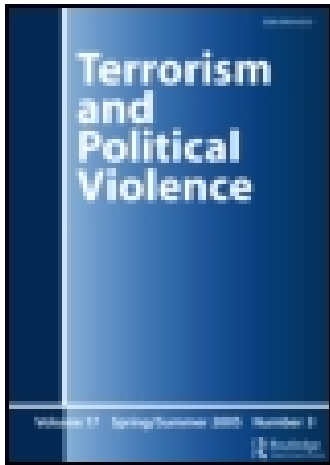


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### The provisional Irish republican army: Command and functional structure

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# The Provisional Irish Republican Army: Command and Functional Structure

JOHN HORGAN and MAX. TAYLOR

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The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) has long been regarded as one of the most highly organised and sophisticated terrorist groups the world has seen. The command and functional structure of this large, hierarchically-organised movement is outlined here. The adaptability of the PIRA is noteworthy as demonstrated through a major structural and functional reorganisation accentuated by external pressures. While the threat of PIRA terrorism continues, recommendations are emphasised for understanding and encouraging analyses of the command and functional structures of an organisation such as this.

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The Irish Republican Army (IRA) has had the longest running paramilitary campaign the modern world has yet seen. Although Irish Republicanism can trace its roots back to Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen of the late eighteenth century, the 'IRA' as we today know it was born in December 1969, following a split in the ranks of the older, original IRA, a movement with a long historical tradition of militancy against Britain.<sup>1</sup> This largely ideological split saw the emergence of the Provisional IRA (PIRA), and the Official IRA.<sup>2</sup> The Provisionals, or Provos,<sup>3</sup> have since followed a much more violent campaign aligned with political struggle than their occasional counterparts.

The PIRA, allied with their political wing, Provisional Sinn Fein (PSF), or Sinn Fein,<sup>4</sup> are an overtly nationalist movement seeking the removal of British rule from Northern Ireland, and specifically, as stated in the PIRA Constitution,<sup>5</sup> it aims:

1. To guard and honour and uphold the sovereignty and unity of the Republic of Ireland.
2. To support the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation.<sup>6</sup>
3. To support the establishment of, and uphold, a lawful government in sole and absolute control of the Republic.

These are the PIRA's long-term objectives. Its more proximal objective, however, is a simple policy of 'Brits out', i.e. withdrawal of the British

military presence in Northern Ireland. The PIRA has tried to force this through a sustained campaign of rural and urban terrorism against British forces in Northern Ireland throughout the past 27 years. To a lesser extent, its operational areas have extended to the Irish Republic, Great Britain, mainland western Europe, the Middle East, Africa and the United States.

The PIRA's *modus operandi* has incorporated bombings, shooting attacks, beatings, high-profile assassinations and kidnappings. The movement has been extensively involved in extortion and armed robberies, and has a sophisticated financial network not unlike that of any large business. PIRA targets have included members of the security forces in Northern Ireland [i.e. the British Army,<sup>7</sup> the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – the Ulster police force, the Ulster Defence Regiment<sup>8</sup> (UDR) and Royal Irish Regiment (RIR)] as well as government and private-sector individuals, including senior British government officials and British military targets in the mainland United Kingdom and in western Europe. PIRA targets have also included innocent civilians in Ireland and abroad, and also members of the security forces in the Republic of Ireland.<sup>9</sup> The organisation's militancy has, furthermore, been directed against Northern Irish Protestant paramilitary movements, in the main, groups reactive to the Provisionals' terrorist campaign.

The PIRA has sometimes used 'cover' names, not so much in order to distance itself from specific crimes (as the movement has more often than not claimed responsibility for acts, as PSF president Gerry Adams describes 'when it was in many ways unpopular'<sup>10</sup>) but perhaps where certain strategic benefits arise from the use of such a 'name' (or rather the lack of the name 'Provisional IRA'). An example includes the pseudonym 'Direct Action Against Drugs', a shadowy group responsible for killing a number of alleged drug dealers during the PIRA's recent 17-month cease-fire.<sup>11</sup>

PIRA tactics have changed, indeed evolved, remarkably throughout its current almost 30-year long campaign.<sup>12</sup> During the 1970s, the organisation's tactics often appeared quite indiscriminate, incurring many civilian casualties in its sometimes spectacular bombing attacks.<sup>13</sup> The PIRA has become more discriminate in the wake of Sinn Fein's elevation as an acceptable representative of the Republican electorate and also with the development of a sophisticated organisational strategy which now belies almost all PIRA activities. Since 1983, which saw his election as a Westminster M.P., the PSF leader Gerry Adams has 'effectively consolidated his authority' over both faces of the Republican movement.<sup>14</sup> Although apparently distinct physical entities, Provisional Sinn Fein and the PIRA can be considered in many ways symbiotic movements, many core members holding positions in both organisations.

## Command and Functional Structure

The PIRA has a cellular-based, hierarchically-organised authoritarian structure ensuring both operational and non-operational efficiency. The active membership of the movement does not exceed a few hundred at any one time, but this merely obscures a much larger support network consisting of thousands. It may appear surprising that detailed descriptions of the PIRA's command structure and functioning have not progressed beyond largely transient and unconnected discussions, notably even in some authoritative works.<sup>15</sup>

More often than not, in the aftermath of a PIRA operation, our rather immediate focus is on the few individuals directly responsible for the attack: the cell or Active Service Unit (ASU – containing the 'Volunteers') is the only 'public' aspect of the PIRA's military operations. However, the Provisionals have a very large and complex structure and there are various vital support roles that need to be filled. Indeed, the 'operational' membership (in the form of ASUs and their leaders) are limited in number relative to the overall composition of the organisation and support network (or 'non-operational' membership).<sup>16</sup>

Non-operational members have roles to play in hiding weapons (or perhaps parts of weapons) and in moving weapons away from a scene, a common theme in larger terrorist organisations such as the PIRA and the Basque separatist organisation ETA (Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna – Basque Homeland and Freedom).<sup>17</sup> 'Safehouses' often offer refuge to a member who may be 'on the run' following an incident. They may provide some money for the ASU member or a place to stay, if only for a few hours while awaiting further orders. Taylor<sup>18</sup> notes this as a stark contrast to groups operating 'without wider logistical support', who perhaps engage in foreign incursions. The long journey made by a PIRA active service unit on 28 June 1996 to the Quebec Barracks in Osnabruck in Germany (housing British troops) hence illustrates impressive operational flexibility and planning.<sup>19</sup> A further issue of relevance here is the issue of storage and movement of arms. For the PIRA, this is subject to particularly stringent procedures as laid down by the 'Quartermaster General', a person with direct responsibility for these issues within the PIRA command structure. As we shall see, however, these rules differ slightly when involvement in a foreign operation is considered. It is highly unlikely for example that an ASU travelling abroad to carry out an operation will bring weapons back to Ireland with them. The PIRA and a Republican spin-off, the smaller Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) have been known to follow supergrasses<sup>20</sup> to foreign countries such as England and Spain and return without arms, much to the dismay of police officials watching these terrorists. Analogous examples can be used to

illustrate this. While Mary McGlinchey, the wife of former INLA leader Dominic McGlinchey, was bathing her two sons Declan and Dominic, she was shot dead by two intruders in revenge for the murder of the men's brother (for which they held Mary McGlinchey responsible). The men had flown from the United States the previous night, borrowed the weapons for the attack and were transported to the McGlinchey house to kill her. After the shooting, the men returned the weapons to their supplier and the following day were on a flight back to the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Taylor<sup>22</sup> draws our attention to Robert Clark's<sup>23</sup> study of the Basque ETA, an organisation quite similar to the PIRA. He notes Clark's illustrations of the complexity of ETA by reference to an organisational table bearing remarkable similarities with the functional organisational chart of a large business. This similarity becomes quite evident when we observe the hierarchically-organised structure of the PIRA – an organisation having numerous roles to fill, as in any large business, each role having specific responsibilities while still allowing for accountability to 'same-level' peers or higher authorities.

To fully appreciate the complexity and relative sophistication of this organisation and its operational efficiency we will now outline and examine the command and functional structure of the PIRA from a top-down perspective.

### *General Army Convention*

More often than not, we regard the PIRA leadership as being what we know as the 'Army Council'. However, the 'Constitution of Oglaiġh na hEireann' states that the General Army Convention (GAC) is the organisation's 'Supreme Army<sup>24</sup> Authority'. In actual practice the purpose of the GAC is simply to elect (by ballot) an 'Army Executive' (a body of twelve members) who in turn elect the Army Council.

The GAC is often mistakenly viewed as a distinct body, or unit, within the PIRA command structure, but it is important to note that it is not: it is simply an organised *meeting* of delegates (usually 100–200) from other structures within the organisation. GAC composition includes some currently active Volunteers, prisoner 'representatives' (i.e. those representing the views of imprisoned PIRA members), Brigade staffs (i.e. regional 'commanders' such as the O/C (Officer Commanding or Officer Commandeering)), General Headquarters members and usually all members of the Army Council (this includes the Chief of Staff, Adjutant General and Quartermaster General – these 'positions' will become clearer as we progress).

