

# 100 Years of Irish Republican Violence: Introduction to the Special Issue

**John F. Morrison (University of East London)**

**Paul Gill (University College London)**

*In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.<sup>1</sup>*

This line concludes *The Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, issued by the Easter Rising leaders on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1916. It has proven to be a call to arms, not just for the men and women of 1916, but for each future generation of Irish republican paramilitaries. From the ashes of the Rising, came the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921), the Anglo-Irish Treaty (1921) and the Irish Civil War (1922-23). The Easter insurgency has also since provided the perceived historical mandate for the recurrent campaigns of the Border Campaign<sup>2</sup> (1956-1962), the Troubles (1969-1998) and that of modern day violent dissident republicans (1994<sup>3</sup>-present day). This history of insurgency and terrorism, which predates even the events of 1916, has shaped the political, social, economic and cultural identity of modern-day Ireland, both north and south of the border. The centenary of the Rising is being embraced, as a time of celebration and introspection. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the journey that Irish Republicanism embarked upon one hundred years ago.

From the battles at the GPO, right through to the modern-day attacks on the streets of Belfast and Derry, paramilitary republicanism has taken many guises. This has provided researchers with a multitude of data and resources to analyse. Prior to 9/11, these opportunities were regularly embraced; with the Provisional IRA being the then most researched terrorist group.<sup>4</sup> However, with the subsequent proliferation of terrorism research the focus for many has shifted elsewhere. The publication of this special issue of *Terrorism and Political Violence* reassesses the evolution of the Irish republican 'struggle' across one hundred years of sporadic violence. A diverse range

of scholars has been brought together to share their invaluable research and insight. They represent both established and new voices in the analysis of Irish republicanism. The papers cover insights from political science, psychology, history, and crime science. While the authors predominantly come from within academia, this scholastic expertise is accentuated by the contribution of two authors, Rory Finegan and Sandra Peake, who utilise their experiences working for the Irish Defence Forces and victim support groups respectively to enhance our understanding.

This volume should not be regarded as a complete anthology of one hundred years of Irish republicanism. Indeed, very few collections could claim to be. Instead, it represents a critical analysis of some of the key issues arising across each of the main paramilitary campaigns. Resultantly there are significant areas that are not, and cannot be, represented here; most notably non-violent political engagement and activism. Paramilitary activity represents the most sensational, but far from the only section of Irish republicanism history. Since 1916 some of the most significant gains have not come from the bomb or the bullet, but from peaceful protests, negotiations and day-to-day electoral politics. The history of modern-day Northern Ireland may be marred by over 30 years of near persistent terrorism and violence. But in stark contrast to this, has been the ever-present peaceful activism of the civil rights movement, 'Women for Peace,' the SDLP and many others. In order to gain a holistic understanding of Irish republicanism, nationalism, the Troubles and the Peace Process it is imperative that the analysis of these, and other, non-violent actors is also included. However, this is outside of the remit of this special issue.

It is our belief that the issues covered here are relevant not only to scholars of Irish republicanism, but also to anyone studying terrorism around the world. While there are distinct differences, there are also clear parallels to be drawn from the analyses presented here. The methodologies applied, and insight given, may assist in re-assessing other global conflicts, across a range of different themes. We encourage scholars of other conflicts and terrorist groups to engage with the issues raised here. The long history of The Troubles gives an insight into all aspects of a terrorist conflict. It provides analysts with an opportunity to assess the evolution of a terrorist movement across the generations. The analysis shows how the movement can, and does, adapt to societal, political and security changes. It allows one to analyse what

happens in the process of organisational fragmentation, strategic change and politicisation. The access researchers now have to primary sources from the Northern Ireland conflict, including interviewees and primary documents, is second to none. It is the engagement with these sources, as the authors throughout this special issue have done, which can bring us closer to a holistic understanding of a terrorist movement and insight into the inner workings of the organisations. Scholars of other movements and conflicts could use the understanding gained from this in-depth analysis as a means for shaping the construction of their research questions.

The analysis of Irish republicanism, and the broader Irish Troubles, both in this issue and elsewhere has a significant part to play in developing our understanding of individual and organisational involvement in terrorism. It allows one to question whether ‘radicalisation’ is a necessary pre-requisite to terrorist involvement.<sup>5</sup> It has addressed the potential politicising role of organisational splits, rather than merely looking at these organisational changes as the birthplace of further violence.<sup>6</sup> The long-standing nature of the terrorist campaign has also provided researchers with the opportunity to develop, and analyse, vast datasets of paramilitary actors to examine the shifting and operational profile of the membership across the evolution of the paramilitary involvement.<sup>7</sup> History has shown us that terrorist and guerrilla groups the world over have operationally, organisationally, technologically and strategically learned from the Irish republican terrorism. A clear example of this can be seen in both Afghanistan and Iraq with the utility of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), whose technology was reminiscent of the bombs used on the streets of Belfast, Derry and Armagh.<sup>8</sup> Therefore if terrorist groups around the world believe that they have something to learn from Irish republican terrorism, it is incumbent on us as scholars of terrorism to continue in our endeavour to fully understand this case. It is both irresponsible and reckless to ignore the case of Northern Ireland just because the country is now ostensibly at peace.

