COUNTERINSURGENCY IN NORTHERN IRELAND – a Case in Point?

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This thesis reflects the research I conducted on the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland in order to complete the master programme ‘Conflicts, Territories, and Identities’ at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. It is the end result of an eventful year which has taught me a lot and allowed me to broaden my view upon our world. As an officer in the Royal Netherlands Navy, it was not implicit that I could take this path following the bachelor ‘Krijgswetenschappen’ I enjoyed at the Netherlands Defence Academy. I am therefore grateful that I have been given the opportunity to do so.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland have intrigued me ever since I learnt about its existence as it represents a violent conflict that, contrary to ‘the norm’, took place within the realms of a highly developed Western state. In addition, I have always had a special interest in military operations in general. Hence, when the opportunity arose to take on an internship at the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Netherlands Defence Academy, I found the perfect opportunity to combine these interests into a workable subject for my thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who have contributed to, or supported me in my research process. In particular Dr. Romain Malejacq, who was appointed to me as my first supervisor based at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, and Dr. Theo Brinkel, who facilitated my internship and with whom I have closely cooperated throughout my time at the Faculty of Military Science in Breda. Both have provided me with valuable advice and took their time to discuss the content of my thesis with me. Their critical look has contributed towards a better end result.

Finally, special thanks to my family and my girlfriend, Myrthe, for their unwavering support throughout this past year.

Wormerveer, July 2014

Christiaan Alexander Beumer
Summary

In this thesis it is argued that Northern Ireland became the stage for a revolutionary war during the Troubles of 1969-98. The conflict is thus perceived as a politico-military struggle in which Republicans waged an insurgency in order to secede from the United Kingdom while the British government acted as a counterinsurgent to prevent them from doing so. Here, an insurgency is defined as an internal struggle in which a disaffected group (the insurgents) seeks to gain control of a nation. It is a hybrid form of conflict that combines subversion, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism. Counterinsurgency is its reactive strategy which is adopted by – or in aid of – the government defending the status quo. It covers the wide range of political and military efforts taken to prevent the insurgents from winning over the support of the population while simultaneously convincing this population of the government’s cause.

This thesis shows that the outcome of the Troubles can be perceived as a counterinsurgency success because the British government retained its authority over Northern Ireland and achieved a settlement in which the Republican insurgency dwindled. Yet despite this relatively successful outcome, it is questionable whether the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy that led to this success. Therefore, the following question is central to this thesis: to what extent has the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy during the Troubles in Northern Ireland? It derives from the classical counterinsurgency paradigm to answer this question. Based on the works of leading classical counterinsurgency theorists such as Robert Thompson, David Galula, Frank Kitson, and Charles Gwynn – whose views take a central position within classical and contemporary counterinsurgency discourses, a five-point framework for analysis is used that largely corresponds with Thompson’s counterinsurgency principles. It reads as follows: 1) a clear political aim; 2) acting in accordance with the law and minimum use of force; 3) an overall plan and civil-military cooperation; 4) priority on political measures; and 5) intelligence.

Rather than examining the Troubles as a whole, this thesis approaches the conflict as three subsequent phases that are based on the strategic approach of the British government. These phases are: (i) 1969-74: the militarisation phase; (ii) 1975-81: the Ulsterisation phase; and (iii) 1982-98: the politicisation phase and peace process. Each phase is analysed using the abovementioned five-point framework. This leads to the following findings:
During the militarisation phase, the British army was deployed in aid of the civil power on what was believed to be a temporary basis. Initially, Westminster sought to avoid assuming full responsibility for the situation in Northern Ireland. This resulted in a primarily military approach that was unbacked by an equally determinant civil effort. In addition, the adaptation of poorly informed policies and a series of violent clashes between the Catholic-nationalist population and the government’s security forces led to a rapid alienation of this minority community. Overall, the counterinsurgency effort was not in line with the five points mentioned above and the British government thus performed poorly in regard to the counterinsurgency theory.

During the Ulsterisation phase, the government sought to normalise the situation in Northern Ireland and adopted a policy based on the criminalisation of paramilitary organisations and the professionalization of the local security forces. In effect, this meant that the government adopted an internal security approach that was meant to de-politicalise (and thereby delegitimise) the Republican insurgency. In doing so, it did not prioritise the political aspect over the military aspect of the conflict. While considerable improvements were made in comparison to the militarisation phase, the British counterinsurgency effort was thus fatally flawed because it undermined the political nature of a primarily political conflict.

During the politicisation phase and peace process, the British government’s approach towards the conflict remained largely unchanged. However, it did come to the realisation that it could not defeat the Republican insurgency. Instead, it sought to contain it using its security forces and the intelligence organisation. It was believed that this would eventually lead to the demise of the Republican insurgents. When the conflict eventually cumulated in a stalemate of which both the British government and the Republican insurgents were aware, the peace process began to take hold. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1990s before a substantial effort to tackle the sources of Catholic-nationalist discontent was undertaken and, while the counterinsurgency effort had significantly improved in comparison to the 1970s, the British government did not ‘win over’ the Catholic-nationalist population, nor had it set out to do so.

The findings of this analysis lead to the conclusion that while the British government did develop an internal security approach that ultimately contained the Republican insurgency, it did not deploy a successful counterinsurgency strategy in keeping with the classical counterinsurgency theory.
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. i
Summary ................................................................................................................................. ii
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................... iv
List of Figures and Tables ....................................................................................................... vi
List of Acronyms ..................................................................................................................... vii

Chapter One – Introduction ................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Research Objective and Questions ............................................................................ 3
  1.2 Scientific and Societal Relevance ........................................................................... 4
  1.3 Methodology .............................................................................................................. 5
  1.4 Structure .................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter Two – Theoretical Framework ............................................................................... 9
  2.1 The Classical Counterinsurgency Paradigm ......................................................... 9
  2.2 Revolutionary War ................................................................................................. 12
  2.3 Insurgency ............................................................................................................... 15
  2.4 Counterinsurgency ................................................................................................. 20
  2.5 Success in Counterinsurgency .............................................................................. 21
  2.6 Principles of Counterinsurgency: a Framework for Analysis .............................. 25

Chapter Three – The Troubles of Northern Ireland......................................................... 36
  3.1 The Background to the Conflict .......................................................................... 36
  3.2 Warring Parties ....................................................................................................... 38
  3.3 Analysing the Troubles in Phases ........................................................................ 41

Chapter Four – Counterinsurgency during the Militarisation Phase: 1969-74 ............. 45
  4.1 A Clear Political Aim ............................................................................................ 46
  4.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force .................................... 48
  4.3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation ............................................... 51
  4.4 Priority on Political Measures ............................................................................ 52
  4.5 Intelligence ............................................................................................................ 54
  4.6 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 55

Chapter Five – Counterinsurgency during the Ulsterisation Phase: 1975-81 ............... 56
  5.1 A Clear Political Aim ............................................................................................ 57
  5.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force .................................... 59
  5.3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation ............................................... 61
Chapter Six – Counterinsurgency during the Politicisation Phase and Peace Process: 1982-98

6.1 A Clear Political Aim
6.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force
6.3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation
6.4 Priority on Political Measures
6.5 Intelligence
6.6 Conclusion

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

7.1 Conclusions
7.2 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

References
Appendices
List of Figures and Tables

Figure A.1 Map of Northern Ireland ......................................................... viii
Figure 2.1 Logic for Assignment of Case Outcomes as used by Paul et al. ................................................................. 22
Figure 2.2 Support in a revolutionary war ............................................... 28
Figure 2.3 Deaths by month in the Northern Irish conflict during 1971 .................................................................................. 33
Figure 3.1 Organizations responsible for deaths from political violence, 1969-98 ................................................................. 39
Figure 3.2 The Troubles as a violent struggle in terms of deaths, 1969-98 ................................................................................. 40
Figure 5.1 RUC and UDR/RIR manpower, 1969-83 ................................ 63
Figure 5.2 British troops in Northern Ireland, 1969-83 ............................... 63
Figure 6.1 Paramilitary deaths in set-piece confrontations by the British security forces, 1977-94 ........................................................ 73
Figure 6.2 RUC and UDR/RIR manpower, 1981-99 .................................. 74
Figure 6.3 British troops in Northern Ireland, 1981-98 ................................. 75
Figure B.1 Visit of the NLDA to Stormont estate .................................. 96
## List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIA</td>
<td>Anglo-Irish Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFA</td>
<td>Good Friday Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOC</td>
<td>General Officer Commanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIA</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICRA</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>OIRA</td>
<td>Official Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Prevention of Terrorism Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIR</td>
<td>Royal Irish Regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUC</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>RUC SB</td>
<td>Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>Special Air Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>Social Democratic Labour Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSNI</td>
<td>Secretary of State for Northern Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDA</td>
<td>Ulster Defence Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDR</td>
<td>Ulster Defence Regiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFF</td>
<td>Ulster Freedom Fighters</td>
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<tr>
<td>UVF</td>
<td>Ulster Volunteer Force</td>
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Figure A.1 Map of Northern Ireland.¹

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

"In practice, the fact that the army is so heavily engaged in [Northern] Ireland now makes it unlikely that it will be involved in exactly this task between 1975 and 1980 because it is reasonable to hope that the present emergency will be resolved within five years."

- General Sir Frank Kitson

With the termination of operation Banner in the summer of 2007, the longest military campaign in the history of the British Empire had come to an end. For 38 years, British troops had been deployed in Northern Ireland in an attempt to come to grips with a violent conflict rooted in an ancient antagonistic tradition within its society. Many people, both within and outside the academic world, have studied this conflict, also known as the Troubles, as it fits many explanations. Cairns and Darby, for example, argue that it represents "a tangle of interrelated questions involving historical, religious, political, economic and psychological elements." Moreover, this thesis shows that Northern Ireland, during the Troubles, became the stage for a revolutionary war between the Republicans seeking to secede from the United Kingdom and the British government who sought to prevent them from doing so. Ultimately, the government was relatively successful in this respect as the Republican insurgency was contained and the conflict entered an ongoing peace process. However, I argue that this relatively successful outcome does not, on the whole, correspond with the implication of a successful counterinsurgency strategy by the British government.

Conventionally, war is fought between nation-states and the means used to fight a war are their military forces. However, as for example recent operations of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and other parts of the world show, the conduct of warfare is not bound to conventional means and players. The Correlates of War Project shows that out of

the 654 wars that occurred between 1816 and 2007, only 95 – or 14.5 percent – can be considered ‘conventional’ in this sense. The others were conflicts in which non-state actors were involved. Conflicts such as civil wars and insurgencies.\(^4\) Insurgency has been defined as a “politicomilitary struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control.”\(^5\) Here, the insurgents are unconventional actors that deploy unconventional means to wage their war. A government that faces an insurgency cannot wage a conventional war to counter this unconventional treat. Instead, it should adopt a different strategy that is more suitable for its struggle against the insurgents. The term used in both the military and academic world to describe such a strategy is counterinsurgency – or COIN for short. Combined, insurgency and counterinsurgency represent both sides of a revolutionary war.\(^6\)

Although there are differences within discourses on, and doctrines of counterinsurgency, one major consensus remains: it is perceived as a complex subset of warfare that is difficult to apply in practice.\(^7\) Despite the fact that a government has access to far superior assets than its opponent – a factor often decisive in conventional war – success in counterinsurgency is far from certain. Indeed, a 2010 study by Connable and Libicki, which reports their analysis of 89 clashes between insurgents and governments since the Second World War, shows that merely 28 led to a successful conclusion for the government (as opposed to 26 losses, 19 mixed-outcomes, and 16 still ongoing).\(^8\)

The British counterinsurgency campaign in Northern Ireland accounts for one of the few recent counterinsurgency efforts that is considered successful. Based on this observation, Martin van Creveld sees this as a campaign worth studying because this very success is what distinguishes it from so many other counterinsurgencies that have failed to achieve their goal.\(^9\) While he acknowledges that there may be circumstances under which the methods used by the British cannot be applied, he concludes that the way they deployed counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland represents a good way of dealing with the issue.\(^10\) Given that the outcome of the conflict has indeed been relatively successful – e.g. the British government retained its authority over the region, its army has withdrawn from


\(^5\) Headquarters Department of the Army, "FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5," (Washington DC, 15 December 2006), 1-1.

\(^6\) Ibid. 1-1.

\(^7\) Ibid. 1-1;

David J. Kilcullen, Counterinsurgency, (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2010), 2;

John A. Nagl, Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), xii;


\(^8\) Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, How Insurgencies End, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), 165.


\(^10\) Ibid. 294.
Northern Ireland, and the Republican insurgency has, save for some dissident splinter groups, dwindled significantly – this is an understandable conclusion. Nevertheless, the outcome of the conflict is not free of criticism. Sluka, for example, argues that the fundamental cause of the conflict has not been addressed since the divided population of Northern Ireland continues to shape itself in mutually exclusive political aspirations.\footnote{Jeffrey A. Sluka, "In the Shadow of the Gun: 'Not-War-Not-Peace' and the Future of Conflict in Northern Ireland," Critique of Antropology vol.29(3) (2009): 282.} Moreover, while counterinsurgency experts have frequently deemed the outcome successful,\footnote{I have already mentioned van Creveld, who argues it is one of the very few successful counterinsurgency efforts by a developed country, and Connable and Libicki, who list it among their 28 'government wins'. In addition, Paul Dixon also emphasises its status as 'one of the few cases where the state’s armed forces have defeated insurgents'. While he does not agree that the IRA was defeated, he does argue that the IRA’s armed struggle has been contained successfully. See: Paul Dixon, "’Hearts and Minds’? British Counter-Insurgency Strategy in Northern Ireland,” in The British Approach To Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan, ed. Paul Dixon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 265.} “neither the IRA [Irish Republican Army] nor the security forces ‘won’ the conflict.”\footnote{Brice Dickson, “Counterinsurgency and Human Rights in Northern Ireland,” in The British Approach To Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan, ed. Paul Dixon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 309.} In addition, it took the British government nearly thirty years to quell the Republican insurgency, a relatively long period in comparison to the ten years Connable and Libicki found as the average time span for insurgencies.\footnote{Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, xii.} Finally, its approach, primarily during the early years of the conflict, has been a catalysing factor for the violence that held sway in Northern Ireland for so many years.\footnote{Joost Augusteijn, interview by author. Tape recording. Leiden, May 8, 2014.} Based on these observations, it is questionable whether the relatively successful outcome of the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland coincides with the implementation of a successful counterinsurgency strategy.

\section{Research Objective and Questions}

This study seeks to critically engage with the notion that the British counterinsurgency campaign in Northern Ireland can be perceived as an example of a successful counterinsurgency approach by reflecting upon the core principles of the classical counterinsurgency paradigm and comparing these to the British approach in Northern Ireland. In doing so, it contributes to the scientific discourse on counterinsurgency and the field of social sciences in general as it examines the extent to which a relatively successful completion of a conflict can be attributed to the (counterinsurgency) effort of a developed nation.

This research objective translates into the following question: \textit{to what extent has the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy during the Troubles in Northern Ireland?}
To answer this main research question, I have formulated the following sub-questions:

1. What are the core concepts of the classical counterinsurgency paradigm?
   a. What is counterinsurgency?
   b. What is successful counterinsurgency?
   c. What are the prerequisites for successful counterinsurgency?

2. How did the British approach to Northern Ireland develop throughout the conflict and how does this relate to (classical) counterinsurgency theory?
   a. What were the British strategic objectives throughout the conflict?
   b. Did the British government meet these objectives?
   c. What role played counterinsurgency herein?

1|2 Scientific- and Societal Relevance

This thesis is scientifically relevant because it contributes to the scientific discourse on counterinsurgency. In the wake of 9/11, counterinsurgency has been under a renewed interest as scholars and practitioners rediscovered and re-examined past experiences. Indeed, as Kilcullen observed in 2006, “counter-insurgency is fashionable again: more has been written on it in the past four years than in the last four decades.” The classical counterinsurgency paradigm, from which this thesis primarily derives, takes a central position within this contemporary counterinsurgency discourse. It forms the foundation of what is called the neo-classical school. In contrast, the global counterinsurgency school denounces the localised nature offered by the classical paradigm and opts for a more global approach in order to comprehend the globalised nature of contemporary (counter)insurgencies. This thesis contributes to this debate by using the classical counterinsurgency paradigm as a scope to analyse the Troubles. This allows for an examination of a counterinsurgency effort with a relatively successful outcome and its relation to the principles of classical counterinsurgency theory. In addition, this thesis may contribute to the overall understanding of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Next to this scientific relevance, this thesis also has relevance for society. As counterinsurgency is a subset of warfare, the military, or government personnel and politicians concerned with the conduct of military operations focussing on counterinsurgency, can benefit from this study. Also, it can inform military policy makers in order to shape their ideas on the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. In addition,

the audience for this thesis is not limited to scholars and (military) policy makers but includes everyone with an interest in counterinsurgency, military operations in general, or the conflict in Northern Ireland.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is the final product of a research internship at the section International Security Studies of the Faculty of Military Sciences, which is part of the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) and located in Breda (See Appendix A). It reflects a qualitative study mainly conducted by means of a desk research. Information was primarily acquired by means of a literature study. In addition, a limited number of interviews was conducted.

This section outlines the methodology used to write this thesis. First, it shortly expatiates on the internship that facilitated my research project. Second, it discusses the validity and reliability of this study. Third, it explains the various sources used throughout this thesis and finally it describes the research design and methods.

Because the goal of this thesis is ‘to critically engage with the notion that the British campaign in Northern Ireland was an example of a successful counterinsurgency approach’, I chose to use qualitative research methods which I consider more suitable for this study. This means that the outcomes of this study are broader and more open than that of a quantitative study, which would provide more specific and precise outcomes.18 The validity and reliability of this research is guaranteed through triangulation of various literary insights, official documents released by the British government and military, and semi-structured interviews. Here, validity refers to the extent to which the outcomes of this study are correct whereas reliability refers to the consistency of these outcomes – i.e. that the results of this study would be the same if this research were repeated.19

As mentioned, the information necessary to write this thesis was primarily acquired through a literature study. The sources varied from scientific literature – e.g. scholarly journal articles and books, to official releases by the British government or military, and other non-scientific literature such as newspapers. Before coming to an analysis of the British approach in Northern Ireland, it was necessary to gain a clear understanding of the concept of counterinsurgency itself. I chose to focus on the classical counterinsurgency paradigm. The basis of the decision for this approach is three-fold. First, the classical counterinsurgency paradigm is at the centre of the contemporary counterinsurgency

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19 Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill, Methoden en technieken van onderzoek, (Amsterdam: Pearson Education Benelux, 2008), 140-41.
debate as scholars and practitioners either embrace or criticize the classical theories as a proper framework to analyse contemporary counterinsurgency. The critique of this approach is that it is unfit to understand the complex and global environment of contemporary insurgencies such as Iraq and Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{20} While the conflict in Northern Ireland shows some characteristics similar to these cases, it is not perceived as a contemporary insurgency.\textsuperscript{21} Hence, the classical theories provide a good framework to understand the conflict. Second, the British counterinsurgency efforts to subdue the Republican insurgency predate the emergence of contemporary counterinsurgency theory. By using the classical counterinsurgency paradigm to analyse the British campaign in Northern Ireland, it is possible to test it on the basis of the knowledge available at the time. Finally, by deriving from the classical counterinsurgency paradigm I delimited the scope of this thesis to a workable basis. This allowed for a more in-depth analysis.

In selecting the literature necessary to test whether the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy in Northern Ireland, I consulted scientific and non-scientific literature on a wide range of subjects related to the Troubles and the British approach to the conflict. As most of the literature on these subjects has been written in English, access to the relevant literature was not a problem.

I was also given the opportunity to conduct five semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). The non-standardised format of semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth conversations with the interviewees, who were given the opportunity to share their personal experience and expertise. The interviews were a valuable addition to my desk research as they provided me with additional information. Because the interviewees all had different backgrounds and could provide different kinds of information, each interview was prepared separately, contained different questions and did thus not abide to a general format. All the interviewees were given a clear understanding of the purpose of the interview, their rights as an interviewee, asked if the conversation could be recorded and used within this study and whether their names could be sited. They all agreed to these requests.

I decided to analyse the British counterinsurgency effort by studying three subsequent phases – or cases – within the conflict. The rationale behind this decision is that the British approach to Northern Ireland did not remain constant throughout the Troubles. Therefore, analysing the conflict in different phases allowed for an examination of how the British counterinsurgency approach developed in relation to the classical counterinsurgency paradigm. In effect, this study thus deviates from the standard single case-study as it is a cross-over between a case study and the comparative method, which Arend Lijphart defines as the analysis of a small number of cases and “one of the basic

\textsuperscript{20} Jones and Smith, “Whose Hearts and Whose Minds?,” 98.
\textsuperscript{21} See for example: Kilcullen, Counter-insurgency Redux, 118; 120.
methods – the others being the experimental, statistical, and case study methods – of establishing general empirical propositions.”  

Its merit, he argues, is that when “given inevitable scarcity of time, energy, and financial resources, the intensive analysis of a few cases may be more promising than the superficial statistical analysis of many cases.”

The different phases, which are explained more thoroughly in chapter three, are based upon how the British government approached the conflict in Northern Ireland and roughly coincide with the following time-spans: (i) 1969-74: the period during which the British government deployed its troops and rapidly increased the military presence in Northern Ireland in an attempt to beat down the Republican insurgency; (ii) 1975-1981: the period during which the British government strived for a normalization of the conflict (also known as ‘Ulsterization’ as the British sought to approach the conflict as an internal security problem and eliminate the political context of the conflict); and (iii) 1982-98: the period during which Sinn Féin – the political branch of the IRA – began its political campaign in Northern Ireland and the peace-process which would lead to the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) emerged.