The Constitution posits that the GAC should meet 'every two years unless the majority of delegates notify the Army Council that [it is] better for military purposes to postpone it'. This may help us understand why it is

believed that only two such conventions have been held so far, one in 1969 (from which the OIRA/PIRA split emerged) and one in 1986, in advance of the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (annual meeting), to approve the move away from the traditional Republican policy of Dail<sup>25</sup> abstentionism. Garda sources have, however, strongly indicated that GAC meetings were held in September of 1996, in a supposed 'rethinking' of policies following the 1994-96 cease-fire.<sup>26</sup>

### *Army Executive*

Next in line is what is termed the 'Army Executive'. This is a board of 12 senior and very experienced PIRA veterans, said to meet 'at least once every 6 months'. Again this recommendation is laid down by the PIRA Constitution, but for security and other reasons, it may be that the frequency of such meetings is subject to change. Also, it is vital to note that as with the GAC, the Army Executive is not a distinct ruling body (in terms of operational decision-making), but has the responsibility to elect seven members of the Provisional movement (excluding themselves) to the Army Council. Sources note that the Executive acts in somewhat of a sentinel role, 'keeping watch' on the Army Council's activities on behalf of all GAC representatives (until, of course, the GAC meets to elect a *new* Executive).

If a member of the Army Executive *is* elected to the Army Council by his or her peers, and the member wishes to accept this post, then that member must resign his/her Executive position. The Army Executive's internal rules make allowances for this, and hence, as the Constitution notes, 'the Executive shall always have six substitutes in readiness'.

### *Army Council and General Headquarters*

The PIRA's Constitution describes the 'Army Council' as '...the Supreme Authority when the General Army Convention is not in session'. The Army Council is the overall PIRA (or 'Army') leadership, responsible for the execution of all military policies in line with overall strategies. The Constitution states that the Army Council has the authority to 'conclude peace or declare war when a majority of the Council so decide' but that 'the conclusion of peace must be ratified by a Convention'. The Council is a seven-person committee, believed to meet much more regularly than the Constitution's 'at least once a month' recommendation.

Quite significantly, the Army Council is actually viewed within the Republican movement as: 'the direct representative of the 1918 Dail Eireann parliament and ... as such they [Army Council members] are the legal and lawful Government of the Republic, which has the moral right to pass laws...to claim jurisdiction over the whole geographical fragment of Ireland'. In practice however, the Army Council organises and controls the

strategy and tactics of the PIRA's war efforts. These aspects are regulated (and operations subsequently executed) through the PIRA's departmentalised 'General Headquarters' (GHQ) Staff and Command Structure (whose 'post appointments' (e.g. Director, etc.) are sanctioned only by the Army Council's Chief of Staff).

Once elected by the Army Executive, the seven Army Council members select a Secretary, Chairperson, and a Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff is the Army Council 'authority', and overall decision-maker. This person is of course accountable to his<sup>27</sup> peers in the Army Council, by whom he is appointed, but has the right of veto over certain operations. This includes operations both planned by the Army Council and certain operations whose details are forwarded to the Council from GHQ.

Decisions made by the Army Council have been implemented by GHQ since the PIRA's strategic reorganisation in the late 1970s and by its 'Northern Command' and 'Southern Command' structures. Security sources indicate that the existence of these two commands in tandem with GHQ and the Army Council 'obscures [their] working knowledge' of the PIRA's command and functional structures somewhat. The Army Council is also known to order *specific* operations, and as a body (just as in the role of Chief of Staff in relation to *his* peers) has the right of veto over certain operations which are planned by any of its subordinate structures: i.e. GHQ and/or Northern and Southern Commands. An apparent breakdown in communication between the Army Council and GHQ was observed through the denial of responsibility which members of the Army Council advocated following the shooting dead in Co. Limerick of Detective Garda Gerry McCabe in June 1996. Only later did it emerge that the attempted robbery which resulted in McCabe's death was actually sanctioned by the GHQ 'Operations Commander' in Dublin (who was subsequently demoted).

Furthermore, sources suggest that the Army Council can co-opt members (but only with endorsement from the 'upstairs' Army Executive) and, like the General Army Convention, the Army Council can sometimes arrange for 'visitors' to attend meetings in order to report or make proposals to the Council. It is important, however, to recognise the Army Council formation as 'generally fluid' as security forces in the Republic describe '*increasing* co-option of members onto its [Army Council] strength without election from the Army Executive' [our italics<sup>28</sup>]. Sources also indicate that this apparently has resulted from the strong influence of at least two predominant individuals within the movement, both of whom are current senior Sinn Fein figures.

All in all, the Army Council is described by security forces as a 'management committee' in relation to its GHQ 'assistants' running the PIRA campaign of violence. Sources also indicate that GHQ appears to act as a

'governing body' *between* Council meetings and refers any decisions which it makes (or proposals drafted) directly back to the Army Council. A minimum of 3–4 members is needed for a meeting of the Army Council but this may vary. Sources indicate, for example, that ratification of the 1994–96 cease-fire was passed by a 5 to 2 majority. In effect, this quorum probably continues to fluctuate as a function of the nature of the decision in question.

We must now distinguish the Army Council from Northern Command and Southern Command which in turn must be distinguished from GHQ.

### **Northern Command**

'Northern Command' refers to both a PIRA operational area and a definite command structure. The area referred to as Northern Command does not refer to the six counties of Northern Ireland. It includes these six as well as the five border counties of Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal and Leitrim. This is presently the most important area for the PIRA's campaign as it remains their most prominent operational area. Security sources describe the Army Council and GHQ as being 'responsible for ensuring that the conduct of operations in Northern Command areas is in line with the Army Council policy directives.' Structurally, Northern Command is composed of (in decreasing authority) Brigadiers (sometimes known as Brigade Adjutants or Brigade Commanders), OCs, and ASUs. Each ASU (consisting of usually 4 Volunteers) has one OC, with there being about 3–4 ASUs in each Brigade. The leadership of Northern Command (based in Belfast since 1969) has 'close ties' with the Army Council and GHQ. It is believed that the 'personal dominance' of a number of senior PIRA figures on these two bodies ensures that 'there is no breakdown in communications between the three bodies'. Informed sources suggest that Northern Command may be thought of as '...a number of [different] levels with the top level linking them to the Army Council/GHQ' and the lower level linking them to all of the 'senior "brigade" commanders that operate throughout the Command'. Sources also indicate that this co-ordination between members may be actually characterised by the practice of 'formal and informal meetings with the leadership of related specialist areas', as is the practice in the next important area, the PIRA's Southern Command.

### **Southern Command**

Like Northern Command, 'Southern Command' similarly refers to a distinct operational area and a command structure. Excluding the five border counties, Southern Command areas consist of the remaining 21 counties in the Republic of Ireland. And also as above, Southern Command comprises Brigadiers, OCs, and ASUs. This area and command structure in particular

functions very much as the 'logistic support' for Northern Command, acting mainly in what is referred to as a 'Quartermaster' role. Its principal activities, which are incidental to the PIRA's primary *modus operandi*, include the training of Volunteers (and supply of Volunteers for 'duty' in England as 'sleepers'), funding and the storage and movement of armaments.<sup>29</sup> Significantly, much support is offered in the form of safehouses. Without the stringent operational pressures (in the form of intense security) which hamper activities in Northern Command areas, sources describe Southern Command leadership as 'less cohesive' and it is seen to play a 'much lesser role in major *decisions*' than both Northern Command, or GHQ, even though GHQ is often (and presently) based in Dublin.

A number of Southern Command figures are from Northern Ireland, including the current 'OC [head of] Southern Command' or 'Operations Commander' (originally from Belfast). As with Northern Command areas, the Army Council and GHQ are responsible for ensuring that the conduct of operations within this operational area is in line with the Army Council policy directives.<sup>30</sup>

The relevance of Southern Command areas to Northern Command's operational successes is debatable. We know, for example, that the largely successful 'Operation Silo' in the Republic of Ireland was able to uncover substantial arms dumps, hidden in sometimes remarkably well-developed underground facilities in some of these areas.<sup>31</sup> It is apparent, however, since this operation (conducted in 1992) that the PIRA's operational capabilities have not been markedly affected. As far as community support (which, one imagines, would translate into PSF votes) is concerned, the PIRA has garnered perhaps more implicitly expressed support in these areas<sup>32</sup> (although this may be changing<sup>33</sup>), quite different to the often explicit enthusiasm which the movement commands in the Six Counties, while however still offering impressive logistical support in the form of safehouses and arms storage to Southern and Northern ASUs.<sup>34</sup>

The activities of Southern Command ASUs was quite explicitly illustrated in June 1996 with an attempted post-office robbery in Adare, Co. Limerick, subsequently resulting in the murder of the Garda referred to above. The individuals responsible for McCabe's murder were described as part of the PIRA's 'Limerick unit', believed responsible for the storage and transportation of the majority of the PIRA's weapons arsenal in this area. It is believed that these same individuals maintain arms bunkers and control a major supply of weapons to Northern Command. Members of this unit maintain close contact (and as Cusack and Breen<sup>35</sup> point out, in one case through marriage) with another ASU in the Longford-Westmeath area. It is believed that this Limerick ASU transports these weapons to a Longford-

Westmeath ASU which in turn transports the weapons inside the border for use by other Northern Command ASUs.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, sources point to the PIRA's general usage of main roads, and not secondary or tertiary routes, in the *transportation of these arms*.

Furthermore, there are said to be around 230 safehouses in the Munster area alone.<sup>37</sup> This is solely between the six counties of Kerry, Limerick, Cork, Tipperary, Clare and Waterford. In operational terms, there are thought to be 70–85 ASU members in Southern Command, with about 30–35 activists concentrated in Kerry, Limerick and Cork, all under the control of about 15–20 command figures (i.e. Brigade commanders and OCs). Certain areas are earmarked (sometimes misguidedly) as PIRA 'strongholds': in Limerick and Kerry for example, Cahirciveen, Killorglin, Tralee (and surrounding townlands), Listowel, Askeaton, Newcastlewest, Rathkeale, Patrickswell, Tarbert, Foynes, Shannon and areas in Limerick city are 'flagged' areas considered as possible security threats in the Republic. In Cork, areas such as Newmarket, Macroom, Millstreet, along with some more isolated areas as Carrigtohill and East Cork, rural 'spots' are similarly noted. Also of relevance are safehouses in Cork city, investigated shortly after the McCabe murder.<sup>38</sup> The ability of the PIRA to 'draw on their resources' becomes apparent given their amazing capacity to derive safe support from 'houses' in areas which are not known to the security forces, or at least would not merit immediate investigative consideration.

