

THE THREAT TO LAW AND ORDER IN NORTHERN IRELAND OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS

Preamble

For historical reasons conflict is built into society in Northern Ireland. The roots of this conflict are many and varied and therefore not likely to be readily eradicated in the short term. They include the traditional friction between the Gael and the Scots/Irish planter stock; the cultural divide between the Catholics and the Protestants; the economic disparity (though now diminishing) in the wealth commanded by the two communities; anti-British feeling in some sections of the Irish community as a whole; Protestant fears of a 'takeover' of the province by the Republic.

2. Arising from these historical roots violence has become endemic in Northern Ireland, most conspicuously so during the past 6 years. Acts of violence are committed by individuals acting alone or in concert. History may have so structured society that conflict is inevitable. But individuals do not see themselves as taking to the bomb and the bullet in order to act out a historical imperative. Motivation needs to be considered under three different headings:

THE MOTIVATION OF VIOLENCE

- a. The Traditional Republican Desire to Expel the British from Ireland and to create ultimately a United Ireland free of British Influence

This is matched by the determination of the Loyalist majority in Northern Ireland not to be subjugated in this way. It needs to be understood that this motive is quite separate from any consideration of just government within the borders of Northern Ireland. It is very probable that the number of those prepared to take violent action for this motive alone is comparatively small. However, in terms of inflicting damage this small number is capable of considerable effect. They will continue to exist as long as the border exists.

- b. Civil Disaffection Arising from Community Conflict

This is the other side of the coin. Even if the dispute about sovereignty over Northern Ireland did not exist it is clear that those who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are socially and economically disadvantaged would resort to protest action and possibly violence to better their lot and that those who feel challenged by such violence would react in

kind. Thus at the beginning of the present emergency numbers of people were drawn into violence because they were concerned about the Civil Rights issue not because they were concerned about the border. This remains true even if it is accepted that other sinister forces used this situation for their own ends, and will continue to do so.

c. The Corruption of the Past 6 Years of Violence

Quite apart from what can loosely be described as "political motivation" at a. and b. above, there are those who now commit violence to make a living, for revenge and simply for excitement, to an extent that sets the problem of criminality in Northern Ireland apart from that of the rest of the UK. An unfortunate and serious feature has been the inculcation of violence in the minds of young people. There are now enough people in Northern Ireland who have access to weapons, who are trained in their use and are inured to causing and receiving violence, for violence to have become self generating. Moreover, the paramilitary organisations provide an umbrella of quasi respectability for this kind of criminality and seek to extend their protection to their members engaged in crime.

THE FIVE MAJOR THREATS

3. Against this background of the historical roots of conflict and the motives for violence, it is possible to identify five major threats to law and order in Northern Ireland over the next few years. In this context Northern Ireland is not a homogenous whole. The extent and nature of the threat under each of these headings is likely to vary as between major cities of Belfast and Londonderry, the border areas and the rest of the country. The degree of variation is however difficult to quantify.

4. It can be assumed that a 32 county Ireland of the kind for which the Provisional IRA claim to be fighting will not emerge during the period under review. Whatever political accommodation may be reached in the North, there will, for several years to come, be a residual Provisional campaign. If the present Provisional movement collapses completely it will have heirs. Such a campaign is unlikely to enjoy much support in the North in its own right. Unless such support is forthcoming for other reasons, the main threat could become the threat of a border campaign on the pattern of similar campaigns before the present emergency. The attitude of the Government of the Republic will be extremely important. It cannot be assumed that this attitude will always be precisely what it is today. Such a residual campaign might also linger on in West Belfast, the Creggan and the Bogside where the

Provisional structure is much better rooted than in the years before 1969.

2 5. There is a separate but closely inter-related threat of acts of violence arising from grievances real or imaginary in the Catholic community in the North. These grievances may include:

a) A sense of non-participation in Government in the broadest sense, not only at national level;

b) Economic factors. No act of Government can change the economic structure of the province. Some predominantly Catholic areas are likely for a long time to suffer from inadequate employment opportunities, and social difficulties, some of which they have created themselves;

c) Provocation by militant elements in the majority community;

d) Resentment of a too overt British presence. There is an important distinction between this factor and the Republican objective referred to at paragraph 4 above. Though relatively few people may be prepared to commit acts of violence against the abstract concept of British Sovereignty, it is likely that a greater number will be prepared to react violently to the presence of troops on the streets in which they live.

