Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism: The IRA

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Terrorism and Liberal Democracy

Overview of Lecture

- Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism
- The formation of the IRA
- What are the IRA's aims and objectives?
- Why do people join the IRA?
- The organisational structure of the IRA
- A sample of IRA attacks
- The politicisation and evolution of the IRA and the Republican Movement
- Who are the IRA today?
- Questions to consider before the tutorial.

Nationalist-Separatist Terrorism

- Ethno-nationalist or nationalist-separatist terrorist groups wage campaigns of terror with the aim of gaining self-determination for a specific region.
- The most prominent ethno-nationalist groups have been in operation in Northern Ireland, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, the Basque country and to a lesser extent in Quebec.
- The division in Northern Ireland is often times referred to as a division between Catholic (republicans and nationalists wanting to be part of a united Ireland) and Protestants (loyalists and unionists wishing to remain part of the United Kingdom).
- While the majority of Irish republican terrorists have a Catholic background their motivation is not religious, but ethno-nationalist in nature

The Formation of the IRA

- 1969 'The End of the Beginning' (Morrison, 2008)
- In order to understand the formation of PIRA must look at the aftermath of the Border Campaign and the Goulding leadership (Bishop and Mallie, 1987. Chapters 3-7; Coogan, 2000. Chapters 14-18; Peter Taylor, 1998. Chapters 1-5)
- Restructuring of the Republican Movement; more political (introduction of Johnston and Coughlan)

The Formation of the IRA

- Armed struggle versus political
- Civil Rights Movement and pogroms
- Leadership at a time of weakness
- Recruitment of both old and new members
- Army Council meeting of 1969 and Ard Fheis of 1970

What are the IRA's aims and objectives?

- Long Term Objective: "The long term objective of the movement as stated in the constitution of the Army in which the rest of the movement vests leadership is the 'Establishment of a Democratic Socialist Republic.' Towards that end all our Politico Military Activities must be directed." (Green Book, p. 28, originally 1978)
- Short Term Objectives: '…hurdles or obstacles which must be cleared…the British connection must be broken.'



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Why Do People Join the IRA?

- In order to answer this question you must be aware of the specific time and place
- Various reasons, not all to do specifically with the long term objective of the group
- Mostly immediate circumstances
- Defence, sense of injustice, family, influential individual and peer influences
- Significant Incident (e.g. pogroms 1969; Bloody Sunday 1972; Hunger Strikes 1981)
- Process (see Horgan, 2005)

Richard O'Rawe

I came from a historically Republican family. My father was in the IRA in the 1940s, he was actually in the Northern Command of the IRA in the 1940s, and had been interned in the 1940s, he was also interned during the 1956 campaign. So I grew up in a Republican environment and surrounded by Republicans, surrounded by the likes of Billy McKee, who was a leading Belfast Republican, and who was said to have been almost the founder of the Provisional IRA. I grew up with these people, I was surrounded by these people. It was sort of a natural progression for me to go on to be a member of the IRA. If there hadn't of been the Troubles I dare say I would still have been a member of the IRA. I believed in the concept of a Republican freedom for the people of Ireland.

Martin McGuinness

Well it was in late 1970 and I became involved basically because I had observed the ongoing progress of the civil rights movement in the north and the response of the state to that, in terms of attacks on it by militant unionists and loyalists and the support for those attacks by the RUC at the time. And also the arrival in the north of the British army which was seen by many of us in the broad nationalist community at that time as being an attempt to shore up and support the unionist government here in Belfast. Effectively I decided in the face of ongoing attacks on the community I came from the only way to respond was to join an organisation which was prepared to fight back. So I joined the… in fact I joined the Official Republican Movement in the initial stages, but really I only stayed with them for a matter of weeks and left…For us we joined what we believed to be the IRA in Derry.