### **GHQ and Staff: A Closer Examination**

A General Headquarters staff of usually 50–60 people is responsible for the overall maintenance and conduct of PIRA activities, as directed by Army Council policies. These are not 'full-time workers' in a traditional sense, but are said to devote a considerable amount of time to these duties. There are said to be 'extremely close connections between the Army Council and GHQ'. This is seen through some Council members '[having] executive functions by holding posts with the GHQ', as mentioned above, thus effectively ensuring operational or organisational control over a number of levels within the movement.

General Headquarters is currently based in Dublin and it consists usually of 10 departments.<sup>39</sup> Each department is then composed of 'Director', or 'Officer' and 4–5 staff members, or subordinate assistants. These departments are described as having two principal roles: 'to carry out operational decisions as referred to it by the Army Council and to provide various forms of support' (through the GHQ departments) as military activities demand. The Directors of the first two of these Departments (as

listed below) currently hold posts on the Army Council. We should note that although GHQ itself (i.e. a particular location) is in Dublin, not all of its officers are based there. The individuals in charge of the first two departments that we will describe are, at the time of writing, both based in Belfast, while the Foreign Operations officer in the main, is said to live in England. The Departments of GHQ are:

- |                       |                 |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Quartermaster      | 6. Training     |
| 2. Security           | 7. Engineering  |
| 3. Operations         | 8. Intelligence |
| 4. Foreign Operations | 9. Education    |
| 5. Finance            | 10. Publicity   |

*Department of Quartermaster and the Quartermaster General*

The Quartermaster General, an Army Council delegate, has as his main role control over the procurement, transportation and storage of PIRA armaments not only into the 32 counties but into Northern Command's operational areas. By the latter we mean the movement of arms from Southern Command counties in the Republic (where resources such as guns, rifles, ammunition and explosives, rockets etc. are kept under the eyes of regional Quartermasters, one principal figure [with a role in controlling the Munster brigade] based in Co. Tipperary) to Northern Command areas: more generally speaking, from non-operational areas into operational areas. Hence, as Northern Command remains the PIRA's principal operational area, sources denote that much of this person's work 'lies within the territorial area of Northern Command and there is much overlapping of responsibility'.<sup>40</sup>

Since no 'secret army' such as the PIRA is effective without its arms, this man occupies a role which is central to operational successes. The QMG personally ensures that exceedingly strict control is kept over weapons.<sup>41</sup> Under his supervision from GHQ (or since the present QMG is in Belfast, his orders are delegated from there to GHQ), 'the weapons are [ordered to be] distributed to Quartermasters in the various Brigade areas, and kept in bunkers'. These 'regional' Quartermasters then are said to dispatch weapons to ASU's '*only as required*' for operations.<sup>42</sup> In some areas, small amounts of weapons are actually held by local ASUs for training and what sources describe as 'local activity' (e.g. the same 'personalised' rifles are used by 'guards' when transporting samples of arms from caches to operational areas, ensuring that the caches themselves remain untouched), but in the majority of cases, weapons are returned to the Quartermaster General's command after operations.<sup>43</sup> We reiterate that this excludes certain ASUs which are involved in incursions abroad.

### *Security Department and the Adjutant General*

Issues of internal security and discipline are the responsibility of the 'Adjutant General' (AG) and his staff. A member of the Army Council, sometimes the AG allocates regional 'responsibility' of matters which fall within the boundaries of this department's role: evidence from PIRA members who have presented themselves for disciplinary action at locations far-removed from each other suggest that this is so. Sources indicate that investigations into breaches or suspected breaches of security (by both PIRA members themselves *and* security force personnel) are undertaken by a 'specifically-appointed' unit of staff members. Furthermore, these sources denote that this then is 'one area where the [general authority and] "operational expertise" of a similar unit within Northern Command' has actually superseded the authority and investigative powers of its 'equivalent unit' in GHQ. Sources also strongly indicate that investigations into *major breaches* of security outside Northern Command's territorial area, including GHQ departments, have been undertaken by this distinctly separate Northern Command security team of specially-appointed individuals, and who are 'accountable only to the Adjutant General'.

Although some academic commentators accurately point to the absence of psychopathology in members of highly-disciplined and well-controlled terrorist organisations such as the PIRA,<sup>44</sup> there is tentative evidence to support the notion that the PIRA does in fact make use of individuals of a particularly brutal nature for the conduct of punishment attacks (and beatings in particular): in the words of a former PIRA gunman, to deliver a beating was described as a task for 'someone else' in that 'I could *never* do that'.<sup>45</sup> Proximal and situational features of PIRA operations (such as the 'Proxy' bomb) may well explain why some Volunteers can be seen to shy away from the interpersonal and ferocious nature of punishment attacks.<sup>46</sup> Some units within the security department, whose responsibility it is to expose informers, are referred to as 'Nutting Squads': a reference to being shot in the 'nut' (head).<sup>47</sup>

### *Operations*

The person in charge of this department is known as the Operations Commander, or Director of Operations. At the time of writing, sources indicate that he is responsible for overseeing *all* PIRA operations, but that he usually co-ordinates operations in the 32 counties only (another individual, as we shall see, is usually regarded as responsible for operations on the British mainland). The Operations Commander is also involved with arms procurement operations abroad, working closely with the QMG.

The holder of the Operations Commander post is usually the overall head of Southern Command although this is not necessarily so. For the most

part of 1996, the then Operations Commander, from Tallaght in Co. Dublin, was in effect the head of the Southern Command also. However, as a result of his demotion last year, he is no longer 'in charge' of Southern Command. He does, however, presently maintain his position as Operations Commander. Sources believe that 'operations mounted in Britain and in Europe are the *specific function*' of this man's department, but often in order to maintain internal security, it is reported that certain specific operations are described as 'the responsibility of small groups drawn from other departments' believed accountable 'only to the Chief of Staff'.<sup>48</sup>

### *Foreign Operations*

The head of this department (sometimes referred to as the 'England Department') is known as the Foreign Officer, or England Officer (as he appears to be more or less permanently based there). He is currently thought responsible for the co-ordination of primary and incidental operations in England (e.g. bombings and armed robberies) and remains in strong liaison with the Operations Commander in Dublin. The Foreign Officer is responsible for overseeing the recruitment of so-called 'sleepers' (from the Republic of Ireland and England) and the movement and storage of arms in a particular 'foreign' operational area (i.e. outside Northern and Southern Command areas). The operations of PIRA sleepers conducting attacks on the mainland UK were illustrated somewhat inadvertently with the premature detonation of a bomb on a London bus by Co. Wexford Volunteer Edward O'Brien in February 1996. Some of the first sleepers to publicly emerge came to our attention in November 1991 when two 'courting couple' Volunteers, Frank Ryan and Patricia Black, blew themselves up while setting a bomb at a concert in Hertfordshire. Ryan is regarded as an atypical PIRA sleeper. His nationality was actually English, he was recruited in England and he had no criminal record. This, of course, would have made it extremely difficult for police and the security services to have reason to monitor his movements.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately however, there remains a grave misconception about many PIRA sleepers in that these individuals – whom we only hear about after a particular operation – in the main, do actually attract the attention of the security forces (through selling Republican newspapers and other legitimate activities such as attending marches and commemorations and so on<sup>50</sup>) but apparently it is their lack of *criminal record* which facilitates their (often) temporary activities as PIRA members abroad. Therefore the notion that these members are unknown to the security forces is a myth. Garda Special Branch detectives, for example, apparently monitored Eddie O'Brien's movements in Wexford, while the RUC Special Branch were undoubtedly aware of Frank Ryan's activities in Belfast. Their lack of criminal records makes them 'invisible', thus not

susceptible to occasional surveillance, a necessary operation for identification of potential sleepers.

### *Finance*

PIRA (and some PSF) funding requirements are the responsibility of this department.<sup>51</sup> Since the early 1970s, the PIRA has been involved in extensive fund-raising activities, some of which demonstrate considerable sophistication. Sources of funding include armed robberies (not necessarily confined to Ireland, it must be noted<sup>52</sup>) from banks, post offices and building societies. Activities also include money-laundering, fraud, extortion and trade in counterfeit goods (e.g. video-tapes, CDs, brand-name jeans) and these are just some of the areas in which the PIRA have shown themselves to be highly adept. PIRA annual income is currently estimated as at least IR£10 million.