Based upon the classical counterinsurgency paradigm, which I discuss in chapter two, I outline five points as the instruments for analysis that largely correspond with the counterinsurgency principles of Sir Robert Thompson. These five points are: 1) a clear political aim; 2) acting in accordance with the law and minimum use of force; 3) an overall plan and civil-military cooperation; 4) priority on political measures; and 5) intelligence. For each phase I discuss how the British government’s directed its efforts in comparison to these points. From there, I conclude that despite of the relatively successful outcome, the efforts of the British government in Northern Ireland were, on the whole, not an example of a successful counterinsurgency strategy in keeping with classical counterinsurgency theory.

As to further delimit the scope of this thesis, I focus explicitly on an examination of the British counterinsurgency strategy whereas alternative explanations for the relatively successful outcome of the conflict are not examined in great detail. This could be perceived as a limitation to this study because it may hereby not be able to fully explain the course of the conflict. However, as can be derived from the aforementioned research objective, this study does not seek to give an explanation for why the Troubles cumulated into a peace process. Rather, it seeks to elaborate on the British counterinsurgency effort. Hence, while this thesis might produce recommendations for further research into the influence of other factors, it focusses in principle on the British counterinsurgency alone.

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23 Ibid. 685.
1.4 Structure

Hereafter, the second chapter describes the theoretical framework. It deals with the first sub-question, gives an overview of the theoretical insights on revolutionary war, insurgency, and counterinsurgency according to the classical counterinsurgency paradigm and links these insights to the conflict in Northern Ireland, hereby strengthening the argument that Northern Ireland can be perceived as a revolutionary war. The third chapter, ‘The Troubles of Northern Ireland’, gives a short introduction to the background of the conflict after which it introduces the conflict itself and the three phases herein. Subsequently, the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapter each discuss one of the three phases through the framework of the abovementioned instruments. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes this thesis by answering the main research question. In addition, this concluding chapter outlines recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

As this thesis reflects my research on British counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, it is important to take note of what counterinsurgency actually is. This task stretches beyond merely defining the concept. For starters, counterinsurgency always reacts to (and therefore co-exists with) insurgency.  

Hence, one cannot explain the former without considering the latter. If only because the outcome of a reaction is always dependent on the action to which it reacts. This chapter therefore explores counterinsurgency in its broadest sense. In doing so, it seeks to answer three consecutive questions: what is counterinsurgency?; when is counterinsurgency successful?; and what are the prerequisites for successful counterinsurgency? In order to do so, I have constructed this chapter as follows.

First, I delimit the scope of this thesis by arguing for the classical counterinsurgency paradigm as a framework to analyse the conflict in Northern Ireland. I do so by expatiating on the different schools of thought within counterinsurgency discourses. In addition, I reflect on the critique of classical counterinsurgency theory in order to point out possible limitations of this decision. Second, as insurgency and counterinsurgency are two sides of the same coin, I shortly discuss their common ground by describing the features of a revolutionary war. Subsequently, the third and fourth section focus on insurgency and counterinsurgency respectively. Combined, the second, third and fourth sections serve to give a clear understanding of what counterinsurgency is. From there, I move on to the sixth section which deals with the second question posed above and explains when counterinsurgency can be perceived as successful. Finally, the seventh section is in line with the third question and points out the prerequisites for successful counterinsurgency based on the classical paradigm

2|1 The Classical Counterinsurgency Paradigm

Counterinsurgency is not a new concept. As insurgencies stretch back well beyond the start of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, so does the effort to defeat them. Moreover, as we face a world in which wars – in the words of General Rupert Smith – are increasingly
fought ‘amongst the people’\(^2\), the study of insurgency and counterinsurgency alike continues to be of relevance today. Hence, and perhaps unsurprisingly, these subsets of warfare have received a lot of attention – both within and outside the academic world – as people attempt to grasp what they entail. Among them is Kilcullen, a leading figure within the dominant contemporary (counter)insurgency discourse. He distinguishes two paradigms in this field: classical insurgencies and contemporary insurgencies. These paradigms differ in terms of where, how, and when insurgencies arise, and how they are waged in strategic, operational, and tactical terms.\(^3\) In understanding contemporary insurgencies, he argues, the classical theory, which was developed in response to the wars of national liberation from 1944 to about 1980, is of lesser relevance.\(^4\)

Within the contemporary counterinsurgency discourse, a further distinction can be made between the neo-classical school and the global insurgency school. The former arose during the late 1990s and developed throughout the 2000s. It builds upon a renewed interest in issues related to counterinsurgency and draws heavily upon the classical counterinsurgency discourse that formed during the Cold War.\(^5\) In contrast, the global counterinsurgency school is shaped by the events of 9/11 and the globalised nature of Islamist insurgency. While both schools share a common desire to revitalise counterinsurgency thinking and advance its status within defence circles, the global school prioritises a different set of strategies that demand a comprehensive global counterinsurgency effort rather than the revival of the classical paradigm which views (counter)insurgency as a localised affair.\(^6\)

The denouncement of the neo-classical framework in favour of the global school should be seen in conjunction with the complexity of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.\(^7\) While the Northern Ireland conflict does show some characteristics of such contemporary insurgencies, mainly in terms of insurgent operational art and tactics, it bears less resemblance with the global counterinsurgency school on other aspects such as the insurgents’ goals and strategies.\(^8\) Also, the conflict emerged and developed largely during the classical counterinsurgency era – and thus predates the development of the neo-classical and global counterinsurgency schools – and Kilcullen maintains that Northern

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\(^2\) In his book ‘The Utility of Force’, Rupert Smith argues that a paradigm shift has taken place in which the old paradigm of interstate industrial war has made place for a new one: that of war amongst the people. See: Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 5.

\(^3\) See: Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” 112-21, for a thorough description of the differences between classical insurgency and contemporary insurgency.

\(^4\) Ibid. 111-12.


\(^7\) Jones and Smith, “Whose Hearts and Whose Minds,” 94-98.

\(^8\) Ibid. 98.

For example: Kilcullen states that in many contemporary insurgencies, the insurgent fights to preserve status quo rather than challenging it whereas in Northern Ireland, the IRA challenged the status quo. Also, he observes that: “the intent to replace existing governments or create independent states is only partly evident today” while for the Republican insurgents, this was the main objective. See: Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” 112-17.
Ireland was a traditional insurgency. Based on these observations, I argue that the classical counterinsurgency paradigm is the proper framework to analyse the Troubles.

There are three key theorists in the classical counterinsurgency paradigm: David Galula, Frank Kitson, and Robert Thompson. Their writings continue to be of influence today and form the foundation of contemporary counterinsurgency doctrines such as the latest British Army Field Manual 10-1 and the U.S. Army/Marine Corps FM 3-24. Although I do not limit myself solely to their explanations of counterinsurgency, I acknowledge their leading position within the counterinsurgency discourse. Hence, their insights have a pivotal position in my analysis of the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland. While I do not refrain from using recent insights entirely, the classical paradigm remains the main scope of this thesis and insights of theorists nested within the contemporary paradigms are used only insofar as they fit within this scope.

However influential, the classical counterinsurgency paradigm is not free of criticism and limitations. According to Stathis N. Kalyvas, it is possible to pinpoint two key elements within social and political theory that underlie it. First, he argues, "it is informed by a constructivist understanding of identities as malleable (or at least of individual behaviour as relatively independent of identities)." The malleability of identities is a point of contention within social sciences. Primordialists for example, see identity as a deeply rooted, powerful political motivation that is very slow to change. Although a constructivist perception is not necessarily at fault, classical counterinsurgency theorists refer to the ‘neutral population’ as a homogeneous mass waiting to be won over by either the insurgents or the counter-insurgents. As with the Protestant-unionist and Catholic-nationalist populations in Northern Ireland, the reality of the situation shows that identities may be more fixed than counterinsurgency theory presumes. While this does not mean that identities may never change, Fitzsimmons points out that the time-span of a revolutionary war generally is "quite short to the generational time frames over which group identities and affiliations tend to evolve." He then draws upon Ted Robert Gurr to show that group identities tend to grow in importance when civil conflict occurs in multi-ethnic societies. This reinforces group boundaries and further erodes the malleability of these identities.

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9 Ibid. 118.
14 Ibid. 20
15 Ibid. 20
The second key element Kalyvas points out is a misperception of a revolutionary war’s battleground as a place where the population interacts directly with the counter-insurgents or the insurgents. He points out that within classical counterinsurgency thinking, it is perceived that if the link between the population and the insurgents is severed, the population will automatically turn to the government. This reasoning is at fault, he argues, because it neglects the local and regional networks in which the population is embedded.\(^{16}\)

The malleability of the population and the way a population interacts with the counter-insurgents or insurgents are not the sole elements of classical counterinsurgency theory that have been criticised. Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, for example, argued that the support of the population is not a necessity for an insurgent movement to initiate its campaign. They found that: “even fairly far along in the struggle, [insurgents] can make substantial progress \textit{without} substantial popular endorsement.”\(^{17}\) The same goes for the counter-insurgents, they argued, as it is not the genuine support of the population that decides who is victorious in a revolutionary war. Rather, they propose an alternative approach that suggests that population behaviour is also dependent on a consideration of the costs and opportunities for supporting either side by which a population is confronted.\(^{18}\) This is a more economic explanation of why insurgencies fail or prevail, greed over grievance, so to say. In this sense, the classical counterinsurgency paradigm contradicts the perception of many contemporary researchers, who according to Kalyvas, “have privileged, instead, ‘greed’ interpretations.”\(^{19}\) While this is not necessarily a limitation in itself, it goes back to the limitation posed in the introductory chapter: by using classical counterinsurgency theory as a paradigm to analyse the Troubles, alternative explanations for the relatively successful outcome of the conflict might be excluded.

\section*{2.2 Revolutionary War}

In order to gain a proper understanding of counterinsurgency, it is necessary to take a step back and place this subset of warfare within its broader context. According to FM 3-24, the latest U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine,\(^{20}\) insurgency and counterinsurgency, despite being distinctively different types of operations, represent two sides of the same

\begin{itemize}
  \item \(^{16}\) Kalyvas, ”Review Symposium,” 352.
  \item \(^{17}\) Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, \textit{Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts}, RAND corporation (Chigago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970), 149.
  \item \(^{18}\) Ibid. 150.
  \item \(^{19}\) Kalyvas, ”Review Symposium,” 351.
  \item \(^{20}\) FM 3-24 draws heavily on classical theory and has become a much appreciated and highly influential document within the current counterinsurgency discourse. See: Gian Gentile, \textit{Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency} (New York: The New Press, 2013), 2.
\end{itemize}
type of conflict which has been described as revolutionary war\textsuperscript{21} – a term that was also used by Galula and Thompson.\textsuperscript{22} Terminology is often disputed, however, and ‘revolutionary war’ poses no exception. Even over forty years ago, Kitson pointed out that: “...to many people such an expression is too heavily weighted towards the activities of communist or left-wing groups.”\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, it is a recurring term within classical theory to describe the phenomenon otherwise known as insurgency and counterinsurgency. Moreover, as opposed to other definitions, it leaves little room for ambiguity. The term ‘small wars’, for example, which came into use at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and is still used to date, is explained by Colonel Callwell as: “…to include all campaigns other than those where both the opposing sides consist of regular troops.”\textsuperscript{24} This categorization (which also fits the description of ‘irregular warfare’) is rather broad, however, and may entail forms of conflict other than insurgency and counterinsurgency. I do therefore not embark on a quest to redefine the concept of revolutionary wars and use the term as it stands.

Revolutionary wars are included within the above mentioned category of conflict known as irregular warfare.\textsuperscript{25} This categorization gives way to an important feature of insurgency and counterinsurgency: they deviate from what is perceived as regular (or conventional) warfare. Shy and Collier illustrate this by stating that: “it is not ‘war’ in the generally understood sense of the word, not international war or war between nations, with its usual (though not invariable) expectation that fighting will lead, sooner or later, to some negotiated settlement between the belligerent powers.”\textsuperscript{26} Instead, revolutionary wars are primarily an internal conflict in which a non-state actor, the insurgent, faces the government of that state, the counter-insurgent. Hence, at its most basic: a revolutionary war refers to the armed conflict that arises when an insurgent movement attempts to seize political power – or split off from the existing country – and the counter-insurgent reacts to prevent it from doing so.\textsuperscript{27} In this sense, I argue that the conflict in Northern Ireland, which witnessed an insurgent movement – the IRA – attempting to split off from the United Kingdom while the British government tried to prevent it from succeeding, can be perceived as a revolutionary war.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{21} FM 3-24, 1-1.
\bibitem{22} Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 3; Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency; Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1966), 13.
\bibitem{23} Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 2.
\bibitem{24} C.E. Callwell, Small Wars; Their Principles and Practice, 1906, reprint, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 21.
\bibitem{25} FM 3-24, 1-1.
\bibitem{27} Ibid. 817;
Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 3.
\end{thebibliography}
According to Galula, revolutionary wars are civil wars. However, a civil war is not necessarily a revolutionary war. There is a profound difference between the two. Kalyvas’ definition of civil wars, for example, reads that: “civil war is defined as armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities.” Revolutionary wars can be grouped under this definition. At the same time, it includes conflicts like the ‘American War Between the States’, which, despite being fought within the boundaries of a sovereign state and between the citizens of that state, does not resemble a revolutionary war since the belligerents did not oppose each other as insurgents and counter-insurgents.

Therefore, I conceive of revolutionary war as a distinct form of civil war. Coming back to the basic definition posed above, what makes a civil war a revolutionary war is the challenge to a government’s authority by an insurgent movement.

This definition is by no means exhaustive. On the contrary, while it shows that revolutionary wars are political, this characteristic is all but unique to this subset of warfare. Indeed, as was already accepted by Carl von Clausewitz in his famous observation that “war is merely the continuation of politics by other means”, war in its broadest sense is about reaching a political objective. However, whereas the adversaries in conventional wars are similar, those in revolutionary wars are not. Galula recognized this and stated that: “there is an asymmetry between the opposite camps of a revolutionary war. This phenomenon results from the very nature of the war, from the disproportion of strength between the opponents at the outset, and from the difference in essence between their assets and their liabilities.” On the one hand, he argued, this means that strategic initiative lies with the insurgents and that the insurgency can reach a high degree of development while the counter-insurgents are incapable of taking effective measures to stop the insurgents in their tracks. This is because, unlike the players in conventional wars, the insurgents represent nothing that would justify a large effort by the counter-insurgents before they take action towards their objective. On the other hand, at the start of a revolutionary war, the assets available through the apparatus of the state are in hands of the counter-insurgents. The insurgents thus have to grow in strength as the conflict unfolds whereas the counter-insurgents will weaken as their adversary becomes more successful.

In light of this asymmetry between the warring parties in a revolutionary war, it should come as no surprise that insurgents do not engage their adversary in its own game, for they are certain to go to the wall if they do so. This was already accepted by

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28 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 4.
30 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 5.
32 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 5.
33 Ibid. 5-6.
T.E. Lawrence, who in writing down his experiences in irregular warfare almost a century ago stated that whereas most wars are wars of contact in which both forces strive to keep in touch to avoid tactical surprise, irregular forces facing a regular opponent should wage a war of detachment. He observed that his ‘irregulars’ should avoid the enemy, not disclosing themselves until the moment of attack. This attack must be directed not at the opponent’s men, but against its materials. “At length”, he continued, “we developed an unconscious habit of never engaging the enemy at all.” 34 In addition, the battlefield upon which a revolutionary war unfolds is not bound to a geographical space. Rather, the fight is conducted through the population and the support of this population is the most vital objective in the struggle for political power. 35 This was also realised by the Republican insurgents in Northern Ireland. Former IRA volunteer Eugene Coyle, for example, remarks that the support of the community was a necessity for the IRA to carry out its military campaign. “You need the support of the people,” he argues, “This is why the IRA were so successful, especially within areas such as Derry.” 36

2.3 Insurgency

Counterinsurgency thus refers to a government’s effort during a revolutionary war meant to prevent its adversary – the insurgents waging an insurgency – from succeeding. As mentioned above, counterinsurgency and insurgency are “distinctly different types of operations.” 37 Yet, apart from the observation that they represent both sides of a revolutionary war, I have left both terms largely unexplained. Because a clear understanding of insurgency is vital to comprehend counterinsurgency, I first elaborate the concept of insurgency before coming to its reactive strategy. In doing so, I do not merely define the concept but also shortly expatiate on its aspects and conduct. Also, I make clear that the Republican struggle against the British government can be perceived as an insurgency.

The first problem to be faced by anyone concerned with insurgency are the distinct concepts and terminology that are often mentioned in the same breath. Terrorism, guerrilla, subversion and insurgency, for example, are often used to describe the same

35 Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 91-92;
Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 6;
Kilcullen, Counter-Insurgency Redux, 117;
Kitson, Low Intensity Operations ,29;
37 FM 3-24, 1-1.
phenomenon. Hence, it is important to determine what sets them apart in order to grasp what insurgency entails. Here, a first distinction should be made between insurgency and guerrilla warfare. In order to do so, it is necessary to understand what is meant by guerrilla warfare itself.

While guerrilla tactics can be traced back even further in time, the term 'guerrilla' has its origin in the Spanish people’s war against Napoleon during the early 19th century and literally means 'little war'. It is characterised by the basic tenet of guerrillas to only give battle on their own terms, their light armament, high mobility and ability to disappear amongst the civilian population. This also reflects the definition of guerrilla by Mao Tse-Tung, the protagonist of the Chinese People's Revolutionary War and whose framework embodies a highly influential position within the (counter)insurgency discourse. He defines guerrilla warfare as:

"The tactics of avoiding strength and striking at weakness, of flitting about and having no fixed position, and of subduing the enemy according to circumstances, and when we do not oppose the enemy according to the ordinary rules of tactics."

The fact that Mao Tse-Tung writes on guerrilla gives way to an important element in understanding how it differs from insurgency: it can be part of an insurgency effort. Yet guerrilla warfare is not bound to insurgency alone. This can be illustrated by the fact that guerrillas have operated in support of conventional forces on many occasions. In other words, guerrilla tactics are a means of waging an insurgency. Guerrilla in itself, however, is a form of warfare that can serve other purposes than that of an insurgency.

The second distinction in the terminology referred to above is between insurgency and subversion. Again, as is the case with guerrilla warfare and insurgency, both concepts are closely related. Unlike guerrilla, however, subversion always serves the same purpose as an insurgency. The difference, therefore, lies not in the purpose they serve but in their conduct. According to Kitson, subversion refers to: "...all measures short of the use of armed force taken by one section of the people of a country to overthrow those governing the country at the time, or to force them to do things which they do not want to do." Insurgency, he argues in turn, covers the use of armed force by

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40 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 159;
42 Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, 2;
Shy and Collier, "Revolutionary War," 817;
Kitzen, "Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency," 8.
a section of the people for the same purposes as subversion. The two should be seen in conjunction as subversion often precedes an insurgency and is aimed at the creation and expansion of the support base amongst the population which the insurgents desperately need to wage their campaign against the government – a process that generally continues during the violent phase of an insurgency. Hence, like guerrilla warfare, subversion is a tool at the disposal of the insurgents which may be deployed to win their objective: the population.

Through the means of subversion insurgents may have a wide array of options at their disposal short of the use of force. In case these prove insufficient, they can intensify their campaign by using guerrilla tactics in order to further erode the government’s support base. However, insurgents may also resort to another form of violent action to achieve their goals: terrorism. Again, like guerrilla and subversion, terrorism can be perceived as a means of action at the disposal of the insurgents rather than as a synonymous understanding. The 2001 British military doctrine AFM 1-10 defines terrorism therefore as: "the use of indiscriminate violence to intimidate the general majority of people in a state to accept the political changes advocated by the insurgents." While terrorism is not bound to insurgency alone and its effects may reach well beyond the scope of a single state, this definition does capture the core element of what terrorism is accepted to be about: the use of indiscriminate violence to influence political behaviour. What sets terrorism apart from other acts of indiscriminate violence – such as, for example, ‘strategic bombing’ during the Second World War – is that the violence is used through extranormal means. Moreover, as is emphasised by Mark Juergensmeyer: "terrorism is meant to terrify [...] the public response to the violence – the trembling that terrorism effects – is part of the meaning of the term." Hence, it is about achieving a psychological effect on the population rather than the act in itself.

The above makes clear that terrorism, subversion and guerrilla are not synonymous with insurgency but that they are all strategies or means at the disposal of the insurgents. In addition, as I discussed in the section on revolutionary war, insurgencies are primarily internal conflicts waged in order to ‘seize political power’. Based on these observations, I conceive of insurgency as it is defined by Thomas Mockaitis: an internal struggle in which a disaffected group – the insurgents – seek to gain control of a nation by using "a hybrid

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46 AFM 1-10 (2001), 3-4.
form of conflict that combines subversion, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism." No two cases are the same, however, as each insurgency differs not only in terms of how means of subversion, guerrilla and terrorism are deployed, but also takes place in its own context of time and space. Yet despite such differences, theory dictates one important prerequisite for success that lies at the basis of any insurgency: a good cause. Without it, the insurgents have little hope of winning over the support of the population.

Given a basic cause, the insurgents can tack other issues on to it in order to mobilize the people and strengthen their support base, which can be subdivided in an active and a passively supportive part of the population. In order for an insurgency to work, the amount of active support does not have to be high. This was already accepted by Lawrence, who observed that: “rebellions can be made by 2 per cent. active in a striking force, and 98 per cent. passively sympathetic.” This observation has retained much of its relevance and, while the proposed percentages may deviate, the notion of a relatively small active support base next to a large passively supportive population for the insurgents to be effective has also been adopted by others.

If the insurgents have a cause and a sufficient base of support amongst the population, they may pose a serious challenge to the opposing government. In doing so, the most renowned modus operandi for their insurgency can be derived from the writings of Mao Tse-Tung. This so-called Maoist model foresees in a protracted struggle – a feature accepted to be common to insurgencies – in which the insurgents eventually overthrow the government by use of a regular revolutionary army which develops from, and operates in conjunction with the insurgents’ guerrilla forces. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mao recognised that the population was the primary asset to achieve success in a revolutionary struggle. In order to come to success, however, an insurgency does not have to cumulate into the development of a ‘regular revolutionary army’. This was already understood by General Grivas in his struggle against British colonial rule over Cyprus as he formulated his aim: “to draw the attention of international public opinion, especially among the allies of Greece, to the Cyprus question which might prove a source of trouble to them unless a settlement were found that satisfied our claims.”

