Oglaigh na hÉireann

Analysis of the IRA must begin with its first name, Oglaigh na hÉireann, its title in Ireland’s official national language, and its self-description in its official communications, signed by ‘P. O’Neill’ on behalf of the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau. The IRA activities sometimes refer to the organization as ‘O’Niall’s army’, the acronym of its Gaelic name. The etymology of Oglaigh na hÉireann is significant: Oglaigh means ‘heaven, champion, warrior, soldier’; and Éire means ‘young’; and so Oglaigh came to mean ‘brave’, ‘youth of military age’, or ‘soldier’, and finally ‘volunteers’. Oglaigh na hÉireann therefore comprises the ‘Volunteers of Ireland’, or ‘The Irish Volunteers’. The Volunteers had been founded as Oglaigh na hÉireann in 1913, in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, a militia loyal to the Ulster Unionist Party and determined to oppose the granting of home rule to Ireland by the Westminster parliament. Oglaigh na hÉireann was the idea of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), otherwise known as the Fenians, who tried to run it as a front organization, although it was formally convoked by a broad coalition of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and Gaelic League revolutionaries, i.e. by the major cultural bodies of the Irish nationalist revival. The Volunteers divided shortly after the start of the Great War. The National Volunteers, following John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, took the majority into the British army — on the understanding that Great Britain would honour its commitment to implement home rule when the war was over. The minority retained the founding organization’s tricolour flag, and rejected service as another English war, not least because home rule had been postponed because of the resistance of the Ulster Unionists. Oglaigh na hÉireann organized military training. Its members were subsequently partly mobilized through an IRB-conspiracy, in the launching of the Insurrection of Easter 1916 — in which a Republic was proclaimed in arms, but put down by forces of the British Crown. At the start of the Insurrection Oglaigh na hÉireann was retained in (English) language, together with the Irish Citizen Army, as the Irish Republican Army, and it was as Commandant General of that army that Pádraig Pearse surrendered. It was ‘Irish’ because of its national identification ‘Republican’ because militant Irish nationalism since the late eighteenth century has opposed British Crown authority and an ‘Army’ because only such an organization is the legitimate defender of a state or nation.

The Volunteers remained known by their original English title for a while; and even since rank and the IRA members have been known as ‘volunteers’. In October 1917 Sinn Féin, the political party which had originally stood for a separate Irish parliament under the British Crown, was revitalized by a redux of Volunteers who elected Eamon de Valera, the surviving leader of the 1916 Insurrection, as the party’s president. Then in the course of the meeting, 250 delegates met in an Army Congress in the GAA grounds, Croke Park, Dr de Valera was elected President, and Cathal Brugha Chief of Staff, but the IRB was prominently represented in the staff. [Michael] Collins was Director of Organisation. The IRA was now, in principle, subordinated to political control by a party — which claimed the right to speak for the nation, although it was in practice significantly controlled by Collins, now the President of the Supreme Council of the IRA. While subordinated to civilian authority the IRA had established its internal democracy — a general convention, and the election of the senior officers. The IRA subsequently spearheaded Ireland’s War of Independence between 1919 and 1921, in conjunction with Sinn Féin, which was victorious in Ireland in the Westminster general elections held in 1918 — the first held under Home Rule suffrage and the franchise for women over thirty. Sinn Féin won on an explicit platform of...
Looking back at the IRA

"Abatementism." 1 In MPs would not take their seats at Westminster just instead would constitute the deputies of the Irish parliament.

Two significant entities today call themselves Ogláigh na hÉireann; because both claim to be the army of Ireland. Ireland’s Easter, Revolt Aborn, in October 2004 pointedly said, "Our Constitution states there can be [only] one Ogláigh na hÉireann. At the moment there are two. One is the official name of the army of the sovereign, independent and democratic republic of Ireland that congregates twenty-six counties of the island, and is a member-state of the European Union and the United Nations. This Ogláigh na hÉireann has never fought a foreign or defensive war; it serves a nation that is free (yet a member of NATO), and is typical of the resource-starved military of a small European 'Venus', best known for participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Under the Irish Free State (1922–37) it was known only as Ogláigh na hÉireann, and had no official English name. The other Ogláigh na hÉireann is the secret army, the IRA. The two ‘Ogláigh na hÉireann’, official and unofficial, spring from the winners and losers, respectively, of the Irish Civil War (1922–23). That war was precipitated by the implementation of the Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland, which led to a division within the ranks of the IRA, then over 100,000 strong. After April 1922, there were two armies, one loyal to the Free State’s provisional government, the other to the IRA Executive.

Pro-Treaty volunteers joined the army of the Irish Free State; anti-Treaty volunteers insisted they constituted the true IRA.

Initial Constitutional Objectives

The reform of anti-Treaty IRA's initial constitution, drafted in the spring of 1922, before the outbreak of the Civil War, stated that

The Army shall be known as the Irish Republican Army. It shall be a purely volunteer Army... its objects shall be:

1. To safeguard the honour and maintain the independence of the Irish Republic.
2. To protect the rights and liberties common to the people of Ireland.
3. To place its services at the disposal of an established Republican Government which faithfully upholds the above objects."

Paving "dismal arms"- acknowledged defeat in the civil war in May 1922.— the IRA intended its constitution in November 1925 to specify four objectives: guarding the Republic's honour and upholding its sovereignty and unity, establishing and upbuilding a legitimate Irish government with total control over the Republic, securing and defending citizens' civil and religious liberties and their equal rights and opportunities, and, lastly (a new item), reviving the Irish language and promoting the best characteristics of the Irish race.

Aside from this addition of an extranational agenda, the content was the same as that of spring 1922. It is vital to understand the original three quoted objectives. The IRA was reformed by those republicans, a majority of the Volunteers, who regarded the Treaty signed by Sinn Féin's delegates in 1921 as a fundamental betrayal of 'the honour and independence of the Irish Republic'. This was, among other things, because the Treaty acknowledged a continuing role for the British king and his successors as the (constitutional) monarch of Ireland, gave Great Britain a right of ratification over the permanent constitution of the Irish Free State by requiring that the latter comply with the Treaties, restricted Ireland's international sovereignty, and required the Free State to make its key naval ports available to the forces of the Crown. The failure of the Treaty immediately to reverse
the partition of Ireland into two entities, 'Northerners' and 'Southerners', which the Westminster parliament had authorized in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, without the consent of a single Irish MP, was regarded by some, but not all, opponents of the Treaty as an equally fundamental betrayal of Ireland's national honour, rights, liberties and independence.

'To protect the rights and liberties common to the people of Ireland', meant that the IRA's mission was to defend the right of the people of Ireland to what they would call their human rights. It was also a statement of inclusive civic republican nationalism for Irish citizens, whatever their origins, and of their collective right to national self-determination.

The third object of the IRA, 'to place its services at the disposal of an established Republican Government which faithfully upheld the above objects', warrants detailed parsing. The IRA endorsed republican — and democractic — government, and, in principle, the subordination of the army to an 'established Republican Government', provided that government faithfully upheld the honour and independence and the rights and liberties of the people of Ireland. 'Established Republican Government' was code for the government created by 'Dail Eireann' — the Assembly of Ireland — formed by the Sinn Fein members elected to the Westminster parliament of 1918 who had then proclaimed Ireland's own parliament. Its successor, the Second Dail, elected in 1921, had 'established' and sworn its members' loyalty to the Irish Republic proclaimed in the rebellion of 1916.

In 1919, Cathal Brugha, Minister of Defence in the Government created by Dail Eireann, had insisted that the IRA take an oath of loyalty to Dail Eireann — thereby formally establishing civilian control of the military in the new and emergent state, and attempting to reduce the influence of the IRI (and Collins) within the IRA. The Treaty precisely required members of Dail Eireann to swear an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, thereby repudiating the establishment of the Republic. The provocative British insistence on this new oath, requiring deputies to forewear their solemn commitments, stuck in the throat of republicans, many of whom were otherwise prepared for political compromise, e.g. Eamon de Valera, the then President of Dail Eireann, who had sought for Ireland to have 'external association' with, but not membership of, the British Commonwealth, and was willing to recognize the British king as the head of the Commonwealth.

In the perspective of the new IRA's constitution, the deputies of Dail Eireann who obliged the Treaty by taking the oath, had done what they had no right to do, namely disestablish the Republic at British insistence, and thereby dishonoured the independence, rights, and liberties of the people of Ireland.

The Treaty, made under the duress of David Lloyd George's threat of 'immediate and terrible war', had been accepted by a bare majority (32 to 2) of Ireland's negotiators (who had then signed as black), and by a bare majority of the cabinet of Dail Eireann (4 to 3). The deputies who accepted the Treaty included the majority of the second Dail Eireann, led by Michael Collins (then President of the IBCC, and Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein), who had received the Treaty as members of the negotiating team and the cabinet. The deputies of Dail Eireann later dissolved themselves into the new parliament (also called Dail Eireann) of the Irish Free State, which had 'dominion status' within the British Empire, with the British king as head of state. The defeated majority of deputies became, in the vision of the new anti-Treaty IRA, the upholders of Ireland's honourable independence, the 'established' Republic — and they, as the rump 'Second Dail', provided the legitimate
democratic authority for the IRA to oppose the Treaty. After losing the Civil War, the IRA did not disband, but endured as a significant organization of trained soldiers opposed to the Treaty and its consequences, including the partition of Ireland. The split within the IRA was mirrored at party level. Sinn Féin divided the majority forming Cumann na nGaedheal (and the first government of the Irish Free State), while the minority maintained the title deeds to Sinn Féin. Most of the members of Cumann na nGaedheal would later become, in the 1930s, members of Fine Gael, the party that was most committed to the Treaty.