Joe Doherty

I grew up in Belfast, and you kind of always grew up with politics, hard politics, you always knew there was something wrong in society. You know that the shipyards weren't our shipyards; city hall wasn't our city hall. You always grew up with sense of alienation and subjugation within society…' The civil rights marches, I kind of grew up with that, the civil rights campaign. I didn't exactly understand the mechanisms of discrimination; I just knew we couldn't get jobs. So the civil rights marches started to enlighten people about that… The army came on the streets through the pogroms, so that brought a really hardened politics. The army raids, that was the conditions of British occupation within the community. You were being constantly harassed and put against the wall. People's homes being raided, army trucks, it kind of militarised the whole community. I just became a part of it. I was one of the young lads you probably see in film shows throwing bricks and rocks. I kind of gravitated from that to joining the IRA, or then it was na Fianna Eireann, which was a republican scout movement. I was too young to join the IRA.

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- Read Horgan and Taylor (1997) in TPV Vol 9. No.3
- Cellular based, hierarchically-organised authoritarian structure.
- While the active membership did not exceed a few hundred support network consisted of thousands

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- General Army Convention
- Army Executive
- Army Council
- General Headquarters
- Northern and Southern Commands
- Brigades
- Active Service Units

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- **General Army Convention**
- Organised meeting of delegates from other structures within the organisation
- GAC should meet 'every two years unless the majority of delegates notify the Army Council that [it is] better for military purposes to postpone it
- Purpose is to elect an 'Army Executive'
- Supreme Army Authority

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- Army Executive
- Board of twelve senior and experienced IRA veterans
- Has responsibility to elect seven members to the Army Council
- 'Keeping watch' on Army Council activities on behalf of GAC
- Always has six substitutes in readiness

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- Army Council and General Headquarters
- Army Council is '…the Supreme Authority when the General Army Convention is not in session.'
- Seven person committee
- The overall leadership responsible for the execution of all military policies in line with overall strategies
- Has the authority to 'conclude peace or declare war when a majority of the Council so decide.'
- The conclusion of peace must be ratified by a Convention.
- 'The direct representative of the 1918 Dail Eireann parliament and… as such they are the legal and lawful Government of the Republic.'

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- Regulated by GHQ
- Secretary, Chairperson and Chief of Staff appointed to Army Council
- Decisions made by Army Council have been implemented by GHQ since the PIRA's strategic reorganisation in late 1970s and by Northern and Southern Command
- Army Council has right to veto over certain operations planned

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- GHQ Departments
- Quartermaster
- Security
- Operations
- Foreign Operations
- Finance
- Training
- Engineering
- Intelligence
- Education
- Publicity

The Organisational Structure of the IRA

- Northern and Southern Command
- Comprises of brigadiers, OCs, and ASUs.
- Leadership of Northern Command have close ties with Army Council and GHQ
- Southern Command very much logistic support for Northern Command
- Acting in Quartermaster role
- Safehouses and training



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A Sample of IRA Attacks

- Bloody Friday 1972: 2 British soldiers, 5 Protestant civilians and 2 Catholic civilians killed by IRA explosions (22 bombs)
- Birmingham Pub Bombings 1972: 21 British civilians killed in 2 IRA explosions
- Kingsmills 1976: 10 Protestant civilians shot dead by IRA (bus stopped and Catholic driver allowed go)
- La Mon 1978: 12 Protestant civilians burned to death by an IRA firebomb

A Sample of IRA Attacks

- Warrenpoint 1979: 18 British soldiers killed by the IRA
- Enniskillen 1987: 11 Protestant civilians killed by an IRA bomb
- Shankill Road Bombing 1993: 1 IRA member and 9 Protestant civilians killed in the premature explosion of an IRA bomb
- Canary Wharf 1996: 2 English civilians killed in London by an IRA bomb

A Sample of IRA Attacks

- These attacks are not representative of deaths in the Northern Irish conflict (see Lost Lives)
- Most people killed in Northern Ireland were not killed in high-profile multiple death events. (see White, R. W., 2000. in TPV, Vol 12, No. 1)
- Cannot be looked at as a stand alone attack.
- Must look at what was happening both internally and externally prior to and after the attacks.
- Does not represent all IRA's activities both illegal and legal