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50 Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 3.
51 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 27; Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 13; Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 21.
52 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 21.
53 Lawrence, “The Evolution Of A Revolt,” 22.
54 See: Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 63; Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 102; and FM 3-24, 1-20.
55 Mockaitis, British Counterinsurgency, 6; Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 8; FM 3-24, 1-1.
56 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 5.
Grivas’ aim shows that a total defeat of the government may not be a necessity for a successful insurgency. Moreover, while insurgency is primarily an internal affair in which the support of the local population is vital, his objective ‘to draw the attention of the international public opinion’ indicates that insurgencies are not limited to internal influences. According to Kilcullen, this is especially true for contemporary insurgencies, where “the people remain the prize, but comprise a global audience rather than a local citizenry.” Yet even the Maoist post-colonial struggles could involve at least two distinctive populations as insurgents not only strove to win over the local population for their cause but also sought to demoralize the metropolitan population of the intervening power. Hence, while support of the local population remains the foremost prerequisite for success, the influence of external parties cannot be ruled out.

Based on the above, I argue that Northern Ireland became the stage for a Republican insurgency during the Troubles. While the IRA had previously posed a minor threat to the British authority over Northern Ireland, the civil rights movement of the late 1960s and the quickly deteriorating situation following the deployment of the army in 1969 provided the Republican movement with the subversion it needed to initiate its armed struggle. In doing so, it did not oppose the British government through conventional means and tactics. Rather, the Republicans used a mixture of subversion, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism – i.e. an insurgency – to achieve their goal: to secede from the United Kingdom and seek unification with the Republic of Ireland.

This Republican insurgency deviated from the rural revolutionary insurgency envisaged by Mao. Yet a Maoist character is not a prerequisite for an armed struggle to qualify as an insurgency. On the contrary, as is also emphasised by Kitson: “there is a wide difference of approach between one exponent of insurgency and another.” In fact, he draws upon J.J. McCuen to describe an alternative path to Mao’s rural insurgency. This path, which outlines three phases for urban insurgency (organization, civil disorder and terrorism), bears more resemblance to the situation in Northern Ireland. Moreover, the Republican insurgency shows the characteristics mentioned above: it derived from a clear cause – the desire to secede from the United Kingdom and unify with the Republic of Ireland; a small active support base – during the first few years of the conflict, when numerical strength of the IRA factions was at its highest level, membership never rose

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58 Kilcullen, Counter-Insurgency Redux, 122.
61 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 6.
62 Ibid. 38.
above roughly 2,000 people of whom not all could be counted as active members;\textsuperscript{63} and relied on national as well as international support for the continuation of its struggle.

\section*{2.4 Counterinsurgency}

Having shortly expatiated on insurgency I can now come to its reactive strategy – counterinsurgency – and formulate an answer to the logical question that arises to those not familiar with this subset of warfare: what is counterinsurgency? In part, this question can be answered based on what I have written above.

First of all, as can be derived from the section on revolutionary war, it is a non-conventional form of warfare that is meant to cope with a specific threat: insurgency. Due to the nature of revolutionary wars, a government engaged in a counterinsurgency effort faces a challenge that is different from the interstate war for which its armed forces are generally designed. Second, as it is a reactive strategy to an insurgency – which may differ in terms of how means of subversion, guerrilla and terrorism are deployed – its form depends on the insurgency it seeks to counter. Therefore, in its broadest sense, counterinsurgency can be perceived in the words of Kilcullen, who describes it as “an umbrella term that describes the complete range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgencies.”\textsuperscript{64} This definition is insufficient, however, as it fails to grasp what the measures at a government’s disposal are, and how or when a government can deploy these measures. Finally, the support of the population is not only a vital objective for the insurgents but equally so for the counter-insurgents as revolutionary wars are fought through the population.

In short, counterinsurgency refers to the attempt to defend a government’s position of power in response to an insurgency. This response is tied to certain rules that restrict and determine how a government may shape its counterinsurgency campaign. A first point of discussion that arises is the question as to why it should be a responsive strategy if a government could prevent an insurgent movement from gaining a foothold in the first place. After all, it has the assets at hand to beat down dissident behaviour when it arises. However, as is also pointed out by Mockaitis, it is a delicate matter to determine at what point opposition becomes subversion. Moreover, if a government wishes to remain a democratic and open society, it shall struggle to beat down an insurgency beforehand as this inevitably fails to coincide with this desire.\textsuperscript{65}

Another example of how a government is restricted in its counterinsurgency effort can be found in the use of force. While this is often an essential part of counterinsurgency, a government should be careful in its application because

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[63]{Ministry of Defence, \textit{Operation Banner}, 3-2.}
\footnotetext[64]{Kilcullen, \textit{Counterinsurgency}, 1.}
\footnotetext[65]{Mockaitis, \textit{British Counterinsurgency}, 6.}
\end{footnotes}
indiscriminate violence is likely to do more good to the insurgents’ cause than to its own.\textsuperscript{66} In effect, this means that counter-insurgents should show restraint with regard to the use of force. This observation is not a novelty. It arose even before the invention of the term ‘counterinsurgency’ itself. Writing in 1934, Charles Gwynn argued that the amount of force used by a government to counter a revolutionary movement “must be the minimum the situation demands.”\textsuperscript{67} In fact, this is the second out of four general principles he listed to which armed forces engaged in countering revolutionary movements should abide. Before coming to these — and other — principles of counterinsurgency, however, I first define the concept itself.

In a report by the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) that analyses the British army’s operations in Northern Ireland, a distinction is made at the tactical level, i.e. the way military units are deployed in order to contribute to the goals of the operation as a whole,\textsuperscript{68} between counterinsurgency, counterterrorism and public order operations.\textsuperscript{69} The report states that 1972 marked a turning point in the operations in Northern Ireland and saw a shift from counterinsurgency operations to counterterrorism.\textsuperscript{70} However, as I argued in the section above, an insurgency is a form of conflict that combines means of subversion, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. In this sense, counterinsurgency – which entails ‘the complete range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgencies’ – would also encompass counterterrorism operations. Also, the range of measures used by a government to counter an insurgency are not solely military. As revolutionary wars are primarily a political conflict, the main effort in counterinsurgency should be political as well. This is also emphasised by Galula, who describes counterinsurgency as 80 percent political and 20 percent military.\textsuperscript{71} Combining the various takes on counterinsurgency that have been discussed above, I define counterinsurgency as: \textit{a reactive strategy to an insurgency by – or in aid of – the government defending the status quo that covers the wide range of political and military efforts taken to prevent the insurgents from winning over the support of the population while simultaneously convincing this population of the government’s cause.}

## 2.5 Success in Counterinsurgency

The previous three sections served the purpose of formulating a clear understanding of what counterinsurgency is: the strategy a government deploys in an attempt to successfully overcome an insurgency. But what exactly is success in counterinsurgency?

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Kitzen, “Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency,” 10.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Charles W. Gwynn, \textit{Imperial Policing}, (London: Macmillan And Co. Ltd., 1934), 14.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Defensiestaf, “Nederlandse Defensiedoctrine,” \textit{NDD}, (Den Haag: Defensie, 2005), 19.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ministry of Defence, \textit{Operation Banner}, 5-1.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ministry of Defence, \textit{Operation Banner}, 2-10
\item \textsuperscript{71} Galula, \textit{Counterinsurgency Warfare}, 66
\end{itemize}
While the answer to this question might appear self-evident – the government wins, the insurgents lose – the outcome of a revolutionary war is not always this clear cut in absolute terms. Thompson, for example, accepted that in fighting insurgents, “the hard core will not be completely defeated and will tend to disperse and scatter into smaller, hard-hitting groups which can still do a great deal of damage.” So if the total destruction of an insurgent movement is not a necessity to speak of counterinsurgency success, what is?

In a 2010 RAND study, Paul et al. analysed a set of 30 insurgencies that began and were resolved between 1978 and 2008. In order to determine whether a counterinsurgency force succeeded in beating an insurgency. For each case, they tested if the government against which the insurgency arose stayed in power and whether it retained sovereignty over the region of conflict. Based on the criteria included within figure 2.1, they then characterised the outcome of the cases as either a counterinsurgency win, not a counterinsurgency win, or mixed. By and large, these categorizations coincide with those of Connable and Libicki, who identify four possible outcomes in their study How Insurgencies End. In addition to the three mentioned above – which they coined government loss, government victory, and mixed – they include a fourth category coined ‘inconclusive or ongoing’. As its name clearly suggests, this latter category refers to revolutionary wars that have not yet reached a conclusive end-state.

![Figure 2.1 Logic for Assignment of Case Outcomes as used by Paul et al.](image-url)

72 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 148.
73 Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, Victory has a Thousand Fathers, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010), 5-10.
74 Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, 13-14.
75 Paul et al., Victory has a Thousand Fathers, 9.
While the above scheme might imply that classifying outcomes of revolutionary wars is easy, it proves a more difficult task in practice. Not only does the reality of a situation often fail to coincide with a clear government ‘win’ or ‘loss’, a mixed outcome tends to be more favourable to one of the belligerent parties than the other. Therefore, Paul et al. categorised mixed outcomes favouring the insurgents as a case in which the government did not win whereas a mixed outcome favouring the government was characterised as a government win. Connable and Libicki keep the ‘mixed’ categorization intact and explain that: “we separate [an insurgent] victory from muddled or mixed outcomes by identifying only those insurgencies that effected a political, and thereby a social, upheaval through an existing process. If the current government survived but made some concessions to insurgents, we relegated the case to ‘mixed outcome’. A government, they argue in turn, wins by destroying the insurgent cadre, its political structure or both. In addition, they state that: “a government can also achieve victory through legitimate political channels, although this method typically requires at least some concessions to insurgent demands.” This is where they "drew a fine line between government victories and mixed outcomes."

The Republican insurgency did not result in a government loss as the British government retained the political authority over Northern Ireland. It did, however, result in the termination of the Protestant dominated regime in 1972 and an improved position of the Catholic/nationalist minority within the region. Moreover, the struggle between the Republicans and the British government culminated into mutually perceived stalemate which brought representatives of the warring parties to the negotiating table. Hence, the conflict did not result in a clear government win either. Based on the outcome-categorization outlined above, I therefore argue that the revolutionary war in Northern Ireland had a mixed outcome. Since this categorization covers a wide range of possibilities favourable to either the government or the insurgents, a further examination of when counterinsurgency can be perceived as a success is necessary to evaluate the British government’s efforts.

This further examination requires a deepening of when a mixed outcome can be perceived as a counterinsurgency success. One example of this is offered by Paul et al., who argue that the insurgency in El Salvador between 1979-92 resulted in a mixed outcome favourable to the government – i.e. a ‘counterinsurgency win’. They argue that: “the conflict reached a stalemate in the late 1980s and was ultimately resolved through a settlement favourable to the government as external support to the insurgents dwindled and participation in the political process became an increasingly tenable approach to

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76 Ibid. 10.
77 Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, 14.
78 Ibid. 17.
79 Ibid. 19-20.
redressing grievances.”

In addition, as is shown in Connable and Libicki’s categorization of government wins and losses above, it is inevitable that if a government is making use of ‘legitimate political channels’ to end an insurgency, it shall have to make at least some concessions to insurgent demands. Based on these observations, I argue that if a government succeeds in politicising a conflict within its own constitutional boundaries and hereby end the insurgents’ violent struggle, the outcome can be perceived as successful. This is also emphasised by Martijn Kitzen, counterinsurgency expert at the NLDA, who explains that if the insurgents participate in a political system as opposed to waging an insurgency, they have become part of this system and it is in their interest to abide to its rules and laws.

In light of this, I observe that Northern Ireland resulted in a situation favourable to the government. This is also emphasised by John Newsinger, who states that there is no doubt that the outcome of the Troubles is a defeat for Irish republicanism because Republicans would never have accepted a negotiated settlement in which Northern Ireland did not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom at any earlier stage in the conflict. He continues to describe that: “as for the British, while they have certainly not achieved their preferred solution (the destruction of the IRA), they have achieved a settlement that is compatible with their interests, a settlement that has involved the Republican movement compromising its historic objectives, abandoning the armed struggle and embracing constitutional politics.” This quote equally shows that the outcome of the conflict has not been conclusive since the Republican insurgent movement has not ceased to exist. However, as can be derived from Thompson’s quote at the beginning of this section, this is not a prerequisite for a counterinsurgency effort to be perceived as successful. In addition, Galula emphasised that victory in counterinsurgency is not achieved through the destruction of the insurgents’ forces. Rather, he argued, “a victory is that plus the permanent isolation of the insurgents from the population, isolation is not enforced upon the population but maintained by and with the population.”

On the basis of the theories included in this section, I argue that success in counterinsurgency can be determined on the following set of observations: first and foremost, the government must stay in power and retain its sovereignty over the region; second, the government must deny the insurgents the capability to continue its campaign on their own terms; and third, the defeat of the insurgents need not be total as long as the population ceases to perceive their struggle as legitimate – e.g. they accept a negotiated settlement. The Troubles in Northern Ireland eventually cumulated into a

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80 Paul et al., *Victory has a Thousand Fathers*, 13.
82 Martijn Kitzen, interview by author. Tape Recording, Breda, May 21, 2014.
84 Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 57.
situation in line with these observations. The British government retained its authority over Northern Ireland, the Republican insurgency dwindled as its protagonists continued to pursue their goals through legitimate politics, and the Catholic population of Northern Ireland favours the peaceful settlement over a continuation of violence. Indeed, the outcome of the British counterinsurgency effort can be perceived as relatively successful. However, whether this outcome is the result of an adaptation of a successful counterinsurgency strategy remains questionable. Not only did the conflict well exceed the average time span of a revolutionary war, the outcome – despite being successful in depriving the Republican movement from reaching its objective through an insurgency – was far from decisive as the tensions between the Catholic and Protestant populations have remained unsolved. Therefore, the question central to this thesis – to what extent has the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy during the Troubles in Northern Ireland? – retains much of its relevance.

2.6 Principles of Counterinsurgency: a Framework for Analysis

Various theorists have come up with ideas and prerequisites to which a government’s counterinsurgency strategy should abide. As a result, it is possible to derive from the literature a number of counterinsurgency principles that are to be taken into account by a government and its armed forces if they wish to make a claim for a successful counterinsurgency strategy. It is with these principles that this section is concerned and, in their evaluation, it formulates an answer to the third question posed at the beginning of this chapter: ‘what are the prerequisites for successful counterinsurgency?’ Based on these findings, I then compose a five-point framework for analysis.

Theories of counterinsurgency predate the invention of the term. According to Marston and Malkasian, the history of its study can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century, when scholars and military officers began to reflect on campaigns between colonial powers and insurgent opponents. Some of the best examples of these early counterinsurgency theorists, they argue, are the British officers Colonel C.E. Callwell, whose definition of ‘small wars’ I mentioned earlier in this chapter, and Major-General Charles Gwynn, who I mentioned in the fourth section. Callwell discussed the conduct of military operations in a colonial setting in his 1896 book ‘Small Wars; their principles & practice’. While the bulk of the book is concerned with the actual conduct and tactics of these military operations, a number of principles to which these operations should be conducted are discussed in the first ten chapters. These principles are aimed at directing

85 Based on a study of 89 insurgencies, Connable and Libicki found that insurgencies last approximately ten years and that a government’s chances of winning may increase slightly over time. See: Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, xii.

86 Marston and Malkasian, Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare, 13.
the military action – e.g. the importance of a clear and well-defined military objective and the design of a military supply chain. Callwell’s approach to small wars focusses solely on the military aspects of these conflicts. Therefore, while he does give a thorough description of how these differ from conventional warfare, I argue that he only covers the lesser aspect of counterinsurgency strategies which should be, as I argued above, primarily political.

Gwynn also described the role of the army in countering revolutionary movements in his book ‘Imperial Policing’ but, contrary to Callwell, he emphasised that this is not solely a military affair. Preluding the emergence of the counterinsurgency paradigm in the Cold War, he described the government’s effort as follows:

“The suppression of such [revolutionary] movements, unless nipped in the bud, is a slow business, generally necessitating the employment of numbers out of all proportion to the actual fighting value of the rebels, owing to the unavoidable dispersion of troops and the absence of a definite objective. It becomes a battle of wits in which the development of a well-organized intelligence service, great mobility, rapid means of intercommunication and close co-operation between all sections of the government forces are essential.”

Gwynn continued to describe that if a widespread agitation develops from the unrest, (reasonable) precautions and close cooperation between civil and military authorities are required to ensure that if the situation escalates and the police require reinforcement, the army is capable of timely intervention. If the army is indeed called upon this task, it should take an impartial stand, separate the warring parties, and take measures to prevent the renewal of fights. In doing so, Gwynn argued that there are four general principles to which the army’s effort should abide. The first principle he pointed out is that questions of policy must remain vested in the civil government and that the policy of the government must be loyally carried out by the armed forces. The second, which I already mentioned in the fourth section, reads that the amount of force should be the minimum the situation demands. This is because, as Gwynn put it, “the hostile forces are fellow citizens of the [British] Empire,” and “the military object is to re-establish the control of the civil power and secure its acceptance without an aftermath of bitterness.”

Moreover, as argued before, too much violence by the government’s forces may lead the population to support the insurgents’ cause. The third principle is allied with this principle of minimum force and dictates that action should be ‘firm and timely’ because delay will be interpreted as weakness and may lead to a rapid deterioration of the situation. Finally, Gwynn’s fourth principle underscores the importance of co-operation between the armed

87 Callwell, Small Wars, 34-42; 57-68.
88 Gwynn, Imperial Policing, 11-12.
89 Ibid. 14.
forces and civil-power because, he argued, the task of restoring order does not rest on the army alone.  

According to Edwards, Gwynn’s *Imperial Policing* soon became the leading document on internal security operations for the British armed forces and his principles shaped the overarching ethos of British counterinsurgency thinking. Moreover, while Gwynn wrote down his principles with regard to the British expeditionary struggles in the Empire’s colonies, the situation he addressed – an army operating in support of, or taking over the civil service – bears much resemblance to that of Northern Ireland. In fact, when the British army was first deployed during the Troubles in 1969, it was envisioned as a short term operation to aid the police and not as the long term politico-military campaign it became. Yet despite this resemblance in terms of army deployment, the situation in Northern Ireland was different from that of the colonies addressed in Gwynn’s *Imperial Policing*. His first and fourth principles, for example, would work towards a deterioration of the conflict rather than the providing of a solid framework for success. Kennedy-Pipe & McInnes illustrate this and describe that:

"As with previous colonial emergencies, in Northern Ireland civilian authorities remained in charge. In Northern Ireland, however, the situation was complicated both by the confused relations between Westminster and Stormont on security issues, and the fact that Stormont remained illegitimate in Catholic eyes. It therefore proved impossible to devise a coordinated politico-military strategy which would woo Catholic support away from the IRA and which at the same time retained Protestant support. Nor could the army work closely with the local police force, as it had in colonial emergencies, because working in tandem with the Protestant-dominated RUC would alienate the army from the Catholic community."

Based on the above, it is possible to observe that counterinsurgency principles do not necessarily uphold as prerequisites for success. But a more accurate observation, I argue, would be that in the case of Northern Ireland, the principles that dictated the British approach did not necessarily coincide with the overarching principle of ‘winning the support of the population’. This is in line with the four counterinsurgency laws of David Galula, which stress the importance of the support of the population for the counter-insurgents’ cause and dictate that:

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90 Ibid. 12-16.
93 Ibid. 19.
1. The support of the population is as necessary for the counter-insurgents as for the insurgents.

As argued above, the fight in a revolutionary war is conducted through the population. Therefore, this population should not only be the objective to win over for the insurgents, but equally so for the counter-insurgents.

2. Support is gained through an active minority.

Galula states that: "in any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral majority, and an active minority against the cause."94 It is important for the counter-insurgents to find the active minority favourable to their cause and rely on this minority in order to rally the neutral favourable to their cause and aid him in its struggle against the opposing active minority.

3. Support from the population is conditional.

The minority that is hostile to the insurgents is unlikely to actively oppose their cause as long as the insurgents are in control. They must therefore be convinced that the counter-insurgents have the will, means, and ability to win.

4. Intensity of efforts and vastness of means are essential.

Meaning that a large concentration of efforts, resources, and personnel is necessary in order for the counter-insurgents to convince the population of their determination and capability to beat the insurgents.95

While being written down in 1964, these laws seem to have maintained their relevance and many contemporary writings tend to emphasise a population-centric approach as well.96 FM 3-24, for example, translates Galula’s second law into the figure portrayed below.

![Figure 2.2 Support in a revolutionary war.](image-url)

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94 Galula, Counterinsurgency Warfare, 56.
95 Ibid. 55-59.
96 See for example: Kilcullen, "Counter-Insurgency Redux," 117; Kilcullen, Counterinsurgency, 3-10; FM 3-24, 1-20; and Mackinlay, Insurgent Archipelago, 144.
97 FM 3-24, 1-20.
Depicting a population in such a way tends to assume a binary struggle between the insurgents and the counter-insurgents, a feature Kilcullen points out as common to classical counterinsurgency theory.\(^98\) Like in many other cases, the situation in Northern Ireland proved to be more complex. The Troubles represented a confrontation between three key sets of antagonists: the British state, which aimed to maintain the majority’s desire to secure Northern Ireland’s position within the United Kingdom; the Republicans, who posed an insurgent threat to the British state and sought to secede from the United Kingdom and unite with the Republic of Ireland; and Loyalists, who organised in pro-state militias that utilised violence to ensure the position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.\(^99\) Moreover, the British government had to deal with a divided population – a Catholic-nationalist minority and a Protestant-unionist majority – which represented two separate communities rather than a single ‘neutral or passive majority’. In turn, the ‘active minorities’ for and against the British cause aligned with these separate communities. This meant that if the British forces cooperated with Loyalist paramilitary organizations it would alienate the Catholic-nationalist population from the British government rather than aid towards gaining its support. This is also attested by former IRA volunteer Paul McNearney, who describes that:

_The British were initially welcomed because people thought they were protecting them against the state. Following the curfew, however, everything changed as people realised that they were here to protect it. Then when the people saw that the British were working hand in glove with the unionist paramilitaries it fuelled the conflict because it gave the IRA all the more support._\(^100\)

Next to the emphasis on the support of the population, a second theme that can be derived from Galula’s _Counterinsurgency Warfare_ has already been mentioned in the previous section and dictates that political power should have primacy over military power in counterinsurgency. In the case of Northern Ireland, this meant that in order for the British security policy to be successful, it would have to address the grievances underpinning the Republican insurgency.\(^101\) This is not to say that the military aspects of counterinsurgency operations were irrelevant but, in the words of Marston and Malkasian: “tactical brilliance at counterinsurgency translates into very little when political and social context is ignored or misinterpreted. Time and time again tactical military successes have not deterred a local population from supporting or joining an

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\(^98\) Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” 116.


