

III SECURITY

3.1 The problem

West Belfast (which for the purposes of this paper will be taken to be Catholic West Belfast (CWB) unless otherwise stated) has a very considerable paramilitary presence which permeates practically all areas of life there. In security terms, the problems manifest themselves on a daily basis. There were 10 deaths in the Police Division 'B' area last year and 71 incidents of terrorist-related serious crime. (Figures relating to terrorist violence in West Belfast may not of course tell the whole story, as people living there are responsible for terrorism outside the area also - principally in other parts of Belfast).

3.2 Ordinary crime is more difficult to measure. Crimes committed are not always reported. The figures contained in last year's Chief Constable's Annual Report seem to bear this out. Police Division 'B' had barely half of the notifiable offences known of other areas. In 1988, Police Division B were aware of 6,391 offences, and in the same period cleared 2,788 offences. 'A' Division know of 11,754 offences and cleared 4,899 offences in 1988. In the lower courts 1,710 people were prosecuted by 'B' Division, as opposed to 5,220 in A Division. (Source: Chief Constable's Annual Report 1988).

If this includes city centre - "shoplifts" /
including Traffic
A Div - 4249
B Div - 2882

How many Motorist offences? on average almost 80%

Paramilitary Policing

3.3 It is believed that many people in West Belfast choose either to ignore the petty crime that goes on there, or to report their findings to the paramilitary organisations which act as an informal police force in many parts of West Belfast. This policing has a number of different effects

on the community. In addition to providing an informal arm of Republican 'government', it emphasises the opportunities for those living in West Belfast to avoid dealing with those parts of the British Government machine they either do not like or do not have confidence in. The paramilitaries seek to exploit any lack of confidence. They encourage behaviour which ensures that the Government does not have a substantive overt role in the community except for security, which they know will be seen as oppressive.

- 3.4 Paramilitary policing takes different forms. Warnings to individuals, threats to leave the area or in the more extreme cases "punishment" shooting through elbows and/or knees. The people of West Belfast have an ambivalent attitude to such measures, for while they may not condone the methods, they can see that some rough sort of justice is being done. This is in contrast to what they see as inaction from the police. However even when a suspect is identified local people are often unwilling to give evidence or testify in court. The perception of police action as slow and ineffective is a result of the care the police need to take in all their actions in West Belfast. Naturally enough the security forces are circumspect in coming to the scene of any crimes, in case of booby traps or other forms of terrorist attack.
- 3.5 The security problem is such that in West Belfast, the RUC find it necessary to be accompanied by the Army for protection, rather than the more usual case of the RUC accompanying Army patrols that are likely to come in contact with the public in sensitive areas. The police stations reflect the security realities of the situation in West Belfast. But their appearance also emphasises starkly the alienation of the security forces from a significant part of the community which they are seeking to

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police and to serve. This alienation is reflected in the low support for the activities of the security forces, the low poll ratings concerning their perceived impartiality and the unwillingness of Catholics to join the RUC within the area. The UDR do not operate in West Belfast but man VCPs with RUC accompaniment in the arterial roads into West Belfast. It is likely that, despite the RUC presence, sectarian tensions run high at these check points.

Peacelines

- 3.6 The physical security measures taken in West Belfast are not confined to police stations. The "peace lines" are a collection of physical barriers between sections of the two communities in places where there has been serious sectarian conflict. They are introduced as a response to public order problems. In general, proposals put forward by the security forces carry the support of at least a section of the local community. Most peace lines attract some cross-community support, because both communities (especially those living at the community interface) have an interest in reducing tension. The peace lines undoubtedly help to control the security situation, although they emphasise the separation of West Belfast from the remainder of the city. Fixtures such as the Westlink and more particularly the barriers that can be drawn to secure all the main access roads to West Belfast to prevent car bombs or other trouble also tend to increase this separation, and encourage the people of CWB to see the area as a completely self-contained entity thus making it more difficult for integration to occur. The 'ghetto mentality' that results is to the advantage of the paramilitary organisations, as they are able to control and operate in distinct areas. The Catholic Church, while not supporting the methods or aims of the paramilitaries, contributes

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indirectly to this introspection by encouraging conservative concepts of family, community and Catholicism.

Dealing with the community

- 3.7 In addition to the very great strain placed upon the security forces, because they must always be conscious of the possibility of attacks, they are additionally required to act in a way which is above reproach when dealing with the local community. The attitudes of the security forces are something that cannot be fully explored in this paper, as its terms of reference did not permit its authors to talk to any representatives. However, it is not surprising that soldiers and policeman occasionally stray beyond the bounds of what might be considered courteous or professional in dealing with people they know to be involved with, or sympathetic to, paramilitary organisations, and when provoked. They are not trained primarily to deal with such circumstances although the RUC do have some community relations training now. The above does not of course mean that the Government can or should condone such action. Indeed it is crucial that all members of the security forces should be made aware that discourteous actions can and do result in increased alienation. Stories of alleged misconduct spread rapidly, and any one such story could result in another young person being pushed into the arms of a paramilitary organisation.
- 3.8 It is arguable that more could and should be done to make policemen aware of the sensitivities of the communities they are working in. The 'policeman on the street' is not a feasible alternative in the current situation in CWB, and greater coordination of information by the different arms of government can only be helpful in improving the community relations efforts of the security forces. However perhaps more can be done to ensure that the