The majority of the deputies of Sinn Féin left its ranks in 1926 to join the new Fianna Fáil party, which was prepared to work the dominion system while being committed to removing every obnoxious vestige of the Treaty from the constitution of independent Ireland. In the meantime the IRA was pledged, by its revised 1925 constitution, provided the Republic was fully established, to acknowledge the authority of such an emergent entity: ‘The Army Council shall have the power to delegate its powers to a government which is actively endeavouring to function as de facto government of the republic... When a government is (thus) functioning... a General Army Convention shall be convened to give the allegiance of Oglaigh na hÉireann to such a government’.11

The IRA Between Two Wars in Ireland

The volatile, labyrinthine, public and secret history of the IRA (or, as some would have it, of the many IRAs) between 1923 and 1969 cannot be thoroughly traced here. It is chronicled in a range of journalists’ narratives (Tim Pat Coogan, Peter Taylor, Patrick Bishop and Eamonn Mallie), in the memoirs of former IRA volunteers, and sympathizers (notably Uíneann Mac Esin), and in more systematic appraisals by contemporary historians (J. Bowyer Bell, Richard English, Brian Hanlon and Peter Hart). The story in the standard accounts, of course, is not one of complete coherence. Contradictory dispositions in and actions by the IRA abounded in the fifty years between the onset of Ireland’s War of Independence and the extreme ‘return’ of British troops to Northern Ireland in 1969. The IRA apparently did not believe that a majority, even an Irish majority in the Dáil, had the right to be wrong on the constitutional status of Ireland — evidence of ‘vanguardism’ and ‘elitism’. Yet its successive leaders generally sought to lead (or assist a popular revolution against three regimes (in Belfast, Dublin and London). In the 1920s and 1930s, the IRA commended parliamentary abstentionism, which for many became an article of faith as opposed to a tactic, but one of its Army Council members was elected to the Northern Ireland parliament in 1933, and the organization actively canvassed for Fianna Fáil (which described itself as ‘The Republican Party’ in English) in two critical general elections in 1932 and 1933 — both of which saw the anti-Treaty party return to power. The IRA’s membership was mostly Catholic in its origins, but the Catholic clergy and bishops of Ireland regularly condemned it. The IRA proclaimed a civic Irish republicanism, true to the heritage of the eighteenth-century revolutionaries, the United Irishmen, in which Protestants and other minorities would have full citizenship rights. Yet its leaders and members were often regarded as ‘ sectarian’ in practice. The IRA was described as comprised of highly localized sectarian militias, defenders of Northern Irish Catholicism, but also as centralized internationalist left-wing revolutionaries. In one decade, the 1930s, the leadership of the IRA went from being a Communist’s closest ally in Ireland to conspiring with Nazi Germany, under Sean Russell, several years later, before returning in the 1960s to an accommodation with
Marxism. In the early and mid-1940s, the IRA 'deterrent partition', which remained very much an organization focused on the overthrow of the British rather than the Northern case. It trained for war, yet often used to prevent its members involving themselves in confrontation with their enemies.

Yet despite multiple ejections, not least in resistance toward colonial policies in the 50-year interval, one can observe a unifying sense across the IRA's history before 1959, namely, the comprehensive constitutional rejection of British determination of Ireland's constitutional arrangements. Here is a sketch of five partially overlapping phases, which correspond to the received history learned by IRA volunteers.

First, after the glorious defense and surrender of 1916, came suicide and surprising success by guerrilla warfare against the British. The IRA refers to this moment as the 'Twelfth War'—after its engagements with the Black and Tan (formed in black and khaki, emergency reserve police recruited from Great Britain. Success affirmed for many the reside of armed struggle, particularly guerrilla warfare which had done more to create the self-governing Ireland that fifty years of parliamentary pursuit of home rule.

The second phase, 1924–38, opened after the explicitly sudden defeat of the bulk of the IRA in the Civil War of the Twenties. The IRA was decisively defeated militarily; significant numbers of volunteers were killed, injured, or incarcerated. Of those subsequently released many left the organization. The IRA, explicit or tacit electoral supporters became a minority in the South. It became an anti-system oppositionist underground army organization in the Irish Free State — and was weaker still in Northern Ireland. There was a progressive attenuation both in

the strength of and the support for the IRA, even though its membership in the 1930s had increased so high as 30,000. Volunteers were increasingly misreported, subjected to extensive surveillance, interned without trial, and gradually marginalized even though the term of the Third War resumed a de facto duration in the South. This loss of support was largely because the IRA progressively lost its raison d'être in the South. Subsequent political leaders of political parties in independent Ireland, under Cumann na Gaedheal, Fianna Fáil, and later Fine Gael and Fine Éireann, were to prove Michael Collins's perception of the Treaty to be true; it could be used as a stepping stone to establish Ireland's formal — and republican — independence from Britain.

A Cumann na nGaedheal-led government consolidated the neutrality and independence of all the British territories in the Treaty of Westminster of 1931. From 1935, Fianna Fáil governments, under the leadership of de Valera, who had been most active espousing away from the abstentionist policies of Sinn Féin and the IRA, progressively dismantled most of the objectionable features of the Treaty. They removed the oath, absolved the post of governor general, recovered the Treaty ports, and established Ireland's external sovereignty — to the extent that it was able to enact neutral in World War II (though it proximally at the maintenance of partition). The removal of the requirement that deputies take an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, according to de Valera, removed the case for abstentionism in the South: deputes were now free to argue for the republican planks without Româte institutional impediments. Ireland then established its popularly endorsed constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) in 1937 without British interference and created an elected president as head of state, and external association with the British Commonwealth, i.e., a republic in all but name. Later a Fine Gael and then a Fine Éireann-led coalition government

14 Halsby, IRA, 120–27.
15 Rosen Nourie, The IRA, and its Enemies, 15, 126. A War provides the most recent scholarly examination of the IRA in those years. It attempts to discuss in succinct detail about this excellent work here.


17 Comprehensive statistical treatment of the IRA in Northern Ireland between 1916 and 1939 are given in Bernard J. McNelis, Northern Irish Free State (1922–25) (Belmont, 2001). This figure is safely assumed by Connolly (IRA, 78, but Hayes, 10, 11), provides good reasoning for thinking that the IRA membership between 1919 and 1939 was 12,000 volunteers in 1932, before the (still) significant breakdown by the politically-minded founders of the Republican Congress, and being reduced to fewer than 4,000 members by 1936.
proclaimed Ireland a Republic in 1949. The 1937 constitution vested sovereignty in the people of Ireland, made it plain that the institutions established were a product of Irish will, and (implicitly) reaffirmed the Government of Ireland Act (1920), which had partitioned Ireland. In Articles 2 and 3 of its constitution, it affirmed that the whole island of Ireland was "national territory," and reserved to the Irish parliament the right to govern all of Ireland, including the six southern counties. The 1949 declaration that independent Ireland was a Republic—it then left the British Commonwealth because that organization did not then accept republics—meant that the IRA was left with no meaningful grievance against Ireland's constitutional status. In short, the constitutional remission at the Treaty in sovereign Ireland had been substantively resolved by 1937, in the view of one former IRA anti-Treaty man, who had become Prime Minister, de Valera, and by 1949, by another former anti-Treaty IRA man, Seán MacBride, who became Minister for External Affairs.

The third phase, 1939-56, saw a strong reorientation of the rank IRA, abandoned by many of its southern leftists, toward achieving Irish unification. Reversing the partition was the last extensive objectionable feature of the Treaty of 1921, arguably after 1957, and certainly after 1949. This reorientation began with a bombing campaign in England, after a formal declaration of noce and war, in 1939-40. The campaign was a failure and the upshot was the imprisonment and the near-execution of the IRA's volunteers in both parts of Ireland as well as of its activists in England.10 The IRA had to be rebuilt almost from scratch after World War II.11 The logical corollary of the orientation toward ending partition was seen in an Army Convention resolution of 1948 that there would be no military action by the IRA in the twenty-six counties—which should in retrospect be read as the IRA's first step toward formal recognition of what it called the "Leinster House Parliament." It was followed, shortly, by General Army Order No. 8, which forbid volunteers from defending their arms in the South or on any defensive actions in the South. In short, the IRA was no longer at war with independent Ireland. That armed struggle had been abandoned.

The fourth phase, the IRA campaign of 1956 to 1962, within Northern Ireland, launched from both the North and the South, was intended to liberate the six counties, and to reunify Ireland using guerrilla warfare and armed propaganda.

It was preceded by significant evidence of Northern Irish nationalism discontent with the Belfast régime, expressed in successive elections of Sinn Féin candidates. But it was a small-scale conflict, quickly repressed on both sides of the border, and ended in a thorough defeat, publicly acknowledged by the IRA's Army Council.12

The comprehensive failure of the IRA's armed struggle to liberate the North led to a fifth phase, between 1962 and 1969, when an emergent left-wing-oriented leadership tried to take the IRA, South and North, strongly in the direction of communists politics, to make "reds" out of "greens." They were ready to abandon militarism, and to shift toward recognition of Ireland's parliament and the abandonment of princely abstentionism.

This capsule history is, at first glance, one of comprehensive military, political, and strategic failure for the IRA. It went to war against the government of the Irish Free State (1922-25), against the government of Great Britain in 1939, and against the Northern Ireland government in 1956. It was defeated in all three instances, and had acknowledged each defeat, and by the early 1960s appeared to have a renderous with a cooperator. Politically most of its members has been moral conservatives, Jeffersonian republicans rather than hard-line socialists.
— although socialism had been consistently the more ideologically-driven of them, believing their positions had been legitimated by the incorporation of Marxist James Connolly into the IRB in 1916. By the late 1930s in both parts of Ireland, and within the Irish state, the IRA appeared to be a relic, a group of conservatives discredited from contemporaneous politics. It had never recovered its successful symbiosis with Sinn Fein in 1919-21, when a military and democratic political movement had combined and forced the Irish government to negotiate with Irish republicans.

But there was not the whole story. The IRA’s standing agenda had been substantively redefined in the South. At all southern governments from 1922 had former senior IRA men in their ministerial ranks. With the notable exception of Kevin O’Higgins, most were republicans with kinds beliefs to those of the IRA. They progressively addressed its constitutional agenda, which was not rejected but neglected, even if it was dormant, and seen if refused the right of a majority to be wrong at the constitutional status of the state. However, representatives did had the IRA into increasingly bizarre ideological devolution. The deputies of the new Dáil who had taken the anti-Treaty side, and who had walked from participation in the ‘parliamentary’ Dáil Eireann, ceased to meet until the late 1930s as if they were the valid parliament of Ireland. In this, in turn, meant that the IRA’s mandate stemmed from the last all-Ireland parliament—one that was ‘statelessness’, in time passed, demographically as well as chronologically removed from the current preference of the people of Ireland, North and South. The donors from which the IRA derived its authority was frozen in time, increasingly virtual. Eventually, the ageing deputies, the rump Dáil, authorized the IRA Army Council to be the government of Ireland until the Republic would be re-established—although in the IRA’s theory it had never been validly de jure ‘disestablished’. It was, for example, in its capacity as the alleged government of the Irish Republic that the IRA declared war on Great Britain in January 1939.25 Ideological decision of arose and progressively diverged mandates did not stop with the view that the IRA was the Government of Ireland pursuing the re-establishment of the Republic and a validly constituted Dáil. The last surviving member of the rump Dáil, General Tom MacEntee, was to work long enough to be twice asked to avoid which section at the republican movement was the true inheritor of the mandate of the last valid Dáil (and thereby the valid government of the Republic of Ireland). In 1969, he decided that the mandate belonged with the Provisional IRA, and in 1988 that it belonged with those who rejected the decision of Sinn Féin to recognize the legitimacy of the Dublin parliament. On his death MacEntee handed the letter on to Michael Hobbs.26

This exception to the repercussions of republican constitutional ideology might occasion laughter if the stakes were not so serious in considering policy responses to retaliate violence, it is too customary for analysts and policy makers to treat ideology and corrosive constituent doctrine as masks for other interests or grievances or as simply invalid plausible that can be rapidly rephrased as when a movement requires. Policy-makers tend to focus on either the incentives or opportunities that encourage or discourage the use of political violence, or on the material grievances held to underpin anti-government movements. These are two possible dispositions. But ideologically informed organizations may be best induced to withdraw from violence if an internally procured path can be found for their members to abandon their use of violence, Governments that directly engage the ideological preconditions and the
In the 1950s and 1960s, judging by their publications and statements, Irish nationalism did not consider that Ireland's progressive abandonment of the Treaty had entrenchment Ulster unionism's wish to remain part of the United Kingdom. Ernie Kennedy, in an analysis of unionist newspapers 1919-49, argues that if in fact widened the gulf between both parts of Ireland by which he means the gulf between Unionist unionists and Irish nationalists, see The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State, 1919-1949 (BelFAST, 1996).


