

BACKGROUND PAPER BPARAMILITARY ORGANISATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. The principle threat to Law and Order in Northern Ireland during the present emergency has come from the violence organised by the Republican or Loyalist paramilitary organisations. The aim of the IRA on the Republican side is to get Britain to leave Northern Ireland. That of the Loyalist paramilitaries is to preserve both the borders of Northern Ireland and Protestant dominance within these borders. The number of active participants may not necessarily be very large; but tacit or active support is given by a much larger element in each community. Some support is gained by intimidation.

2. In addition paramilitary organisations on both sides finance themselves by criminal activities. Such activities become an end in themselves. There is thus a great deal of self perpetuating gangsterism and protection rackets in the urban ghettos carried on under the umbrella of terrorist organisations.

REPUBLICAN ORGANISATIONS

3. The old IRA is now divided into three parts much the largest of which is the Provisional IRA.

THE PROVISIONAL IRA

4. The Provisional IRA is the primary threat since the Provisionals have not been prepared to pursue any of their objectives without violence and because they are well armed and determined. Provisional objectives remain unchanged. They are:- the ending of British sovereignty over Northern Ireland (via a British Government declaration of "intent to withdraw"); the phased withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland; an amnesty for all their sentenced prisoners; a United Federal Ireland to which the present Government in the Republic is seen as just as much an obstacle as is the British regime in Northern Ireland.

5. The Provisional Headquarters are in Dublin. They are led by a so called Army Council of 7 or 8 members, possibly including at this time a preponderance of Northern Irish members. They decide the broad lines of policy and organise supplies of money and arms. Some of the money and most of the arms comes from the United States. For the purpose of day to day operations the Provisional IRA in the North is divided into so called Brigades covering the main urban and rural areas and these in turn into so called Battalions which may consist of only a dozen or two dozen men. It is impossible to be precise about the number of Provisionals. This fluctuates depending on the security and political situation. The Provisionals are well equipped with modern automatic weapons. Their experience with large calibre weapons - mostly home made - such as mortars and rockets has been generally unsuccessful. They have shown great ingenuity and considerable skill in designing sophisticated explosive devices using either commercial or home made explosives. They have acquired considerable tactical skill in reconnoitering targets and planning

attacks against them. However, in recent months their success rate with explosives has dropped sharply, because of the use - apparently deliberate - of ill trained volunteers to plant bombs.

6. During 1975 two important developments took place. Firstly, the Provisional's safe haven in the Republic as a whole is becoming less safe under the impact of more determined measures by the Government of the Republic and because of the loss of popular support due to a number of blunders they themselves have made - such as the Herrema kidnapping. Secondly, in Belfast and Londonderry the support given to the IRA by sections of the minority community in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Disturbances of 1968/69 has now been withdrawn. The Provisionals no longer have the emotive card of detention to play.

7. In this changed situation the Provisionals have considerable leadership problems. Some are arguing for the end of the so called ceasefire policy and a new all out campaign before the movement loses direction completely; others argue for a wait and see policy until a more favourable climate emerges. Meanwhile the ceasefire policy, which allows for violence as long as it is called retaliation, enables them to accommodate these conflicting views within the increasingly unconvincing appearance of a coherent policy.

8. If this policy changed it would certainly be possible for the Provisionals in Belfast and Londonderry to undertake, perhaps at the cost of further alienation of the minority community, a considerably higher level of activity than during 1975. They might not be able to sustain it over a prolonged period. But they might reckon that even a short campaign would bring about a Protestant backlash or bring about stronger security measures which would bear heavily on the minority community, so that they could once again pose as defenders of the Catholics.

9. The situation in the border areas, and in South Armagh in particular, is different. These include some areas of solid support for the Republican cause. It is ideal bandit country. The border, honeycombed by many crossings, offers an opportunity for terrorists to flit to and fro. Many attacks on the Security Forces have, in the past, been launched from firing positions south of the border. There are a number of desperate men who are already on the run for a variety of crimes and have little more to lose. It is clear that the Provisionals in this area straddling the border are operating autonomously, remaining in touch with the Provisional leadership but probably not receiving direct authorisation for specific actions from Dublin.