Popular involvement in acts of violence which are triggered off by one or other of these reasons is likely to be greater than popular involvement in violence which stems from the simple Republican ideal. At the same time it will be made more dangerous to the extent that it coalesces around the emotive pull of Republicanism. Here again, attitudes in the Republic (not necessarily only the attitudes of the Government), and to some extent, attitudes in the United States may have a part to play in determining the extent of violence in this category.

3 6. The Loyalist paramilitaries are here to stay at least as long as the threat of Republican violence continues. Conversely, if the Catholic community abandons violence, this would increase the hope that Police action can in time eradicate the Loyalist paramilitaries. It is true, as their apologists claim, that much of the Loyalist paramilitaries violence is reactive. But it is important to recognise that they react not only to Republican violence, but also, in a different sense, to any economic or political or social advance by the minority community which they interpret as an advance at the expense of the majority community. It can be argued that over the next few years the

Catholic community will either improve its economic and political position vis a vis the majority community, or will continue to resort to violence. (These alternatives are not mutually exclusive). If this is so, there will always be one or the other motive for "reactive" Protestant paramilitary violence. This situation is likely to be exacerbated by the continuing decline in Northern Ireland's economic prospects which in the next few years is likely to bite hard into the standard of living of the Protestant working class.

4 7. There is a climate of violence abroad in the world which was not there at the end of the last campaign in 1962. Modern weapons and modern terrorist techniques which were not then available now are available. The present emergency has exacerbated the corruption of morals and the breakdown of traditional family and church authority. A lot of people now make a criminal living by robbery and extortion under the guise of membership of one or other paramilitary organisation. As the economic situation worsens and the cost of living rises, their ranks may swell. The chief sufferers are the working class areas from which these criminals come. Though they do not enjoy popular support from the communities on which they prey, they may for a time evade effective opposition from these communities because of the confusion which they are successful in engendering between criminal and political motives, and through organised intimidation.

5 8. It cannot be excluded that non sectarian revolutionary violence will take root in Northern Ireland. This might evolve from the Official IRA aided by existing Marxist revolutionary groups. It is also possible that revolutionary groups of an anarchist nature might spring up having no roots in traditional Ulster attitudes, but rather drawing inspiration from overseas and from the province's growing industrial troubles. This sort of threat is more likely to appear in middle class (particularly University) circles distinct from those which have traditionally fed existing militant Northern Ireland groupings.

MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE

9. The broad categories of threat to law and order considered above will manifest themselves in a variety of specific forms of violence:-

a. Explosives and Incendiary Attacks on Commercial and Economic Targets

Such attacks have been a major feature of the present IRA campaign and have been designed to weaken the will to resist without causing such loss of life as would lead to revulsion and counter attack. This form of violence, and notably those

aspects of it which are most difficult to combat, (eg, the proxy bomb and the miniature incendiary,) will continue for as long as there is an organised terrorist capacity. Conversely, if the cohesion of the Republican terrorist groups begins to break up, it can be assumed that they are likely to turn away from this kind of activity to less disciplined and more dramatic forms of terrorism.

b. In a related area there are a limited range of 'prestige' targets which will remain vulnerable for as far ahead as one can foresee. These include those vulnerable sectors of a modern industrial state which, if put out of action, produce maximum disruption with minimum effort. Airports, power stations, waterworks, broadcasting facilities are examples, so too are symbols of authority such as Government buildings, courts, and customs posts. It is unlikely that it will be possible, during the period under review, to discount the risk of such attacks, which are now a threat to all industrial societies even those free of Northern Ireland's problems.

c. There have been relatively few assassinations of "establishment" figures of either community during the present emergency. A number of attempts, some successful, have been made on the lives of members of the legal profession, civil servants and politicians. It is difficult to believe that, had the will existed, more successful attacks would not have taken place. The risk is likely to go up, if and when the forces of law and order get the upper hand of the terrorist organisations, as the members of these organisations become more desperate.

d. Sectarian Violence manifests itself in a number of different ways:-

- i. Mass violence by elements of one community against elements of the other. This was a feature of the early stages of the present emergency. The fear of this kind of violence is high on both sides and this in itself is a factor which needs to be given due weight;
- ii. Sectarian attacks on individuals will continue for the foreseeable future. It is not possible to say at what level, except to make the general point that continuing violence of any kind is likely to make one paramilitary organisation or another attribute blame to individuals and seek to exact retribution. On occasion this will take the form of massacres such as the murder of 10 workmen at Whitecross on 5 January 1976 which will dangerously raise the temperature in the community as a whole.