According to security forces, the Finance department is another example of the sometimes very ambiguous 'delineation between GHQ and Northern Command'. For example, there are ASUs exclusively trained in armed robberies, and it is also thought that many of the ASUs in both Northern and Southern Commands amass their *own* finances through various operations. (An ASU in Co. Cork, for example, has been self-financed. But money gained from armed robberies is still submitted to the Finance section head in Dublin – around £60,000 was 'surrendered' at the beginning of the 1994–96 ceasefire<sup>53</sup>.) Sources note 'in this respect for example, Northern and Southern Command ASUs are assessed as almost self-sufficient for its day-to-day requirements', although long-term planning on behalf of the organisation as a whole is said to be a large part of GHQ's concerns. That the PIRA has undertaken substantial money-laundering efforts is a testament to this.<sup>54</sup>

At the time of writing, three individuals oversee the procurement of illegally-gained funds (the Provisional Sinn Fein's legal fund-raising activities are not examined here) and subsequent money-laundering procedures. Money-laundering operations are co-ordinated by people experienced in banking and accounting. The third man, a senior figure described as somewhat of an overseer, is 'third in command' of Southern Command. One of the group is believed to have hired his services to a number of criminals, not exclusively PIRA, is described as a 'freelancer' and does not occupy a formal position within the PIRA's command structure. The PIRA's substantial portfolio of investments includes some 20 pubs in Dublin along with a smaller number of other pubs scattered around the Republic of Ireland. Apart from these pubs, two PIRA-controlled hackney services in Dublin, a security firm, guest houses, courier services, video shops and a haulage company are further examples of the organisation's money-laundering portfolio in the Republic.

### *Training*

This GHQ department is responsible for organising adequate training of all PIRA recruits. As indicated above under 'Southern Command', sources indicate that much training takes place in the Republic, and note that substantial exertion and caution is directed into the maintenance of these camps' security and secrecy. Training camps are thought to be located in remote areas, sometimes in isolated farmland<sup>55</sup> (often donated for 'use' by sympathetic locals) or in mountainous areas. For new recruits, training may involve military drill and weapons training, physical exercise, engineering lessons (for those instructed in bomb-making) and even educational guidance. Security forces indicate that very often, Volunteer training is supplemented with the use of videotapes of history documentaries and details of 'other struggles'.<sup>56</sup> According to informed sources, training in foreign countries continues for select Volunteers: up to July and August in 1995, for example, there was direct evidence of some PIRA training in Lebanon.<sup>57</sup>

### *Engineering*

The Engineering department occupies a key role in determining PIRA operational successes and co-ordinates research and development of all armaments. This department has been under the control of only one person at a time (as Director) although it has had a number of 'senior figures' arrested by the Gardai – many of whom apparently have been (and continue to be among present staff) skilled technicians. Examples are John O'Brien, a telecommunications technician, arrested while making electronic circuit boards for bombs, and Ciarain Chambers, who designed the mortar bomb equipment culminating in the Heathrow Airport attacks in 1994.

In recent years this department's remarkable evolution has seen the use of portable mortars, drogue grenades, road mines, car and truck bombs, booby traps, under-car bombs (which the PIRA used to kill the Loyalist Ulster Defence Association (UDA) chief John McMichael in December 1987) and improvised explosive devices (e.g. fertiliser mix in tandem with Semtex, a so-called 'plastique' explosive).<sup>58</sup> The PIRA are generally now believed to be manufacturing their own explosives. This department has had assistance from American laboratories and their technicians in the attempted development of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles.<sup>59</sup> Another 'major area of PIRA research', according to sources, has been in the development of advanced radio and scanning equipment, both for 'operational use by PIRA active service units and to monitor security force operations'.

It was reported in June 1996 that security forces believe that a Dublin electrician was then the PIRA's main 'engineer'.<sup>60</sup>

*Intelligence and Training and Continuing Education in Intelligence*

Intelligence is *vital* to both the operational successes and organisational survival of the PIRA, a senior Republican stating: '...the leadership at the moment, are on the pulse of everything, and they have...information available to them...that ...determines whatever actions they're going to take'.<sup>61</sup>

During Volunteer training, recruits are educated and informed of ways in which they are expected to both evaluate information and report it. Recruits are advised that any information may hold potential value to the organisation as 'intelligence' which may facilitate or determine the tactics, pace and conduct of operational activities. The importance of good intelligence encompasses all PIRA activities, including the amassing of information related to internal security and the acquisition of finances or armaments. Information can have huge potential for use as propaganda. It appears that GHQ cannot emphasise enough the importance of intelligence-gathering for Volunteers. PIRA recruits are reminded that they are not just 'soldiers' but the 'eyes and ears' for their own comrades. A PIRA intelligence manual<sup>62</sup> states: 'H.Q. knows only that which is reported and whatever it manages to glean through its independent sources.' It is conceivable that the PIRA uses similar reporting methods when reporting to this Department's director as members of the Irish police do when reporting to C3, the Intelligence Section of the Crime and Security Branch of Garda Headquarters.

According to informed sources, considerable interest has been shown since the late 1980s in Northern and Southern command areas in having all collated information computerised and it appears now that the suspicions of the Garda Síochána have been confirmed.<sup>63</sup>

An aspect of the organisational communication channels employed by the PIRA is the 'need to know' principle of seeking information. The leadership encourages command officers to pay particular attention to this: information regarding operations, etc. should be restricted to an absolute minimum which a person needs to know and no more. To illustrate some of these points, the aforementioned intelligence manual is worth printing in detail. Regarding the need to know principle of information, the manual states:

...It is vital that information is acknowledged by the Command I.O.<sup>64</sup> and that if a project is abandoned or postponed, all involved are informed of the fact (that is where such is in accordance with security) but not necessarily given the reasons for postponement or whatever.

It goes on:

Wherever possible information from one source should be checked against other sources. Only when it is confirmed can information be

considered intelligence and not rumour. Over a period I.O.s will learn which sources are generally reliable and of high quality.

The manual also lends an insight into the PIRA's somewhat crude but nevertheless effective system of intelligence classification:

Intelligence can be divided into two main categories: High Intensity and Low Intensity. High Intensity is that supplied by a few well-tryed contacts and gives hard information on the enemy's intentions, organisations, personnel etc. Low intensity refers to more easily had information based on many sources. Even a rumour has a basis of fact. I.O.s must learn to differentiate between the two categories and follow up information received accordingly.

It adds an interesting aside:

Very often we come across the case where an outside source supplied information which was duly assessed but not acted upon; the source, not realising the reasons for not acting on the information becomes dissatisfied and sees no point in supplying any more; in such cases, particularly where the source is a good one, he or she should at least be told that their information was duly transmitted to the Command Staff, but that it could not be used at that time (or whatever would be a reasonable explanation). Again, you need not disclose the reason if it was highly confidential, but you would, as was stated earlier, let the source know that the information was received.

Regarding possible infiltration by members of the security forces, the manual states that:

Command and Section I.O.s have a duty to watch all listening posts (certain pubs and haunts of Republicans) and warn all Volunteers of the dangers inherent in them. They should be told that it is not enough to avoid being overheard by the S.B.<sup>65</sup> or touts,<sup>66</sup> that anyone who has any information may, unintentionally and without realisation of its value, pass it on to someone who will see that it reaches the enemy. Therefore, any place used by Volunteers or others must be kept under close surveillance and any hint that information might be made available to outsiders, whether they are working for the police or not, must be investigated without delay.

An example of how important the PIRA views the security of its organisation is that a full assessment and 'screening' of all recruits or potential recruits is made. This explains how some former activists claim they had to wait 'a few weeks' before being admitted to the movement:

People should not easily be admitted and when they are admitted should be subjected to surveillance. It is known that some organisations, apart altogether from the police, have instructed members to join the Movement to further their aims from within, or to cause dissension and splitting. All past or present members of these organisations should be subjected to thorough examination and each should be told that there cannot be any question of a person currently a member of another group becoming active in the Movement.

The relative sophistication of the PIRA's intelligence network is thoroughly underlined by the following:

A full dossier on each member, detailing his occupation, contacts in vital services both privately and government controlled and owned, should be prepared by each Command I.O. and should be available to the Director of Intelligence if so required. Such information is vital to the building of an efficient and comprehensive network and the maximum employment of the information potential of each and every member of every branch of the Movement.

This last paragraph contains some points worthy of discussion. 'Contacts in vital services' go a long way in helping understand how certain logistic aspects of PIRA operations materialise with apparent ease, particularly when vehicle registration plates or travel tickets are needed in a hurry. Publicans, teachers, shopkeepers and tax officials are just some of the kinds of occupations held by activists and command figures.

#### *Education and Publicity*

These two Departments sometimes involve considerable overlap. It is believed that members of GHQ's Publicity department sometimes double as Education officers, whose responsibility extends to GHQ's training department as noted.

The Publicity department has apparently emerged as one of 'increasing importance' to the PIRA through the evolution of PSF's political activities. Also, this department is a clearer example of the PSF/PIRA symbiosis. Sources indicate that this post has frequently been occupied by the current editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*<sup>67</sup> (through which the PIRA 'communicate', i.e. issuing statements or 'delivering' messages) and security forces refer to this person as 'Publicity Director'. Pleas for funds and Volunteer obituaries (and sometimes details of commemorations for dead Volunteers) are just some of *An Phoblacht's* responsibilities. Interestingly, PSF is currently expanding its supportive prowess through the use of more sophisticated forms of spreading political awareness of the

movement: PSF and *An Phoblacht* are now readily accessible on the Internet.

All of these departmental structures, in liaison with Northern and Southern Commands, have as their collective role the establishment, control, direction and maintenance of the Provisional IRA's Active Service Units.

### The Active Service Unit

The Active Service Unit (ASU) contains the PIRA's Volunteers, that is, the individuals who directly carry out military operations such as shootings or bombings. The Provisional IRA has many thousands of supporters throughout the 32 counties, but are concentrated in Northern Command areas. Of these, sources note that there are no more than 500–700 ASU members,<sup>68</sup> with a heavy concentration again in Northern Command. This figure includes an informed estimate of between 70 and 85 Volunteers in Southern Command.<sup>69</sup> Yorkshire Television<sup>70</sup> reported that before the cease-fire in 1994 Belfast was home to one third of the PIRA's full-time ASU members.<sup>71</sup> The Belfast Brigade of the PIRA is undoubtedly the main stronghold of the entire organisation (along with South Armagh and East Tyrone), although GHQ remains in Dublin for operational reasons.