\(^100\) Paul McNearney, interview by author. Tape recording. Belfast, April 7, 2014.

insurgency if its concerns are not addressed.”¹⁰² According to Paul Dixon, the principle of political primacy was also reflected in classic British counterinsurgency doctrines. He states that: “this emphasis on politics is remarkable because it might suggest that politicians should take a lead role and that military power is ineffective. More usually, however, it has been interpreted to suggest that the military […] should be more involved in politics.”¹⁰³ Kitzen draws a linkage between this emphasis on politics and the means at the disposal of the counter-insurgent and states that: “[the counter-insurgents’] military means are insufficient to occupy a whole country or region and conform its population to the political elite.”¹⁰⁴

Based on Galula’s views on counterinsurgency, I contend that in order to speak of a successful counterinsurgency strategy, a government should direct its efforts in such a way that it does not act in breach with the objective of population support. Also, given that a population cannot be ‘won’ militarily, a counterinsurgency strategy should be based on a strong political effort in order to persuade the population to support the counter-insurgents’ cause and military action should be subordinate to political action.

The importance of politics in counterinsurgency and the need to win the support of the population are also embraced by Sir Robert Thompson in his book ‘Defeating Communist Insurgency’, which is based on the British experiences in Malaya. He states that:

> "An insurgent movement is a war for the people. It stands to reason that government measures must be directed to restoring government authority and law and order throughout the country, so that control over the population can be regained and its support won. This cannot be done unless a high priority is given to the administrative structure of government itself, to its institutions and to the training of its personnel. Without a reasonably efficient government machine, no programmes or projects, in the context of counter-insurgency, will produce the desired results."¹⁰⁵

Dixon points out that according to Thompson’s counterinsurgency theory, the main effort should be to target the political subversion rather than the insurgents themselves.¹⁰⁶ The rationale behind this leads back to the importance of the support of the population: “if the guerrillas can be isolated from the population,” argues Thompson, “i.e. the ‘little

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¹⁰² Marston and Malkasian, Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare, 16-17.
¹⁰⁵ Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 51
fishes’ removed from ‘the water’, then their eventual destruction becomes automatic.”  

Here, he refers to the famous analogy of Mao Tse-Tung, who stated that “the guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.”

This priority on defeating subversion is one of the five counterinsurgency principles formulated by Thompson. Combined, these five ‘basic principles of counterinsurgency’ form his most influential contribution to the counterinsurgency discourse. According to Kitzen, these principles are formulated so broadly that they are applicable to any conflict in which an opponent hides amongst the population. They dictate that:

1. **The government must have a clear political aim.**
   Thompson formulates this aim as “to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable.” While this aim, as Thompson recognised as well, is ‘rather broad’, the rationale behind it is that it allows the government to comply with the needs of the population through the establishment of structured administrative institutions.

2. **The government must function in accordance with the law.**
   According to Thompson, a government that doesn’t abide by this principle “…forfeits its right to be called a government and cannot expect its people to obey the law.” This also reflects Gwynn’s principle of minimum force as the excessive use of violent means is hard to coincide with the law.

3. **The government must have an overall plan.**
   This plan should not solely cover the security measures and military operations but must include all measures which have a bearing on the insurgency. Here, it is important to find ‘a proper balance’ between military and civil effort, with complete coordination in all fields and a clear definition of all the roles and responsibilities as to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure there are no gaps in the government’s field of action.

4. **The government must give priority to defeating the political subversion, not the guerrillas.**
   As explained above, this serves to isolate the insurgents from the people.

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107 Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 56.
110 Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 51.
111 Kitzen, "Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency,” 8.
112 Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 52.
5. *In the guerrilla phase of an insurgency, a government must secure its base areas first.*

Writing from the perspective of countering a rural insurgency, Thompson dictated that the government should give priority in its security effort to the more highly developed areas as these contain the greatest number of the population and are most vital with regard to its communications and economy. From there, the area under government control can be extended. In doing so, Thompson described that the government should prepare to conduct a campaign for the ‘long haul’. “By preparing for a long haul,” he argued, “the government may achieve victory quicker than expected. By seeking quick military victories in insurgent controlled areas, it will certainly get a long haul for which neither it nor the people may be prepared.”

Thompson based his theory upon British experiences far abroad in a setting much different from that of Northern Ireland. Rather than questioning the core of his principles, however, I argue that it is their application which should be adapted to the insurgency one seeks to counter. For example, what is accepted to be ‘in accordance with the law’ in one situation may not equally apply to another. This is also agreed upon by Kitzen, who emphasises that: “[principles] should never be interpreted as completely prescriptive. Rather, it should be examined what is needed for each specific campaign.”

This can be illustrated by the fact that, in his analysis of the British experience in Malaya, Thompson described detention as perhaps one of the most controversial powers which a government may exercise. Nonetheless, he continued to state that: “it is a power that most western governments have taken in time of war, and it cannot be denied to governments which face a national emergency caused by terrorism and insurgency.”

However, when the policy of internment was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1971 – which meant that people were arrested and imprisoned without trial on the suspicion of involvement in terrorist activities – it did not coincide with the (Catholic-nationalist) population’s perception of the British government acting in accordance with the law. Hence, rather than squelching the IRA and putting an end to the conflict, it actually marked a large escalation of violence (as can also be seen in figure 2.3), inflamed Republican militant sentiment and allowed the Republican insurgents to deal more easily with resource constrains and recruitment.
Like Gwynn and Galula’s principles and laws discussed above, Thompson’s five basic principles must thus not be followed blindly based on past experiences. Rather, they should guide a government’s counterinsurgency effort in such a way that they do not collide with the objective of gaining the support of the population. This translates into ‘winning hearts and minds’, a phrase most associated with Sir Gerald Templer, the British military ‘supremo’ in Malaya. This formula means that the government’s action should at all times be directed as to winning the emotional support of the people – the hearts – and to persuade them to submit to the counter-insurgents’ cause – the minds.119

Another key representative of both the classical counterinsurgency paradigm and the British approach to counterinsurgency is Frank Kitson, whose 1971 book Low Intensity Operations covers many of the same issues as Galula and Thompson. He also stresses the importance of politics over the military and the notion that ‘military measures only represent one aspect of the problem’ is a main theme within his book. This is illustrated by his statement that: “broadly speaking it is almost always recognized that the political leadership should take precedence over the military because the ultimate aim is usually political, and the means of achieving it are also political in so far as they are concerned with gaining control of the population.”120 Rather than outlining laws or principles, he explains a method of fighting insurgents which is, in his own words, “based on collecting and developing information and which is relevant to any situation.”121 In doing so, he lays a more emphatic interest on the importance of intelligence122 – the collection of information which provides guidance for (military) action – and writes that in

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118 Woodwell, "The ‘Troubles’ of Northern Ireland,” 173.
120 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 41.
121 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 132.
122 Marston and Malkasian, Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare, 15.
counterinsurgency, the insurgents and their supporters rely on remaining anonymous. Therefore, the problem of destroying them ‘consists very largely of finding them’. If this is accepted, “it is easy to recognize the paramount importance of good information.”

The emphasis on the importance of intelligence is not unique to Kitson. On the contrary, many theorists have stressed it as an essential part of any counterinsurgency effort. Perhaps unsurprisingly, intelligence has therefore become generally accepted as a sixth principle in addition to Thompson’s five principles mentioned above. Michael Kirk-Smith and James Dingley go even further and see it as the most important counterinsurgency principle. Based on their analysis of the role of intelligence in countering terrorism in Northern Ireland, they argue that it was the primary weapon in the government’s struggle against the IRA and state that: “everything that is done in countering terrorism has to be based on intelligence. This was the great lesson of Northern Ireland’s counter-terrorism experience – intelligence led.”

The principles discussed in this section form the basis for my analysis of the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland. I combine them into framework that largely coincides with Thompson’s counterinsurgency principles. This framework, I argue, is representative for the classical counterinsurgency paradigm as it includes those elements that are at the core of the views of the theorists discussed above. It consists out of five points:

1. **A clear political aim**
   As mentioned before, Thompson defined this aim as “to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable.” Hence, for the case of Northern Ireland, I analyse what the political aim of the British government was throughout the conflict, and how this aim coincides with the aim envisioned by Thompson.

2. **Acting in accordance with the law and minimum use of force**

   Both Gwynn and Thompson emphasised that a counter-insurgent cannot use excessive force in his struggle against the insurgent. Gwynn therefore formulated his principle of minimum force whereas Thompson pointed out that a government must direct its actions in accordance with the law. For each phase, I examine how the British effort coincided with these principles.

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126 Ibid. 51.
127 Ibid. 52.
3. **An overall plan and civil-military cooperation**
   A recurring theme within the classical counterinsurgency paradigm is the importance of civil-military cooperation and the coordination of the counter-insurgents’ efforts. Therefore, I analyse how the British government shaped its campaign.

4. **Priority on political measures**
   Thompson stated that if a government wishes to win over the support of the population, its main effort should be directed not at the military defeat of the insurgents but at defeating the political support for its cause.\(^{128}\) This is very much in line with Galula, who emphasised that the primary course of action in counterinsurgency should be political.\(^{129}\) Hence, in line with these principles, I examine whether the British efforts were primarily military or primarily political.

5. **Intelligence**
   Intelligence is accepted as an important factor by most counterinsurgency theorists. Frank Kitson is among the most renowned protagonists of its importance and sees it as the basis for any counterinsurgency operation. Hence, in addition to the instruments mentioned above, I examine how the British have embedded the role of intelligence in their struggle against the Republican insurgents.

On the basis of this five point framework, I argue that the relatively successful outcome of the Troubles does not, on the whole, correspond with the implementation of a successful counterinsurgency strategy by the British government. However, before I come to the analysis associated with this statement, I use the next chapter to elaborate on the Northern Ireland conflict itself in order to place the British counterinsurgency campaign in the context from which it emerged and wherein it played out.

\(^{128}\) Thompson, *Countering Communist Insurgency*, 56.
CHAPTER THREE

The Troubles of Northern Ireland

“When it got to 1998 and the police and the army were no longer in the streets you kind of missed that [...] you had become so used to it that it had become part of your life.”

- Former IRA volunteer Paul McNearney¹

After nearly 25 years, the conflict in Northern Ireland culminated into a situation in which the British government accepted it could not defeat the IRA. Instead, its security forces were able to contain the conflict to what was perceived as ‘an acceptable level of violence’.² In turn, the IRA accepted that they could not win their struggle if they continued to pursue their goals through violent means.³ In other words, the British government and the Republican insurgents reached a mutually perceived stalemate in which neither of them could force a decisive victory.⁴ This allowed for the emergence of a peace process and ultimately, a situation that can be characterised as a successful counterinsurgency outcome.

Before I come to the analysis of the British counterinsurgency effort that supposedly led to this outcome, I shortly introduce the conflict itself and the context from which it emerged. For this purpose, the first section of this chapter shortly explains the background of the Troubles. Hereafter, the second section examines the different warring parties in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Finally, the third section outlines the three phases of the conflict that serve as the basis for my analysis of the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland.

3.1 The Background to the Conflict

The roots of the Troubles can be traced back to the 16th and 17th century, when Protestants from the British mainland began to settle on Ireland.⁵ While they initially

¹ Paul McNearny, interview by author. Tape recording. Belfast, April 7, 2014.
³ Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 192.
⁵ Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, 19-20.
⁶ Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 2-1;
remained largely separate from the native Catholic community, their coming laid the basis for a society deeply divided along ethnic and religious lines. Through time, the two communities shaped themselves in mutually antagonistic terms and reciprocal bloodshed, wars, and oppression eventually culminated in the treaty of 1921, which saw Ireland partitioned into two sections: the 6 counties in the North and the remaining 26 in the South. Whereas the southern part was granted Home Rule, Northern Ireland remained a part of the United Kingdom due to a majority vote of the Protestant community, which made up about two-thirds of the population in this region. In its creation as a separate state, this Protestant majority effectively institutionalised their own position of advantage to ensure their permanent control of the country. A clear example of this practice is posed by the city of Derry/Londonderry, where Protestants actually did not make up a majority of the population but could acquire a two-thirds of the seats in the city council. Generally, members of the Protestant community were unionists who sought to maintain Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. In turn, many Catholics were nationalists who perceived Northern Ireland as a part of Ireland and wished for Irish unity.

The newly installed Protestant-unionist government was housed in Stormont and was ultimately answerable to London. According to Dingley, however, the British government in effect distanced itself from the governance of Northern Ireland and almost ignored its province until the Troubles began. Hence, as the Protestant-unionist majority held sway in the region and improved its position at the expense of the Catholic-nationalist community, this minority population shifted its focus towards the Irish Free State. With the Catholic-nationalists unwilling to accept the normalization of their subordinate position within the Northern Ireland state and the Protestant-unionists determined to maintain this system, the social world in which each viewed the other as a threat to its own identity was strengthened. This allowed for the rationalization of violent action against the other.

Throughout the 1930s, rioting between both communities frequently occurred and the wedge between them and their political aspirations further increased: whereas the Protestant-unionist population became more and more alienated from the Republic of Ireland, the Catholic-nationalist population became more and more alienated from the Northern Ireland state, with each community becoming more and more convinced that the other was the root cause of all the troubles.

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Cairns & Darby, “The Conflict in Northern Ireland,” 755;
Neumann, *Britain’s Long War,* 10;
6 Ministry of Defence, *Operation Banner,* 2-2;
Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency,* 152;
7 ni Aoláin, *The Politics of Force,* 20;
Edwards and McGrattan, *The Northern Ireland Conflict,* 4;
10 Conway, “Active Remembering,” 313.
Ireland, which they perceived as a Catholic dominated state, the Catholic-nationalist population grew an increasingly aggrieved perception towards Stormont as they felt shut out from the public employment opportunities that were generated by welfare state expansion. While efforts to change the inequalities that resulted from this system had always been undertaken it was not until the 1960s that the Catholic-nationalist population increasingly began to protest against their subordinate position. Inspired by similar movements in the United States, they organised in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and demanded reforms and an end to the violations of their civil rights. In turn, the Protestant-unionist communities increasingly felt a need to defend their advantageous position, which they believed was now at risk. A 1969 government inquiry concluded that there was a rising sense of continuing injustice and grievance, complaints against local governments, and a powerful sense of resentment and frustration amongst the Catholic population in Northern Ireland. Simultaneously, it stated there were “fears and apprehensions among Protestants of a threat to Unionist domination and control of Government by increase of Catholic population and powers.”

By the summer of 1969, tensions between both communities were soaring as a result of several violent clashes between them in the antecedent years. When Stormont allowed for the traditional Orange parades – marches associated with Protestant-unionist superiority – to go ahead, a Catholic-nationalist revolt erupted and violence spread across Derry/Londonderry, Belfast, and other cities within Northern Ireland. With Northern Ireland’s Protestant dominated police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), unable to contain the situation, British troops were deployed and interposed between the two communities in an attempt stop the violence.

3.2 Warring Parties

The violent events of the summer of 1969 and the deployment of the British army on the streets of Northern Ireland marked the start of a violent conflict known as the Troubles. I argue that this was a revolutionary war between the Republicans waging an insurgency to bring about Irish unity and the British government acting as a counter-insurgent. This does not mean that the Troubles represented a binary struggle between insurgents and counter-insurgents or that the conflict was purely political. Indeed, many other issues can be

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12 Ibid. 307.
13 Ibid. 307; Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 153.
14 Ibid. 154; Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 2-2.
16 Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 155-156; Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 2-4.
attributed to the Troubles. Sectarianism, ethnicity and identity, for example, are frequently recurring typologies used in its description. Nevertheless, as is also emphasised by Cairns and Darby, "the conflict at its most basic can be seen as a struggle between those who wish to see Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom and those who wish to see the reunification of the whole island of Ireland." However, rather than the two belligerent parties illustrated by the struggle between counter-insurgents and insurgents, the Troubles witnessed a third party: Loyalist paramilitaries who sought to defend unionist supremacy in Northern Ireland. As shown in the table below, these three warring parties were responsible for nearly 3,500 deaths from the outbreak of violence in 1969 until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

![Figure 3.1](image_url)  

**Figure 3.1** Organizations responsible for deaths from political violence, 1969-98.

The table above not only depicts which party is responsible for the deaths of the Northern Ireland conflict, but also gives an indication of how the struggle between the British government, the Republican insurgents, and the Loyalist paramilitaries played out. Remarkably, reciprocal violence (in terms of deaths) between Loyalists and Republicans has remained fairly low. In fact, each killed more of their own ranks than of the other. Moreover, it appears that Loyalist paramilitaries generally did not target the government’s security forces – which is unsurprising given that Loyalists wanted Northern Ireland to

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17 Cairns and Darby, *The Conflict in Northern Ireland*, 754.  
19 Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon’s Teeth," 904.
remained part of the United Kingdom and were thus supportive of the government’s cause. Not counting the deaths they caused among their own ranks, Loyalist paramilitaries thus primarily targeted civilians, especially amongst the Catholic-nationalist population.\(^{20}\)

While Republican insurgents were also responsible for a high amount of civilian deaths, they mainly targeted the government’s security forces, which they perceived as their main opponent to be defeated in order to achieve their goal.\(^{21}\) In turn, the government’s security forces primarily caused deaths amongst the Republican insurgents and civilians – although considerably less so than the Loyalists or Republicans, who often deliberately targeted the civilian population. Hayes and McAllister translate these observations into the figure included below. Based on this figure, it is possible to observe that the violent struggle between the militant agents primarily represented a struggle between the Republicans and the Security forces.

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**Figure 3.2** The Troubles as a violent struggle in terms of deaths, 1969-98.\(^{22}\)

The Republican insurgent movement did not represent a single united front. Discordance within the IRA had led the Republican paramilitaries to split into two factions by the end of 1969. Dissidents who found that the IRA’s emphasis on politics had led to a military rundown of the organisation at the expense of the Catholic people’s security formed the Provisional IRA (PIRA) whereas the traditional faction became known as the Official IRA (OIRA).\(^{23}\) Eventually, the former would continue its armed struggle throughout the conflict’s duration while the OIRA declared an unconditional and unilateral ceasefire in 1972 (which remained unbroken), reduced their military capacity, and eventually became an entirely political organization by the late 1970s.\(^{24}\) This led to a further split within the OIRA as

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\(^{20}\) This is clearly shown in a study by Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry. While this study analyses the conflict up to 1989, the amount of Catholic deaths caused by Loyalist paramilitaries was already over 500 (out of a total of 620). See: Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism; Understanding Northern Ireland*, (London: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1993), 24-25.

\(^{21}\) Ibid. 23;


\(^{23}\) Hayes and McAllister, "Sowing Dragon’s Teeth," 906.

Republicans who disagreed with the abandoning of the OIRA’s violent struggle formed the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA). While significantly smaller than the PIRA, this would become the second largest Republican insurgent group throughout the Troubles, responsible for about one-third of the 335 deaths caused by non-(P)IRA Republicans.\(^{25}\)

On the Loyalist’s side, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) made up the main paramilitary organizations. The UVF had officially been established in the mid-1960s to oppose any challenge to Protestant supremacy whereas the UDA emerged during the early 1970s in reaction to Republican violence. Despite being responsible for 254 deaths through its satellite organization the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), the UDA retained a legal status until 1992.\(^{26}\)

Thompson saw the use of paramilitary forces against an insurgent movement as a genuine possibility.\(^{27}\) However, as I argued in the previous chapter, the British government would have become too much associated with Protestant supremacy if they had used Loyalist paramilitaries to this end. Therefore, while they did not pose a threat to British authority over Northern Ireland, the Loyalist paramilitaries cannot be perceived as an actor in support of the counterinsurgency effort. If anything, they made the situation more complex. This also became apparent in a conversation I had with General Rupert Smith, General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland from 1996-98. He explained that:

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"They \text{ [Loyalist paramilitary organizations] weren’t attacking us [the security forces], they were relatively easily penetrated by the RUC, and they were not of the same order as the IRA in any way at all. But you couldn’t trust them either. They could create civil disorder very easily and provocatively and they could inhibit you – which they would often do deliberately.}"\(^{28}\)

### 3.3 Analysing the Troubles in Phases

In the subsequent three chapters, I examine the British counterinsurgency effort throughout the Troubles during three phases: (i) 1969-74: the militarisation phase; (ii) 1975-1981: the Ulsterisation phase; and (iii) 1982-1998: the politicisation phase and peace process. Before coming to this, however, I use this section to further introduce each phase and focus on what sets them apart in terms of the British government’s strategy.

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\(^{26}\) Hayes and McAllister, “Sowing Dragon’s Teeth,” 903.