The Official IRA

10. One weakness of the Provisional IRA is that they want to get rid of the British and the Government of the Republic but have very unclear ideas about what should follow. The Official IRA do have a coherent Marxist/Leninist policy of the Moscow persuasion. Their weakness is that this has not taken root in Irish soil. They only

got 15,000 votes in the May elections in Northern Ireland. A further and greater weakness is that the Official IRA do not currently present a convincing revolutionary threat. They have maintained and generally kept a ceasefire against the British since 1972, and it is therefore not possible to say how many gunmen they could now put on the streets. As a result of their long ceasefire Republicans looking for violence have therefore gone elsewhere. What is more, the Officials were reduced in numbers by the defection in December 1974 of their members to the newly formed Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) with whom they then fought a debilitating feud. Subsequently the Provisionals in October 1975 launched an all-out attack on the Officials who lost credibility by their inability to retaliate effectively. But they remain a potential long term threat.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP)

11. The Irish Republican Socialist Party are a mixed bag of Trotskyists and a small number of active psychopaths who split off from the Official IRA. They combine the violence of the Provisions with the political pretensions of the Officials. In the short term they have not yet succeeded in arming and financing themselves enough to be a major danger, though they have committed a number of attacks on the Security Forces. But in the long term they form the nucleus for one form of revolutionary violence whatever ultimate political settlement is reached in Northern Ireland.

LOYALIST ORGANISATIONS

12. On the Loyalist side there are four main groups which to some extent overlap. These are the UDA, the UVF, a group of other smaller paramilitary organisations who are currently less active, and the UWC.

Ulster Volunteer Force

13. The UVF are the oldest of the Protestant paramilitaries. At the moment they are the odd men out and are not formally represented on the ULCCC which is the umbrella organisation of the Loyalist paramilitaries. They, and their allies the Red Hand Commandos, are the only Loyalist organisations which, like the IRA, are proscribed in Northern Ireland. They are an ill disciplined body whose members are only loosely controlled by their nominal leaders. Their members in mid Ulster are the counterpart of the Provisional activists in South Armagh - a few experienced terrorists who will stop at nothing and against whom the Police find it difficult to get evidence. The UVF have difficulty in obtaining explosives and have only a limited number of guns. Their terrorist expertise remains below that of the IRA, particularly in explosives. The UVF present a continuing threat in that they remain likely to commit indiscriminate acts of violence against the minority community whenever there is violence from the IRA or whenever they feel that British policies take too much account of minority interests and too little account of these of the majority.

Ulster Defence Association

14. The UDA is the mass Loyalist organisation and grew out of street defence associations formed in the early stages of the emergency in Protestant urban areas. Following the Ulster Workers' Council's

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strike of May 1974 the leadership of the UDA has, with limited success, sought to play a more political role and has restrained the majority of its members from large scale violent action. Individual UDA groups have, however, continued to commit sectarian crimes. The UDA, in common with other Loyalist groups, do not have the fire power or the expertise of the IRA. Many of their firearms are home made, and, unlike the IRA they find it difficult to get significant quantities of commercial explosive or modern firearms. They would not be able to arm more than proportion of their members at any one time. These factors more than anything else restrain them from carrying out their threat to law and order. They would be in the forefront if any Protestant reaction to major IRA violence in the cities of the North took the form of mass violence against the minority community in exposed places. Secondly, direct action against the government would coalesce around the UDA should government policies again be violently rejected by a significant element of the Protestant population as happened in May 1974.

15. The remaining - principally rural - Loyalist paramilitary organisations represented on the Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee (ULCCC) are not in themselves a major threat to law and order though they ensure that a wide spectrum of the Protestant community would be covered in any action which the paramilitaries as a whole might take either against the minority community or against the Government.

16. The Ulster Workers' Council deserves a mention on its own. Their influence has declined since their strike in May 1974 designed to bring down the power sharing Executive. But there remains a group in key industries such as the power industry which takes an intransigently Protestant supremacist line and which could form the nucleus for industrial action if the Protestant organisations made common cause against the Government.

17. These then are the main organisations on both sides. They frequently cause confusion by using flags of convenience such as Ulster Freedom Fighters - Protestant Action Force - Republican Action Force - Peoples Liberation Army. These are invented for the occasion of particular acts of terrorism.

18. There is some contact between leaders of the Loyalist and Republican paramilitary organisations. At the moment there is no sign that the rank and file are ready to acquiesce in any real co-operation between the two sides directed against either the British Government or the law abiding communities of Northern Ireland both Catholic and Protestant.

Summary

19. The main threat is from FIRA which is a skilled, well organised terrorist force now showing some signs of internal argument and commanding less support from the minority population than it did. The Loyalist forces, though much larger, are less well organised and armed but are capable of reacting mainly by sectarian murder and mass disturbance.