27 Constitutional unionism of such movements, may have greater success in promoting their internal transformations. That is one lesson one can extract from the progressive diminution of the IRA as a serious subversive threat to the government of the Irish Free State, and its successor, the government of the Republic of Ireland. By progressively eliminating the obvious features of the Treaty, by transforming Ireland's constitutional status and laws, successive Irish governments rendered impossible the IRA's constitutional objection to the 'actually existing' Republic of Ireland. This assisted in the destabilization and constitutionalization of the IRA's members in the South, and their withdrawal from the politics of armed struggle. There is a forgotten logical counterfactual to this proposition: Had Irish governments not followed this path, and had not British governments reconciled themselves to it, whether by accident or design, independent Ireland's Civil War over the Treaty would have been reinvigorated, and the IRA would have had greater support for attempting a coup d'etat in the South.

Notwithstanding constitutional engagement with insurgents is not sufficient for making political settlement and peace, nor is what might be termed 'constitutional appeasement' always appropriate or sufficient. The long-run success of Irish governments in marginalizing the IRA in the South owed a great deal to the regularly renewed democratic and majority mandates of such governments, their successful use of civil policing, extensive surveillance, intermittently severe repression under the rule of law and the imposition of multiple backstops which included many IRA veterans to leave the organization or to emigrate. One must not forget that the institutionalization of the Irish state, supported externally by Winston Churchill, was preceded by the thoroughly brutal — and frequently lawless — suppression of the majority of the IRA in the Civil War, including executive-authorized executions. Nevertheless, where military nationalist movements have constituencies that guide their conduct, and are organized around other constitutional revetments, constitutional engagement may be a necessary condition for conflict-resolution. Having shown how the argument applies to the IRA in the South, I will later attempt to show that a similar argument can be used to interpret the IRA's willingness to sustain ceasefires in the 1990s and presently to consider its own disarmament.

Provisional IRA: Objectives and Nature

The IRA could, and did, object to the failure of Irish government to achieve Irish unification, but its volition knew that the major obstacle to Irish unification lay not with what they persisted in calling the Free State. After all, governments in Ireland had diplomatically campaigned for Irish unification after 1937. Rather the obstacles lay with the UK government, and with the wishes of Ulster unionists, the strongest beneficiaries and supporters of the Treaty settlement. The Provisional IRA was created in December 1969 from full knowledge of these facts, its vanguard, Provisional Sinn Fein, shortly afterwards. The new IRA's first declaration affirmed its allegiance to 'the Twenty-six County Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by Tal Tai Oíra, 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922, to this day by the British imposed Six County and Twenty-six County partitionist state, a re-statement of the IRA's traditional stance. The 'Provisional' role served three functions. It echoed the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic proclaimed in 1916; and, secondly, it repudiated the 'Official' IRA's leaders, who had just sought to manoeuvre the IRA to end political abstentionism, and had, it was thought, used unconstitutional means to do so. Thirdly, 'Provisional' suggested a temporary cessation, pending
the reorganization of the IRA. This mission was proclaimed accomplished in September 1970, but the name 'Provisional IRA', and its derivative 'Provo', stuck.

The split between the Provisionals and the Officials is generally attributed to three cleavages. The Officials were Marxist, or on the verge of becoming so; the Provisionals were more nationalist, and the Officials preferred to build a political liberation front to military struggle.24 There is truth in this characterization. The historian Roy Foster further maintains that the Officials were 'woolly radicals dreaming of a national liberation front', whereas the Provisionals are typecast as 'Defenders' and as 'fundamentalists'.30 The Defender motif is commonplace in accounts of the Provisional IRA.31 It suggests a lineage from the clandestine eighteenth-century agrarian Catholic nativist militia of Ulster who defended their co-religionists from Protestant settler vigilantes, the 'Peep o’ Day Boys', organized killers and exploiters of Catholics. It insinuates that the Provisionals are more sectarian than ideological, and less committed to the civic citizenship agenda of Ireland’s first-eighteenth-century republicans, the United Irishmen (who fused the Defenders into their organization before the 1798 insurrection). It treats the Provisionals as an atavistic.

The Defender motif appears to make sense because the impetus for the formation of the Provisional IRA was the unpreparedness of the IRA, North or South, for the assaults on Catholics, especially Belfast Catholics, by Protestant mobs, in collusion with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its auxiliaries, the B Specials, in August 1969. These assaults, which led to deaths, injuries, and expulsions, and the burning out of Bombay Street, are standardly described as 'pogroms' in the memories of post-1969 Provisional IRA volunteers.32 These assaults were responses to the then peaceful civil rights movement, which republicans had helped organise from 1966 to mobilize against deep injustices within Northern Ireland, modelling the protests on the US civil rights movement.33 The Provisionals were organized in immediate response to urban defenselessness, and to remonstrative graffiti on Belfast walls that declared 'IRA = I Ran Away'. But the post-1969 Provisionals were not atavistic throwbacks. Their new members were, mostly, urban working-class activists who saw themselves, initially, as defenders of their communities against contemporary loyalist, partisan police and partisan British troops. Their founding leaders soon persuaded them that active offence against the British state was the only or at least the best way to address the unformalized policy of Northern Ireland. To typecast the Provisionals as religious 'fundamentalists' is as misleading as reading them as throwbacks. Their early and their later members included many self-styled socialists; and although the Provisionals have been overwhelmingly Catholic in social origin they have not, generally, been pious believers, have not followed the political advice of their Church’s bishops — or the Pope — and are less overly and traditionally Catholic than the volunteers of 1916 or the 1920s. There has never been a serving priest, let alone a bishop, in the IRA’s Army Council, or, to my knowledge, among its volunteers.34 The IRA’s symbolism may be suffused with a Catholic heritage, as some maintain, but it is the Irish nation rather than the Roman Catholic Church which they affirm, and to which they pledge allegiance. That said, the Provisionals were founded by ‘republican’ fundamentalists, men who had fought in the failed 1956–62 campaign, such as Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Diáithí Ó Conaill, Seán Mac Stroífín, and Joe Cahill, and who believed in the republican traditions, i.e. in rejecting the Treaty’s institutions, and undoing partition by force.35

The Provisionals soon declared themselves at war with the British army, which had been deployed in Northern Ireland in 1969


31 Kevin Toolis, Rebel Heroes: Journeys Within the IRA (London, 1993), 280. Toolis sees the IRA through investigative and press-linking of 'defenders', 'brothers' [the Finians], 'retirers', 'volunteers', 'youths', and 'martyrs'. In his study evil and guilt (Rebel Heroes) is the best (and certainly lazy) entry into the IRA. It is, however, a social science free zone, and its policy proposals are shrewd, but flawed, quality of endearing literature, if mine of its stories seem like realist film scripts.

32 See the interviews in Robert White, The Revolutionary Irish Republicans (Wesport, Ct., 1972); and Bob Pardee, ‘Was the Civil Rights Movement a Republican/Counter-Culture Conspiracy?’, Irish Political Studies, 1 (1980), 33-41.


34 Fr. Michael Flanagan was Vice President of Sinn Féin (1971-72), and as President in 1974 he was discredited by the Roman Catholic Church and was the sole political leader in Ireland to support the Spanish Republic against General Francisco Franco, Irish Nationalism, 279-80; Fr. Patrick Brett, whose extradition to the UK was refused by the Irish Courts in 1980, was accorded of being a member of the IRA.
in support of the civil power", apparently in a peacekeeping role, and to head off a potential intervention by the Irish government — which had arranged at least one clandestine supply of arms to protect Northern Catholics. 36 The new IRA, which some, wrongly, maintain was brought into being through the active planning of the Irish government, argued that only a British disengagement would resolve the conflict on the island, and focused its initial attention on removing the Stormont parliament — through which the Ulster Unionist Party had organized a systematic system of discrimination for nearly fifty years. 37 In 1970—71, the Provisionals rapidly surpassed the Official IRA in militancy and recruitment amongst Catholic youths and from 1969 until 1992, with breaks in 1972, 1974—75, and between 1994 and 1996, this new IRA organized a sustained insurrection. It has not succeeded in unifying Ireland, but regards itself as having removed the majoritarian and tyrannous Stormont parliament in 1972. It was not militarily defeated by what is widely acknowledged as the most capable European army, nor, after 1976, by an extremely large, armed, recognized, and well-funded police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Operating mostly within a territory with just over one million and a half people, and for most of that time within a support base of a minority of the minority cultural Catholic population of approximately 610,000, the IRA's organizational endowment was impressive. It survived the efforts of five UK police ministers to crush it — Harold Wilson, Edward Heath, James Callaghan, Margaret Thatcher, and John Major. The IRA's leaders negotiated, directly or indirectly, with all these prime ministers. The leader of the UK's opposition, Harold Wilson, who was to be prime minister again between 1974 and 1976, met the IRA in Dublin in 1971. In 1972, an IRA negotiating team, including the young Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, met with Heath's Deputy Prime Minister, William Whitelaw, in London. The IRA would later indirectly negotiate with Wilson's government in 1974—75, and with Major's between 1990 and 1996. Thatcher must have authorized Peter Brooke, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to open negotiations about negotiations by proxy with the IRA in 1989. 38 And since 1997 the IRA has been indirectly — directly or indirectly involved, with four Irish prime ministers — Charles Haughey, Albert Reynolds, John Bruton and Bertie Ahern. In short, 'talking to terrorists' has been considered a necessary risk by six British prime ministers, and at least four recent Irish premiers.