A popular misconception of the PIRA Volunteer is of the masked and stealthy figure, almost invisible, always on the run, hiding from place to place, while awaiting instructions or opportunities for the next operation. The reality of PIRA operations and 'operators' may perhaps be described above for a very small select group of Volunteers, but for most it is different. Overall, there generally appears to be two different 'types' of PIRA Volunteer.<sup>72</sup>

First, there is the part-time Volunteer. These include men and women who hold 'regular' work positions in their communities but who adopt operational membership, for example, at weekends. We might note that this is a time when quite a substantial number of punishment attacks appear to occur.

Second, there are full-time Volunteers, who are fewer in number than the part-time members. This applies not only to Volunteers in Northern Ireland but to activists based in, or operating from, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain (not exclusively 'sleepers', we might add, but apparently full-time ASU members). These Volunteers do not have regular 'ordinary' jobs. According to PIRA activists themselves, they do not 'sign on' to receive social welfare payments, although Tim Pat Coogan's interviews with Volunteers do make reference to some claiming the 'dole'.<sup>73</sup> These people apparently are said to be '24-hours-a-day' Volunteers and they receive a

weekly allowance from the organisation. The amount of this allowance is a topic for debate. In the 1980s, this 'wage' apparently was £10 for a single person with £20 for those married.<sup>74</sup> Dermot Finucane,<sup>75</sup> a former Volunteer, emphasised the role of the 'supportive' community within which many, if not the majority, of PIRA Volunteers operate, describing Volunteers as 'living off their community'. Volunteers, if known by supporters in an area, would be taken for a drink, or 'would be bought a pair of shoes, if he needed it'.<sup>76</sup> Sources note that Volunteers and their families are indeed 'looked after' at Christmas time.<sup>77</sup> Although an exceptional example, a current senior figure in Southern Command (from Dublin and heavily involved in finances) received around £6,000 during one Christmas in the cease-fire period.

In contrast to some commentators, the journalist Tom Brady, making reference to security sources, claims that Volunteers depend 'on a regular income ... to pay their bills since they left school', suggesting a much larger weekly allowance.<sup>78</sup> Reliable sources currently point to a figure of between £30 and £40 per week,<sup>79</sup> but this should be considered in the context of Finucane's comments about members being given materials if 'needed'. This allowance, if it appears somewhat subsistent, should not necessarily be viewed as a sole income source for Volunteers. As mentioned earlier, security forces believe that many ASUs are responsible for their own financial 'concerns'.<sup>80</sup>

### *Volunteer Profiles?*

There is no 'profile' of a Provisional IRA Volunteer (which again raises questions of membership, and types of member, be it Volunteer, or person who stores arms, etc.) and certainly, we must acknowledge that there is no meaningful psychological profile of Volunteers.<sup>81</sup>

Activists vary in age and background. Most are male. White and Falkenberg White<sup>82</sup> noted the age for Volunteers as ranging from 'roughly 15 to 40 or so years of age', with some members in the 1970s being as young as 11, 14 and 15 (p.111). Generally the youngest of today's recruits are about 17–18 years old (White and Falkenberg White noted a mean age of 19.33 at recruitment). The recruitment age, however, probably reflects various organisational and environmental influences or strains on the Provisionals at particular times.

ASUs are generally trained and designed to specialise in *specific* tasks, e.g. robberies, shootings, bombings, internal security, intelligence-gathering on specific targets, etc. For example, the active service unit terrorising London's West End in the mid-1970s specialised in bombings. It was this group which bombed the Guilford and Woolwich pubs and later was arrested following the infamous Balcombe Street siege. This apparent

'specialisation' is an effective tactical and 'economical' aspect of PIRA functional strategy. As we have said, the PIRA devotes considerable time and energy to keeping its training camps safe and secure, and invariably little time exists to train Volunteers effectively in more than one area of expertise. This strategy produces highly-specialised, effective Volunteers. Also, given that there is always a high probability of capture by the security forces during or after an operation, it does not pay to 'branch out'.<sup>83</sup>

As mentioned earlier, each ASU is composed of usually four Volunteers and one OC. This OC has at his/her disposal a group of staff including an IO (Intelligence Officer) and Education Officer (who turns up at training camps and gives lectures, advice and training in counter-interrogation). Each cell is currently believed responsible for arranging its own financing for the various operational costs which it may incur (e.g. fuel for transport, etc.). It is also responsible for arranging safehouses (with whom familiarity will be established), and also to arrange transport outside its operational area, e.g. abroad or across the border. Each Volunteer in theory only knows the identity of the OC. Each OC in theory knows only one *higher* authority, which is the Brigade Adjutant, who receives orders from a member of the GHQ/Army Council/Northern-Southern Command grouping.

For operational purposes, the PIRA distinguishes between rural and urban ASUs. Most of its ASUs are urban-based as this is where most support is to be found, e.g. Belfast, Dublin. Volunteers who do not take adequate security precautions during their active duties can expect expulsion from the movement (the Green Book outlines these security recommendations quite starkly, as it does even more bluntly regarding the consequences if members are found in breach of some of these rules). This, of course, has the purpose of minimising the risk of arrest for any member of the cell, which at the very worst, on the basis of successful interrogation and investigation by police, could lead to the whole cell being captured or implicated (if of course the members are familiar with each other from various operations and know each other's names, or at least some details with which they can be identified). Many ASUs do operate within their 'own' locality: familiarity with Volunteers' specific operational area, if not already very substantial, will grow as length of ASU membership grows (and success is maintained – i.e. avoiding imprisonment as well as conducting successful attacks).

A further safeguard which the organisation has put in place regards communication between cells. Communication between cells is confined where possible to the OC of each cell. The 'need-to-know' basis of information exchange ensures that security remains as tight and controlled as possible for the organisation. There is some evidence of Volunteers adopting disguises and fake 'identities' during operations.<sup>84</sup>

Security sources acknowledge and currently emphasise that to *understand and appreciate the PIRA's military successes (in the form of ASU-executed operations)*, we must understand the origins of the role and function of this command structure.

### **Operational Considerations and Functional Efficiency**

The present cellular structure was adopted as part of a major internal reorganisation for the PIRA between 1976 and 1978, details of which emerged when Seamus Twomey, a former Belfast OC was captured by Gardai in 1977 during a raid on a Dublin house. Twomey was found to have in his possession an internal PIRA document (entitled 'Staff Report',<sup>85</sup> and subsequently becoming publicly available) detailing this reorganisation and the concerns from which it arose. The subsequent changes which were implemented resulted at the time in the emergence of a more 'secretive and deadlier' organisation.<sup>86</sup>

In the time leading up to this reorganisation, it had become obvious to the PIRA that to survive, the organisation strongly needed to change. Like other Republican leaders, Twomey had become increasingly concerned about the mass infiltration of security services into the PIRA. Therefore, apart from training its Volunteers in anti-interrogation tactics (it was not an infrequent event for a PIRA Volunteer then to implicate up to 12 men, and in one case 35) there was an obvious need for the PIRA to adopt a cellular restructuring due to these heavy losses incurred by infiltration – a frequent occurrence during the 'mass' PIRA recruitment in the early 1970s.

The structures as they stand today strongly mitigate against the damaging losses incurred through the informant procedures while also guarding against suffering heavy losses through infiltration. The Volunteer units of the PIRA gradually changed from the older 'Battalion' structures (with large numbers of Volunteers in each grouping) into the small ASUs of today. As Coogan<sup>87</sup> puts it, a tactic was to 'move younger, unknown figures into position of responsibility leaving well-known, established, older men in a high-profile position as front men'. Communication between the cells then became confined where possible to the one liaison, and soon, unit members did not know, or rather were instructed that they could not allow each other to know their names. As is apparently the case today, ASU members generally speaking only know each other by a first name.<sup>88</sup> Loyalist paramilitary organisations have adopted similar strategies. The freelance 'hitman' Michael Stone<sup>89</sup> refers to this while working for the UDA:

Somewhere near the shops I bumped my horn and flashed my lights.  
Two youngish lads came out from my right and joined me. Both were

walking tight together and concealing a shotgun between them. One had a revolver as well. I didn't know either of them. We all knew what the job was, and they only knew me by my alias, Tony May.

Gardai have stated that because of these structures and their functioning, they are unable to establish the identity of all of the people in the organisation: 'We know the key personnel and activists and sympathisers who have come to our attention, but the cell structure is so tight that their own members wouldn't know the make-up of other cells'.<sup>90</sup> This is particularly frustrating for even the most successful and persistent of interrogators.

Other operational considerations are present. During operations, according to Twomey's report, ASUs are required to operate *away from* the areas from which the Volunteers came. This would cause confusion for security force investigations. White and Falkenberg White,<sup>91</sup> however, in interviews with former senior PIRA figures, describe ASUs as remaining to operate within their own localities. Reasons for this would be to avail of local facilities before, during and after operations, such as safehouses where they would be recognised without difficulty, and also because of familiarity with the operational area (a vital aspect of the operational 'cycle' – target selection, planning, escape routes, etc.).<sup>92</sup> Perhaps, however, this may be seen to have a detrimental effect on the internal security of ASUs – after all, it is far more difficult being required not to know the identity of one's ASU colleague if, in fact, Volunteers are operating in their 'own' locality.