Conversely, if the level of tension in the province as a whole declines, it can be expected that this would be reflected in a decline in sectarian assaults on individuals.

iii. The polarisation of the two communities which has progressed steadily over the last 6 years makes it likely that there will be a continuing tendency for each community, by intimidation, to secure its own territory by the expulsion of enclaves of the other community. Examples are the movement of Catholics out of certain areas of North Belfast and of Protestants out of certain areas of Armagh. Even if violence does begin substantially to decline, fear of violence will outlive it and it is therefore possible to reach the tentative conclusion that in an improving situation, this kind of intimidation is likely to persist longer than some other forms of violence.

iv. Demonstrations and provocative marches leading to potential riot situations were a dominant feature of the early stages of the present emergency and before. These have become subsumed by more violent forms of terrorism. Given the traditions of Northern Ireland, the potential for such situations arising again in the future is likely to persist and perhaps to become more acute as the danger of armed violence by organised terrorist groups recedes.

e. The Security Forces (Army and Police, Regular and Reserve), will remain a target for attack from irredentist Republicans during the period under review. This is certain to be so in border areas. This means that they will need to continue to pay attention to their own defence as well as the defence of the community. It also means that there is a sense in which the Security Forces deployment and pattern of operations may itself be the focus for violence of a kind which would not occur or occur elsewhere if the deployment or operational pattern were different.

f. Armed Robbery and Other Crimes for personal gain backed by violence or the threat of it, are likely to remain endemic in Northern Ireland for years to come. Arising out of these criminal activities there may be feuding leading to violence between the groups engaged in these activities. If political and security developments lead to the disintegration of the present terrorist organisations it is possible that they will break up into a multitude of warring criminal gangs. In order to secure themselves from prosecution the gangsters would attempt to intimidate the communities within which they live and to impose their own discipline by violence on their own members. If political organised violence declines, however, there is no

reason to suppose that the police will not be able to progressively erode this threat in time.

g. Vandalism will be an increasing urban problem in common with experience in the rest of the UK but with the added dimension of vandals with weapons.

h. There is now a large number of people in prison for terrorist and terrorist related activities. Their numbers will not decline significantly for some years, whatever the political and security developments in Northern Ireland as a whole. Since many of these people are not regarded as "criminal" by the communities from which they come, nor by themselves, they present a dual law and order problem. On the one hand their organisation and immediate friends and relatives are unlikely to become reconciled to society and to live at peace within society as long as there remains a substantial group whom they regard as 'prisoners of war'. Any untoward event taking place in prison may therefore provoke limited violence outside the prison. Conversely the prisoners themselves, enjoying a measure of moral support from their own communities are unlikely to settle down to serve their sentence quietly.

i. Civil disobedience and the threat of civil disobedience is likely to remain one of the major potential threats to law and order during the period under review. This threat covers a wide spectrum ranging, for example, from casual refusal to pay rent, rates and services at one end of the spectrum through organised rent and rate strikes, to the extremes of civil disobedience on the scale of May 1974. At the lower end of the scale these phenomena are not unique to Northern Ireland but in Northern Ireland they are more likely to produce violence.

j. The administration of the normal provisions of the law

is, for some years to come, going to present a security threat in Northern Ireland. A simple example is the application of motoring laws. In attempting to apply these uniformly across the province, the Police are likely to meet with resistance in some areas, whereas selective application may itself provoke protest from those who feel that they are the unjust target of a law which is partially applied.

k. The economic situation may produce considerable industrial unrest in the next few years in the United Kingdom as a whole. A combination of economic decline, Northern Ireland's relatively vulnerable economic position and the presence in the province of a number of illegally held weapons may well lead to strike/lock out situations in which violence could occur.

10. The catalogue in paragraph 9 of the forms which violence may take is comprehensive because they are not causally connected. Thus dispositions to deal with one form will not necessarily cope with threats of a different kind; each threat needs to be considered in its own right. This should not lead to the conclusion that all these manifestations of violence are likely to occur at once or with equal intensity - nor that the price of failure to contain the threat is comparable in all cases.

13 February 1976