What is known about the contemporary IRA? Transparency cannot be the dominant trait of an underground army. The names of the IRA's Army Council and Executive leaders, although widely guessed, reported, and denied, are organizational secrets, which Ed Moloney claims to know. Presently many of its serving volunteers freely supply journalists with extensive information about intra-IRA debates, apparently in violation of IRA General Army Order No. 3, 'No member ... shall make any statement either verbally or in writing to the press or mass media without General Headquarters permission.' 39

Most studies of the IRA are dependent upon unauthorized interviews. 40 There are, of course, some documentary materials. The IRA, since its first effective organizer Michael Collins, has been textual. Its 1979 'Green Book' is a manual of lectures on constitutional commitments and rules for recruits, and guidance for volunteers facing interrogation. 41 The IRA tries to keep furtive records in notebooks and electronic media. This trait, of course, often compromised secrecy. Peter Taylor's remarkable account of an interview with
Ruairí Ó Brádaigh shows that the IRA's leaders keep extensive minutes, and that these minutes are authoritative. It is equally clear that no journalist, let alone historian, has had access to full copies of such records, and whether they will eventually become available, at revelation, cannot be known. They are, however, more likely to be reliable than some of today's literature and pulp fiction that goes into successive editions for the dens of airport lounges and the generally tame consorts of books on war and conflict.

For sensitive matters on the IRA's senior analysts are dependent upon the organization's formal communiques, transcripts of its authorized interviews with journalists and academics, public police and court records of volunteers and prisoners, stolen, lost or leaked British or Irish army, police, MI5, MI6, and Ministry of Defence intelligence reports, accounts of confidential incidents and victims of incidents; and what can be gleaned from the memoirs, autobiographies, and authorized and unauthorized biographies of the IRA's leaders and volunteers, or from the National Graves Association, which provides a roll call of the Irish republican war dead. There are also the susps but potentially informative accounts of volunteers turned spies or who have abandoned the cause. What follows is a provisional summary of what is known about the IRA from a critical but impartial appraisal of these sources.

Structure: Division of Labour, Ranks, and Rivalry

Until 1977 the IRA was organized, as it had been since the Irish Civil War of 1922-23, as a shadowy underground version of the British army, complete with officers, staff and line, and territorial brigades, battalions, and companies. From 1976-77 it was reorganized in smaller cellular structures, active service units (ASUs), each intended to be self-sufficient (e.g. in stripping, evacuations, bombings, robberies), and to comprise a small number of volunteers. The idea was to obviate the division of labour, and to create a mini-private organization, less vulnerable both to volunteers' surrendering information and to negligence liable through informants. In this reformation, several hundred volunteers, especially inline-non-volunteers, were excluded from the ASUs as security risks, either because they were easily identified security risks, or because they were otherwise regarded as unreliable. Nevertheless, after the change some of the old camaraderie of battalions and brigades was preserved — and re-casemation and Tyrone left service was paid to the change.

Presented in a formal organizational chart the top tier of the IRA consisted of the Executive (12 members), elected by the General Army Convention, which did not meet between 1970 and 1986, because of the danger of mass arrests. As the agency responsible for the IRA's constitution, the Convention is its sovereign. The Executive acts and, nominally, holds to account the Army Council (17 members), the operational executive chaired by the Chief of Staff. The General Headquarters of the IRA staff is also organized hierarchically into 'offices': Quarter Master General, Operations, Engineering, Intelligence, Finance, Training, Security, Publicity, and Political Education. Operations are organized by area (England, Europe, and, since reorganization, two 'Irish Command', 'Southern' and 'Northern'). The role of Southern Command is to act as the supplier and procurer for Northern Command — as for many operations in England. Judging by arms, guns, ammunition, explosive devices, and bomb-making equipment found by the Garda Síochána (the Irish police) in the decade preceding the cessation of the 1990s, most matériel was kept in the border counties, or in the Greater Dublin region, which makes logistical sense, although extrapolating from the location of 'finds' may be misleading because matériel may be more successfully hidden elsewhere in rural Ireland. Before and after reorganization the IRA

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sought to establish a pyramidal command and control organisation, like a functioning army. But, of necessity, the IRA has been extensively decentralised, reliant on the initiative and skill of its semi-autonomous units.

The Army Council and the GHQ were engaged in oversight, not command. Operational matters were often decided by those close to the trigger. Intelligence was apt to arrive rather than be sought. GHQ spent a great deal of time balancing demands and seeking resources rather than in directing a war. All the strategic decisions had been made. Most tactical decisions were shaped by opportunities and vulnerabilities. Initiative was seldom pursued, so in reality the IRA ran on a consensus achieved largely unconsciously.

Operational freedom often meant blunders, innocent people killed, incompetents sent in harm's way, bodies denoted when quiet was needed; but there was every indication that tight control from the centre would have changed matters.

Two more elements of IRA organisation require comment: its secrecy and its finances. The IRA has its own internal security, colloquially known as the ‘rattling squad’, whose mission is to intercept, court martial, and, where deemed necessary, to execute suspected spies or informants. It also organises vigilante justice through punishment squads of auxiliaries, a lower tier of generally lower calibre volunteers, who are not members of the IRAs, although they can graduate to them. The administration of ‘punishment beatings’, what I call police without prisons, may take the form of brute ‘beatings’ of limbs with baseball bats or iron bars, or of knuckle ‘cappings’ with guns. This is one of the most politically and morally sensitive subjects for the IRAs’ supporters and apologists. It is clear from interviews that republicans leaders would be delighted to be avowed of any association with the system — even though one standard analysis is that the IRA leaders support punishment beatings to entrench their local power. The punishment-beating system, which has its counterpart among loyalists, has been both a demoral and a supply problem for the IRA. Rough justice is demanded for alleged offenders and petty criminals within nationalist working-class communities, especially where the IRA is dominant, and where calling on the whims of the police, especially the unformed RUC, has been unimaginable — not least because police officers have often been unwilling to provide standard security where they fear that they might be set up and shot. IRA leaders in Belfast felt it necessary to provide some of this demand — and at least some of its auxiliaries have performed punishment beatings with satanic enthusiasm. The supply problem has been occasioned when the IRA has a surplus of potential volunteers who might otherwise either join other republican organisations, or dilute the calibre of the core organisation. Organising the surplus to auxiliaries and punishment squads solves some of this problem. The system is one of the greatest by-products of the absence of legitimate state institutions.

The last item in considering organisation is the IRA’s finances. These are, of course, not known, but are subject to extensive speculation. Journalists regularly report Irish police and RUC estimates as authoritative, but they cannot be, at least not without confirmation from the IRA’s internal ‘accountants’ and ‘auditors’. Albizu dated, the most interesting evaluation, precisely because it was not intended for publication, remains that of the stolen reports of Brigadier James Glover of 1978. It estimated IRA annual income at £50,000,000, and expenditure at £780,000, i.e. with an annual surplus of £470,000, 17.9 per cent, available for arms, ammunition and explosives. Glover estimated expenditure as devoted, in descending order of importance, to four
terms "volunteers" pay, travel and transport costs, propaganda, and prisoner support. He considered the IRA had four principal sources of income, in descending order of importance: theft and robbery in Ireland,acketering in Ireland, overseas donations, and the Great Count (a prisoners’ aid organisation). ‘Overseas donations’ were estimated at £120,000, i.e. 12.7 per cent of revenue, and were not expected to rise.35

Glover assumed that the IRA’s commercial undertakings were mainly ‘dishonourable and incompetent’, and poor sources of revenue, other than its black taxi service. He listed no domestic Irish donations at all, which seems incredible. His estimated outlay per volunteer assumed that a £20 per week supplement was paid to 230 volunteers drawing UK unemployment benefit, and that a further 60 were paid £40 per week (implying a part-time paid cadre of just over 300 volunteers). More recent estimates of the IRA’s annual income range from CS$10 million to the figure of £1.8 million usually cited by contemporary police sources on journalists.36 These figures imply a significant growth of revenue since the mid-1970s, even allowing for inflation. Sources of income, contrary to Glover’s expectations, have included commercial undertakings — such clubs, service and hospitality centres also serving as money-laundering operations — as well as extortion, armed robberies, and, to a degree, domestic donations. Kidnapping, as Glover makes clear, has been regarded as counter-productive, and unauthorized, although it took place in the 1970s. If one compares Glover’s report with subsequent estimates of the IRA’s income and expenditures, in my view three judgements cannot be avoided. First, asening the IRA is a relatively cheap enterprise, primarily dependent upon the donated time and sacrifices of its volunteers.37 Second, the IRA demonstrates the power of the weak. It does not need large expenditures to have dramatic and powerful impacts. Small numbers of determined musicians can build and use relatively cheap ‘home-made’ or improvised explosives (fertilizers and metax bombs), install bespoke body-wear devices with devastating effect, and own, maintain and use relatively cheap guns. Thirdly, the low estimates of the IRA’s financial surplus, and of resources available per volunteer, strongly suggest that ‘rent-seeking’ or ‘greed-based’ accounts of its maintenance lack empirical foundation. — Glover acknowledged that ‘we cannot accurately judge the extent to which these line their own pockets’; 36 in short, the focus of policy-makers on closing down or squeezing the IRA’s finances, while a necessary and predictable response, was never likely to be pivotal in affecting its performance.

Who volunteered to join the IRA? Here there is far greater degree of consensus. From all, most volunteers were young men, although there are female members, and there is a long-standing women’s republican organization, Camra’ na mBan. Secondly, the founding membership of the Provisional IRA was from families with long ties to the IRA, during back to the 1920s, and in some cases back to the Famine of the 1860s.39 This core provided the nucleus around which the IRA had survived after the 1940s. (Familial socialization, of course, is not inevitably: many males with such relatives did not become volunteers.) Thirdly, IRA recruits are nearly all young males, of Catholic origin, who are usually from working class, small farmer or lower middle-class occupations. The list of the occupancies of ninety-five IRA prisoners, imprisoned for more than three years in Belfast Prison between 1936 and 1960, is revealing.40 It included just one businesswoman, Construction workers, farmers, clerks, and industrial apprentices predominated. They were neither prosperous professionals, nor ‘harried proletarians’. Twenty years later the Glove Report (1978) stated: ‘Our evidence of the calibre of rake and file (IRA) territories does not support the view that they are nuns and highspeeds drawn from the unemployable and the unemployable.41 Two surveys of...
republican offenders coming before the courts found that the data ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ established that the bulk of them were young men and women ‘without criminal records in the ordinary sense, though some have been involved in public disorders [but] in this respect and in their records of employment and unemployment they are reasonably representative of the working class community of which they form a substantial part’ (and do not fit the stereotype of criminality which the authorities have from time to time attempted to attach to them).62