To complement the PIRA's successes,<sup>93</sup> Garda sources confirm to there being 'no shortage of young, dedicated Volunteers to fill the ranks' of the PIRA.<sup>94</sup> This has been highlighted with recruitment which continued throughout the recent 1994–96 cease-fire. Of importance to earlier comments made about PIRA policy for recruitment in respect to age, certain qualities are sought – dedication and commitment are attributes which potential recruits must appear to have as the following comments from 2 former ASU members (the second now a Command figure) indicate:

When you join the 'Ra, you're told straight up, you'll either spend a long time in jail or you'll die.<sup>95</sup>

I've known a lot of people over the years...I know nobody that has benefited financially, materially in any way for it [membership of the PIRA]...all I know...in most people that I know...people have suffered a lot, and given up a lot...broken families... imprisonment...people who lost their jobs...<sup>96</sup>

If, as security sources in the Republic note, Volunteers are plentiful and never in short supply, it may appear unusual that we do not observe a greater

incident rate than we do, even in the early 1990s when we began to observe the worst levels of violence since 1972. A number of factors explain why the PIRA are seen as to be restrained in this.

First we note that attacks are not carried out unless there is a high probability of success,<sup>97</sup> i.e. target identification (problems with bystanders are frequent during planned shootings – PIRA Volunteers sometimes refer to people ‘getting in the way’, thus having to call off an attack at the last minute<sup>98</sup>), escape route accessibility<sup>99</sup> (factors governing this include time of day, rush hour, the presence or absence of security patrols), the area in which the attack is taking place – is it a ‘foreign’ incursion by the PIRA into a Loyalist area, or into one of their own areas? (which implies the availability of logistic support in the form of safehouses and the existence of people who are extremely unlikely to inform the security forces). All of these factors and more have a bearing on the potential success of an operation and are considered during the planning stage of an attack.<sup>100</sup>

Second, we must note that the prevailing political and organisational climate controls the frequency and indeed type of operations which are conducted. Control may be tightened or loosened for various reasons.

Another factor merits discussion. ASUs continue to operate to some extent with a degree of autonomy. In some ways they are independent of the organisation (in, for example, arranging safehouses, funding and reporting intelligence to GHQ). And as we have said, in theory each ASU’s OC knows only the Brigade Adjutant. He then gives certain orders to the OC and his ASU staff regarding target selection and other operational considerations. However, although certain operations, such as an assassination of a high-profile figure, for example, is ordered from the top-down (i.e. GHQ, Army Council), target selection may nevertheless be on the basis of that same ASU’s intelligence-gathering on the actual target. Crenshaw<sup>101</sup> explains that increased efforts by the Irish and British governments in the 1990s to subvert the PIRA’s activities have had two serious implications for the organisation’s maintenance. The first was that the organisation had to expend greater effort in countering informers and infiltrators through its own internal security system. Of greater relevance to our discussion, the second implication was that *greater autonomy* was granted to individual ASUs to select their targets and methods. This had the purpose of reducing communications and subsequently reducing security risks. The PIRA in this sense has become more decentralised – the leadership paradoxically having ‘less control over strategy and thus less power to prevent the civilian casualties that provoke public opprobrium and internal dissent’.<sup>102</sup> The Enniskillen bombing and the murder of Detective McCabe are two good examples. A discussion of the former with a figure within the PIRA’s command structure reveals that: ‘We would...

argue...let's say...whether or not...it was right to put the bomb in there in the first place...that is the thing...*internally*, we would argue...'.<sup>103</sup>

As for the murder of Detective McCabe, following the Southern Command OC's demotion in September 1996, sources indicate that it is probably the high esteem in which this person is held by the organisation that has prevented him from being executed for sanctioning an operation which has resulted in massive pressures being brought to bear on all aspects of the Republican movement.<sup>104</sup>

## Overview

It is hoped that what has gradually emerged from the foregoing snapshot pictures of the PIRA is that proper analysis of this complex movement demands our recognition of the PIRA as a very large, efficient, hierarchically-organised command structure. Other paramilitary organisations, including, we might add, some of the 'local' Irish ones which have clear exposure to the activities and operations of the PIRA, (e.g. UDA), have traditionally not reaped the same organisational benefits of adopting such a structure.<sup>105</sup> We emphasise again the considerable safe logistical support which the PIRA derives from within the Irish Republic. Of relevance here is work by Post,<sup>106</sup> who has examined the relationships which terrorist organisations have with their broader environment, incorporating an examination of their group and organisational dynamics.

Small terrorist groupings such as the West German Baader-Meinhof gang and to a large extent some of the smaller extremist militia groups in the United States are sometimes known as 'autonomous cells'. They are autonomous in that the actors (i.e. those who plant the bombs or shoot at targets) operate alone and do not actually belong to any overall command structure. Thus, they set their own agenda and make their own decisions with full 'autonomy'. This type of group contrasts highly with the hierarchically-organised terrorist groupings (e.g. PIRA, ETA). In these, there is usually very little autonomy left within the active cells.

In theory, of course, the larger hierarchic group is more efficient, secure, organised and effective. This becomes clear when we examine decision-making processes in the context of group and organisation structures and dynamics. The smaller groups have a much looser structure than the larger groups. This automatically accentuates leadership disputes. In a small group, decision-making cannot be encouraged if there are many different voices expressing conflicting views. As Post<sup>107</sup> notes, the group is thereby less secure: it is too susceptible to the problems of group decision-making. For the terrorist cell operating within a hierarchically-organised and large command structure, however, decision-making tends to be much more centralised. If we

examine the role of ASUs within the Provisional IRA, for example, they have relatively little effect on the decision-making process. This in turn ensures that ASU members cannot compromise decision-making. Given that volunteers may often be unaware of the overall strategy as adopted by their leadership (as communication for each cell member in theory does not extend past that of the OC-Volunteer interaction) the strategic benefits can soon become obvious as illustrated in the case of the PIRA reorganisation.

Some of the negative features, however, (not only of small groups, but) of large groups where security and other strategic concerns become paramount is that, as in the example of the PIRA, ASU members may become 'insensitive' to their operational environment (this may differ, however, between rural and urban-based cells). This can result in a rather paradoxical anonymity for the Nationalist terrorist organisation whose group and organisational dynamics owe much to the role of the supportive environment in order to flourish.

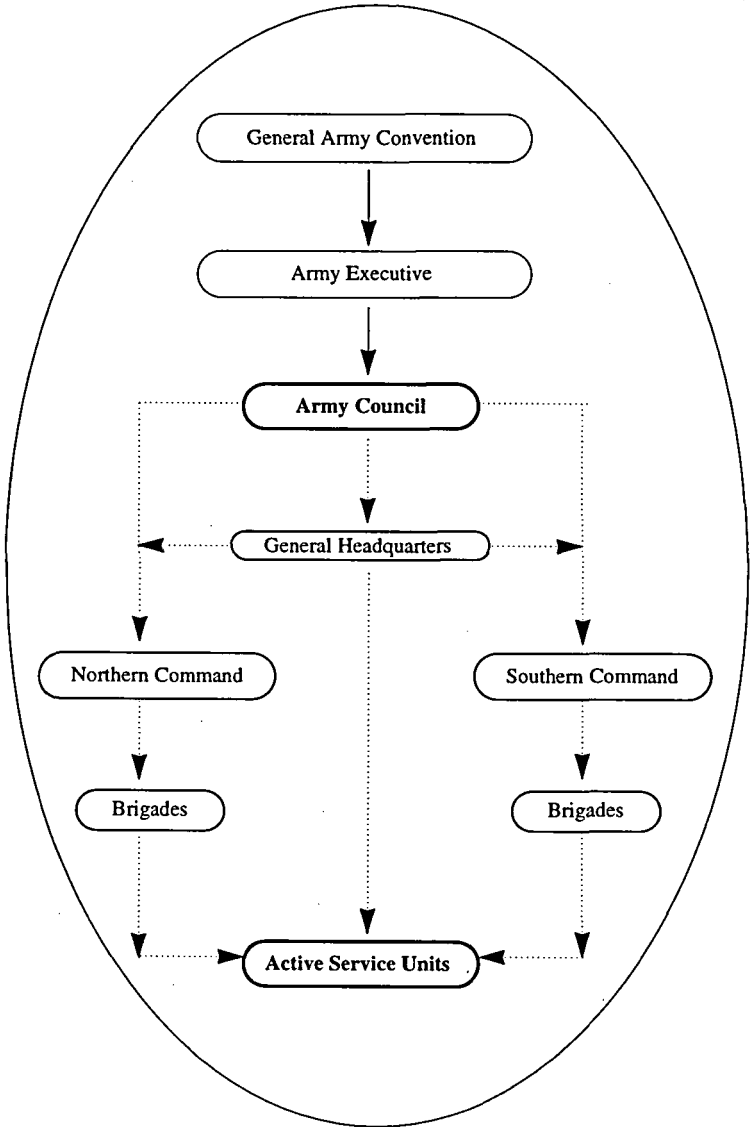
As outlined, the PIRA makes clear distinctions between 'leaders' and 'followers'. As Post<sup>108</sup> indicates, for any terrorist organisation, the perceived locus of authority can have quite a major impact on internal dynamics. The 'working ability' of terrorist groups may become somewhat problematic if, as Post describes, leaders are offered as available targets for dissent within the group. Post concedes that a large aspect of the problem of splits and factionalism is a simple result of a leader 'wanting to do his own thing'. When disputes arise in PIRA or ETA, the organisational structure which has been adopted mitigates against possible fragmentation.