\(^{27}\) Edwards and McGrattan, *The Northern Ireland Conflict*, 8, 33;


(i) **1969-74: Militarisation**

The initial period of the Troubles can be characterised by the deployment of the British military and the rapid militarization of the conflict. When violence broke out in the summer of 1969, the British government had three battalions of infantry based in Northern Ireland for a total of 2,700 troops. This amount rose quickly as the British government deployed more troops into Northern Ireland and erected the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) in an attempt to cope with the deteriorating security situation and public disorder. \(^{29}\) Within three years, British military presence in Northern Ireland had rocketed, topping over 25,000 troops from the British army as well as the UDR and the Irish Home Service Force (HSF) by 1972. \(^{30}\)

During these early years, the immediate objective of the British government had been to revitalise and restore the Stormont state system of Northern Ireland. \(^{31}\) However, as tensions rose and support for the Republican insurgency increased, Stormont’s position proved untenable. By March 1972, control of the internal affairs of Northern Ireland was taken away from the Unionist government and direct rule under Westminster was imposed. \(^{32}\) 1972 would eventually become the conflict’s most violent year. According to ní Aoláin, “there were 10,628 shootings, 1,853 bombs planted, 470 deaths, 27.4 tons of explosives found, and 531 persons were charged with terrorist offences.” \(^{33}\) Hence, while the military deployment had already exceeded its initially expected time-span, the conflict was all but over.

That the crisis in Northern Ireland would not be a short term affair had become apparent to the British government, which began to seek alternatives to the internment and confrontational approaches from 1973 onward. By the latter half of the 1970s, the dominant political objective became the elimination of the political context of the Troubles, which in effect meant the ‘Ulsterisation’ of the conflict and the criminalization of political violence. \(^{34}\)

(ii) **1975-81: Ulsterisation**

After the British government had attempted to achieve a negotiated settlement through the Sunningdale Agreement – which sought to install a power-sharing arrangement but collapsed under strong opposition from the unionist community in 1974, the PIRA initiated a ceasefire based on the assumption that the British

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\(^{30}\) Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 7-1.

\(^{31}\) Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 67.

\(^{32}\) Loughlin, The Ulster Question Since 1945, 83; ní Aoláin, The Politics of Force, 43; O’Leary and McGarry, the Politics of Antagonism, 177; Moloney, A Secret History of the IRA, 112.

\(^{33}\) ní Aoláin, The Politics of Force, 43.

\(^{34}\) Ibid. 44-46; Edwards & McGrattan, The Northern Ireland Conflict, 75; Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 179.
government was inclined to leave Northern Ireland. However, when it became apparent that the British government would not forsake its province, the PIRA realised it had to change its strategy if it were to oust the British from Northern Ireland and shifted its emphasis from a short term perspective towards a long term campaign. As a result, the organisation was reorganised and denounced its battalion-like formation in favour of a cellular structure.

Meanwhile, the British government had also shifted its focus and reshaped its approach to the Northern Irish question. This resulted in the Ulsterisation of the conflict, which was to be achieved by relieving the army of its main overall responsibility for the struggle against the IRA. Instead, this responsibility would be transferred to the RUC while the army obtained a supporting role for the RUC’s efforts. Moreover, the British legal system would be reshaped in order to deal with the crisis through ‘regular’ criminal justice processes and, in addition, it meant the removal of the special category status for those convicted of politically motivated offences.

Discontent with this eradication of their status, Republican prisoners began to protest by the late 1970s. Initially they found little support for their cause. However, they did not waive in their efforts and continued to escalate their tactics. Eventually, the protests culminated into the hunger strikes of 1980-81 which provoked mass sympathy amongst the nationalist population. Based on the successes demonstrated by these strikes, Sinn Féin – the political wing of the republican movement – seized the moment to commence its political campaign.

(iii) 1982-98: Politicisation and the Peace Process
The British government’s unwillingness to give in to the hunger strikers’ demands enabled the Republican movement to politicise their struggle. This is also emphasised by former IRA volunteer McNearney, who recalls the situation at the time as follows: “by 1980 the IRA were going nowhere. The hunger-strikes reinvigorated the IRA big time as it inspired a whole lot of people – not just in Ireland but worldwide – and it wouldn’t have cost the British anything at all whatsoever to concede to the prisoners. If they had conceded to the prisoners the

35 Loughlin, The Ulster Question since 1945, 94-98; Walker, A Political History of the Two Irelands, 118; Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 2-12.
38 Edwards and McGrattan, The Northern Ireland Conflict, 77; Moloney, A Secret History of the IRA, 209; O’Leary and McGarry, the Politics of Antagonism, 191.
IRA probably would have faded away." While this latter remark is open for discussion, the fact remains that the British government now also faced the Republican movement on the political sphere. After its emergence, Sinn Féin immediately contested the elections as its support rose to a third of nationalist votes in 1982. By 1985, the support for the party had risen to roughly 40 percent of the Catholic-nationalist community.

According to the British MoD, “the British Government’s main military objective in the 1980s was the destruction of [the] PIRA, rather than resolving the conflict.” Simultaneously, however, rapprochement between London and Dublin allowed for negotiations which led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in 1985. This agreement suggested a renewed British commitment to reform Northern Ireland, included the Irish government in the arbitration process of the conflict, and pledged both governments to co-operate on various fronts to improve the situation in Northern Ireland. In addition, it affirmed that the status of Northern Ireland could only change with the consent of a majority of its population.

The AIA enjoyed strong international support, but it was ill-received within Northern Ireland: unionists felt betrayed by the increasing role of the Republic of Ireland; Republicans and nationalists affiliated with Sinn Féin denounced it as a formal recognition of the partition of Ireland. As a result, the agreement was incapable of contributing to an end of the Troubles on the short term and the years following its implication saw an upsurge of violence directly related to the overall discontent with the agreements. Nevertheless, it did foster the foundations for an improved cooperation between the Irish and British governments and eventually enabled London to return to its traditional objective of devolution and power-sharing. While the AIA thus failed to produce its immediate intended effects, it did lay the basis for the emergence of the peace process in the 1990s that resulted in the GFA.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Counterinsurgency during the Militarisation Phase: 1969-74

"...We, whether we like it or not and whether we think it’s right or not, had a particular style of imperial policing, which was on the whole not frightfully friendly [...] We tended to regard the natives around the world as being our subjects and if they were misbehaving, they should be clobbered and told to behave and if they didn’t behave then you put them in jail.”

- Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin, recalling the British army’s attitude towards internal security operations in the late 1960s.¹

By the summer of 1969, the wave of communal violence that swept through Northern Ireland throughout the late 1960s had exhausted and demoralised the RUC. With the police no longer able to cope with the civil disorder, the army was introduced in an attempt to quell the spiralling cycle of violence. At first, the military intervention was greeted with relief by the Catholic-nationalist population, who expected the army would protect them from Loyalist hard-liners and the equally ill-perceived RUC, restrain Stormont, and have a determining role in shaping policy for the future. However, as the reality failed to align with these expectations, this welcoming attitude quickly withered away and the Catholic-nationalist minority grew more hostile towards the British military presence.² Hence, while the army was initially able to subdue the communal violence³, this success was short-lived and the British government soon found itself facing a Republican insurgency that rapidly grew in strength. In reaction to this deteriorating security situation, it reacted by adopting security measures such as the policy of internment and rapidly increased the number of security forces in its province. The period in which these events unfolded lasted from 1969 until about 1974 and can be perceived as the militarisation phase of the conflict.

In this chapter I examine the British counterinsurgency effort during this militarisation phase. In line with the second sub-question of this thesis I analyse what the British strategic objectives were during the militarisation phase, whether the British government met these objectives, and what role counterinsurgency played in their attempt to do so. For this purpose, the subsequent five sections each discuss one of the five instruments outlined in chapter two. Hereafter, the sixth section gives a conclusion in which I assess the British counterinsurgency effort on the basis of the findings in the previous five sections. In addition, I come back to the abovementioned sub-question and evaluate the British strategic objectives and whether – or to what extent – these objectives were met.

4.1 A Clear Political Aim

An official release by the British government dating from 20 August 1969 reads that: "the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] will assume full command and control of the Ulster special constabulary for all purposes including their organisation, deployment, tasks and arms. Their employment by the Northern Ireland Government in riot and crowd control was always envisaged as a purely temporary measure." This statement gives way to two important observations regarding the British interference in Northern Ireland. First, the British government perceived the military response to the communal violence as a temporary measure. Second, the GOC assumed command of security measures within Northern Ireland in aid of the Northern Irish government. In other words, Stormont retained its authority over Northern Ireland.

According to Neumann, "Westminster’s objective was to restore a reformed status quo ante, so that the troops could be withdrawn and Northern Ireland be re-insulated from Great Britain." This strategy was set out in a Downing Street Declaration in which then UK Prime Minister Wilson and Northern Ireland Prime Minister Chichester-Clark agreed upon the deployment of British troops in “the closest co-operation with the Northern Ireland Government” to restore law and order in the region, that the responsibility for affairs in Northern Ireland was “entirely a matter of domestic jurisdiction,” that the border was not an issue, and that the Northern Irish government would act towards the equal rights and treatment of its citizens. Moreover, it affirmed

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5 Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 44-45.

that: “Northern Ireland should not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland” and the parliament of Northern Ireland.  

The declaration thus set out a number of political objectives that came down to the reaffirmation of Stormont’s authority on the basis that the Protestant-unionist government ensured the termination of the subordinate position of its Catholic-nationalist minority. On paper, the political objectives set out in this declaration seemingly have a bearing with Thompson’s ‘clear political aim’. While it did not immediately strive for the creation of an independent country, it did embrace this possibility through the ‘consent of the majority of the people’. In addition, it stressed the need for full equal treatment of all citizens in Northern Ireland and stated that the government was determined “to take all possible steps to restore normality to the Northern Ireland community so that economic development can proceed at the faster rate which is vital for social stability.” This can be translated towards an aim of ‘creating a country that is politically and economically stable and viable’. In addition, the declaration stressed the importance of restoring law and order – a necessity according to Thompson, “so that control over the population can be regained and its support won.” Yet despite these seemingly positive remarks, Neumann points out that: “the continued existence of Stormont as the only source of political power in the province maintained an asymmetry in military and political control which provided fertile soil on which the national question was to resurface.” In other words, while the British government showed its intention to improve the position of the Catholic population within Northern Ireland, it simultaneously sought to restore the status quo from which the conflict had emerged. Moreover, the declaration translated into very little ‘on the ground’ as Westminster retained its determination to keep British involvement in the Northern Irish question to a minimum and to withdraw its troops as soon as possible.

This attitude dictated the British government’s efforts until March 1972, when the deteriorated situation in Northern Ireland had ruled out the possibility to uphold Stormont’s position any longer. Then British Prime Minister Heath expressed that: “…in the British Government’s view new and more radical measures were necessary if there was to be any prospect of breaking out of this deadlock.” In effect, this ‘radical measure’ meant that direct rule from London was imposed upon Northern Ireland and, with its initial objective of retaining Stormont as the authority its province off the table, Westminster had to reshape its political aim for Northern Ireland.

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 51.
10 Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 46.
Again, the British government re-assured that “there would be no change in the Border without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.” Rather than seeking a solution to the conflict within the existing – or by this time disbanded – structures of the Northern Ireland state, Westminster now began to look for alternatives. Its takeover of Stormont was initially planned to last a year, during which discussions between both parties would take place in an attempt to resolve the conflict. By the end of 1973, the British desire to transfer authority over Northern Ireland back to domestic politics appeared to be realised as leaders of the largest unionist party and the Catholic-nationalist SDLP (Social Democratic Labour Party) accepted the Sunningdale Agreement. This agreement provided for a power-sharing executive in which representatives of both communities shared authority over Northern Ireland, and the establishment of a ‘Council of Ireland’ that gave the Irish Republic a number of executive powers in non-conflict related areas. It was strongly opposed by paramilitary organizations on both sides of the divide and found little basis amongst the Northern Irish society. This was especially true for the Protestant-unionist population, who opposed the notion that the Catholic-nationalist minority should be guaranteed representation in Stormont. The desire to transfer back authority to Northern Ireland politics under the arrangements proposed in the agreement was thus not ‘politically viable’. As a result, the Sunningdale Agreement collapsed within six months and Westminster found itself once again in full control of Northern Ireland. The Catholic-nationalist community reproached this collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement upon the British government’s inaction in regard to Protestant-unionist efforts to thwart the agreement. As a result, their already bitter perception of Britain as a neutral arbiter eroded even further. Unionists, on the other hand, viewed it as a welcome step back from what they perceived as the road towards Dublin.

4.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force

The first serious challenge to the British army came from within the Protestant-unionist community. According to Newsinger, “this outbreak was suppressed with considerable violence by the army and appeared, as was intended, to have successfully intimidated the Protestant working class, at least for the time being. This success convinced the military that a tough no-nonsense response was the answer to disorder.”

13 Ibid.
14 Loughlin, The Ulster Question since 1945, 85.
17 O’Leary and McGarry, the Politics of Antagonism, 200-01.
threat to the government’s authority came not from the Protestant-unionists, however, but from within the Catholic-nationalist communities. Hence, the ‘tough no-nonsense response’ more often found its way against the latter. According to Joost Augusteijn, this was an understandable development. He emphasises that:

_The military was send in to keep the warring parties apart. However, it also had to act against violence... and violence came primarily from the IRA. So when the military undertook action against this violence, it would often act against the Catholic population – which would in turn provoke conflict between the army and this population._

However understandable, the upsurge of confrontations between the Catholic-nationalist population and the British security forces inevitably meant that the army increasingly found itself in situations where it had to use force against civilians. Here, it had to abide by the principle of minimum force. A principle well known to the British army as it was – and still is – central to their counterinsurgency thinking. Yet even within the army – let alone between the army and a civilian population it faces – what can be perceived as minimum force is open to a wide array of different interpretations. This became all the more apparent in 1970, when tensions between the army and Catholic-nationalist population cumulated in the Falls Road Curfew from 3-5 July in Belfast. Here, the British army mounted a battalion operation to relieve a trapped company and initiated a large-scale area search that involved four battalions. As a direct result of military action during these days, four (Catholic) civilians died and over 60 were left injured. While the army might have acted within its own perception of minimum force at the time, Dixon argues that: “as a result of the curfew the army was no longer seen as the protector of the Catholic community, recruitment to the IRA accelerated and the alienation of the Catholic population was now such that it could afford to take offensive action against the British army.”

The British MoD therefore reflects on the curfew as an example of “poor military decision-making” that had “serious operational and even strategic consequences which were unforeseen at the time.”

The introduction of policy of internment in 1971 would mark the second large misstep in the British strategy to ‘restore law and order’ on the streets of Northern Ireland. It meant that people could be arrested and imprisoned on the mere suspicion of involvement in terrorist activities and was introduced to subdue the rapidly growing Republican

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20 Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’,” 276; Moloney, _A Secret History of the IRA_, 91; Ministry of Defence, _Operation Banner_, 2-5.
21 Dixon, “‘Hearts and Minds’,” 277.
22 Ministry of Defence, _Operation Banner_, 8-8.
Both internment and the Falls Road Curfew are examples of what Gwynn describes as “drastic punitive measures to induce surrender.” The problem with such measures, he argues, is that while they may prove effective at the time of their implementation, they “may awaken sympathy with the revolutionaries, and in the long run militate against the re-establishment of normal conditions.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, both the curfew and internment had such a counterproductive effect. General Rupert Smith, at the time a British army Captain, was deployed to Northern Ireland on several tours during the militarisation phase and recalls the situation that developed as follows:

"With hindsight you can see that there is a line of civil disorder... which became civil disorder and guns... an occasional bomb, but mostly guns... and then you get internment. Which, if the Falls Road Curfew doesn’t turn the population, then internment certainly does. It was wrong because the context didn’t explain it anymore [...] it was wrong in its actual act because it targeted the wrong people."

Internment compounded to the already deteriorated relation between the Catholic-nationalist community and the government. In fact, it turned out to be the herald of the PIRA’s heyday. Not only did it serve to enlarge the insurgent movement into what Ed Moloney describes as ”a six-county-wide army [that] could now seriously challenge British rule in Northern Ireland,” it also stimulated international support – primarily from Irish-American diasporas – for the Republican cause.

With the Republican insurgency coming into full effect, the army increasingly directed its efforts against the Catholic-nationalist population. As a result, the perception that the government and its security forces acted against and suppressed the Catholic-nationalist community became well-embedded within this minority population. This is not to say the security forces disregarded the law altogether but, as clashes between the Catholic-nationalist population and the security forces continued to occur and the use of force by the latter against the former increased, this negative perception became well instilled within the Catholic-nationalist population. The most infamous example of these encounters is undisputedly ‘Bloody Sunday’: the events of 30 January 1972 that took place in a predominantly Catholic area within Derry/Londonderry known as The Bogside. Here, the British military killed 13 unarmed civilians while they were taking part in a civil rights march against the policy of internment. According to Brice Dickson, “it is

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24 Gwynn, Imperial Policing, 14-15.
26 Moloney, A Secret History of the IRA, 103.
27 Loughlin, The Ulster Question since 1945, 80.
29 Conway, “Active Remembering,” 3;
Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 2-7.
undeniable that the reputation of the British army in Northern Ireland suffered a huge blow on ‘Bloody Sunday’, one from which it never fully recovered during the subsequent 35 years of troop deployment in Northern Ireland.”

4.3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation

The Downing Street Declaration of 19 August 1969 stated that the British government would deploy its troops on the streets of Northern Ireland on a temporary basis in order to restore law and order and bring back normality to the region. In addition, it declared the intention to treat all citizens in Northern Ireland equally irrespective of their political or religious views. While it thus set forth the intention to reform Northern Ireland, it said nothing about mechanisms to achieve these reforms. According to Loughlin, “…the government [of Northern Ireland], though committed to reform, yet feared its effect on [Unionist] party unity and was reluctant to move.” With no determinant effort from Westminster to impose the necessary reforms in its stead, British intervention was thus limited to security measures and military operations.

Because the British government planned to interfere on a temporary basis, it was ill-prepared for the Republican insurgency that arose in the wake of the army’s deployment and had not formulated an overall plan to deal with this situation. Unwilling to further inflame discontent within the Catholic-nationalist population – of which it believed that it would only serve to strengthen the Republican insurgent movement – the government therefore sought to adopt a strategy in which actions in predominantly Catholic-nationalist areas that might have been regarded as provocative were avoided as much as possible. Much damage in this respect had already been done, however, and the self-restraining attitude of the British government led to the emergence of ‘no go areas’ within certain Catholic-nationalist wards of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry where it had virtually no authority. While these no go areas were a sanctuary for the PIRA, they would remain unchallenged until July 1972, when the British government initiated operation Motorman which cleared the Republican barricades surrounding the wards under Republican control.

While Motorman instilled the British government’s determination to increase its control and to act accordingly within the Northern Ireland population, there is a limit to what can be achieved through military operations alone. Smith argues that: “It’s probably

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30 Dickson, "Counterinsurgency and Human Rights in Northern Ireland," 303.
32 Loughlin, The Ulster Question since 1945, 65.
34 Ibid. 418.
fair to say that Motorman is the period when the army was most in charge,” following Motorman, “there was a period in which the violence went down and most of the [IRA’s] people were in the Maze. Yet that’s as far as an army can go.” Indeed, as is also emphasised by Thompson, a government’s plan must cover all military and non-military measures. Moreover, he points out that: “it is essential, too, that there should be a proper balance between the military and the civil effort, with complete coordination in all fields. Otherwise a situation will arise in which military operations produce no lasting results because they are unsupported by civil follow-up action.” This was not the case during the militarisation phase of the Troubles. Although military presence had rapidly increased during the first years of conflict, this had not been met with an equally determined civil effort to tackle the problems underlying the Republican insurgency. Also, as shown by Dixon, “...the counterinsurgency campaign initially had to be coordinated across the British government, the Northern Ireland government (until 1972), the RUC and the military, as well as various civil institutions.” With the disbanding of Stormont and the appointment of a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (SSNI) this coordination was simplified. However, “this did not diminish friction between the politicians and the military.”

4.4 Priority on Political Measures

The basis for political subversion in Northern Ireland stemmed from the subordinate position of the Catholic-nationalist minority within the Northern Ireland state. Discontent over this awry appreciation of identity backdropped the emergence of the NICRA in the 1960s that demanded equal rights for all citizens of Northern Ireland. As the Protestant-unionist population resisted concessions to the civil rights movement – which they believed to be the harbinger of their own demise, this fuelled the emergence of the communal conflict in which the British government intervened in August 1969.

The British government recognised that the Catholic-nationalist discontent was genuine and had to be addressed. The Cameron Report, a government inquiry released in September 1969, embraced Stormont’s commitment to reforms and stated that: “the honest implementation of these reforms already promised or foreshadowed by the [Northern Irish] government with the least necessary delay, is one essential step toward the development of a lasting peace and a measure of harmony and mutual understanding among all the people of Northern Ireland.” But as Stormont showed reluctant to substantiate its commitment to reform, the British government’s intervention prioritised

37 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 55.
on quelling the violence rather than defeating the political subversion underlying it. According to Kennedy-Pipe and McInnes, the army did undertake some counter-subversive actions in Catholic-nationalist districts in an attempt to ‘win over’ the Catholic-nationalist population. However, they point out that: “without a Province-wide strategy which could convince Catholics of Stormont’s legitimacy, these initiatives could only have limited impact.”41 In addition, Northern Ireland proved a complex environment to implement measures that could serve to take away Catholic-nationalist subversion. The disarming of the RUC and disbanding of its reserve force the ‘B Specials’ in 1969, for example, would evoke massive subversive behaviour amongst the Protestant-unionist population which led to the first serious clash between the army and the population.42

Because the Northern Irish government, in the words of Christopher Tuck, "saw the solution to the disturbances in Northern Ireland as a hard-line security response, not root and branch political reforms,"43 the initial phase of the conflict all but coincided with a prioritisation of a political over a military measures. This remained unchanged until March 1972, when Stormont was disbanded and direct rule under Westminster was imposed. The decision to impose direct rule stemmed from London’s realisation that the conflict could not be resolved under the direction of a Protestant-unionist dominated state. A statement by then British Prime Minister Heath explained that the British government had therefore “reached the conclusion that responsibility for law and order in Northern Ireland should be transferred to Westminster.”44 According to Cabinet documents, “the purpose [of the disbandment of Stormont] was to seek to deprive the IRA of the support which it enjoyed among a substantial portion of the minority community in Northern Ireland.”45 By now the government realised that there could be no military solution to the problems in Northern Ireland.46 After the completion of operation Motorman, Westminster therefore sought to rearrange the political system of Northern Ireland, a process that resulted in the Sunningdale Agreement.

