leaving pipe bombs at the homes of the relatives of a PSNI officer from the Shantallow area. The group also claims a punishment shooting in the Hazelbank area
- 16 September** Three men from Lurgan, linked to CIRA, are jailed for fifteen years each in connection with a mortar bomb plot to kill police officers earlier that year. Their sentences led to serious rioting in the Kilwilkie Estate, which saw the hijacking of vehicles which were then placed on the Belfast-Dublin railway line (closing it for 38 hours); that same day a hoax alert in Rosslea, Fermanagh, forced fifteen families out of their homes
- 18 September** PSNI in the Greater Belfast region launch Operation Descent – involving mobile vehicle checkpoints and increased security measures in an effort to combat a feared dissident 'spectacular' to mark the impending arrival of Matt Baggott as the new Chief Constable
- 19 September** Sectarian attacks on Orange halls in Ballymoney and Rasharkin in Co. Antrim
- 22 September** Bomb defused outside Lavin Orange Hall in Armoy, north Antrim
- 23 September** Meeting of the Derry DPP disrupted by protestors from the 32CSM and RNU
- 29 September** Dissident republicans blamed for shooting a man five times in Twinbrook in west Belfast.
- 8 October** Man shot in the leg in paramilitary attack in the Bogside in Derry; police investigating the incident are attacked by a crowd throwing stones and other missiles. In Strabane shots are fired by masked men over the coffin of John Brady, a former member of the PIRA suspected of dissident involvement, who had died while in police custody the previous weekend

- 16 October** Bomb explodes under the car of a woman in east Belfast; intended target believed to be her partner, a PSNI dog handler; attack later claimed by RIRA/ONH
- 17 October** RAAD shoot a seventeen year old in the legs in the Waterside area of Derry, accusing him of being 'heavily involved' in anti-social behaviour
- 22 October** Bomb explodes inside a Territorial Army base in north Belfast; later claimed by RIRA
- 31 October** Youths in Crossmaglen attack the local PSNI station with petrol bombs and paint containers
- 3 November** RAAD shoot a man in the Creggan area of Derry
- 8 November** A Remembrance Day parade in Bellaghy, Co. Londonderry, is cancelled after police receive a warning that a viable device had been planted
- 9 November** It is reported that dozens of judges in Northern Ireland have had 24-hour security restored after coming under threat from dissident republicans
- 18 November** The Army makes safe a 'horizontal mortar', designed to kill police officers, in the Friary Road area of Armagh
- 20 November** A man is shot in the leg in Beechmount Crescent in west Belfast; CIRA later claim responsibility
- 21 November** 400lb car bomb partially explodes outside the Policing Board's headquarters in Belfast; elsewhere, the security forces successfully prevent a dissident attack on a police officer in Garrison, Co. Fermanagh. Four men are arrested by undercover police, acting on information supplied by the Special Reconnaissance Regiment
- 23 November** Elaborate hoax device causes disruption in Armagh
- 30 November** Pipe bomb is thrown at Strabane police station, but fails to explode
- 6 December** Police responding to two pipe bomb attacks in the Creggan in Derry are attacked by a crowd throwing petrol bombs, bricks and stones. Three other pipe bombs were planted that evening, all of which were later claimed by RAAD
- 7 December** Two hoax devices are left outside banks in south Belfast
- 11 December** Two men are shot in the legs by RAAD in the Creggan area of Derry. Police trying to help the victims are attacked by youths throwing missiles

17 December A man is shot in the hands, ankles, knees and calves in west Belfast

30 December Shots fired at Crossmaglen PSNI station

2010

7 January Man is shot in the leg by masked men in Armagh

8 January Car bomb attack near Randalstown, Co. Antrim, critically injures Peadar Heffron, an Irish language specialist for the PSNI and captain of the PSNI GAA team

12 January Masked gunmen shoot a man in the legs in west Belfast

18 January Man shot in the leg in Lurgan in paramilitary attack

20 January Alleged drug dealer, Gerard 'Topper' Staunton, is shot dead in Cork. The 32CSM later release a statement from the RIRA claiming responsibility and promising to take further action against drug dealers

24 January Gun attack on Crossmaglen police station

27 January RAAD shoot and seriously injure man who owns a shop selling legal highs Derry

29 January Two INLA members, arrested in Dublin in September 2008 in possession of explosive materials, are sentenced to nine years in jail

31 January RIRA gun attack on Bessbrook PSNI station

3 February Pipe bomb attack on Old Park police station in north Belfast, claimed by the 'Real IRA Belfast Brigade'; police foil suspected dissident attack when they stop a car near Stranorlar in Co. Donegal

8 February Statement announces that INLA has decommissioned its weaponry – comes after November 2009 statement confirming that its armed struggle was over

9 February Dissolution of the IICD

19 February Mortar bomb left outside Keady PSNI station – leads to three day security alert. It is reported that it took the police some three hours to respond to the device after it had been reported by locals¹⁵¹

22 February 250lb car bomb in Newry detonates outside the court house

¹⁵¹ R. Black, 'Residents' fury over bomb alert', *Belfast Telegraph*, 22 February 2010.