The Evolution and Politicisation of the Irish Republican Movement

- 1969/1970: The split of the Old IRA
- 1972: Bloody Sunday
- 1975: IRA ceasefire (beginning of politicisation from the Maze)
- 1977: Northern Command established and Revolutionary Council set up. Cellular restructuring of IRA starts.
- 1981: Bobby Sands gets elected MP while on hunger strike

The Evolution and Politicisation of the Irish Republican Movement

- 1981: 'Armalite and Ballot Box' approved by IRA Army Council
- 1986: General Army Council lifts abstentionist policy to Dail, as do Sinn Fein in Ard Fheis
- 1988: Hume-Adams talks begin
- 1990: Debates about ceasefire begin at Army Council level
- 1990-1991: Proxy bombs (see Horgan and Bloom, 2008)

The Evolution and Politicisation of the Irish Republican Movement

- 1994: IRA ceasefire
- 1995: First suggestions of decommissioning
- 1996: End of ceasefire. Failure by dissidents at GAC to take over Army Council. Brian Keenan leaves dissidents and backs Adams leadership.
- 1997: IRA ceasefire. Mitchell Principles accepted
- 1998: Good Friday Agreement

The Evolution and Politicisation of the Irish Republican Movement

- 1998: IRA Convention lifts abstentionist ban on taking seats in Stormont followed by Sinn Fein (after two attempts)
- 1998: Second GAC of the year restores Army Council's power to decommission
- 1999: IRA appoints a representative to meet with Gen John De Chastelain to discuss decommissioning
- 2000: IRA agrees in principle to putting weapons beyond use and the inspection of two arms dumps

The Evolution and Politicisation of the Irish Republican Movement

- 2001: Sinn Fein become largest nationalist party in Westminster elections
- 2003: Sinn Fein largest nationalist party in Assembly
- 2005: IRA put all weapons beyond use and members ordered to pursue objectives through "exclusively peaceful means".
- 2006: St Andrews Agreement
- 2007: Sinn Fein to take seats on Policing Board. Sinn Fein and DUP sit in devolved government

Who are the IRA today?

"So far as the paramilitary groups are concerned, they must obviously demonstrate that they have finally disposed of all their terrorist capabilities and weapons. We have previously recognised that to undertake and manage this change they must retain command and planning structures; no organisation can transform itself without personal and institutional leadership. But they do need to go further. Relinquishing the leadership structures appropriate to a time of armed conflict is the signal that they have emerged at the other end of the process. IN so far as the PIRA are concerned, we assess that in practice this transformation is all but complete" **IMC report 18, May 1st 2008, paragraph 6.5**

Who are the IRA today?

"Has the PIRA abandoned its terrorist structures, preparations and capabilities? …The so called 'military' departments have ceased to function and have been disbanded…PIRA is not recruiting or training members and the membership continues to decline…In so far as gathering information or intelligence may continue in any limited way- not in itself improper if it does not involve illegal methods or intent- we believe that it is mainly for the purpose of ascertaining the nature of any threat from dissident republicans." **IMC report 19, September 2008, paragraph 2.8**

Who are the IRA today?

"While in theory any organisation can be resurrected however long it has been dormant or non-existent, our answer in respect of the PIRA which existed when we first reported four and a half years ago is firmly in the negative. In our view the way in which the leadership has adopted an entirely different course, disbanded terrorist related structures and capacity and engaged in different a activities, and members have moved on to other things, means that the PIRA of the recent and violent past is well beyond recall…It is clear that the Provisional movement is now fully committed to the political path and will seek to maintain sufficient coherence to ensure that its mantle does not pass to others bent on violence." **IMC report 19, September 2008, paragraph 2.13**

Questions to consider before tutorial

- Should we still research and analyse the IRA and the Northern Irish Conflict? If yes why? If no why not?
- Consider the role played by the 'active' and the 'passive' supporters of the IRA. How significant was this role?
- What specific events enabled the Peace Process to be 'successful'?
- Why were the Adams leadership more successful than the Goulding leadership in 'politicising' the Republican Movement?