It thus seems that contrary to the initial phase of its involvement in the Troubles, London now adopted a more political approach to overcome the political violence in Northern Ireland. This can be perceived as a welcome change in attitude in regard to the primarily military character that had dictated the British counterinsurgency effort in the previous years. Even so, as Kitson pointed out, in order “to work out an overall programme designed to achieve [the] aim of regaining and retaining the allegiance of the population,” a counter-insurgent “should include measures designed to maintain and if

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42 Newsinger, “From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security,” 242.
possible increase the prosperity of the country, as well as measures aimed at the destruction of the subversive organisation.”\textsuperscript{47} While the Sunningdale Agreement undisputedly was a political measure, it stemmed from Westminster’s desire to reinstall a devolved government within one year after it imposed direct rule rather than an attempt to ‘win over’ the Catholic-nationalist population.\textsuperscript{48} It did not, as classical counterinsurgency dictates, prioritise on the introduction of political measures aimed at overcoming the political subversion.

4\textsuperscript{5} Intelligence

According to Kirk-Smith and Dingley, intelligence played a pivotal role in the government’s effort to overcome the Republican insurgency. “Overall,” they argue, “the RUC, in cooperation with the army, developed good and highly effective intelligence systems that fundamentally defeated the PIRA.”\textsuperscript{49} However, when the army was deployed to Northern Ireland in 1969, the intelligence organisation on which it had to rely was yet poorly developed. According to the British MoD, “the RUC SB [Special Branch] was almost completely ineffective and the traditional source of HUMINT [Human Intelligence] – the B Specials – had been disbanded […]. Without actionable intelligence of any appreciable quality or quantity, the security forces’ main offensive option was to search occupied houses, usually conducted on the basis of low-grade tip-offs.”\textsuperscript{50}

As the British struggled to get their intelligence organisation of the ground, the poor background information on the basis of which it had to act proved a catalysing factor in its already worsening relation with the Catholic-nationalist population. This proved especially problematic with the introduction of internment. Keith Jeffery points out that: “when internment without trial was introduced in Northern Ireland in August 1971, very little was known about the recently-formed Provisionals. The majority of the 340 people lifted initially were ‘old-style’ republicans, known for their involvement on the political side of the movement. But the gunmen were hardly touched at all and the whole process was both a political and a security disaster.”\textsuperscript{51} General Rupert Smith recalls the problems of the British army with regard to the intelligence apparatus during these early years of the conflict and states that:

“We had intelligence but it wasn’t useful… it was wrong and it was about the wrong persons. In some ways it was worse than having nothing at

\textsuperscript{47} Kitson, \textit{Low Intensity Operations,} 50.
\textsuperscript{49} Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 566.
\textsuperscript{50} Ministry of Defence, \textit{Operation Banner,} 5-1.
It was not unique to the setting of Northern Ireland that the government’s security forces had to operate on the basis of a small and inaccurate amount of information during the early phase of their counterinsurgency effort. It often takes time to build up an effective intelligence organisation. In this build-up process, good coordination between the different intelligence-gathering agencies and a centralized analysis structure of the acquired information are crucial for the ultimate effectiveness of the intelligence effort. According to Bamford, "[these] principles were widely known throughout the security apparatus in Northern Ireland.” Still, “they were largely disregarded by the different agencies that were operating there because of the confusion at the outbreak of the conflict.”53 With the RUC unable to spearhead the intelligence organisation due to its poor and outdated structure, the army (and other intelligence organisations) had to take the lead in intelligence activities and no focused attempt was made to organise them into a single, coordinated intelligence effort.54 Smith recalls: “I don’t think we were beginning to get [the intelligence organisation] together until London had taken over.”55 It was initially ill-prepared to meet the rapidly increasing demands posed by the Republican insurgency and, while efforts towards improvement were made during the militarisation phase, it would not be until the latter half of the 1970s that the intelligence gathering network developed into an extensive system that involved the military, the RUC and the British Security Service.56

4.6 Conclusion

During the militarisation phase of the Troubles, the British government perceived the conflict as an internal affair and sought to keep its own involvement at a minimum. Its initial strategic objective was to aid Stormont in restoring law and order on the streets of Northern Ireland while simultaneously revitalising its discriminative state system. This ambivalent approach towards the situation in Northern Ireland would lead to a rapid escalation of the conflict. According to Newsinger, “what resulted was a security policy, vitiated by contradictory political initiatives, that was repressive enough to continue the alienation of working-class Catholics but not repressive enough to actually defeat the...
Provisional IRA.\textsuperscript{57} Hence, with the disbanding of Stormont in March 1972, the British government had not only failed to meet its strategic objective, its efforts had led to a worsening of the situation.

It is probably fair to say that the British government did not think of its efforts in terms of counterinsurgency at that time – least not until the Republican insurgency had already well developed.\textsuperscript{58} However, the British government’s initial unawareness of its role as a counter-insurgent does not change the fact that it acted as such. Based on this analysis of their efforts throughout the militarisation phase, I conclude that it poorly performed this role. While their seemingly clear political objective did opt for reforms that would address the Catholic-nationalist grievances, it lacked a determination to materialize these reforms. What resulted was a primarily military intervention which was unbacked by a strong political effort that could pull the cart. In addition, a series of key events including the Falls Road Curfew, internment, and an increasing amount of violent clashes between the Catholic-nationalist population and the security forces that eventually led to Bloody Sunday, had demolished whatever perception was left of the British government as a counter-insurgent acting in accordance with the law. While the disbanding of Stormont and operation Motorman would shape the environment for the British government to redirect its effort, it awaited a tremendous task in reaching its strategic objective: to bring an end to the violence and create a political environment in which Northern Ireland would "not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland."\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Newsinger, “From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security,” 244.
\textsuperscript{58} Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 54.
Counterinsurgency during the ‘Ulsterisation’ Phase: 1975-81

“The most you could do was to defeat or deter the particular attacks and pursue the perpetrators of those attacks into the criminal court. That is what everyone set out to do... and the logic of it goes back to the strategic idea that we would operate within the civil law we were supporting [...]. Everyone understood this up to the point that it just wasn’t being discussed.”

- General Rupert Smith.¹

With the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974, the PIRA believed that the British government sought for an opportunity to withdraw from Northern Ireland. It initiated a ceasefire by the end of the year which – save for a short interruption in its early phase – lasted until late September 1975.² Contrary to the PIRA’s expectation, the British government did not intend to withdraw but sought to change its approach. In a secret meeting held in January 1975, for example, it was decided that an information campaign against the PIRA was needed to separate it from the Catholic-nationalist community. The report of the meeting to the SSNI stated that: "a terrorist movement cannot survive without the hope, however remote, of eventual success. The best way to destroy that hope is to continue to show that the Government is absolutely determined to defeat terrorism.”³

In order to reach this aim, the report continued to describe that an essential element was to ‘demonstrate that violence and crime will not pay’. In this context, it embraced the abandoning of the special category status for prisoners convicted of terrorist activities as an important step to be made.⁴

By 1976, the British government took this ‘important step’ as it adopted a new policy that had the removal of the special category status for prisoners at its core. According to ní Aoláin, Special category prisoners “were allowed to wear their own clothes and were not required to undertake prison work. [This special status] was the legal acknowledgement of a loss of political legitimacy and the creation of opposing centres of

² Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 178.
⁴ Ibid.
power within the state.” In addition to the removal of the special category status, this new strategic course reshaped the British legal system and introduced police primacy, which meant that the RUC assumed the primary responsibility for security operations in Northern Ireland while the army adopted a supportive role. This new strategic course dominated the British approach to Northern Ireland between 1975-81 and became known as the policy of Ulsterisation.

In this chapter I examine the British counterinsurgency effort throughout this Ulsterisation phase. Similar to the previous chapter, the subsequent five sections correspond to the five instruments outlined in chapter two. Hereafter, the sixth section gives a conclusion in which I evaluate the British strategic objective(s) and the role of counterinsurgency herein.

5.1 A Clear Political Aim

The Sunningdale Agreement reaffirmed Westminster’s previously stated aim to strive for a political settlement and continued to stress that: “if in the future the majority of the people of Northern Ireland should indicate a wish to become part of a united Ireland, the British Government would support that wish.” Much of the agreement’s main points would reappear in the AIA and later in the GFA but, at the time of its implementation, it failed to install a governmental system that was acceptable to the population of Northern Ireland. According to a 1975 governmental discussion paper:

"The experience of recent years in Northern Ireland leads to the inescapable conclusion that general acceptance of the system of government cannot be achieved unless there is widespread and genuine participation in it. That is the only basis for government by consent."

The British government realised that a continuation of the military approach it had adopted in the antecedent years would be insufficient to bring about this ‘widespread and genuine participation’ and began to look for alternative approaches to solve the Northern Irish question following the disbandment of Stormont. In effect, this meant that the government sought to divert the militarisation of the conflict towards a policy of normalisation. While it would not be until the mid-1970s before this transition came into effect, the stepping stone

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6. Ibid. 44-46; Edwards & McGrattan, The Northern Ireland Conflict, 75; Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 179.
to facilitate this change emerged in late 1972, when a commission chaired by Lord Diplock set out to examine the criminal justice system and how it could be altered to enhance effectiveness of the prosecution of terrorist suspects.\(^9\) Preluding the Ulsterisation policy, the commission recommended the installation of an extra-judicial procedure to prosecute alleged terrorists through the regular courts of justice. In effect, this meant that the report made a number of recommendations to alter the legal system in order to overcome problems with the prosecution of the suspects of terrorist offences.\(^10\) While it stemmed from the intention to phase out the policy of internment, O’Leary and McGarry argue that the “recommended options were only mildly less Draconian: the suspension of the right to a jury-trial for certain indictable offences, new relaxed rules on the admissibility of evidence and on the onus of proof, and wider powers of arrest for the security forces.”\(^11\)

According to ní Aoláin, “the dominant political objective of the mid to late 1970s was to eliminate the political context of the violence, effectively neutralising political legitimacy for the opponents of the state, and re-establishing the legitimacy of the statist order.”\(^12\) In other words, the British government’s political aim was to de-politicise the Republican struggle while simultaneously reinstalling a legitimate Northern Ireland Government. In its essence, this aim did not deviate much from when the British government intervened in Northern Ireland in 1969. While the introduction of direct rule in 1972 had ruled out ‘the reaffirmation of Stormont’s authority’ as a viable political objective, it still reflected a strong desire to confine the conflict within the boundaries of Northern Ireland. The difference was that the power-sharing debacle of 1974 had led Westminster to the conclusion that “a stable constitutional, political, military and economic environment needed to be achieved prior to launching another political initiative.”\(^13\) This view was captured in the ‘Gardiner report’ – an influential document that laid the basis for the British policy towards Northern Ireland throughout the Ulsterisation phase. The report emphasised that “a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland should be worked out in political terms, and must include further measures to promote social justice between classes and communities.” It was therefore desirable, the report stated, to develop housing regulations, further erode discriminative policies in the private employment sector, and adopt a "new and more positive approach to community relations.”\(^14\)

Whereas the initial political aim of the British government had an ambivalent nature – it sought to address Catholic-nationalist grievances while simultaneously restoring the status

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\(^12\) ní Aoláin, *The Politics of Force*, 44.
\(^13\) Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 121.
quodata from which these grievances arose, the political aim that developed towards the latter half of the 1970s was more in line with the clear political aim as it was envisioned by Thompson. In line with his argument that the correction of weaknesses in the political system is vital in counterinsurgency\(^\text{15}\), the British government acknowledged that the political situation was too weak and had to be improved before it could work towards its ultimate objective of reinstalling a Northern Irish government. Also, its efforts to erode support for the Republican insurgency while restoring a legitimate authority in Northern Ireland have a clear bearing with Thompson’s argument that government measures must be directed to restoring government authority and law and order throughout the country.\(^\text{16}\)

Yet despite these improvements, Kirk-Smith and Dingley argue that the British political aim during the Ulsterisation phase was primarily driven by a desire to devolve “as much responsibility as possible for dealing with the Troubles to the local authorities and security forces.”\(^\text{17}\) Not, as Thompson stated, to create a viable political solution for Northern Ireland.

### 5.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force

When the British government adopted the Ulsterisation policy towards the latter half of the 1970s in order to ‘re-establish the legitimacy of the statist order’, it had to re-instil itself within the population as a legitimate body in order to prevent further alienation of the Catholic-nationalist population. One important step it had to take in this respect was the termination of internment. This was also advised in the Gardiner report, which stated that:

"Detention cannot remain as a long-term policy. In the short term, it may be an effective means of containing violence, but the prolonged effects of the use of detention are ultimately inimical to community life, fan a widespread sense of grievance and injustice, and obstruct those elements in Northern Ireland society which could lead to reconciliation."\(^\text{18}\)

This advice would be materialized by December 1975, when the last people who had been interned without trial were released.\(^\text{19}\) In addition to the advised termination of internment, the Gardiner report also expressed its concerns in regard to the special category prisoner status. It stated that its implication had been “a serious mistake” and recommended the British government that “the earliest practicable opportunity should be taken to bring special category status to an end.”\(^\text{20}\) This ‘earliest practicable opportunity’ arose in 1976

\(^\text{15}\) Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 51.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid. 51.

\(^\text{17}\) Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 553.


and, with the recommendations of the Diplock commission to overhaul the criminal justice system also coming into effect, this marked the start of the criminalisation policy that was at the core of the British strategic approach during the Ulsterisation phase. The logic behind this policy can be traced back to Thompson, who stated that: “it puts the government in a position in which it is represented as a protector of those who are innocent, and it puts the terrorists in the position of criminals. This creates the proper psychological attitude in the country as a whole, with the government as the ‘cops’ and the terrorists as the ‘robbers’.”

The criminalisation policy had a different effect in Northern Ireland. While it initially appeared to be successful as the PIRA’s activity was reduced and the number of convictions increased, it soon became shrouded in controversy as interrogation techniques used by the RUC not only received criticism from within Northern Ireland, but also came under the attention of the international community. A report of an Amnesty International mission to Northern Ireland in late 1977, for example, concluded that: “on the basis of the information available to it, Amnesty International believes that maltreatment of suspected terrorists by the RUC has taken place with sufficient frequency to warrant the establishment of a public inquiry to investigate it.”

The criminalisation policy was also ill-received by Republican prisoners, who began to protest against the eradication of their special category status towards the end of the 1970s. As they initially found little support for their cause, the prisoners escalated in their tactics. Eventually, the protests cumulated into the hunger strikes of 1980-81. The British government, now under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, adopted a hard-line approach and refused to give in to the hunger strikers’ demands. This proved to be a poor decision. London’s unwillingness to recognize the Republican cause led to public outrage and, as a result, the hunger strikes provoked mass sympathy amongst the nationalist population. This allowed Sinn Féin to commence its political campaign.

Finally, the criminalisation policy was founded on an ambiguous nature. Neumann points out that: “even on the government’s own terms, there was little foundation to support the claim that there was no political dimension to the crime.” He illustrates this by pointing out that according to the government’s own definition – included in the 1974 Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), a document that served “to proscribe organisations concerned in terrorism, and to give power to exclude certain persons from Great Britain or the United Kingdom in order to prevent acts of terrorism, and for connected purposes” –

21 Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 54.
22 Loughlin, The Ulster Question since 1945, 106.
“terrorism was ‘the use of violence for political ends’.” Therefore, “common sense suggests that there were indeed two different categories of crime: one for ordinary, and another one for ‘terrorist’ (i.e. political) offences.”26 These three reasons, I argue, compounded to the negative legacy of the British counterinsurgency performance during the militarisation phase and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the criminalisation policy failed to introduce the British government as the ‘protector of those who are innocent’.

During the Ulsterisation phase, the British government had thus sought to criminalise the paramilitary organizations that were terrorising Northern Ireland. This coincided with a sharp decrease in the use of force as compared to the militarization phase. According to ní Aoláin, this can be attributed to three reasons:

"First, the changeover in agency responsibility, where the army plays second fiddle in large crowd situations to the police. Second, the army itself is adjusting to its role in a civilian situation, adopting to the local environment, learning to read the ground rules more cogently. Finally, the emphasis on legal structure to control the conflict essentially moves the crisis off the streets, which had been the dominant site of confrontation.”27

It thus appears that the security forces made improvements in regard to the principle of minimum force in the sense that the use of force became less frequent. However, the late 1970s also witnessed the emergence of what seemed to be a ‘shoot to kill’ policy by units of the Special Air Service (SAS). Andrew Mumford argues that: “by the end of 1978, after a full three years of deployment, the SAS was responsible for the deaths of ten people, three of whom were innocent members of the public mistaken for IRA members. These tragedies were a public relations disaster for the British military.”28

5|3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation

During the Ulsterisation phase the British government’s primary political aim was to de-politicalise the Republican struggle while simultaneously reinstalling a legitimate Northern Irish government. Here, to de-politicalise meant to criminalise. Which the Ulsterisation policy set out to do by removing the special category status of convicted terrorist offenders and reshaping the Northern Ireland legal system. Combined with the intention to end interment and the introduction of police primacy, this would form the locus of the Ulsterisation policy that had to bring about the desired normalisation of the conflict.

26 Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 111.
Ulsterisation thus marked a notable shift away from the primarily military approach that the British government had adopted up to the mid-1970s. In its stead, the legal system had to become the primary means to cope with the political violence in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{29} According to Tuck, this shift bestowed a number of advantages. He explains that:

"Reducing the profile of the army helped to "localise" the conflict, reducing the most obvious elements of external intervention, and also lowering the campaign’s profile on mainland Britain. Criminalisation attacked crucial symbolic aspects of PIRA strategy, not least its attempt to portray its campaign of violence as a legitimate war between two armies."\textsuperscript{30}

In effect, this new strategic course meant that the British government adopted an internal security approach to the Troubles. Forthcoming from this policy shift, the local security forces gained a more prominent role within security operations within Northern Ireland. This was to be achieved by the professionalization (the expansion of full-time personnel) of both the RUC and the locally recruited defence regiment: the UDR. This is also shown in figure 5.1, which depicts the force ratio of the RUC and UDR/RIR between full-time and part-time personnel. According to Neumann, these expansions “reflected two strands of thinking on the British side. On the one hand, [...] it was a recognition of the fact that the conflict in Northern Ireland was not to be resolved easily, and that the government needed to create permanent structures to cope with the security problem. On the other hand, it represented London’s response to the allegation that the security forces were far from being impartial and objective in carrying out their duties.”\textsuperscript{31}

It becomes even more evident that the British set out to ‘Ulsterise’ the Troubles by expanding the professional cadre of the RUC and the UDR/RIR by the decreasing amount of British troops deployed to Northern Ireland. This decreasing trend in British troops is depicted in figure 5.2, which shows that between 1975-81, the number of British troops stationed in Northern Ireland dropped from about 15,000 to 11,600.\textsuperscript{32} The introduction of police primacy did thus not mean that the RUC immediately became the largest element of the security forces within Northern Ireland. Still, they were the only sector to be expanded while the UDR stayed more or less the same and the army’s presence was reduced over 20 percent.

In addition to minimizing its military presence in Northern Ireland, the British government had always expressed a clear desire to transfer the authority over Northern Ireland back to a local government. In order to do so, it acknowledged that the political situation and

\textsuperscript{29} ní Aoláin, The Politics of Force, 45.
\textsuperscript{30} Tuck, “Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency,” 169.
\textsuperscript{32} Irwin and Mahoney, “The Military Response,” 200.
Counterinsurgency during the ‘Ulsterisation’ Phase: 1975-81

Figure 5.1  RUC and UDR manpower, 1969-83.\textsuperscript{33}

Figure 5.2  British troops in Northern Ireland, 1969-83.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} Neumann, "The Myth of Ulsterisation," 371; 373.
\textsuperscript{34} Data retrieved from: Irwin and Mahoney, "The Military Response," 200.
the ‘widespread and genuine participation’ herein had to improve.\textsuperscript{35} It saw the criminalisation of the political violence and the introduction of police primacy as the first steps towards this goal. Once these changes led to an improvement of the situation, the next step was to devolve political power to Northern Ireland authorities.

In regard to the early 1970s, the Ulsterisation policy thus advocated a more balanced civil-military effort and laid down priorities in the measures to be taken first – both of which are put forward by Thompson as important factors in a government’s overall plan.\textsuperscript{36} Yet despite these improvements, it built on a major shortcoming: it denied the political nature of the Republican insurgency. Given that an insurgency is, in its essence, a political struggle, it follows that an overall plan to counter it must focus on the political situation from which it arises. By approaching the Troubles as a matter of internal security in which the criminalisation of the PIRA and other paramilitary organisations had to lead to the de-legitimisation of their struggle, the British government had adopted a policy that was primarily aimed at the insurgent movement. It did not back this up with a coherent effort to undermine grassroots support for the Republican insurgency.

5.4 Priority on Political Measures

The aforementioned recommendations made in the Gardiner report for measures of social reform indicate that the British government was determined to address the grievances underlying the violence in Northern Ireland. In fact, the report emphasised that the implementation of these measures were a necessity to return peace to Northern Ireland and stated that:

“Measures of social reform may not produce immediate results in the reduction of violence. In Northern Ireland memories are long, and past oppression serves to colour present experience; but a more united community is the only real answer to the dilemma of maintaining peace while preserving liberty.”\textsuperscript{37}

Yet despite this emphasis on the importance of social reforms, the Ulsterisation policy sought to criminalise – and thereby de-politicise – the Republican struggle. It thus primarily targeted the insurgent movement rather than the political subversion and Catholic-nationalist grievances underlying it. In light of Kitson’s statement that: “the [counter-insurgent’s] programme should also cater for rectifying genuine grievances, especially

\textsuperscript{36} Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, 55.
\textsuperscript{37} Gardiner, Report of a Committee, 7.
those which the enemy are exploiting as part of their cause, and for attracting support by implementing popular projects and reforms,” it seems that this was an inadequate approach to deal with the Republican insurgency. This observation is strengthened by three examples. First of all, the PIRA enjoyed a significant degree of popular support and was firmly rooted in the Catholic-nationalist working class community. The denial of the political nature of their struggle did not alter this perception. Rather than delegitimising the Republican insurgency, criminalisation thus contributed to the further alienation of many Catholic-nationalists who perceived it as an attempt to criminalise their entire community.