- 23 February** Hoax bomb alert in Lurgan; 29-year old man is shot in both legs by RAAD in the Creggan area of Derry
- 24 February** Real IRA admits responsibility for murdering Kieran Doherty, 31, in Derry
- 26 February** Hoax device in north Belfast causes major traffic disruption
- 27 February** Hoax device used to draw police officers and then a suspected mortar bomb is fired at Brownlow PSNI station in Craigavon; the incident is followed by serious rioting in the Drumbeg and Meadowbrook estates of the town
- 1 March** Police vehicles attacked with petrol bombs in west Belfast
- 19 March** RIRA claims four devices left around Derry, causing security alerts (notably outside Strand Road police station and Bishop Street Courthouse); a series of hoax alerts in Belfast bring traffic and railways lines to standstill in afternoon rush-hour
- 20 March** 'Viable device' is discovered in Magherafelt and destroyed by a controlled explosion; suspicious device left on the railway line in Newry and police are shot at while investigating the incident (later declared to be a hoax)
- 28 March** Four masked men claiming to be RIRA members hijack a van on the Coshquin Road in Derry and then abandon it in Bridgend – leading to a security alert; RAAD claims two pipe bombs left in vehicles in the Creggan area of Derry
- 29 March** RAAD leaves pipe bomb planted outside a shop selling legal highs in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal (subsequently forcing it to close); it also raids a house in Dungiven and warns a man to 'cease' his activities.
- 2 April** Man attacked in paramilitary assault in north Belfast
- 3 April** Car bomb left outside PSNI station in Crossmaglen
- 3–5 April** Easter Commemorations held across Ireland by dissident groups
- 5 April** Elaborate hoaxes shut the M1 motorway between Lurgan and Moira and cause security alert in Lurgan itself
- 8 April** Dissidents blamed for attempted armed robbery on security van in Lisburn; hoax bomb alert in west Belfast
- 11 April** Devolution of policing and justice powers from London to Belfast at midnight; minutes later a 50lb RIRA/ONH 'portable' car bomb, in a hijacked taxi,

explodes outside Palace Barracks at MI5's regional headquarters just outside Belfast. It is later reported that video cameras, hidden in woods to the rear of the base had been used to gather intelligence for the attack in a sophisticated dissident spying operation

- 12 April** David Ford becomes new Justice Minister of NI; CIRA threatens Protestant council workers working in west Belfast
- 13 April** Man is shot in the leg in paramilitary attack in Bogside area of Derry, later claimed by RAAD who said the victim should leave the country¹⁵²; viable car bomb left outside PSNI station in Newtownhamilton, south Armagh, forcing the evacuation of some 60 families; hoax alert at Belfast central fire station
- 14 April** Security alert on outskirts of Derry city causes traffic disruption; car of a Catholic policeman in Enniskillen is burnt out, dissidents held responsible
- 19 April** RAAD claim responsibility for two pipe bombs thrown at different houses in Derry; the group tells the *Derry Journal* it intends to 'execute' one of the men targeted¹⁵³
- 20 April** Man shot in paramilitary-style attack in Strabane, Co. Tyrone; pipe bomb thrown at house in Creggan area of Derry – both attacks claimed by RAAD
- 21 April** Pipe bomb explodes outside a house in Limavady, Co. Londonderry
- 22 April** Car bomb explodes outside PSNI station in Newtownhamilton, south Armagh, the second time the station had been targeted inside ten days (reports that police failed to respond to a 50-minute warning, only arriving after the blast; fire-fighters had moved local families away from the blast). The bombers had fired shots in the air before driving off; two people received minor injuries. Elsewhere, a pipe bomb explodes in Coalisland, Co. Tyrone
- 28 April** Two 'viable devices' (pipe bombs) are found in the Kilwilkie area of Lurgan, defused by the army
- 29 April** Hoax alert in Derry city centre
- 4 May** Pipe bomb explodes outside the home of a Catholic police officer's father in Newry; small bomb explodes outside PSNI station in Lurgan
- 6 May** Viable explosive device left outside Templemore Sports Complex where votes were being counted in Foyle and East Derry constituency for British general election

¹⁵² "Next knock could be your last", *Derry Journal*, 16 April 2010.