## Articles

Bringing together a special issue on one hundred years of Irish republicanism, can take a range of different routes. The focus could have purely been on the historical significance of the 1916 Rising. It could have provided an analysis of each of the different paramilitary campaigns. Or alternatively it might have focused on the

parallel political and paramilitary struggles across the century. Each of these designs would have resulted in a worthwhile edition that supplemented our understanding of Irish republicanism. However, it was decided that an interdisciplinary focus would be applied in order to gain a greater understanding of some of the key issues, actions and actors, in the hundred years post-1916. They provide an insight, into republican self-perception, but also how their loyalist adversaries view them.

The successful politicisation of the Provisionals is seen in stark contrast with the many victims of their thirty years of violence. Peake and Lynch highlight the terror, which their victims and their families faced.<sup>9</sup> In their article, they focus on one group of victims; ‘the disappeared.’ The case highlights the lengths of calculated cruelty that the Provisionals were willing to go to in order to gain power and control within nationalist and republican areas of Ireland. Although small, this group of victims highlights the complexities of the Troubles. In order to address this, the authors focus on the intergenerational experiences of the family of one of ‘the disappeared.’ The data generated through the semi-structured interviews with three separate generations of the family gives a vital insight into the experience of losing a loved one, in such devastating circumstances, an insight too often ignored in our academic research.

The victims and targets of republican paramilitary violence, is a heterogeneous group. They range from civilians to security forces, businesses to criminals. This is highlighted across this edition, by authors analysing each phase of paramilitary republicanism. This is discussed from the very outset in Andrew Silke’s article, which opens the edition.<sup>10</sup> In his analysis of the Irish War of Independence, he questions how the British military force failed to gain a victory over the IRA between 1919 and 1921. He pays particular attention to the republican targeting of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). Silke acknowledges that, while there are a variety of factors that aided the republican campaign, the targeting of the RIC was the cornerstone of their success.

The strategic targeting of the state’s security forces has been employed by republican paramilitaries across their various guises. This is further emphasised by Morrison and Horgan’s article, which demonstrates the continuation of this strategy by the modern-day violent dissident republicans (VDR).<sup>11</sup> By analysing the data from their VDR

events database, they demonstrate how different tactics are used to target distinctive groups of victims. Civilians are more readily targeted by shootings, and explosive devices more consistently target the security forces. They apply the criminological model of situational crime prevention, in order to understand this dichotomy of tactics.

When analysing individual paramilitary movements and their campaigns, it can be easy to assess the relevance within a vacuum, not acknowledging its place in the wider international context. However, when we move away from this localised, at times blinkered, focus we can gain a greater understanding of the relevance of the campaign in the wider context. Kacper Rekawek endeavours to do just that.<sup>12</sup> He revisits *Operation Harvest* of the 1950s and '60s, and places it within the wider international context. In this analysis he contrasts the efforts of the IRA with those of guerrillas fighting in Central and Eastern Europe. He questions if the Irish republicans had understood the failures of anti-communist campaigns (who mounted similar strategies), would they have approached their ultimately ill-fated campaign in a different manner?

Rekawek argues that the IRA of the 1950s may have benefited from applying a more international focus. However, it is now more often the case that the Northern Irish example is the one being analysed internationally, by those wishing to garner knowledge. Many wish to unwrap, how a long-standing paramilitary force permanently moved away from violence. It is this maintained politicisation of the Provisional movement that is rightly seen as the cornerstone of the success of the peace process. In their separate pieces Rogelio Alonso and Sophie Whiting address this issue from differing perspectives. Whiting assesses, how this once violent force now maintains a consistent electoral appeal.<sup>13</sup> She utilises opinion-polling data, coupled with internal party documents, to address how the organisation succeeded in this transition. Her analysis shows how the party divorced the military from the political, and maintained this through their centralisation of the party structure and the political professionalization. In the end she asks whether Sinn Féin is now entering into a form of 'new' politics.

The transition from terrorism to politics was not achieved overnight. There was a drawn out period, where the Provisional movement were straddling their paramilitary past and their political future. During this transitional period, the leadership of the movement adopted a focused political communication strategy in order to simultaneously legitimise the violence of the PIRA and promote Sinn Féin as a viable political party. In his article Alonso addresses how the organisation went about achieving this.<sup>14</sup> He argues that in order to succeed, the movement rewrote its past. This struggle for legitimacy is one that has seen a paramilitary movement responsible for death and destruction rebrand itself as the ‘peace party.’