JRA recruits are therefore not criminals, gangsters or madmen, despite the aforementioned auxiliaries involved in punishment squads. The gangster motif, as the former IRA volunteer Patrick Magee, known as ‘the Brighton bomber’, shows in an intelligently published doctoral thesis is the most stale-dich in the popular or pulp fiction generated by the conflict.63 It is also a theme highlighted in British press and broadcasting reportage, and cartoons. Journalist Stuart Anderson wrote under the heading ‘Making a Killing’ to popularize the gangster idea in the US.64 It is more standing to lend the conception reproduced by a thoughtful liberal intellectual, my friend, Michael Ignatieff, who has lived in the UK and reported on Northern Ireland. His The Lesser Evils maintains there will always be a gap between those who take the political goals of a terrorist campaign seriously and those who are drawn to the cause because it offers glamour, violence, money and power. It is anyone’s guess how many actual believers in the dream of a united Ireland there are in the ranks of the IRA. But it is a fair bet to suppose that many recruits join up because they want to benefit from the IRA’s profitable protection rackets. His footnotes Taylor’s Provo and Coogan’s The IRA, without pagination, before continuing, ‘The IRA bears as much relation to the Mafia as it does to an insurrectionary cell or a radical political party and the motivations that drive young people into the movement are often as criminal as they are political ... The criminal allure of terrorist groups and the criticism of those who join them are additional reasons why it is a mistake to conclude or appear a group like the IRA with political concessions.65

There is no serious empirical warrant for these views, certainly not in the books of Coogan and Taylor. ‘Believing in the dream of a united Ireland’ is not an impartial characterization, and while this belief may not be the primary motivation for all members to join, affiliation of the goal is a condition of membership. Ignatieff’s assumed knowledge of volunteers’ private inner desires is just secularization, and he appears unaware that experience of state repression of or attacks by loyalists is the most widespread thread feature of post-1969 IRA recruits.66 These considerations undermine the ‘criminal’ characterization of the IRA’s volunteers. Robert White’s interviews, and statements by republican leaders, show convincingly that surges in applications to join the IRA are directly linked to political events, rather than to ‘rent-seeking’ opportunities. Attacks on the civil rights movement, loyalist mobs burning out Catholics from their homes in Belfast, the Falls Road curb by the British army, internment without trial, Bloody Sunday, and the British government’s response to the hunger strikes of 1980–81, were more potent sources of recruitment than the meager material ‘rewards’ facing volunteers. The evidence is in fact strongly against the criminal motivation thesis.67

The IRA ‘surplus’ does not enrich its leaders, and if they did, this would be a major UK media theme. Gerry Adams has doubtless become prosperous, after the peace process, but from his published writings. There is no evidence that he was enriched through his IRA or Sinn Féin roles. IRA members do not personally profit from takings; if they do, they are excluded from the organization, punished or suffer moral disapproval. This can be seen in the critical accounts of
McGarflond (1997) and Collins (1997). Volunteers in ASUs rely on minimal support, do so 'by the run', and the auxiliaries' role is to punish petty criminals, not to lead them — though, of course, some may behave contrary to the organization's norms. Earning respect from local peers rather than profiting is a better explanation of membership of vigilante and punishment squads.68 The IRA's resources, however dubious or criminally obtained, are overwhelmingly channelled back into mission-related activities. The IRA recruited those willing to risk their lives or long jail sentences for what they wanted likely would be a dangerous and short career. In short, group-oriented, non-pecuniary and non-egoistic motivations have been key, both to recruitment and retention. The costs of membership have been high: the risks of death or of long-run imprisonment plain, and the costs have also been borne by family and loved ones, even if support is provided to the families of imprisoned volunteers. Famously, IRA volunteers have been resistant to prison management techniques that 'ordinary criminals' generally accept without organized protest or resistance.69 This is not to say that all IRA recruits epitomize aureate republican virtue, merely to affirm that personal criminal opportunism amongst volunteers is punished. The IRA, famously, does not 'do drugs', and has attempted to 'close down' a rival republican organization, the INLA, when it started this mode of 'self-financing'. Northern Ireland, by contrast with the rest of the UK and Ireland, as many have observed, has been politically rather than criminally violent.70 Ignatieff and others have the direction of causality wrong. Defeated violent nationalist organizations may become mafias, but they do not originate as such, nor will they have extensive legitimacy if they become such. One priority of the Irish peace process is to ensure the rehabilitation of former republican paramilitaries — and, to date, rates of recidivism, political or criminal, among ex-IRA prisoners have been strikingly low, and further evidence against the criminal motivation thesis. The IRA, the INLA and the Continuity and the Real IRAs may come to resemble mafias in the course of their respective resolutions, but this will constitute the corruption of their missions, not their starting motivations. Indeed one may argue that the policy implications of the criminality thesis have been tested to destruction in Northern Ireland.71 The hunger strikes of 1980-81, which led to the revitalization of support for both the IRA and Sinn Fein, were a demand for recognition as political prisoners and not as criminals. The authorities faced the obvious problem that most of those incarcerated were incarcerated under 'scheduled offences', i.e. under special procedures for politically motivated special offences. Precisely because the IRA was a political agency, it needed to be treated politically as well as legally (though plainly any politically violent agency in a liberal democratic state violates the criminal law). Had Ignatieff's counsel been followed — i.e. not to conciliate or appease the IRA with political concessions — then there would never have been a Good Friday Agreement in 1998, and perhaps another 1,000 people would have died since 1994 because of a false theory of motivation.

Fourth, there is no sustained evidence that the IRA's recruits are psychologically abnormal. Studies have been made comparing the murderers committing political as opposed to non-political killings in Northern Ireland. They confirm this appraisal (e.g. Lyons and Harbison 1986), and thereby support the general finding in research on political violence and terrorism that ethos-national terrorists are 'normal', i.e. representative of their social bases.72 Yeatsian-tinted psychological portraits of Irish republicans nevertheless abound in the literature. Patrick Bishop and Liam Molloy title the Prologue to their The Provisional IRA, 'Fanatic Hearts', after Yeats's lines, 'Out of Ireland have we come /
Great hatred, little room: 'Maintained us in the war I carry from my mother's womb' / A fanatic heart.' It is good poetry; it is not social psychology. Kevin Tools claims to have 'too many' within the IRA's soul — fine words, but not convincing science. Bishop and Malle find IRA violence as an inevitable psychological product of patriotism: 'Even if the leadership was going to abandon violence, another violent organization would spring up in its place. As long as Britain is divided, violent republicanism will be an inevitable tradition. This is an extreme psycho-political claim that will be tested when the IRA disbands.'

Fifthly, there is agreement that the spatial origin of IRA recruits has changed. In the 1956-62 campaign significant numbers of southerners were involved. Today it is agreed that, except, of course, in Southern Command, northernmen predominate, at all ranks — although there are still significant numbers of volunteers from the southern border counties. The IRA's evolution is, in part, the story of its being taken over by northernmen, i.e., those with least to complain about the long-term repercussions of the Treaty of 1921.

Sixthly, IRA volunteers are Irish nationalists, is identity, and as a result of experience. They did not all grow up in Irish nationalist households, and, indeed, there have been a small number of Irish Protestant and English-born volunteers, but most are Irish nationalists, by birth, or culture and learning. They believe that Great Britain denied the Irish people its right to self-determination when it partitioned Ireland, and that Northern Ireland is an artificial entity which cannot function as a democracy, and, until recently, have believed it is unformidable, i.e., Catholics or nationalists cannot be treated as the equals of Protestants and unionists within the UK. The IRA's nationalist character bears emphasis because it is so often portrayed in international media as religiously motivated.

It is vital to preserve the distinction between nationalist agents who use political violence (whether in democratic or undemocratic settings) and the salvationist violence of apocalyptic religious fundamentalists. In the IRA case, the distinction is not just important from an analytical accuracy. Nationalists prepared to use force may be repressed (but rarely fully), or negotiated with (successfully or otherwise), or both. In contrast, cosmopolitan religious fundamentalists can be thoroughly repressed in some circumstances, because they are likely to be territorially estranged and isolated, but they cannot be negotiated with as long as they retain their beliefs. It is an error, into which Lipset's slippage, to conflate liberal opposition to nationalist violence with liberal opposition to apocalyptic religious fundamentalism.

A last word about the IRA's recruits since 1969 is required no numbers. We do not have the IRA's personnel records. Widespread uncertainty is suggested by the fact that in the major books on the IRA there is a measure of the 'stock' of military activists that probably derives from leaks of the IRA's own organizational planning changes of 1976-77, which informed the Glover Report. It seems reasonable to assume approximately an equivalent number of 'cadres' in training, and in the auxiliaries, at any one time, suggesting an annual stock of ASUs and reserves and auxiliaries of about 900. As for total flow, Martin McGuinness, a former Chief of Staff, is widely cited as having suggested that over 10,000 people have been in and through the IRA's ranks since 1969. One journalist, Eamon Malle, reports that the IRA told him that between 'eight and ten thousand' of its personnel had been imprisoned before 1987. The gap between estimates of current stock and total flow make sense when one recognizes the high attrition rate of volunteers, through death.
initial incarceration, flight — or resignation. The IRA is not like ‘Hotel California’ — one can leave. Most volunteers are expected to retire after having served a sentence. A formal check on the 10,000 estimate of the total flow is the stock and flow of the prison population. The average daily number of prisoners in Northern Ireland’s jails in 1969 was approximately 600; by 1979 it had reached nearly 3,000 — a figure that excluded IRA volunteers in jail in Great Britain and Ireland, but included loyalist prisoners. From 1985 until 1997 the Northern Ireland prison population stabilized at around 2,800 in a daily average. The cited estimate of a total flow of IRA volunteers of 10,000 is therefore credible (especially given that a significant number may have never been incarcerated). It suggests that an extraordinarily high proportion of Northern Irish working-class Catholic males who matured after 1969 have been through IRA ranks.

Tactics, Strategy, Costs of Conflict

Between 1919 and 1921 the IRA improvised to create a standard template in modern violent politics, inventing contemporary guerrilla warfare, flying columns that avoided facing the imperial power in the field of formal war, and modes of resistance and rejection which attacked the state’s sovereignty and its core functionaries, especially its police and intelligence agencies, but in conjunction with a wider democratic movement, of which the most important component was a political party, Sinn Féin. This party’s name, disdainfully translated as ‘Our Selves’, can also be translated as ‘Ourselves Alone’, or even as ‘Self-Determination’, according to Bill Kossatz. Sinn Féin, backed by the IRA’s cutting edge, established a parallel state, creating what is nowadays known, after Trotsky, as a situation of ‘dual power’. The fortitude of the IRA orchestrated by Collins, was killing policemen and intelligence officers — which broke the imperial state’s surveillance and control capabilities. It ensured that the IRA was far more effective than all previous Irish insurrectionary movements; it showed how a war of the IRA could confound an imperial elephant, proving that the elephant felt restrained from destroying the habitat of the bee.