¹⁵³ 'RAAD says it plans to 'execute' bomb target', *Derry Journal*, 20 April 2010.

- 10 May** Pipe bomb abandoned on a street in Newry
- 14 May** Shots fired at a car and house in Newry; no-one injured
- 17 May** Hoax device closes the railway line near the Kilwilkie estate in Lurgan; police attending the scene are attacked by 30-strong mob throwing improvised grenades and petrol bombs
- 19 May** Hoax device left in Belfast
- 20 May** Murder attempt on former UDR member in the Markethill area of south Armagh; shots fired into his house, but he was unhurt
- 21 May** Paramilitary shooting of 18 year old man in Newry
- 22 May** Armed Gardai raid premises in Mount Pleasant, just north of Dundalk and claim to have prevented imminent attack in NI. Elsewhere, RAAD shoot a man in Strabane who they had previously forced out of Derry
- 27 May** Pipe bomb thrown at house in Strabane – later claimed by RAAD
- 28 May** Pipe bomb left in public house in the Bogside area of Derry by RAAD; an elaborate hoax device was also planted at a separate location in the city; elsewhere a pipe bomb was also discovered outside the Sinn Féin office in Castlewellan
- 29 May** Mortar bomb fired at Strand Road police station in Derry; fails to explode; attack claimed by ONH
- 30 May** Pipe bomb thrown into a house in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone (damage, but no-one injured)
- 31 May** Man shot in the leg in paramilitary-style attack in Twinbrook in west Belfast; attributed to the CIRA
- 2 June** Device left beside a car in Dunclug, Ballymena, Co. Antrim; raid by masked and armed men on house in Shantallow area of Derry – response of the police subsequently criticised with it reported that they had refused to attend the scene for fear of the ‘significant threat from terrorists’¹⁵⁴
- 8 June** Man shot in paramilitary-style attack in the Glen Road area of west Belfast; RAAD stage ‘show of strength’ in Creggan area of Derry, fire shots into the air
- 10 June** Hoax device in Shantallow area of Londonderry and another in Lurgan; elsewhere a ‘viable device’ was found in Downpatrick

154 ‘Police apology over response to armed raid’, *Derry Journal*, 18 June 2010.

- 11 June** 'Viable device' found at Sion Mills, Co. Tyrone
- 13 June** Attempted pipe bomb attack in north Belfast
- 15 June** Man is shot in the legs in Dunmurry area of west Belfast in paramilitary-style attack
- 17 June** 300lb car bomb left outside Aughnacloy PSNI station in Co. Tyrone; forces 350 people to spend the night out of their homes
- 18 June** Pipe bomb thrown at Brownlow police station in Craigavon; fails to explode
- 22 June** Beer keg bomb found in Keady, south Armagh, following coded warning from dissident republicans
- 25 June** Pipe bomb attack on home in Hazelbank area of Derry
- 30 June** Paul McCaugherty, 45, from Lurgan and Dermot Gregory, Crossmaglen, are found guilty of involvement in Real IRA gun plot, part of MI5 sting operation against dissident republicans
- 1 July** Vehicles are hijacked and set alight in the Drumbeg area of Craigavon; police attacked with petrol bombs
- 2 July** Shots fired at Crossmaglen police station, south Armagh
- 3 July** Six police officers injured during rioting in west Belfast; Gerry Adams says he believes dissidents to be instigating the trouble
- 7 July** Sinn Féin office in Limavady targeted in arson attack
- 10 July** Bomb explodes, leaving large crater on road between Belleek and Newtownhamilton in south Armagh, in an attack believed to be targeted at police officers
- 11 July** Serious rioting in west and north Belfast leave 27 officers hurt; shots fired during unrest, forcing police to deploy baton rounds and water cannons; elsewhere, five men were detained in custody by the Gardai as part of an operation targeting dissident republicans in the border area
- 12 July** Further major rioting in Ardoyne following sit-down protest against Orange parades in the area. The protest was led by the Greater Ardoyne Residents' Collective (GARC). Spokesman for the group is Martin Og Meehan; elsewhere, rioting in Derry described as among 'the worst in a decade', sees shots fired at police;¹⁵⁵ disturbances also at Lurgan; blast bomb discovered in Armagh, targeted against police

¹⁵⁵ 'Derry rioting 'among worst in decade'', BBC News Online, 13 July 2010.