Second, the transfer of authority over security operations from the army to the RUC was intended “to send a powerful message to the Catholic population, in particular that their security was not provided by an army of occupation but by their fellow Ulstermen.” By this time, the ‘old’ RUC had been largely disbanded and the British government set out to professionalise the organisation in order to improve its representativeness for the Northern Ireland population. Smith recalls that: “the RUC, as it started to be recreated from 1974, had some very high calibre people in it. I could see the change when I was there in 1978 as opposed to the early 1970s... it was impressively different.” Even so, the RUC – like the UDR and RIR, which were also professionalized during the Ulsterisation phase – consisted almost exclusively out of members of the Protestant-unionist community. Therefore, the Ulsterisation policy relied on an expansion of a security apparatus which was, despite its professionalization, not adequately reformed to be representative of the whole population of Northern Ireland. This compounded to the Republican perception that they were fighting against a Protestant-dominated state.

Finally, the more radical Republican and Loyalist groups that were at the core of the Troubles were excluded from negotiations towards a solution due to the policy of criminalisation. Instead, the more moderate parties took the lead in these talks. According to Augusteijn, this was problematic. When the moderate parties proposed a solution to their followers, he argues, it was not only unrepresentative of the population as a whole, but also led to the radicalisation of those who disagreed with it. In addition, as is pointed out by Tuck, “political initiatives designed to support moderate nationalists and undermine radical Republicanism [...] produced a violent Unionist response.” This violent response was often aimed at the Catholic population. Therefore, “the government’s political initiatives in

38 Kitson, Low Intensity Operations, 51.
support of moderates often reinforced support for [the] PIRA, who were seen by many in the Catholic community as a vital protection against sectarian attacks.”

5.5 Intelligence

The British government’s adoption of the Ulsterisation policy meant that the RUC gained authority over the direction of all security operations in Northern Ireland. This shift paved the way for an improvement of intelligence-gathering and the establishment of more effective methods for its exploitation. While it took some years to build up, the (re)introduction of police primacy allowed the RUC SB to develop its training facilities and intelligence gathering capacities. According to Kirk-Smith and Dingley, the RUC SB “evolved in tandem with military intelligence, given that they both had to cooperate within Northern Ireland.” This was advantageous as “this common evolution led to good communications and working relationships at all levels between the police and army.”

The early 1970s had seen a rapid increase in the proactive measures such as foot patrols, vehicle checkpoints and house searches. Simultaneously, however, covert intelligence gathering methods – such as the use of turned PIRA members and security forces personnel in civilian clothes – had gradually grown in importance. Tuck argues that “covert operations became even more prominent” by the end of 1976. Because of this, the latter half of the 1970s not only witnessed an increase the deployment of SAS units, but also the emergence of “a variety of newly created army and Police units for covert operations including intelligence gathering, the recruitment and running of informants, reconnaissance and ambushes.” These shifts coincided with improved coordination between the various intelligence organisations. One example of this is the creation of Tasking and Co-ordination Groups (TCGs) in the late 1970s. These groups contained representatives of the various intelligence organisations, brought together their tactical operations, and allowed for the locking together of information and activities.

Kitson labels the information collected by intelligence organisation as 'background information', which is "immensely valuable for providing data on which policy can be worked out, and it forms the background to operational planning." This background information is a raw product in the sense that it has to be further developed into 'contact information': the information upon which operational commanders can be put "into contact

46 Tuck, “Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency,” 168.
47 Mark Urban, Big Boys’ Rules, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), 238.
48 Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 555.
49 Tuck, “Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency,” 175;
Newsinger, “From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security,” 96.
50 Tuck, “Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency,” 175.
51 Ibid. 176;
Urban, Big Boys’ Rules, 95;
Jackson, “Counterinsurgency Intelligence in a "Long War",“ 76;
Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 554.
with the enemy.”

Here, Kitson refers to the intelligence necessary for the conduct of military operations. It follows that if a government seeks to use this background information to counter an insurgency through non-military means – such as the criminalisation policy in Northern Ireland – this information has to be further developed. According to Bamford:

“The criminalisation policy required the British to rely on a combination of intelligence and policing techniques that ultimately proved relatively successful in containing the violence. As a result of this policy, a greater emphasis was placed on obtaining criminal intelligence, whereas prior to this, it was the acquisition of ‘contact’ information for purely military purposes that was sought.”

This is not something that can easily be done. Jeffery argues that: “the process by which the authorities can ‘criminalise’ the campaign will of necessity be slow, since it depends considerably on changing public attitudes.” As for Northern Ireland, he points out that:

“...it seems that the authorities tried to hurry this process along [...]. Here, the government had informers who were evidently providing a great deal of high.grads intelligence. This could have been used solely for developing contact information, but in keeping with the policy of convicting as many terrorists as possible, the authorities used the information as criminal intelligence to charge and try a substantial number of terrorist suspects.”

This misuse of intelligence in an attempt to criminalise the conflict culminated in the so-called ‘supergrass trials’ during the early to mid-1980s in which informers inside the Republican or Loyalist paramilitary organisations testified against other members of their organisation in exchange for a lighter sentence and witness protection. While this did severely hamper the paramilitaries, it also resulted in a large loss of valuable sources of intelligence as many informers could no longer provide information to the intelligence organisations that had ‘employed’ them. While the British intelligence apparatus in Northern Ireland had thus improved significantly during the Ulsterisation phase, the British government’s desire to normalise the situation in Northern Ireland resulted in the misuse of the information it generated. Nevertheless, the improvements that were made did work.

Bamford, “The Role and Effectiveness of Intelligence in Northern Ireland,” 594.
Jeffery, *Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations*, 143.
Ibid. 143.
Bamford, “The Role and Effectiveness of Intelligence in Northern Ireland,” 594;
towards containing the Republican insurgency, a process that would continue through the 1980s.

5|6 Conclusion

As emphasised by Kirk-Smith and Dingley, the Ulsterisation policy meant that the British government sought to devolve “as much responsibility as possible for dealing with the Troubles to the local authorities and security forces.”\(^5\) In this sense, the overall strategic objective of the British government thus remained similar to that of the early 1970s. However, after realising that the militarisation of the conflict was not going to bring about a situation in which this was going to be achieved, Westminster diverted its course towards an internal security approach based on police primacy and the criminalisation of radical Republicanism and Loyalism. This new strategic course was meant to de-politicise the Republican struggle while simultaneously reinstalling a legitimate Northern Ireland Government. This was not achieved. While the Republican threat did decrease, the security forces could not overcome it. Moreover, instead of de-politicising the Republican struggle, criminalisation eventually culminated into the 1980-81 hunger strikes that reinvigorated the Republican struggle and allowed for its political wing Sinn Féin to enter mainstream politics.

In terms of the British counterinsurgency effort the Ulsterisation policy was an improvement in comparison to the militarisation phase, but this does not mean that the British government adopted an effective counterinsurgency strategy. While Ulsterisation marked a notable shift away from the primarily military approach of the early 1970s, it replaced this by an internal security approach that undermined the political nature of the Republican insurgency. This resulted in a policy that prioritised the de-legitimisation of the insurgent movement itself rather than the political subversion from which it derived. As put forward by Neumann, "[the] strategy was fatally flawed. It assumed an almost ideal game situation, that is, one in which London was the only actor to determine the strategic environment."\(^5\) In sum, the Ulsterisation policy build on reverse reasoning on Westminster’s part. The criminalisation of the Republican insurgents would not delegitimise their violent struggle in the perception of the Catholic-nationalist community. Rather, as classical counterinsurgency theory dictates, a counterinsurgency strategy should be aimed at the political subversion from which it arises and hereby win over the support of the population. In other words, a counter-insurgent should first delegitimise the insurgency in the eyes of the population before it can effectively criminalise its protagonists.

\(^{57}\) Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 553.

\(^{58}\) Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 121.
CHAPTER SIX

Counterinsurgency during the Politicisation Phase and Peace Process: 1982-98

“Recognising the potential of the current situation and in order to enhance the democratic process and underlying our definitive commitment to its success, the leadership of the IRA have decided that as of midnight, August 31, there will be a complete cessation of military operations. All our units have been instructed accordingly.”

- PIRA Ceasefire Statement, 31 August 1994.¹

Ultimately, the British government’s attempt to de-politicise the Republican insurgency throughout the latter half of the 1970s had the contradictory effect of enabling the Republican movement to gain a political foothold. According to Newsinger, “[Thatcher’s] uncompromising stand over the hunger strikes was to create the circumstances that actually forced her government into concessions to the Catholic minority and the Irish government.”² Indeed, a government inquiry into the opinion of the Catholic-nationalist community following the hunger strikes of 1981 found that: “the young in particular are disillusioned with traditional politics and tend to regard conventional politicians as offering wrong answers to irrelevant questions. They are turning to extreme nationalist politics – ‘Brits out’ – as somehow dealing with the ‘real’ issues.”³

The 1980s thus saw the conflict moving into a new dimension as the Republicans politicised their struggle. Simultaneously, rapprochement between the British and Irish governments resulted in the AIA which, while failing to produce its immediate intended effects, fostered the foundations for an improved cooperation between the Irish and British governments and ultimately laid the basis for the emergence of the peace process in the 1990s that resulted in the GFA.⁴ In this chapter I analyse the British counterinsurgency effort throughout this politicisation phase and the peace process. Like the previous

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² Newsinger, British Counterinsurgency, 185.


⁴ Edwards and McGrattan, The Northern Ireland Conflict, 84; Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 147.
chapters, the following five sections correspond to the five-point framework for analysis I outlined in chapter two. Hereafter, I conclude this chapter by evaluating the British strategic objective(s) and the role of counterinsurgency herein.

6.1 A Clear Political Aim

The failure to de-politicise the Republican struggle had not altered Westminster’s desire to minimise its own role in the governance of Northern Ireland. A 1982 White Paper Statement regarding the upcoming Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) elections stated that:

“Direct rule has served Northern Ireland well. It was, however, introduced as a temporary arrangement. It does not provide satisfactory political structures through which a divided community in Northern Ireland can make the necessary mutual accommodations to tackle its special problems.”

The decade of direct rule had not only convinced Westminster of its inability to bring about a realistic prospect of a devolved cross-community settlement, its apparent failure to contain the conflict led London to the conclusion that it had to seek accommodation with Dublin if it were to solve the Troubles. According to Neumann, it therefore became London’s objective “to negotiate a framework that would expedite cross-border security cooperation, facilitate the minority’s support for the institutions of law and order, and make the Irish government a responsible ‘stakeholder’ in the conflict.” Forthcoming from this renewed attitude, the British and Irish governments negotiated the 1985 AIA which suggested a renewed British commitment to reform Northern Ireland, included the Irish government in the arbitration process of the conflict, and pledged both governments to cooperate on various fronts to improve the situation in Northern Ireland. In addition, it reaffirmed that the status of Northern Ireland could only change with the consent of a majority of its population.

Westminster’s political aim expressed within the AIA was thus not essentially different from what it had been during the previous years of its involvement in Northern Ireland. In fact, article 4.b of the Agreement stated that:

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6 Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 146.
"It is the declared policy of the United Kingdom Government that responsibility in respect of certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be devolved within Northern Ireland on a basis which would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community. The Irish Government support that policy."  

As in the previous years of its involvement in Northern Ireland, the British government’s political objective remained to achieve a settlement based on devolution and power-sharing in which the future status of Northern Ireland was to be dependent on the consent of the majority of the Northern Irish population. This means that it did not set out to literally create “a free, independent and united country” like Thompson envisioned.  

8 Given the widely divergent interests of the warring parties in Northern Ireland, none of which sought to achieve an independent Northern Ireland, this is understandable. Even so, at the time of the AIA’s implementation, this objective was not politically viable as it found little support among the Northern Irish population (save for the more moderate Catholic-nationalists supporting the SDLP).  

9 This changed towards the 1990s, when the peace process began to take hold. Here, the 1993 Downing Street Declaration marked an important step for the emergence of the 1994 PIRA ceasefire and subsequent peace talks.  

10 The declaration reaffirmed the political aim that any decision regarding the status of Northern Ireland had to be based on the consent of the majority of its population. Also, it explicitly stated that the British government had “no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland” and that the representatives of the violent paramilitary factions could participate in peace talks if they made “a permanent end to the use of, or support for, paramilitary violence.”  

11 By 1998, the peace talks led to the GFA, which provided that the governance of Northern Ireland could be transferred back to the local government – the NIA – where representatives of both communities would share authority over Northern Ireland in a grand coalition. Here, veto-rights and cross-community support for key decisions would ensure their appropriate representation.  

12 The agreement also contained provisions on decommissioning, policing, human rights, demilitarization and the status of prisoners. Moreover, like the AIA, the GFA recognized that a change in the status of Northern Ireland could only come about through the consent of a majority of its population.  

13 Given that these arrangements had generally dictated London’s desired solution for the Troubles since
1972, the British government had thus achieved its objective – or at least laid the basis for the political landscape from which it could emerge. Overall, the British government’s aim thus remained fairly constant throughout the Troubles. Still, it took over two decades before it turned out to be a politically viable solution for Northern Ireland – that is, viable enough to bring about a negotiated settlement.

6.2 Acting in Accordance with the Law and Minimum Force

From the 1980s onward, the security forces increasingly engaged in set-piece confrontations with the PIRA (special operations in which the security forces, primarily SAS units, acted on intelligence to ambush PIRA members in the conduct of a terrorist act). According to ní Aoláin, “the deployment of specialist units meant that when force was exercised, the soldiers shot to kill. In many pre-planned military confrontations the evidence suggests that arrest in the context of these operations did not constitute taking the suspect into custody; it meant eliminating a threat, even if that meant killing the suspect.” As shown in figure 6.1, this resulted in more than 40 deaths from 1982 onward. Even more so than in the late 1970s, it thus seemed that the security forces adopted a ‘shoot to kill’ policy. The ambushing and killing of eight PIRA members as they attempted to bomb the Loughgall police station in May 1987, and another three in Gibraltar in March 1988 by SAS units are clear examples of such operations. While in both cases, the victims – save for one civilian in Loughgall – were terrorist suspects ‘caught in the act’, many people questioned whether lethal force was used only as a last resort.

The use of lethal force in SAS special operations evoked strong public condemnation amongst the Catholic-nationalist media. According to the British Ministry of Defence, this indicated the serious effect these operations had on the PIRA. Nevertheless, the dubious manner in which lethal force was applied during these covert operations stands in contrast to the principle of minimum force. This was problematic because it gave the PIRA huge propaganda potential. In this respect, Irwin and Mahoney observe that it would have been better if arrests had been made. Arrests, they argue, are “substantially less violent (and therefore in keeping with the aim of maintaining a state of law and order); and a murderer caught in the act and put on trial attracts much less public sympathy.”

16 Dickson, “Counterinsurgency and Human Rights in Northern Ireland,” 304.
17 Bamford, “The Role and Effectiveness of intelligence in Northern Ireland,” 596-98.
Despite the controversy over the ‘shoot to kill’ policy the security forces had seemingly adopted, Neumann points out that their ability to avoid civilian casualties was a significant factor that prevented large issues concerning these special operations from arising.\(^{21}\) In addition, the British had learned from past mistakes such as the policy of internment and the Falls Road Curfew, which had a profound influence on the alienation of the Catholic-nationalist community. Hence, when a deteriorating security situation in the late 1980s led Prime Minister Thatcher to review the security policy so that it would bring an end to police primacy, reintroduce internment, relax regulations on the use of force by security forces, and put a ban on Sinn Féin, it was recognised that this would be counter-productive and the implementation of these measures was averted.\(^{22}\) By and large, the British government thus operated in accordance with the law throughout the politicisation phase and peace process. However, this did not mean that the Catholic-nationalist perception of the British government improved throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As also emphasised by Tuck, “given the process of alienation that had [already] taken place between the Catholic community and the security forces, it proved fundamentally difficult to change existing mindsets.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\) Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 132.
\(^{22}\) Ibid. 129-30;
Tuck, "Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency," 170.
\(^{23}\) Tuck, "Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency," 177.
6.3 An Overall Plan and Civil-Military Cooperation

The attempt to criminalise the Republican struggle came to an end when the hunger strikes led Westminster into concessions to the prisoners. While this can be regarded as a setback to the government’s strategy, the initially unintended ‘side-effect’ of the hunger strikes – i.e. the grassroots support it produced for the Republican movement and its political wing Sinn Féin – proved to be far more threatening to the British hegemony over Northern Ireland. According to ní Aoláin, “Sinn Féin support was read as a failure of the policy of normalisation, because it illustrated that the policy had floundered among a considerable segment of the nationalist population.”24 Yet despite this apparent failure of the Ulsterisation policy, Westminster did not abandon the strategic course it had adopted during the latter half of the 1970s. This meant that the professionalization policy in regard to the Northern Irish security forces continued along similar lines as before. This process is depicted in Figure 6.2, which shows that the rapid expansion of the RUC’s professional personnel (regulars and reserve full-time) continued throughout the first half of the 1980s and more or less stabilised from 1985 onward. Simultaneously, the part-time element of the UDR (which merged into the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) together with the Royal Irish Rangers in 1992)25 was gradually reduced while its full-time element remained more or less intact.

Figure 6.2  RUC and UDR/RIR manpower, 1981-99.26

25 Ministry of Defence, Operation Banner, 3-6.
Along with the professionalization of the locally recruited security forces, police primacy was also maintained throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Hence, the army continued to operate in *support of* the RUC. This did not mean a great reduction in the number of British troops in Northern Ireland. Rather, the deployment levels of the army fluctuated in reaction to the threat to the security situation on the ground. Hence, as shown in figure 6.3, the amount of British troops was gradually reduced between 1981-85, dropping from 11,900 to 9,700 between 1980-85. When the implementation of the AIA resulted in tensions and a deteriorating security situation during the latter half of the 1980s, the amount of British troops was again increased to 11,400 by 1987. A reversed trend can be observed in the years following 1994, when the PIRA, later followed by Loyalist paramilitary organisations, declared a ceasefire and the immediate threat the security situation in Northern Ireland lessened.

![Figure 6.3](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/proni/1981/proni_CENT-1-10-86A_1981-10-05.pdf)

*Figure 6.3  British troops in Northern Ireland, 1981-98.*

Despite the failure of the criminalisation policy to ‘criminalise’ the PIRA’s struggle, Westminster expressed no desire to waive from its key elements. In a statement following the hunger strikes, the SSNI emphasised that: “there will be no question of a political or military system of administration or any return to special category status.” While the government did concede to the Republican prisoners by addressing many of their grievances such as re-allowing them the right to wear their own clothing, the restoration of up to 50% of the prisoners’ remissions, and easing regulations in regard to associate

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with each other,\(^\text{29}\) it thus continued to deny the extra-normal nature of their imprisonment. This argument is strengthened by the observation of ní Aoláin that: “the most cogent feature of this [post-Ulsterisation] period was the trend to completely normalise the emergency by transferring emergency powers into the ordinary law in order to cope with civil strife. Thus, the invisible barrier between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary was in a process of being entirely swept away by the state.”\(^\text{30}\) A 1990 government inquiry that reviewed previous emergency provision acts, for example, stated that: “deviation from the normal law should occur only where it is clearly justified in each case.” Simultaneously, it stressed that the no-jury system to prosecute those convicted for terrorist-offences as it was proposed in the 1972 Diplock report remained necessary and that “new legislation should consolidate those emergency provisions that are being retained with PTA arrest and detention powers.”\(^\text{31}\)

The British government thus continued to adopt an internal security approach to the Troubles in which the security apparatus and the legal system were the primary means to counter the Republican insurgency. However, its strategic approach underwent two important changes during the 1980s. First, the security policy developed on the basis of a strong sense of the British government that it could not defeat the Republican insurgency. Instead, it sought to contain their violent struggle. The rationale behind this was that this would equally deny the victory to the PIRA. It was believed that, with no prospect of success, the Republican insurgency would eventually die out.\(^\text{32}\) Second, the failure of the AIA to impose a constitutional change led Westminster to the realisation that it had to produce a settlement based on the agreement and support of both the Protestant-unionist and the Catholic-nationalist community. In conjunction with the Republic of Ireland, it therefore sought “to launch negotiations for an agreed settlement based on the principle of consent, thus preserving the integrity of the political process whilst paving the way for the inclusion of Sinn Féin” from the late 1980s onward.\(^\text{33}\) Nevertheless, it would not be until the 1990s before this desire could be actualised and the peace process began to take hold. Rather than a coordinated, population-centric civil-military effort that aimed at ‘winning over’ the Catholic-nationalist community, the British government’s overall plan to tackle the Republican insurgency thus continued to focus on the Republican threat. While the desire to contain the PIRA turned out to be more feasible than its defeat, London’s strategy was therefore not in keeping with classical counterinsurgency theory, which

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\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ní Aoláin, *The Politics of Force*, 64.


\(^{32}\) Joost Augusteijn, interview by author. Tape recording. Leiden, May 8, 2014; Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 155;

\(^{33}\) Tuck, “Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency,” 170.

Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 177.
generally dictates that a policy targeted at the insurgent movement must be backed by a strong civil effort to erode the insurgents’ support base among the population.\textsuperscript{34}

6.4 Priority on Political Measures

In effect, the revised objective of containing the Republican insurgency meant that the British government ceased to view the defeat of the PIRA as a vital element to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. Given that both Thompson and Galula emphasise that the main effort in counterinsurgency should not be directed at defeating the insurgent movement but on defeating the political subversion underlying it,\textsuperscript{35} this was a welcome development. However, as shown in the previous section, the British strategic approach prioritised on what Galula describes as police and judicial tasks – measures that focus on “identifying, arresting, interrogating the insurgent political agents, judging them, [and] rehabilitating those who can be won over”\textsuperscript{36} – rather than political measures aimed at gaining control over the (Catholic-nationalist) population of Northern Ireland.