The effects of 'charismatic' leaders is another issue which needs to be addressed. The importance of such leaders is somewhat hazy as leadership functions are often far from clear. However, we do know that sometimes, even in an organisation such as the PIRA or ETA, regional commanders may sometimes overshadow any 'supreme' authority.

## Conclusions

Given the command structure outline documented in this article, it is important to emphasise that sources indicate the constant necessity to distinguish between the 'bureaucratic' structure (presently described) and the *de facto* situation pertaining at any one instance in time.<sup>109</sup> Needless to say, any claims of fully understanding the Provisional IRA are to be treated with caution.<sup>110</sup> In theory, as corroborated with security forces and as outlined in Figure 1, the command structure operates from the lowest level (i.e. the Volunteers and prisoners) who elect the highest (operational) body (i.e. the Army Council) in an upwards process and then 'the authority is delegated back downwards'.

FIGURE 1  
PIRA DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY



Following any PIRA activity, be it a shooting, bombing or punishment attack, we are rarely in a position to consider the complexity of the organisation in which the Republican activist is recruited, assessed, trained, re-assessed, controlled, paid and continually supported (even in death). We also easily forget the sophisticated support structure of perhaps thousands which belie even relatively 'minor' attacks, whether they be in Belfast, Dublin or anywhere else that the PIRA chooses to operate. That the Provisionals remain a significant threat to the security of many is not at issue. The remarkable evolution of this organisation has been characterised by internal learning, an exceptional ability to adapt, reorganise and restructure, and the impressive development of a highly efficient and multi-dimensional support apparatus. This can only complement the predominantly role-specific nature of PIRA membership, all contributing to the PIRA's operational successes.

## NOTES

1. The original IRA was born from the ashes of the 1916 Easter rebellion in Dublin. For a good account of the IRA's early development, see J. Bowyer-Bell, *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1979* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press Ltd. 1989). For a discussion of the durability of the terrorist groups and the exceptionally long lives of religious ones, see David C. Rapoport, 'Fear and Trembling: Terrorism in Three Religious Traditions', *APSR* 78/3 (Sept. 1984) pp.658-77.
2. The Official IRA (OIRA) still exists today. It declared a cease-fire in 1972, but has been involved in a number of successful armed robberies including a haul of £17,000 from Heuston Station in Dublin in September 1973 and £10,000 from the Larne-Stranraer ferry in September 1984. The OIRA's political wing, the Marxist 'Official Sinn Fein', later became known as the Sinn Fein Workers' Party (soon dropping 'Sinn Fein' to just Workers' Party) from which the Democratic Left movement in the Irish Republic (under Pronsias deRossa) has more recently arisen. The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) broke away from the OIRA/OSF in September 1975 and spawned the militant Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). Amid a history of bitter feuding and factionalism, the INLA persists as a viable security threat to both sides of the Border. It has many members based in Tallaght, Co. Dublin. In 1986, an INLA faction calling itself the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLA) was formed. This was decimated by the PIRA in October 1992 after a spate of shootings and punishment beatings of IPLA members resulting from their extensive involvement in racketeering and the drugs trade, not least while colluding with some members of the Loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). In 1986, a split occurred within PIRA/PSF ranks. Two senior PIRA figures, Ruairi O'Bradaigh and Daithi O'Conaill, helped form Republican Sinn Fein (RSF) which security forces in the Republic believe maintains a militant wing (the Irish National Republican Army (INRA)). The split emerged following dissension over Sinn Fein's decision, made at the Party's Annual Ard Fheis (annual convention), to end its members' traditional policy of abstention from the Dail (Irish Government). Many believe that RSF/INRA has failed to flourish as a result of the death of O'Conaill in 1991.
3. The Provisional Irish Republican Army have been referred to as *Oglaigh Na hEireann* (Gaelic for 'Irish Volunteers'), the Provos, the 'Ra, IRA (most commonly), Provies, Pinheads, Pinnies (these last two names are not meant to be derogatory: 'Pinheads' refers to the use of pins with which the traditional Easter lilies have been attached to clothing to

- commemorate the original IRA's uprising in 1916; this contrasts with the sticky gum seen to be used by the Official IRA, hence their nickname 'Stickies' or 'Sticks').
4. Literally the Gaelic for 'ourselves'. Sometimes Sinn Fein is translated as 'ourselves alone' or 'we ourselves', the latter being the party's own preferred translation.
  5. In authors' possession.
  6. This ironically was one of the reasons which contributed to the subsequent isolation in 1969 of what was to become the OIRA, and although it may be quite difficult to see why, the PIRA still claims to hold a socialist outlook as encouraged by the *Green Book*, the manual issued to all PIRA recruits.
  7. Whom Republicans describe as 'members of the armed wing of the British Government'. See, for example, Neil Forde and Liam O'Coileain, 'Declarations, contradictions, but no clarifications', *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (Dublin), 13 July 1994.
  8. Now disbanded.
  9. See 'A dozen other Gardai killed in last 26 years', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 8 June 1996.
  10. See Jim Cusack and Maol Muire Tynan, 'Government accepts IRA killed Garda in Adare', *Irish Times* (Dublin) 14 June 1996. One such example was a bombing in Enniskillen in 1987 in which a PIRA bomb killed 11 people at the annual Remembrance Day parade. For a discussion of the question when do terrorists claim responsibility, see exchanges between Bruce Hoffman, Dennis Pluchinsky and David C. Rapoport in *Terrorism and Political Violence* (hereafter *TPV*) 9/1 (Spring 1997) pp.1–20.
  11. See Jack Holland, 'IRA policing serves practical purpose', *Irish Echo* (New York), 10–16 Jan. 1996.
  12. The PIRA increased its operations in England since the early 1990s. In February 1991, the PIRA targeted then Prime Minister Major in No. 10 Downing Street when they conducted a mortar attack as Major met with senior Cabinet members. Bombings in Britain have targeted police stations, railway stations and shopping centres. The PIRA's campaign of attacks have in recent years focused on so-called 'economic' targets including London's financial districts (e.g. the Baltic Exchange and Canary Wharf areas), resulting in what was described as 'astronomical' damage; see Tim Pat Coogan, *The IRA* (London: HarperCollins 1995) p.587. Damage estimates for the Bishopsgate bomb in April 1993, for example, range from £1.5 to £2 billion.
  13. 'Bloody Friday' in 1972 saw the almost-simultaneous detonation of 22 car bombs across Belfast. Nine people were killed and hundreds were injured. The Birmingham, Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings in 1974 claimed the lives of 28 people.
  14. Martha Crenshaw, *Decisions to Abandon Terrorism: A Preliminary Case Study of the IRA*. Paper presented at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago Hilton, 31 Aug.–3 Sept. 1995, p.3.
  15. In two of the most well-received works on Republican terrorism, Tim Pat Coogan (note 12) and J. Bowyer-Bell (note 1) make all-too scant references to the Provisionals' command structures and functioning.
  16. This distinction is equally important in the context of discussions about the concept of a 'terrorist': should the person who helps store rifles, explosives or ammunition be held equally responsible for the active terrorist's crimes?
  17. For a more detailed discussion, see Robert P. Clark, *The Basque Insurgents. ETA: 1952–1980* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1984) and Max. Taylor, *The Terrorist* (London: Brassey's 1988).
  18. Taylor (note 17) p.136.
  19. See J. Butler, 'IRA admits Osnabruck mortar attack', *Press Association*, 30 June 1996. Also, the German intelligence agency, the Bundeskriminalamt, issued a press release noting that no less than seven vehicles were used in the attack.
  20. Informers, who receive prison sentence remission as a result of having supplied security forces with valuable information pertaining to former comrades.
  21. Coogan (note 17) p.539.
  22. Taylor (note 17) p.136.
  23. Clark (note 17).
  24. 'Army' hereafter refers to Provisional IRA.

25. Dail Eireann is the Irish Government.
26. See Jim Cusack, 'Doves are winning power battle inside the IRA', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 16 Sept. 1996, and also Jim Cusack, 'IRA failures – informers or just incompetence?', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 Sept. 1996.
27. It is currently thought that all Chiefs of Staff have been male. Unless otherwise indicated, the use of 'his' or 'he' necessarily means that the person is a male.
28. Italic (emphasis) ours: hereafter, unless otherwise indicated, emphasis in conversations or interviews with sources is indicated by italics.
29. See, for example, Elaine Keogh, 'Explosives found as Garda search extended in Louth', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 28 Nov. 1996.
30. That this does not always happen is demonstrated by the murders of Gardai by the PIRA throughout the Provisionals' campaign. The Army Council officially does not encourage this tactic, as outlined in the Green Book's General Order no. 8 (Pt. 1) which states that: 'Volunteers are strictly forbidden to take any military action against 26 County forces any circumstances whatsoever. The importance of this order...especially in the border areas cannot be over-emphasised.'
31. See Veronica Guerin, 'IRA unit "intent on killing Garda"', *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 9 June 1996.
32. Sinn Fein still receives a tiny share of the vote in the Republic of Ireland. See Jimmy Wolfe, 'One violent act does not make a hotbed', *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 16 June 1996, p.13.
33. See John Horgan and Max. Taylor, 'The Provisional IRA and Drugs in the Republic of Ireland', in preparation. Also see Jim Cusack, 'Republicans linked to rise of the vigilantes', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 31 May 1996.
34. One security force member in the Republic described areas of Co. Limerick as 'worse than Crossmaglen' (interview conducted by the first author). Also see Max. Taylor and John Horgan, 'The 1994–96 Provisional IRA Cease-fire in Northern Ireland', *TPV*, under submission.
35. See Jim Cusack and Suzanne Breen, 'Reputed head of Munster IRA arrested over killing', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 June 1996.
36. Ibid.
37. This contradicts some authoritative reports – see Veronica Guerin, 'We'll get them: Gardai', *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 16 June 1996.
38. Interview conducted by the first author.
39. Sometimes there is such overlap that confusion abounds. GHQ's 'Education' and 'Publicity' departments often contain the same individuals.
40. It is not difficult to see now how investigative efforts of security forces and intelligence services are hampered by 'pictures' of these apparently formalised command structures, whose function and personnel seem to overlap each other, as in the case of QMG.
41. The Green Book's General Order No. 11 states that: 'Any Volunteer who seizes or is party to the seizure of arms, ammunition or explosives which are being held under Army control, shall be deemed guilty of treachery. A duly constituted Court-martial shall try all cases. Penalty for breach of this order: Death'.
42. Interview conducted by the first author.
43. Ibid.
44. See Max. Taylor and Ethel Quayle, *Terrorist Lives* (London: Brassey's 1994).
45. Interview conducted by the first author.
46. One of the most horrific assaults in the history of this brutal behaviour occurred in February 1996. Martin Doherty, a Belfast teenager, was literally 'crucified', having had steel spikes driven through his hands and knees, nailing him to a post, by a PIRA punishment-gang. Events such as this must surely raise questions about the mental health of the individuals responsible. Is it unrealistic to presuppose the existence of sadism in these instances?
47. Also see Jack Holland, 'IRA policing serves practical purpose', *Irish Echo* (New York), 10–16 Jan. 1996.
48. Interview conducted by the first author.
49. See A. Percival, 'The secret world of the IRA sleeper', *Press Association News*, 19 Feb.