The contemporary IRA also innovated. It invented new modes of urban guerrilla warfare, denoting the ‘car-bomb’ to the known repertoires of political violence. Political murders, assassinations, tit-for-tat shootings, and ‘human bombs’ made the IRA infamous, as did ‘terrorist and feathering’ and kneecappings. It was arguably less effective in killing senior military, police and intelligence officers than the old IRA. It failed to assist its party in creating dual power or a parallel state — unless one counts the vigilante system. It also showed greater political and moral weakness than its predecessor by its expanded conception of legitimate targets — including non-violent and off-duty police and soldiers, retired police and soldiers, and workers in organizations supplying non-military services to the army and the police. (But, as Glover noted, it generally has not attacked the families of police and soldiers.)

The IRA is not proud of its techniques of disciplining its own membership and its community, but it has undoubtedly been resourceful. The IRA’s campaign has been conducted as Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and in places as far apart as Gibraltar and British military bases in Germany, leading to the deaths of approximately 200 people outside the main ‘war theatre’. Fund-raising and weapons running were organized in places as distinct as Carter’s and Reagan’s USA and Colossal Gaddafi’s Libya. In ten dozen towns of thousands of UK soldiers for three decades, imposed immense economic damage on the region, and on the UK exchequer, assassinated key members of the British political elite, including Lord Louis Mountbatten, a member of the royal family.
and, twice came within a whisker of blowing up the UK Prime Minister and Cabinet. The bulk of the IRA's violence, of course, was organized within Northern Ireland, where it was spatially concentrated, notably in Belfast. Allowing for the ceasefire, the IRA's thirty-year campaign is one of the longest national insurgencies in the post-war world, certainly the most enduring in the established liberal democracies.

The Provisional IRA developed a fearsome capability and reputation. Between 1969 and 1994 it was responsible for more deaths, over 1,750, than any other agency in the conflict. It has killed all other republican organizations, all 'loyalists' (i.e. pro-regime) paramilitaries combined; and all loyalists and all other republican paramilitaries combined. It significantly curtailed the individual and combined official forces of the UK: the British army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the B Specials — and their successors, the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment. According to Lost Lives, by David McKeeve, Seamus Heffers, Brian Ferto, and Chris Thornton, the Provisional IRA was responsible for 48.5 per cent of the over 3,600 deaths arising from the conflict between 1969 and 2001. By contrast, the IRA lost nearly 300 of its volunteers, 8 per cent of the total killed. Richard English, using the same data-source, maintains that civilians formed the largest single category of IRA victims (45.7), followed by the British forces (45.7), the Ulster Defence Regiment or Royal Irish Regiment (18.2), republicans (16.2), loyalists (28), prison officers (23) and others (12.7). His conclusion depends upon disaggregating the security forces and aggregating civilians.

A different way to frame the same data, as I have done in Figure 1, is to observe that 967 of the IRA's victims were military, police, prison officers, or loyalist paramilitaries — i.e., the IRA killed more of its self-defined targets than civilians. But that still means only just over 34 per cent of its victims fell within its official legitimate targets, roughly one in two. In any military appraisal of its war, the mass constitute the 'strongest' indictment.

The IRA's violence made Northern Ireland the most politically violent region in the European Community (later the Union). The numbers killed between 1969 and 1990 exceeded those killed as a result of political violence in all other EC countries put together. In 1973–83 violence in Northern Ireland alone placed the UK at the top of a league table of nineteen Western European states in deaths from political violence and political assassinations. The absolute death toll naturally pales in contrast with the mass civil, colonial, and ethnic wars of the post-war authoritarian world.

**FIGURE 1. KILLINGS FOR WHICH THE IRA WAS RESPONSIBLE 1969-2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Adapted from McKeeve et al. (2001, updated)
British authorities have not suppressed the population which explicitly of tacitly supports the IRA in the manner experienced by Algerian Muslims, the Kurds of Iraq, Kashmiri Muslims, Palestinian Muslims and Christians, South African blacks, or Sri Lankan Tamils. The British authorities treated incarcerated IRA prisoners relatively mildly by contrast with what was tried out in Latin American, African, or South Asian jails, yet these observations can mislead. Neatly all wars and civil wars between 1945 and 1990 were exacerbated by superpower rivalries, or by regional powers and neighbours states. These factors did not operate in Northern Ireland — which proves how deep ethnological conflict can become in geopolitically isolated regions. The US government deplored violence in Northern Ireland and sought to privatise unofficial warfare from Irish-Americanism, in the form of guns and money, from reaching the IRA. The 'special relationship' with the UK consistently proved more important for American geopolitical interests during the Cold War than the ethnic sentiments of some Irish-Americans. The Soviet Union, by contrast, used its Northern Ireland experience to embarrass the UK, e.g. in reference to the killing of innocent Irish people in Great Britain, like the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, and the Maguire Seven, but played no role in fostering the conflict. The two states were at war at stake, the UK and Ireland; despite multiple disagreements, generally sought to cooperate to contain the conflict. The IRA did not champion and were not championed by Ireland — although the British regarded Ireland as the IRA's 'safe haven'. Loyalist paramilitaries embarrassed British politicians — and such support as they received from the security forces (so far) appears to have been unauthorised by ministers. The sole third-party state that sought to inflame the conflict, Libya, was neither a regional power nor a neighbour. Its supplying of arms in 1974-75, and again in 1981, was retaliation for American and British actions against the regime of Colonel Gaddafi. The conflict of the last thirty years has therefore been extremely intense given that it took place in a small region, in the presence of moderately amicable relations between the relevant neighbouring states, and regional powers, and in the absence of operational superpower rivalities. In diverse, the present conflict easily outrides all others in twentieth-century Ireland, and only the Irish Civil War exceeds it in intensity.

How did people die? In assassinations (a plurality of all deaths) in gun battles, crossfire, through snipers' bullets, and in ambushes in explosions or from anti-personnel devices; and a small proportion died in riots or affrays. Over half of republican killings mostly by the IRA, took place during gun battles/crossfire, in sniping incidents, ambushes, or through explosions and anti-personnel devices; but contrast with loyalist killings were assassinations. But a third of deaths caused by republicans were assassinations. There were, in effect, two wars. First, a war of national, ethnic, and communal assassination, echoed by IRA voluntaries, loyalist paramilitaries and by some UK security personnel. There was also a guerrilla war counterinsurgency war, with riots and affrays, especially in the early years, enhancing the numbers killed. In aggregate, paramilitary killings of civilians outnumbered those killed in the guerrilla war between republican paramilitaries and the security forces. The number of civilians killed through targeting, or through 'collateral damage', by republicans, loyalists, and the UK security forces amounted to approximately half of the total number killed. The paramilitary 'defenders' of the two major communities had dramatically fewer casualties than the civilians they claimed to be defending. The IRA failed to make and present the war as a clean fight between loyal republicans and the British state; the British state failed to make and present the conflict as just a dispute between two unreasonable communities, but had some success as doing
so loyalists helped veto a British disengagement.

The annual death tolls and responsibilities for them are in Figures 2 and 3. The high death toll in the early years was explained by three factors. The first was the 'loyalist backlash', both proactive and retaliatory, against civil rights demonstrations in the late 1960s, and then against the IRA's war. The British government's decision to abolish the Northern Ireland parliament in 1972, and its efforts between 1973 and 1976 to establish a power-sharing government with all-Ireland institutions increased loyalist fears. Very high numbers of Catholic civilians were victims of sectarian assassinations by loyalists between 1971 and 1975. The intention was to drive Catholics from supporting the IRA, but because loyalists did not have reliable information on IRA volunteers, 'representative' killing of randomly selected Catholic civilians, identified by their first names, surnames, or residences, predominated. The second factor was the decision by the IRA to launch its war, employing classical guerrilla techniques against UK army and police personnel. But it also extensively engaged in large-scale bombings of commercial targets, such as factories and shopping centres. Guerrilla warfare produced large numbers of casualties among inexperienced police and soldiers, while commercial bombings led to significant numbers of civilian deaths, especially in Belfast: Martin McGuinness, by report, organized the urban bombing of Derry with far less collateral damage. The third factor was the repressive — and counter-productive — policy of internment without trial of suspected terrorists, which lasted between 1971 and 1975. Initially targeted (inaccurately) exclusively at republicans the policy produced widespread resentment throughout the Catholic population, acted as a recruiting agency for the IRA, and added fuel to the fire.

Explanations for the fall-off in deaths after 1976 complement this analysis. Loyalists reduced their killings of Catholics, both absolutely and as a share of the total death toll, because their fears of a British withdrawal had diminished — and were not revived until the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Loyalists were arrested and jailed, and their organizations became more factionalized, corrupt, and directionless. The IRA changed its organization, and strategy, in ways that reduced the annual death toll.

**FIGURE 2. CIVILIAN CASUALTIES FROM CONFLICT 1966-2003**

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Source: adapted from McKitrick et al. (2001, updated)
Many of its volunteers had been jailed and in response the AUMs were developed. After 1976 the IRA primarily aimed to attack ‘military’ and ‘police’ targets, and until the early 1990s reduced its urban commercial bombing which had threatened its support. The IRA became responsible for a lower annual death toll, but a higher share of the total death toll. Furthermore, more effective surveillance and intelligence among the security forces reduced the levels of violence. The authorities abandoned internment in 1973–76. A battery of new containment techniques was employed. Up to 30,000 personnel patrolled the countryside and city streets, establishing armed ‘check-points’.

Forts and observation posts with the latest surveillance technologies were established in the heart of nationalist districts, including in school premises. House searching and civilian screening took place on a massive scale, backed up by omnipresent checkpoint checks on over one quarter of the population. Armoured vehicles, bomb-disposal robots, and ‘sentry-snipers’ were used to protect security-force personnel. Entire ‘town-centres’ were cordoned off, and everybody entering such areas subjected to rigorous searching. Emergency legislation weakened civil liberties and facilitated the apprehension and sentencing of suspected paramilitaries. Finally, all experienced ‘learning curves’.

In 1970, the IRA had to make an average of 191 attacks to kill a single member of the security forces; by 1984, 18 were sufficient. The security forces became more vigilant to defend themselves. They also, formally, became more restrained: in the early 1990s, they were permitted to shoot at identified petrol- bombers but now are supposed to use ‘minimum force’ weapons, like plastic bullets. The return to ‘police privacy’ in 1977 was associated with a reduced level of killings. Armoured police are more restrained than soldiers trained to kill in combat. Periodical and collective surveillance and security management by ordinary citizens also increased. They travelled warily in ‘shattered zones’ or ‘frontiers’, or avoided them altogether and migration from ‘mixed areas’ to ethnically segregated residences in the 1970s reduced the opportunities for ‘soft’ or ‘easy’ killings. The time-series show a dramatic falling-off in the number of deaths sustained by the British army — excluding the locally recruited regiment. The local security forces (UDR, RIR, RUC and RUC Reserve) suffered an increasing proportion of the deaths sustained by the security forces. This was the predictable product of ‘segmentation’, the UK’s post-1975 policy preference for local security forces — which reduced the UK’s vulnerability to the loss of British-recruited

84 For example, see Bruce, 'Victim Selection'.

85 O'Duffy (1995); and White (1997). The IRA killed far more members of the security forces than Protestant civilians, partially fulfilling its mission of fighting 'a war of national liberation'. But, that does not definitively settle the question of IRA 'sectarianism' — even if one codes the IRA as less sectarian than loyalists, as the death evidence warrants. Protestants interpret and will interpret the targeting and killings of Protestant members of the local security forces as sectarian. White points out that the small proportions of Catholic members of the security forces killed matched their numbers in these forces (which suggests no special effort on the part of the IRA to target Protestant members of the security forces), but such killings are simply coded as sectarian by unionists, loyalists and their sympathizers. The IRA unquestionably carried out some overt and intended killings of uninvolved Protestant civilians — as opposed to killing such persons through collateral damage'. These actions were deplored by IRA volunteers as necessary acts of deterrence against loyalist kidnap of Catholic civilians, especially in south Armagh, or shamed and acknowledged — or simply denied.