The main issues that nourished Catholic-nationalist discontent since the introduction of direct rule in 1972 are summarised by Loughlin, who argues that: “Britain had failed to pursue a fair and firm policy, particularly in the security field, and had also failed to secure an effective voice for northern Catholics in the government of Northern Ireland, or to significantly improve that community’s position of relative unemployment and social deprivation.”\textsuperscript{37} London was aware of these issues. A 1987 government Report, which reviewed regulations in regard to religious and political discrimination and equality of opportunity in Northern Ireland, stressed that: “the unemployment rate for male Catholics is two and a half times that for male Protestants. This has shown no improvement in the last decade.”\textsuperscript{38} In addition, the report proposed various arrangements and improvements to existing measures in order to cope with discrimination and to improve equal opportunities for members of both communities. Nevertheless, it was not until 1989 before a significant change in governmental attitudes towards the issue of communal inequality came about. This view was expressed in the Fair Employment Act. For the first time, London acknowledged that the material inequality between the Protestant-unionist majority and the Catholic-nationalist minority was “a legitimate grievance that needed to be addressed

\textsuperscript{34} See for example: Thompson, \textit{Defeating Communist Insurgency}, 55; and Kitson, \textit{Low Intensity Operations}, 50.
\textsuperscript{35} Galula, \textit{Counterinsurgency Warfare}, 66; Thompson, \textit{Defeating Communist Insurgency}, 55.
\textsuperscript{36} Galula, \textit{Counter-Insurgency Warfare}, 64.
\textsuperscript{37} Loughlin, \textit{The Ulster Question since 1945}, 122.
if political stability was to emerge."³⁹ By the 1990s, British government investments had resulted in considerable improvements that helped to provide employment opportunities in Northern Ireland and many reforms had been implemented that worked towards the removal of injustices and discrimination in the Northern Ireland system. In all, significant improvements had been made in comparison to the situation from which the Republican insurgency arose during the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁰

Eventually, the GFA further formalised equality legislation and laid the basis for further developments in this respect. However, grassroots support for the Republican movement was not only linked to the relative deprivation of the Catholic-nationalist community. Discontent towards the British security policy played an important role as well. Yet this policy remained largely unchanged during the 1980s and early 1990s. The security apparatus in Northern Ireland thus continued to consist almost exclusively out of members of the Protestant-unionist community who were backed by the British army. It was not until the GFA before the British government moved beyond the professionalization policy and implemented fundamental reforms.⁴¹

Overall, the British government did not introduce strong political measures aimed at overcoming inequality and other grievances in Northern Ireland before the late 1980s and early 1990s. Therefore, I argue that it did not prioritise on the political aspects of its counterinsurgency campaign during the politicisation phase, or indeed the Troubles as a whole.

### 6.5 Intelligence

The ‘supergrass’ trials were abandoned in 1983 after a number of judges refused to accept information provided by Republican or Loyalist informers as legitimate evidence to prosecute members of the paramilitary organisations. By and large, this meant that the large misuse of information had ended.⁴² With this hampering policy out of the way, the intelligence apparatus was able to achieve a high degree of efficiency as it continued to develop and expand its network of intelligence on the paramilitary organisations on both sides of the divide.

Despite the controversy over the use of lethal force, the aforementioned SAS ambush at the Loughgall police station and interception of a PIRA operation in Gibraltar demonstrate that the intelligence organisation was capable of obtaining high quality information on the paramilitary organisations and their actions.⁴³ Here, the informants that infiltrated the

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³⁹ Neumann, *Britain’s Long War*, 144.
⁴² Jeffery, "Intelligence and Counter-Insurgency Operations," 132.
⁴³ Bamford, "The Role and Effectiveness of intelligence in Northern Ireland," 596.
Republican insurgent organisations were the most important source of information. Writing in 1997, Kevin Toolis argues that: their recruitment “has long been the primary British method of gaining intelligence on their Republican enemies […] despite the electronic hardware of the twentieth century, the Crown’s most powerful weapon in the present-day Troubles remained the human informer.”

Building on the information acquired through these sources, the security forces were able to pre-empt and prevent acts of terrorism and identify the key players in the paramilitary organisations. Smith recalls that:

“While you might not always stop something before it happened, whoever did it was either defeated in the doing or picked up and arrested subsequently. This resulted in a very high attrition rate of competent IRA operators. A factor that was becoming self-defeating because they had to recruit less competent people who got picked up quicker. You reached a more or less stasis. You couldn’t defeat them but they couldn’t make any more progress.”

Indeed, Neumann points out that: “the RUC estimated that, by the early 1990s, 70 per cent of all planned IRA operations in the province needed to be aborted for fear of detection, whilst of the remaining 30 per cent, another 80 per cent were prevented or interdicted by the security forces.”

While intelligence alone could not generate the conditions to end the conflict, it played a crucial role in the security forces’ ability to contain the Republican insurgency. According to Newsinger, “this was itself a considerable achievement and constituted a serious setback for the [PIRA].”

6.6 Conclusion

With the signing of the GFA in 1998, an important step had been taken towards peace in Northern Ireland. Even so, the conflict had not reached a definite conclusion. Indeed, as emphasised by Edwards and McGrattan, “[the agreement] did not automatically settle the conflict in Northern Ireland, nor did it lead to the permanent eradication of physical violence, intimidation, and conflict within or between communities.”

It did, however, provide the foundations for a devolved government based on power-sharing and led to the notable demilitarisation of the conflict. This had always been the British government’s ultimate goal since it imposed direct rule in March 1972. While the signing of the GFA thus

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44 Kevin Toolis, Rebel Hearts: Journeys within the IRA’s Soul, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 194, quoted in Kalyvas, The Logic of Violence in Civil War, 176.
45 Kirk-Smith and Dingley, Countering terrorism in Northern Ireland, 556.
47 Neumann, Britain’s Long War, 157.
48 Newsinger, “From Counter-Insurgency to Internal Security,” 105-06.
marked the start of a long process, it equally meant that the British government had finally met the strategic objective that had dictated its efforts for more than a quarter century.

The British counterinsurgency effort had remained largely unchanged during the 1980s. However, with the disappearance of the immediate desire to criminalise the PIRA, the intelligence organisation continued to develop into a highly efficient organisation that would allow the security forces to effectively contain the Republican insurgency by the late 1980s and early 1990s. The mutually recognised stalemate that resulted from this played a key role in the emergence of the peace process.50 This, I argue, is the greatest contribution of the British counterinsurgency effort towards a political settlement of the conflict. This is not to say, however, that the relatively successful outcome of the Troubles – i.e. the GFA and continuing peace process – is all due to a successful British counterinsurgency effort. Indeed, while the British security forces were able to create a mutually perceived stalemate, it was not until the 1990s before a substantial effort to tackle the sources of Catholic-nationalist discontent was undertaken. Moreover, despite significant improvements that the counterinsurgency effort had undergone in comparison to the 1970s, the British government did not – in keeping with the classical counterinsurgency theory – ‘win over’ the Catholic-nationalist population in Northern Ireland, nor had it set out to do so.

50 Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End, 20.
Conclusion

"It is a quite simplistic thought that it was the British counterinsurgency strategy that brought the IRA to the negotiating table... This is not to say that the government did all that bad within the context of what it sought to achieve. However, I don’t think that its counterinsurgency effort has been a decisive factor in the outcome of the peace process...”

Dr. Joost Augusteijn.¹

While the Troubles did not reach an immediate and conclusive end-state with the signing of the GFA in 1998, the agreement did put an end to the revolutionary war between the British state and the Republican insurgents that had dominated the violent conflict since the early 1970s. In the years following the agreement’s implementation, Westminster retained its authority over Northern Ireland, the Republican insurgency dwindled as its protagonists continued to pursue their goals through legitimate politics, and the Catholic-nationalist population of Northern Ireland favours the peaceful settlement over a continuation of violence. In addition, it set the stage for a continuing peace process in which Westminster ultimately achieved its strategic objective of devolution and power-sharing.

In terms of the outcome of the counterinsurgency campaign, the British government may thus make a claim for success in Northern Ireland. However, I argued throughout this thesis that this successful outcome does not, on the whole, correspond with the implementation of a successful counterinsurgency strategy. In this concluding chapter I deepen this statement by coming back to the research question posed in chapter one: to what extent has the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy during the Troubles in Northern Ireland? In addition, I make a number of recommendations for further research.

7|1 Conclusions

In order to come to an answer to the research question posed above, I derived a five-point framework for analysis from the counterinsurgency principles that are at the core of

the works of Robert Thompson, Frank Kitson, David Galula, and Charles Gwynn – the key theorists of the classical counterinsurgency paradigm. On the basis of this framework, I analysed the British counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland for three subsequent phases of the conflict. In this section, I conclude this thesis by reflecting on the findings of this analysis. I do so by shortly describing how the British counterinsurgency effort has developed in relation to each of the five instruments. Hereafter, I formulate a conclusive answer to my main research question.

1. **A clear political aim**

   The British government’s political aim remained fairly constant throughout the duration of the conflict. As early as in 1969, it emphasised that: “Northern Ireland should not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.” This remained a central theme within British strategic thinking in regard to the Troubles that recurred in the AIA and ultimately the GFA. During the initial years of its involvement in Northern Ireland, Westminster set out to restore the authority of the Protestant-unionist dominated government. Yet this was not a politically viable aim as it hereby sought to return the region to the status quo ante from which the conflict had emerged – a situation that was not acceptable to the Catholic-nationalist community. With the imposing of direct rule in 1972, this ceased to be an option for the British government. Instead, it began to look for a political solution based on devolution and power-sharing. During the Ulsterisation phase, the thriving force behind this political aim was Westminster’s desire to devolve “as much responsibility as possible for dealing with the Troubles to the local authorities and security forces.”

   In the 1980s, as it failed to achieve this goal, Westminster developed a sense that such a solution had to be based on widespread acceptance within the whole population of Northern Ireland. Combined with the acknowledgement of the Irish dimension of the Troubles, this would eventually lead to a political aim that was, in the words of Thompson, more ‘politically viable’ as it worked towards a settlement that could include all parties concerned with the – both within and outside Northern Ireland.

   Overall, the British government adopted a clear political aim throughout its involvement in Northern Ireland that is comparable to the political aim as it was envisaged by Thompson, who argued that a counter-insurgent must seek “to establish and maintain a free, independent and united country which is politically and economically stable and viable.” Even so, it took Westminster nearly two decades to create a framework that would work towards a settlement that would

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3 Kirk-Smith and Dingley, “Countering Terrorism in Northern Ireland,” 553.
4 Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 51.
turn out to be ‘politically viable’ – something that is still disputed by many scholars who argue that the current political system in Northern Ireland strengthens the political divide that formed the basis of the Troubles in the first place.\(^5\)

2. **Acting in accordance with the law and minimum use of force**

During the militarisation phase, the British government – either through the policies it adapted or through its security forces – acted poorly in respect to the law and the principle of minimum force. This worked towards the rapid alienation of the Catholic-nationalist population, whose perception of the British government and its security forces (the British army in particular) grew extremely poor during the initial phase of the conflict.

The British government’s approach improved considerably during the Ulsterisation and the politicisation phase in regard to this second point of analysis. Never again did the British government embark on large scale operations against the civilian population in a manner comparable to Bloody Sunday and the (re)introduction of dubious policies such as internment was avoided. “On the whole,” argues van Creveld therefore, “the British played by the rules.”\(^6\) Yet despite the improvements the Government and its security forces made in this respect, I argue that it never fully operated in a manner that would be perceived as being ‘in accordance with the law’ or in line with the principle of minimum force. Overall, as is argued by Tuck, “the Army’s conception of minimum force did not accord with the Catholic’s perception of minimum force (nor indeed of other interested parties, such as the Republic of Ireland).”\(^7\) The already poor perception of the security forces meant that every incident further compounded to the Catholic-nationalist population’s alienation from the British state whereas improvements in this respect were hard to come by.

3. **An overall plan and civil-military cooperation**

As it sought to intervene in Northern Ireland on a temporary basis, the British government initially had no overall plan to deal with the Republican insurgency that emerged from the deteriorating security situation in Northern Ireland. Improvements in this respect were made towards the latter half of the 1970s as Westminster adopted the Ulsterisation policy. However, this policy in effect denied the political nature of the Republican struggle and was primarily aimed at defeating the PIRA and other (Republican) paramilitary organisations. During the 1980s, Britain’s policy towards Northern Ireland largely continued along similar lines but Westminster acknowledged it could not defeat the Republican

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\(^7\) Tuck, "Northern Ireland and the British Approach to Counter-Insurgency," 177.
insurgency. Instead, it sought to contain it. Thus, in the words of Anthony Joes, “British strategy in Northern Ireland evolved from seeking military victory over the IRA to achieving its containment.”8 In the process, the British government maintained that the conflict was a matter of internal security which had to be dealt with through the regular legal procedures and that it had to become the primary responsibility of the local security forces – i.e. the RUC and the UDR/RIR – rather than the British army.

According to Kitson, “[a government] must base its campaign on a determination to destroy the subversive movement utterly, and it must make this fact plain to its people.”9 The British government’s overall plan to deal with the Republican insurgency, however, primarily focussed on the security apparatus and the legal system in an attempt to contain the insurgency (which, it believed, would eventually lead to the demise of the Republican movement). It never developed a strong civil effort to back the containment policy that was aimed at ‘winning over’ the Catholic-nationalist population – least not until it had ‘contained’ the Republican insurgency and a mutually perceived stalemate had developed of which both the PIRA and the British government were aware.

4. *Priority on political measures*

Initially, Northern Irish government retained its authority over Northern Ireland and the British army’s operations in the region. According to Tuck, “this Protestant-dominated body saw the solution to the disturbances in Northern Ireland as a hard-line security response, not root and branch political reforms.”10 With the disbanding of Stormont in 1972, London assumed full authority over Northern Ireland and the counterinsurgency campaign. It was aware of Catholic-nationalist grievances that fuelled the discontent within this community and a 1975 government inquiry stated that: “a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland should be worked out in political terms, and must include further measures to promote social justice between classes and communities.”11 Nevertheless, the emphasis of the British government continued to be on quelling the Republican insurgency rather than the subversive situation that stirred grassroots support for the Republican cause. It was not until the late 1980s until the British government changed this approach and developed a strong political effort to address Catholic-nationalist grievances. Overall, the British government did thus not prioritize political aspects during its counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland.

5. **Intelligence**

When the British army first deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland, the RUC’s capacity to generate intelligence was outdated and inadequate to cope with the deteriorating security situation. While efforts to towards improvement were made during the militarisation phase, it was not until the latter half of the 1970s before the intelligence gathering network developed into an extensive system that involved the military, the RUC and the British Security Service. At first, the urge to criminalise the Republican insurgency resulted in the misuse of information generated by the intelligence apparatus. Still, the intelligence organisation became highly effective in generating valuable information on the PIRA and other paramilitary organisations. Hence, when the hampering policies were abandoned during the early 1980s, this allowed the security forces to effectively contain the Republican insurgency. This is what I conceive of as the most important contribution of the British counterinsurgency effort to the emergence of the peace process.

By using the principles of the classical counterinsurgency paradigm – which I combined into a five-point framework – I have analysed how the British government’s counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland developed between the outbreak of violence in 1969 and the signing of the GFA in 1998. This analysis leads me to the conclusion that the British counterinsurgency campaign made considerable improvements throughout the Troubles. However, the British government did not direct its efforts in such a way that it aimed at ‘winning over’ the Catholic-nationalist population. Instead, it developed an internal security approach that primarily focussed on security measures in an attempt to overcome, and ultimately contain, the Republican insurgency. In doing so, it also acted in contradiction to another important principle of classical counterinsurgency theory: that a counter-insurgent’s main effort should be political. Therefore, coming back to the question central to this thesis – **to what extent has the British government deployed a successful counterinsurgency strategy during the Troubles in Northern Ireland?** – I conclude that while it eventually developed a counterinsurgency effort by which it was able to contain the Republican insurgency and succeeded in achieving its own strategic objective, the British government did not deploy a successful counterinsurgency strategy in Northern Ireland that, in keeping with the classical counterinsurgency theory, aimed at solving the issues from which the Republican insurgency emerged.

Perhaps this was not a necessity. According to Smith, “it can be argued that this particular problem was a manifestation of something that has been going on for much longer and may never be resolved... but it probably does not matter that it cannot be resolved as long as people do not seek to resolve it by violent means. It can become a
political problem and stay like that." As for now, this seems to be the case: the conflict has generally been transferred to the political sphere and representatives of former antagonistic Republican and Loyalist factions are now seated together in the Northern Ireland Parliament in Stormont. However, counter-insurgents seeking to direct their efforts in keeping with classical counterinsurgency theory should realise that Northern Ireland, despite its relatively successful outcome, does not represent a case in point.

7/2 Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The Troubles of Northern Ireland eventually cumulated into a situation in which the British government retained its authority over the region, the Republican insurgency dwindled, and the population of Northern Ireland favours a peaceful settlement over a continuation of violence. Based on the frameworks of Paul et al. and Connable and Libicki, who characterised the outcomes of revolutionary wars in order to determine whether a counter-insurgent was successful or not, I conceive of this outcome as relatively successful for the British government. By using classical counterinsurgency theories as a framework to analyse the conflict, I then concluded that this relatively successful outcome did not coincide with a successful counterinsurgency effort.

This apparent discrepancy between the British counterinsurgency effort and the outcome of the conflict has two implications that provide recommendations for further research. First, the apparent success of the British government to quell the Republican insurgency without the use of a counterinsurgency strategy that was based on population support and primacy on political efforts might suggest that this is not a prerequisite to be successful in counterinsurgency. This does not necessarily mean that classical counterinsurgency theory is at fault. However, a deepening of the concepts of population support and political primacy in relation to other principles of counterinsurgency could lead to a review of their importance. A recommendation for further research in this respect would be a 'large N' case-study in which successful and unsuccessful counterinsurgencies are examined. For each case, it can then be determined whether the counter-insurgents abided by these principles or not and whether this had a determinant influence on the outcome.

Second, a government’s counterinsurgency effort is not the sole factor that influences the strategic environment in which a conflict plays out. While I have not examined alternative explanations for the relatively successful outcome, this does not mean that they are less relevant in this respect. Joes, for example, argues that “[the PIRA’s] strategy suffered from multiple profound miscalculations” and that its “targeted base of support, the Northern Ireland Catholic community, was by everybody’s definition

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13 See: Paul et al., Victory has a Thousand Fathers, and Connable and Libicki, How Insurgencies End.
a minority of the population.”¹⁴ Such aspects are what Connable and Libicki describe as the internal and external factors that influence the outcome of a revolutionary war – i.e. the aspects of the insurgency itself (internal factors) and those that influence the insurgency from outside (external factors).¹⁵ Hence, in order to gain full understanding of why the outcome of the Troubles was relatively successful while the British government did not deploy a successful counterinsurgency strategy, the influence of such internal and external factors in the Northern Ireland conflict has to be studied as well.

¹⁵ See: Connable and Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, for a thorough assessment of these other factors of influence.
References


Interviews


Coyle, Eugene, interview by C.A. Beumer. 2014. *Interview with former IRA volunteer Eugene Coyle* Londonderry, (08 April).

McNearney, Paul, interview by C.A. Beumer. 2014. *Interview with former IRA volunteer Paul McNearney* Belfast, (7 April).

Kitzen, Martijn, interview by C.A. Beumer. 2014. *Interview with Counterinsurgency expert Martijn Kitzen* Breda, (21 May).

Appendix A: Internship

This thesis was written in conjunction with an internship that lasted from 17 February 2014 until 11 July 2014 at the section International Security Studies of the Faculty of Military Sciences, part of the Netherlands Defence Academy in Breda. During these 20 weeks I had a supporting role in the organisation of a six week course on the Northern Ireland conflict for third-year students of the bachelor-track Military Sciences. The main part of this course was a one-week excursion through the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in which each student gave a presentation on a topic related to the Troubles. In addition, the trip included tours through West-Belfast and the Bogside (Derry/Londonderry), visits to the Northern Irish parliament vested at Stormont (see figure B.1), the Irish parliament in Dublin, and seminars at Queens University in Belfast and the National University of Ireland in Maynooth.

Figure B.1 Visit of the NLDA to Stormont estate.
Appendix B: Interviews

List of interviewees

- Paul McNearney (Belfast, Northern Ireland). A former IRA volunteer who now works as a tour guide for 'Coiste Political Tours' in Belfast. Date: 07 April 2007.

- Eugene Coyle (Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland). A former IRA volunteer who now works as a tour guide for 'Free Derry Tours' in Derry/Londonderry. Date: 08 April 2007.

- Dr. Joost Augusteijn (Leiden, the Netherlands). Senior Lecturer at Leiden University at the Institute for History who specialises in modern Irish and British history, history of Irish Republicanism, and history of political violence. Date: 08 May 2014.

- Drs. Martijn Kitzen (Breda, the Netherlands). Assistant Professor at the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA), section 'Military Operational Sciences' who specialises in Dutch counterinsurgency operations for his PhD. Date: 21 May 2014.

- General (ret.) Rupert Smith (Brussels, Belgium). Author of the book 'the Utility of Force' and former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (NATO) and GOC Northern Ireland between 1996-99. Date: 23 May 2014

Interview protocol

Each interview was held with the intention to acquire additional information on the British counterinsurgency campaign from the perspective of the interviewee and to broaden my view on the Troubles and the British government involvement herein. The questions and contents of each interview were dependent upon the interviewee. Therefore, I made no general format to which all interviews abided. In addition, given that all interviews were semi-structured, the course of the interviews was also determined by the information shared by the interviewees. On each occasion, the interviewee was asked whether he had any problems with the recording of the interview and if the information it generated could be used for my thesis. In addition, the context of my research and objective(s) of the interview were orally discussed beforehand.