1996. Also see Tom Squitieri, 'IRA seeks members with clean face, clean record', *USA Today*, 14 March 1996; Jim Cusack, 'Co-ordinated British effort to combat IRA is paying off' and 'Hunger strike revived IRA in Britain', both in *Irish Times* (Dublin), 28 Sept. 1996, and Rachel Donnelley, 'Attacks on cities may have been "imminent"', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 24 Sept. 1996.
50. Interestingly, this contradicts the Green Book's instructions on how to live one's life as an invisible person: Volunteers in training are specifically instructed to remain as distant as possible from any political activities (although perfectly legitimate of course) which might alert the security forces to their 'sympathies', although it is probable that such 'sympathisers' become involved in Active Service after a period of time while involved in more 'general' Republican activities, such as those described (i.e. selling newspapers).
  51. See John Horgan, *Terrorism and Organised Crime in the Republic of Ireland: A Case Study - Provisional IRA Fund-raising*, Ph.D. dissertation, in preparation.
  52. See Jeffrey Robinson, *The Laundrymen* (London: Simon and Schuster 1994).
  53. Interviews conducted by the first author.
  54. See Horgan (note 51).
  55. See, for example, C. Parkin, 'Men still quizzed after likely IRA raid foiled', *Press Association News*, 28 Oct. 1996.
  56. Coogan (note 12, p.479) also makes reference to this in an interview with a former senior command figure.
  57. Interview conducted by the first author.
  58. See, for example, Richard Clutterbuck, 'Trends in Terrorist Weaponry', *TPV 5/2* (Summer 1993) pp.134-7.
  59. See C.J.M. Drake, 'The Provisional IRA: A Case Study', *TPV 3/2* (Summer 1991) p.51. Also see Clutterbuck (note 57) p.134.
  60. Liz Allen, 'IRA units still "alive and kicking"', *Sunday Tribune* (Dublin), 23 June 1996.
  61. Interview conducted by the first author.
  62. This manual, entitled *A Reporter's Guide to Ireland* as viewed by the first author, is actually believed to have been written by a member of the OIRA in the mid-1970s. The present copy as viewed by JH has been used as training material for PIRA members in the Republic of Ireland.
  63. See Liam Clarke, 'IRA hackers break into phone network to plot RUC killings', *Sunday Times* (London), 17 Nov. 1996, and Liam Clarke, 'MI5 uncovers IRA's white-collar spies', *Sunday Times* (London), 1 Dec. 1996. Also see Liam Clarke, 'IRA uses hi-tech international intelligence bank', *Sunday Times* (London), 9 March 1997.
  64. Intelligence Officer.
  65. Special Branch.
  66. Informants.
  67. *An Phoblacht/Republican News* is the Republican newspaper, founded in 1970 following the PIRA's emergence.
  68. This estimate up to January, 1997.
  69. The journalist Liz Allen (note 60) also cites an estimate of 70.
  70. Yorkshire Television, *Talking to the Enemy*, ITV, 20 Dec. 1994.
  71. See Taylor and Horgan (note 34).
  72. See note 70. The Yorkshire documentary refers to this and also cites membership estimates.
  73. Coogan (note 12) p.479.
  74. *Ibid.*; also p.560.
  75. Yorkshire Television (see note 70).
  76. *Ibid.*
  77. Interview conducted by the first author.
  78. See Tom Brady, 'Era of the renegade IRA', *Irish Independent*, 23 Dec. 1994.
  79. Interview conducted by the first author.
  80. See Horgan (note 51).
  81. For a discussion of psychological issues, see Ken Heskin, *Northern Ireland: a Psychological Analysis* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan 1980), and also Ken Heskin, 'Terrorism in Ireland: the Past and Future', *Irish Journal of Psychology* 15/2-3 (1994)

- pp.469–79. Also see Taylor and Quayle (note 44) and Taylor (note 17).
82. See R.W. White and T. Falkenberg White, 'Revolution in the city: on the resources of urban guerrillas', *TPV* 3/4 (Winter 1991) pp.100–32.
  83. It is also cost-effective – an issue which the PIRA holds very dear to its heart and which has very important implications not only for recruitment, but for operational successes, organisational survival in the face of competition, internal cohesion and possible splitting.
  84. The apparent use of forged documents was demonstrated more recently in an attack (claimed by the 'Continuity Army Council') on the Lisburn Army barracks near Belfast (see Martin Crowley, 'Northern Irish bombers may have had fake passes', *Reuters*, 8 Oct. 1996).
  85. As outlined in Coogan (note 12) p.466.
  86. *Ibid.*, p.465.
  87. *Ibid.*
  88. Not necessarily the Volunteer's real first name.
  89. See Martin Dillon, *Stone Cold* (London: Arrow 1993) p.78.
  90. V. Guerin, 'IRA used ceasefire to plan bomb campaign', *Sunday Independent* (Dublin), 23 June 1996.
  91. White and Falkenberg White (note 82).
  92. The PIRA's successes, however, in conducting surveillance in 'foreign' operational areas have been especially noteworthy.
  93. Not least functional organisational achievements.
  94. Interview conducted by the first author.
  95. Interview conducted by the first author.
  96. Interview conducted by the first author.
  97. See Andrew P. Silke, 'Terrorism in Northern Ireland: an Application of Rational Choice Theory', Paper presented at the British Psychological Society Annual Conference, Brighton, April 1996.
  98. Interview conducted by the first author.
  99. See Catherine Cleary, 'Search continues of area where car was found', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 10 June 1996.
  100. For an indicator of such planning, see Rachel Borrill, 'Police trace driver who paid cash for bomb truck', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 18 June 1996.
  101. Crenshaw (note 14) pp.5–6.
  102. *Ibid.*, p.6.
  103. Interview conducted by the first author.
  104. Also see Cusack and Breen (note 35). Aside at all from the Gardai in the Republic seeking McCabe's killers, the PIRA themselves are said to be 'concerned' that 'disciplinary actions' be brought against at least three people; one from Strabane in Northern Ireland and two based in Munster (one a former INLA member).
  105. This has, however, begun to change dramatically since the early 1990s – the UDA having incurred their own reorganisation in what Cusack and Taylor describe (in the words of a senior UDA figure) as 'a return to basic principles' (Jim Cusack and Max. Taylor, 'Resurgence of a Terrorist Organisation – Part 1: The UDA, a Case Study', *TPV* 5/3 (Autumn 1993) pp.1–27. Also see Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: OUP 1992).
  106. J.M. Post, 'Group and Organisational Dynamics of Political Terrorism: Implications for Counterterrorist Policy', in Paul Wilkinson and Alisdair Stewart (eds), *Contemporary Research on Terrorism* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press 1987) pp.307–17. Also see J.M. Post, 'Terrorist Psycho-logic: terrorist behaviour as a product of psychological forces', in W. Reich (ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind* (Cambridge: CUP 1990) pp.25–40. Jerrold Post and Martha Crenshaw have presented different views on terrorist behaviour in Walter Reich's book. Crenshaw has examined the strategic bases of terrorist behaviour while Post believes that members of terrorist organisations do not 'reason' logically, that it is the internal group and organisational dynamics which determine terrorist behaviour. While the present authors do not agree with Post's proposition, we must agree that, as Post notes, 'the specific group [in

this case the PIRA] must be understood in its historical, cultural, and political context' (in Reich (ed.) p.38).

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., p.315.

109. According to a *Sunday Times* report (12 March 1995) which Crenshaw (note 14) cites, so-called 'hardliners' (presumably members of the Army Council and regional brigadiers) agreed to Gerry Adams' proposals for the 1994 cease-fire in exchange for 'greater influence over the internal affairs of the organisation'. Also see Taylor and Horgan (note 34).

110. See Garret Fitzgerald, 'Only clear thing about IRA strategy is uncertainty', *Irish Times* (Dublin), 4 Jan. 1997.