security forces act to support local initiatives rather than treat them with suspicion. Furthermore, the security forces could improve their image through more effective public relations exercises. The failure to explain promptly the reasons for their actions to those they deal with on an every day basis heightens mistrust and allows the paramilitaries to make political gains. However, there is a limit to what can be done, for no matter how well the reasons for a house search, for example, are explained to those whose kitchens are dug up, or houses in other ways damaged in the course of the search for arms, those on the receiving end will never be happy at the prospect. There is a view that suggests that soldiers actually quite enjoy house searches. It is their chance to take the initiative, and to strike back at those who threaten their lives on a daily basis, by inflicting physical damage lawfully on the houses of those in the community suspected of helping terrorists.

- 3.9 House searches do however form an important part of the fight against terrorism. In the police division B area in the period Jan-Nov 1989, 276 house searches were conducted, 56 of which resulted in finds (source: Army). In acting on intelligence information about the likely location of arms, ammunition and explosives, the security forces are performing the role that Government has asked them to - that of preventing terrorism and apprehending those responsible for it. The issue is whether the alienation caused by such actions can be justified by the need to find arms caches, or whether other methods could be used with less aggravation even if they were somewhat less effective. In other words, is there a trade-off that needs to be made between effectiveness and alienation, at least in the short-term? Consideration might also be given to the worth of the alleged policy of searching a whole row of houses on the grounds of an intelligence tip-off that one

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house may have an arms cache. It is obviously important to protect sources but the great technological advances of the past few years may be capable of adaptation for use in identifying hidden arms/ammunition. This is an area in which the benefits from avoiding physical damage to people's homes would be large, and thus worthy of further research.

- 3.10 It is believed that those elements of the security forces who do not have to deal with the longer-term effects of their actions are those who misbehave more freely. The DMSUs of the RUC are as culpable in this as various of the units on roulement tours. There is no clear rule that all such units will behave badly, just a greater probability. Roulement tours are to be increased to six months duration, but this alone may not be enough to make units appreciate local sensitivities and establish local contacts. One idea might be to set up community relations units in roulement battalion TASOR made up of servicemen doing longer tours of duty, just as the Army intelligence staff currently maintain continuity for a number of units in series during their tour.
- 3.11 It is in the light of the difficulties that do exist that the civil representatives are so important. They visit all those who have property damaged by the security forces and ensure speedy and effective repairs are conducted and compensation paid. They are contacted almost daily by Sinn Fein advice centres, and perform an essential service in showing that the NIO accepts responsibility for actions which infringe liberties that would not in normal circumstances be touched. Complaints are extremely difficult to assess, especially in an area like CWB where there is a strong view that even the new complaints system will not provide proper redress, and may result in unnecessary hassle for the person complaining. Those who

do complain may be doing so to make political points, and the allegations may be difficult to disprove.

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- 3.12 It is accepted that there are two connected ways in which the confidence of the community in the security forces is important. Firstly in terms of treating all members of each community fairly, and secondly in winning the community's belief that they are pursuing terrorists effectively. A third important area for the security forces is to be sure that they have the support and trust of security policy-makers in the difficult tasks they perform.
- 3.13 It is also widely recognised that terrorism cannot be defeated purely by "being nice to people" nor by military means alone. There is a greater need for coordination and consultation between the different arms of government to help to develop a greater understanding of the attitudes of the community, as well as of the actions and policies of those other arms of government to improve the situation.
- 3.14 In West Belfast, as elsewhere, the security problem is intrinsically linked to the problem of confidence. Each helps to perpetuate the other. And the solution to the one can only be found in conjunction with the other. Yet there are difficulties in allying the two. As has been argued in the case of house searches, the most effective anti-terrorist measures in narrow security terms may not be acceptable in terms of the political and "confidence" loss that accrues. That, after all, is one of the reasons why internment failed in 1971 and why it is not on the security agenda at present. The difficulty is deciding where to strike the balance between security and confidence considerations - and whether security policies can be

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tailored to make a greater contribution to confidence without undermining their effectiveness.

- 3.15 Policies seeking to ensure public confidence in the security forces do not necessarily conflict with policies which seek an effective security strategy. They are two sides of the same coin; in the long term their aims are complementary as both sets of policies work towards making good stable government possible in Northern Ireland by ensuring terrorism does not succeed. Indeed if it is true, as has often been asserted, that actual or perceived "harrassment" by the security forces is one of the main reasons why members of the urban nationalist community join PIRA, then measures to improve "confidence" will in the longer term, contribute to the solution of the security problem by reducing the flow of terrorist recruits. Short-term conflict is, however, probably unavoidable. Inevitably as further powers are sought to continue the struggle against increasingly better-equipped and more sophisticated terrorists, there is the risk that these powers will be perceived as further illustrations of the way that the nationalist/republican community is oppressed by the security forces.

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