Violence extended far beyond killings. Data on injuries sustained as well as the annual number of explosions, the number of bombs neutralized, the scale of findings of explosives and firearms, the number of shootings incidents, the use of rubber and plastic bullets, the number of armed robberies, and the money taken in armed robberies are available. They show the same patterns as death toll data: very high levels of violent activity in the years 1971-76 with subsequent 'normalization'. Close to one in fifty of the population suffered serious injuries. Available data do not include the mental injuries suffered by those kidnapped, held hostage in their homes during 'stake-outs', arrested without guilty of no crime, or otherwise mistreated. Nor do they measure the distress caused by intimidation, being the friend or relative of...
| Source: adapted from Scariolo (1994: 196-201) |

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A victim or being a witness to violent death, injuries, and other episodes.

The IRA's campaign, as intended, resulted in heavy financial burdens on the UK exchequer. It also placed costs on Ireland's exchequer, the extra security costs ensuing from the crisis between the years 1969 and 1982 were estimated at over £1.794 million. For the same period additional expenditure on security incurred by the UK government was estimated at £864,556 million. One 1981 audit estimated that the annual direct costs of violence of the conflict incurred ran at £1,794 million — a figure that excluded the indirect economic costs of lost output and employment arising from the political crisis. Providing security in Northern Ireland in the fiscal year 1990-91 cost just under £1 billion — more than three times the per capita UK average, and certain costs were not apparently calculated, e.g. those entailed in tightening security at military bases in Great Britain and Germany; intelligence-gathering and surveillance in Great Britain, and protecting the political and civil establishments. Other economic costs included the stress on and infrastructural damage to the public services; health and welfare and housing administration, public utilities, and the penal services. Telephone exchanges, post offices, railway networks, bus garages, gas depots, power stations and reservoirs were bombed or robbed and their staffs intimidated. Frauds against public-sector organizations ran into millions of pounds. Compensation payments to victims of violence or owners of destroyed properties can much higher. Claims for compensation exceeded 13,000 cases per annum. Protection racket payments affected the profitability of many private-sector organizations; as did the requirements imposed by insurance companies upon shops and offices. The insurance costs of private transport rose to reflect the high numbers of vehicle thefts, break-ins, and car-bombings. The incredibly high proportion of the population involved in security led economist Bob Rowthorn to describe the Northern Ireland economy as a "workhouse", in which most were employed in controlling or servicing one another. The most obvious economic costs are the least measurable: the 'opportunity-costs' of three decades of conflict, in lost investment, output, and productive employment.

The human-rights costs and the impact on liberal democratic institutions must also be counted. The legal authorities of Northern Ireland, Great Britain, and Ireland were granted formidable emergency powers. The ratios of arrests to charges, and of charges to convictions, were relatively high, suggesting large-scale screening, and systematic deprivation of many innocent
citizens of their liberty. Departures from traditional legal procedures became normal; military courts were used because jury-trials were not safe from perverse verdicts or the intimidation of jurors and witnesses. Confessions became admissible as the sole basis for conviction on charges of having committed scheduled offences — including confessions subsequently retracted. In 1988 the UK government abandoned the traditional common law "right of silence" — court and prosecutors were entitled to draw inferences from the silence of suspects. Delays of several years became routine in holding inquiries;gan persons killed by the security forces. Britain's foraying, "British justice was shredded. The most egregious cases of wrongful imprisonment demonstrated police-fabrication of evidence against innocent Irish people, incompetent or malevolent forensic practices, judicial wishfulness and partisanship and ethic lies in media reporting. The courts acquired other key instruments. Certain sections of the British intelligence services ran amok in the 70s. Believing that the authorities were "giving in to terrorism", they plotted directly against the elected Labour government, and spread false rumors. Collusion with loyalist paramilitaries also occurred on a significant scale from the late 1980s. The media were censored in both jurisdictions.

What was the IRA's strategy, and how could it justify such costs? Appraisals of its strategy are rare. The simplest answer is that had no single strategy, but multiple strategies. In the first phase of conflict, 1970-75, the IRA expected a short war, a repudiation of what had happened in 1919-21, in which the British government would be forced to negotiate with representatives of the remainder of Ireland. It overestimated its capacity to hurt the UK state, underestimated the costs that loyalists and the security forces could impose on its volunteers, neglected the need for deep denunciation of the majority unionist population within Northern Ireland to oppose a "complacent minority Irish and, overvalued southern support for an offensive — as opposed to a defensive — IRA. The IRA placed a core in the southwest of Munster, but overestimated in thinking it could produce a quick British disengagement, and lacked any overt evidence of a popular uprising. It was also completely unaware of its negotiations — and our manoeuvres in 1975. In the second phase of conflict the IRA's leadership foresaw and organized for a long war of attrition. It was capable of maintaining itself, but underestimated the extent to which it could be contained within Northern Ireland. Taking the war to Great Britain and Europe involved spectacular activities, but those could not be as logistically sustainable as those in Northern Ireland. The IRA initially lacked a convincing political strategy to match its military activities. A new and frequently more effective security emerged almost by accident, in 1980-81, when the impact of the republican hunger strikes on public opinion created opportunities for Sinn Féin to emerge as an electorally significant political party in the North. To continue the novel electoral momentum and search for broader allies the republican movement was obliged to reassess its abstractions, first within local government in the North, and then toward earlier advances in the South. It endorsed change, and modified its constitution. This led to the IRA's significant split in the movement — though not within the IRA. Older pre-1969 southerners in the portef ormed Republican Sinn Féin. The strategy of combining the "holy box" and the "asmatile," as Danny Morrison described it, superficially resembled the Sinn Féin and IRA alliance of 1918-21, but with a major difference: the lack of a majority mandate within the North, not even among the nationalist population, or among the nationalist population in Ireland as a whole. The IRA was persuaded to accept the end of abstentionism by Sinn Féin in the belief that the atrocity would not be run down — and hard-liners were temporarily
sweetened by the prospect of major arms supplies from Libya. Sinn Féin, the IRA's party, became originally it was little more than talk, then placed limits on the IRA. It gained greater autonomy, and sometimes its needs had to be placed first. Bobby Sands and his colleagues had died on hunger strike to "broadcast the battlefield", and had succeeded beyond their expectations. Sands' hunger strike, his victory in a parliamentary by-election, and his death, followed by the deaths of nine other prisoners, cemented the political status of the IRA, but would end up limiting its military actions, and subjecting it to electoral discipline. The party gathered one in three northern nationalist voters on a platform of supporting its army, the IRA, but to grow here, it had to distance itself, or place constraints on its army. In the interests of electoral gains, reinforced by their materialisation, Sinn Féin has, therefore, slowly replaced the IRA as a republicans' preferred organisational means of struggle, and not without dissent within the ranks of the volunteers — and the creation of two small break-away organisations, the Continuity and Real IRA. The party now has many members, probably an overwhelming majority, with no record of service as volunteers, and many of these are now prominent parliamentarians. Combining the ballot box and the Armalite, contrary to what Morrison thought at the time, proved unsustainable. Success with one undermined use of the other. From being the inspirer of the party, the army became a constraint. The IRA's decision to organise a ceasefire in 1994, and later to renew it, had one primary beneficiary: Sinn Féin. The party doubled its vote share in the North within a decade, recently winning four seats in the Westminster parliament, five in Dáil Éireann, and becoming, just, the largest nationalist party in the suspended Northern Ireland Assembly — and it has had one of its former Chief of Staff serve as a Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive.

How did this transformation happen? One: the IRA was not winning its long war to compel the UK state to disengage, even if it was not losing, and even if it could plant devastating bombs in the City of London. No victory on the "battlefield" meant that there could be no victory at the negotiating table. Two: demographic transformations pointed to the possibility of a Northern nationalist majority that could create a constitutional path to end partition — and to a currently enough nationalist base to leverage a power-sharing settlement given existing UK policy commitments to the Irish government. Three: republicans began properly to assess the full recalibration of unionism and loyalism towards the idea of a unitary Ireland, and the possible development of indifference toward "unification is the newly prosperous Ireland. Four: political agents inside and outside the republican movement persuaded sufficient IRA leasers, volunteers and prisoners that a peace process, building up a wider alliance of nationalists, was the best way to advance the IRA's objectives, even if that meant the IRA's disbandment before the attainment of a unitary Ireland. Key sections of the IRA leadership eventually determined on a peace process without express assurances that their declared war-objectives would be met through negotiations, and called a "complete cessation" of military operations in August 1994, after a careful and protracted process of negotiation among Irish nationalists, and then between the UK and Irish governments, had produced the Joint Declaration for Peace of December 1993. The divided IRA resumed military operations by a majority vote of its Army Council in February 1996 in protest at the Conservative government's unwillingness to engage with Sinn Féin, but formally declared a ceasefire again in 1997.

The full complexity of this transformation, is necessary ambiguities, and consequences, is beginning to emerge in a range of studies and publications, and we will likely not know the full details of intra-IRA manoeuvres and disputes for some time. Given space constraints I will use just two texts to complement my earlier argument on
the old IRA, those of Richard English and Ed Moloney, English, a unionist with roots in Northern Ireland, and a professor at Queen’s University, Belfast, has written a distinctive evaluation in *Armed Struggle*. In his concluding chapter, he identifies seven arguments that motivated the IRA. First, its resurgence began primarily in response to defensive needs, providing "muscular defence" in 1969–70 for oppressed nationalists in Belfast and Derry against a partisan RUC and loyalist sectarian mobs. Second, there was deep-rooted unfairness toward the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, where the Ulster Unionist Party ruled without interruption from the formation of the regime until 1972, and which created, thereby, the social base of the IRA. Third, and relatively, there was the cause of Irish national self-determination — to which he argues pays insufficient attention. Fourth, the IRA regarded Northern Ireland as "unformidable. The treatment of the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s confirmed this belief, as had the introduction of internment without trial between 1971 and 1973, and events such as the Falls Road curfew of 1970 and Bloody Sunday in 1972. Fifth, IRA volunteers defined the conflict as a national liberation struggle, and for over two decades stressed solidarity as well as republican commitments. Sixth, they saw unionism as "a residue of British colonialism in Ireland". Lastly, they regarded themselves as, and often succeeded in behaving as, non-violent republicans committed to creating a common democratic state for all of Ireland. One of the many merits of English’s book is that he evaluates these arguments seriously, and shows that these convictions were sincerely held, and were sane.