- 13 July** Elaborate hoax device left in the Castlereagh area of Belfast; further rioting in Ardoyne, described by one priest as 'recreational rioting'.¹⁵⁶ Altogether the three nights of rioting left over eighty police officers injured and cost some £1million¹⁵⁷
- 15 July** Arson attack on Brackey Orange Hall at Sixmilecross near Omagh in Co. Tyrone, the fifth time in two weeks the hall had been targeted
- 17 July** Man shot in both legs in paramilitary attack in Strabane, Co. Tyrone
- 21 July** Pipe bomb thrown at Woodbourne PSNI station in west Belfast
- 22 July** Police arrest five men and recover two guns after stopping a car in west Belfast
- 28 July** Eighteen year old man shot in both legs in paramilitary attack in west Belfast
- 3 August** 200lb car bomb in a hijacked taxi (driver forced at gunpoint to drive the device) explodes outside Strand Road police station, Derry in the early hours of the morning; claimed by RIRA/ONH. No-one was injured in the blast, which exploded 23 minutes into a 45 minute warning
- 4 August** Attempted under car booby trap bombing of Army major in Bangor, Co. Down; the attack was foiled when the device fell off the man's car. Elsewhere, a hoax car bomb was left outside New Barnsley police station in west Belfast, forcing the evacuation of around 100 families
- 6 August** Hoax alert left in east Belfast causing traffic chaos
- 7 August** Bomb found under the car of a serving Catholic police officer in Kilkeel, Co. Down. The target was the niece of independent republican councillor, Martin Connolly who had resigned from Sinn Féin 3 years ago in protest at the party's endorsement of the PSNI; in the aftermath of the attack he refused to condemn it, saying he 'did not want to get into the politics of condemnation'
- 8 August** Hoax bomb alert at Lisburn Road PSNI station in south Belfast ends with controlled explosion of suspect device
- 10 August** Booby trap bomb found in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, under the car of a former police officer, now working as a civilian security worker with the PSNI

¹⁵⁶ M. Simpson, 'Theme park' rioting raises old fears', BBC News Online, 14 July 2010.

¹⁵⁷ 'Cynical godfathers' behind NI violence', BBC News Online, 14 July 2010.

- 12 August** Orange hall in Pomeroy destroyed by fire; the building had previously been extensively damaged by a fire in November 2008
- 14 August** Bomb explodes in a wheelie bin near a school in Lurgan, injuring three children; elsewhere in the town, rioters attack police dealing with additional security alerts and shots are fired at police in the Kilwilkie estate. Hoax bomb alert in Derry, police attacked with petrol bombs when attempting to respond; further hoax alerts in Belfast and Newcastle; in Newry, a member of the DPP has his car destroyed by a petrol bomb
- 21 August** Pipe bomb found, unexploded, within perimeter of Woodbourne PSNI station in west Belfast
- 31 August** Hoax bomb alerts cause serious traffic disruption in Belfast; after a RAAD gun attack on a home in the Bogside area of Derry, police investigating the incident are attacked by rioters throwing petrol bombs
- 2 September** Hoax alert closes the Craigavon bridge and causes traffic chaos in Derry
- 7 September** Gardai discover cache of bomb parts and ammunition in Co. Donegal during counter-terrorist operation aimed at dissident republicans
- 8 September** 'Viable' device left outside an unmanned police station, near an integrated primary school in Crumlin, Co. Antrim
- 10 September** Reports that RAAD were behind the abduction of a convicted drug dealer in Derry; they apparently ordered him to leave the city or be shot; elsewhere, two men are shot in north Belfast in an attack claimed by the GIRA
- 13 September** A hoax bomb alert in Larne, Co. Antrim, forces the evacuation of several homes
- 14 September** Man is shot in both legs in a paramilitary attack in north Belfast; elsewhere, it is reported in the *Guardian* that the Real IRA has said it will target banks and bankers, both in Northern Ireland and in London
- 21 September** Armed dissident republicans attempt to abduct a man from his home in Derry; shots are fired, but no-one hurt. ONH later claimed the attack, saying it wanted to force the man into exile
- 24 September** ONH in Derry warns it will take 'severe and direct action' against informers and agents working in the city

- 25 September** Blast bomb containing 'viable components' is found by workmen in Ardoyne in north Belfast; elsewhere, homes are evacuated in the Rosemount area of Derry after the discovery of a suspect device
- 4 October** Cross-border conference in Belfast between PSNI and the Gardai reveals concern over the growing 'technical expertise' and capability of dissident republicans
- 5 October** 200lb car bomb detonates outside the Ulster Bank and a shopping centre in Derry – two policemen receive minor injuries; the Real IRA later claimed responsibility
- 8–9 October** Gardai conduct raids in Co. Louth and counties Wexford and Waterford; uncover a RIRA bomb component factory
- 11 October** Further seizures of weaponry and bomb components by both Gardai and PSNI in Co. Louth and Co. Tyrone respectively

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