Naturally, he addresses the deficiencies and disputable elements in the IRA’s arguments, dealing seriously with the IRA’s frequently offensive role, and its contribution to serious injustices in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, both through actions and provocations. He adds minor qualifications to the picture of a discriminatory unionist regime before 1972; observes that Ulster Unionists have a case for self-determination and regarding Northern Ireland as legislator argues for the empirical and normative importance of the autonomous dispositions of unionists and loyalists, who often opposed the policies of Westminster and Whitehall, and stresses the counterproductive nature of the IRA’s violence in suffering unionist resistance to Irish reunification, and in inhibiting a political settlement; and, not least, emphasizes the IRA’s internment descent into sectarian killings. But, English scrupulously acquits the IRA of sole responsibility for the conflict of the past thirty years, distributing blame across a range of political groups, and on British and unionist policies and dispositions with which the IRA’s actions or presence would have made little sense. None of his writing avoids the elemental emotions and prejudices involved in IRA actors and their perceptions for both the organization’s target-victims and its members. He forgives neither the "Fonmon rage" of some volunteers, nor the local stains and petty power sometimes achieved through being in the "IRA", but refuses to overemphasize the tabloid components of the IRA, which he treats as neither corrupt nor as ruthlessly efficient as it would have liked to have been.

From this measured study we may conclude that the IRA has failed militarily to drive the British state out of Ireland, and to achieve a united Ireland in the immediate future. Ireland is to be reunited in the future, it will be through ballot boxes and institutional negotiations. But what English misses is the constitutional path through which the IRA must disband, and, if it is to dissolve itself in good order. That requires its volunteers not only to believe that military means cannot win their objectives, and are therefore best replaced through democratic — and constitutional — politics, but to do so consistently with their own constitutions, to which they are
pledged, or else face the danger of further splits and the departure of their militant into the hands of irreconcilables. Thanks to Ed Moloney’s *A Secret History of the IRA*, the current IRA constitution, as amended in 1986, and again in 1996, is a matter of public record. It has five objects, recognizable successors to the founding aims, namely, ‘to guard the honour and uphold the sovereignty and unity of the Irish Republic as declared by the First Dáil’; ‘to support the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation’; ‘to support the establishment of, and uphold, a lawful government in sole and absolute control of the Thirty-Two County Irish Republic as constituted by the First Dáil’; ‘to secure and defend civil and religious liberties and equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens’; and ‘to promote the revival of the Irish language as the everyday language of the people’ (Art. 3. 1–5). Until these objects are achieved the organizational integrity and cohesion of the IRA, and its military capabilities must be maintained (Art. 8. 5.1–2); and ‘until a settlement has been agreed, leading to a united Ireland’ the IRA must retain its arms (Art. 8. 5.3).3 So, the question presently before all is this: how may the IRA constitutionally disband itself if the sovereignty and unity of the Irish Republic, ‘as declared by the First Dáil’, has not been achieved?

Before answering this question let me sweep aside some side-issues. Let me assume that socialism on the basis of the 1916 proclamation, civil and religious liberties, equal rights and opportunities for all, and promoting the Irish language, do not require the existence or use of the IRA’s arms — a proposition with which the current Irish prime minister, who has declared himself a socialist, would certainly affirm. Note, secondly, that it is now the First — not the Second — Dáil’s mandate (for an autonomous Ireland that would exercise its self-determination) that is defended by the IRA. It is this constitutional change that has enabled the IRA not to oppose Sinn Féin’s participation in elections to and membership of Leinster House.

One way the IRA’s constitutional self-transformation may go in future would be to argue that since the Bellagio/Good Friday Agreement of 1998, endorsed by the people of Ireland, North and South, and now on the verge of full implementation, the partition of Ireland presently rests on a decision of the people of Ireland, as do the power-sharing institutions, agencies and policies embedded in that Agreement. In short, the Agreement is the necessary act of Irish national self-determination that repairs the constitutional wound of 1920. That was certainly how constitutional nationalists, North and South, defended the Agreement, and in instructing its voters to endorse it in the two referenda, Sinn Féin became complicit with that argument. The Agreement recognizes (present) partition as an Irish, not a British decision, and recognizes Ireland’s right to achieve (re-)unification through consent in both jurisdictions. It also, of course, establishes consociational institutions within Northern Ireland and cross-border all-Ireland arrangements that may legitimately be construed as harbingers of a federal Ireland.4 Once the Agreement is on the verge of being fully implemented, notably with the withdrawal of British troops to barracks, comprehensive police reform, major changes in the administration of justice, and with the Northern Ireland (Suspension) Act of 2000 removed from the UK’s statute book, then it becomes possible to argue two things. One is to say that ‘a settlement leading to a united Ireland’, without any British external interference over Irish self-determination, has already been accomplished. A united Ireland has been achieved through the Agreement, but not a unitary Ireland, rather an Ireland joined by the institutions of the Agreement. The people of Ireland, North and South,
have the right of national self-determination, but also the right to choose how to exercise national self-determination, and if that involves having one territorial unit, with reversible linkages to the United Kingdom, that need not be a denial of the underlying principle. This would probably be too much for most republicans to stomach — it may seem lawyerly, or specious, although it has its attractions.

Secondly, and probably more persuasive to most republicans, it is possible to argue that "a settlement has been agreed (and implemented) leading to a united Ireland", even though the latter has not yet occurred — "leading to a united Ireland" is not the same as the "attainment of a united Ireland".

EITHER of these arguments permit republicans to imagine their members in good conscience to amend the IRA’s constitution to say that the object of the First Dáil has been met — which would then authorize the ratification of decommissioning by the Army Convention (required by Art. 8.5.3), and the subsequent disbanding of an organization which had met its constitutional mission.

A united Ireland need not necessarily be a unitary Ireland; and a sovereign Ireland may take many forms, including a divided form, through a federation or confederation, or through two units within a European confederation. Moreover, a Northern Ireland Assembly — and legal system, and even UK parliament — which does not require oaths of allegiance to the Crown on the part of ministers is surely in some respects like a Dáil Éireann which has no such requirement. The new Northern Assembly and North-South Ministerial Council could be forums in which all the objects of the IRA may be pursued without recourse to arms, and with some prospects of success (although the chances of the Irish language being less than those of a unitary state). Arguments of this nature may have occurred — or be anticipated — if the IRA is, as is clear, willing comprehensively to decommission its weapons. We shall find out.

If such an internal constitutional transformation occurs the IRA will not have failed politically or the degree that it failed militarily. The IRA, in action or on ceasefire, made it necessary for a political settlement to address the demand of Ireland’s right to self-determination in 1920 — and, for that matter, to undertake the radical police reform that has been negotiated since 1998, as well as range of other anti-discrimination measures that might not otherwise have materialized. The IRA did not fight for power-sharing in a Stormont parliament, nor did it design those institutions, nor did it initially endorse the Good Friday Agreement. But its existence, and the skilled trading of its capacity for constitutional and political concessions, obliged others to create comprehensive power-sharing institutions in and across Northern Ireland, Ireland and Great Britain, all of which are consistent with the core idea of Irish national self-determination. In that idea the Irish include both Irish nationalists and Irish unionists who identify with Great Britain. In that idea self-determination may take a concurrent as well as a unitary form. The IRA may in good faith amend its constitution to accomplish its own dissolution in a manner that the majority of the ghosts of the First Dáil would approve, although the vote might be too close to call among the ghosts of the rump Second Dáil.
Postscript

This essay was completed toward the end of 2004. Three events since have led readers of my draft to ask whether I wish to modify or update my views. They are, first, the failure of the two governments to overcome a renewal of the Agreement of 1998 with the active consent of the DUP and Sinn Féin. The second is a major bank robbery in Belfast which the Police Service of Northern Ireland rapidly blamed on the IRA. It persisted in this claim, despite vehement denials by both Sinn Féin and the IRA, and was joined in its accusation by the two governments and the Independent Monitoring Commission, which additionally alleged Sinn Féin's involvement. The accusations prompted the IRA to withdraw all past offers it has made on the negotiating table, but not to cease-fire. So the story of the robbery has, to date, dissuaded to the extent in the North of Sinn Féin members, suspected IRA members, and one suspected 'assassin republicans' according to the belligerent Ireland's police. The third event is the murder of Robert McCartney in the North, which eventually led the IRA to deny its involvement, to describe such murders as contrary to its principles, and to encourage those with knowledge to do as the victim's family wishes, which means informing the police.

These events do not require any revision of the analysis given above. They are reminders that history records how easily endgames go off course. It is worth emphasizing that Sinn Féin and the DUP had reached an astonishing level of agreement. The gap separating them was narrow — the precise form of policing to accompany the verification of decommissioning. It was also huge because it involved group honour, emphasized above. The IRA and Sinn Féin sought to avoid humiliation, they believed that was precisely the DUP's price-tag on the perspective bargain. As matters have unfolded different humiliations awaited republicans. The interpretation of the bank robbery still requires some caution. It is not yet known whether it was the act of unaligned IRA operatives, or of conspirators within the IRA opposed to the peace process. It seems incredible that it would have been endorsed by the IRA Assembly Council. At the very least the unfolding evidence suggests a loss of control within the IRA that has damaged and embarrassed Sinn Féin's leaders. Neither the IRA nor Sinn Féin is a monolith, and it would be no surprise to find some-time Sinn Féin figures handling the IRA's finances. The argument presented above was that the IRA has been an institutionally unusual nationalist paramilitary organization, politically rather than criminally motivated, and, with the right political management, the key to a future of democratic, political dominance. That argument withstands scrutiny despite these events. Group honour is essential both to understanding the IRA's longevity, and how it must be managed, and the bank robbery and the murder may magnify its importance. One can and should condemn crimes without rushing to brand an organization's leaders as guilty without a trial. To say on a group's honour may assume more weight than reason. The IRA's dissolution should be gentle, but with sufficient care to prevent the type of fragmentation associated with ETA in the Basque country. Sinn Féin will need to cleanse itself, both because it is right and to avoid further damage, but it is always more difficult to reform when shamed. These events have rendered resolution far more awkward, continuing as they do in the run-up to elections in both parts of Ireland and in Britain. They have postponed the resolution which this essay foresees; they have not terminated that prospect.

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