This quest for legitimacy is the bedrock of any paramilitary, or political, movement, at each stage of their struggle. This is as true today for the VDR groups, as it was at any time for their PIRA predecessors. John Morrison analyses the statements of the ‘IRA/New IRA,’ in order to understand how they attempt to legitimise their continued violence.<sup>15</sup> There is a violence that sits in contrast to the narrative of peace-process success. They claim that the justification for violence of the twentieth century is still present in the twenty-first. Through their public utterances, they attempt to legitimise their violence by promoting their own trustworthiness in parallel to the advancement of distrust in Sinn Féin’s ‘constitutional nationalism.’ Morrison argues that by taking note of the paramilitaries’ own narrative a viable counter-narrative may be developed.

In their endeavour to understand one hundred years of Irish republicanism the contributors to this edition of *Terrorism and Political Violence* have analysed the republican movement, both political and paramilitary, but also those aiming to counter and fight against their armed activities. This has included an analysis of the state responses to the IRA, in its various incarnations, as well as the loyalist paramilitaries, from the other side of the sectarian divide. James McAuley and Neil Ferguson examine loyalist perspectives of the IRA and wider Irish republicanism via a series of one-to-one interviews.<sup>16</sup> They trace the evolution of loyalist attitudes to republicanism. It was this evolution, which was vital to bring about the new reality of peace. The researchers display that loyalist attitudes are not purely antagonistic. Perhaps surprising to some readers, the perspectives observed are better described as pragmatic, influenced by societal and local events. These ‘enemies’ of Irish

republicanism, now utilise the transformation of the Provisional Movement as a benchmark to assess their own progress in a post-peace process Northern Ireland.

The loyalists promoted their paramilitary violence as a fight against the PIRA. Parallel to this were the various state-sponsored efforts aiming to bring an end to both loyalist and republican terrorism. Finegan assesses the role intelligence played in the British led counter-insurgency against the PIRA.<sup>17</sup> His analysis demonstrates the evolution of intelligence, within both the military and law enforcement agencies. He surmises, that a patient strategy is more effective than more decisive actions, in the attempt to counter groups such as the PIRA. This patient strategy lies in stark contrast to the targeted assassinations analysed by Gill, Piazza and Horgan in their article.<sup>18</sup> Building on previous work,<sup>19</sup> they consider the impact of assassinations of PIRA militants on subsequent PIRA IED attacks. Their findings indicate that discriminate and total assassination had little to no effect on subsequent PIRA IED attacks. However, the indiscriminate counterterrorism killings increased the likelihood of overall PIRA bombings, while also leading the PIRA to specifically target civilians in their IED attacks.

## Interviews

One of the constant criticisms of terrorism research is the relative scarcity of field interviews. For some, this has contributed to a perceived stagnation in our understanding of terrorist motivations.<sup>20</sup> It is clear that gaining interviews with relevant actors can be difficult in this line of research. However, it is not impossible. It should be pursued if safe, relevant, ethical and worthwhile, and most importantly if the researcher has the appropriate expertise and training. As some of the articles presented in this volume show, the access to interviews can significantly enlighten our understanding of the topics under review. As consumers of terrorism research we rarely gain access to the complete data analysed. We only see snippets of the interviews, the quotes deemed most relevant by the author to support their point. With this considered, we close the special issue by presenting long-form interviews with two key-actors from the heights of the Troubles. These interviews are unedited, and have not been analysed in any way. They are presented as such to provide readers with the opportunity to get as close an understanding to the interviewees own interpretation of the issues discussed.

The two men interviewed are Danny Morrison and Billy Hutchinson. Both played a significant role throughout the course of the Troubles, and within the subsequent peace process. Outside of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, Morrison, a former Provisional IRA prisoner himself, was one of the most visible members of the republican leadership throughout the height of the Troubles. He was Director of Publicity for Sinn Féin, as well as being editor for the newspaper *Republican News* from 1975, and subsequently became editor of the merged, all-Ireland, newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News*. During the 1981 hunger strikes of IRA prisoners, he became spokesperson for the leading striker, Bobby Sands. Morrison came to prominence outside of republicanism, when at the 1981 Ard Fheis<sup>21</sup> he famously argued for a dual paramilitary and political strategy.

*“Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object, if with a ballot box in one hand and the armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?”*<sup>22</sup>

Within Morrison’s interview with John Morrison,<sup>23</sup> he gives an insight on a range of issues, from the importance of the 2016 commemorations, to his reflections on his role during the 1981 hunger strikes and voices his robust critique of the modern-day violent dissident republicans.<sup>24</sup>

Billy Hutchinson is one of the most prominent leaders of loyalism. While he is now the leader of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), for many he is better known as a former leading member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Hutchinson was sent to prison in 1975, for his role in the murders the year previously of Catholic workers Michael Loughran and Edward Morgan. This is a murder, which he claims was a necessity as he was fighting a war against republicanism and the possibility of a united Ireland.<sup>25</sup> While in prison in Long Kesh, Hutchinson took over from Gusty Spence as the ‘officer commanding’ of the prisoner’s branch of the UVF. Upon his release from prison Hutchinson, alongside the late David Ervine, was an integral part in developing the PUP as a credible political voice in Northern Ireland. Within his interview with Neil Ferguson, Hutchinson analyses the centenary of the 1916 Rising, from a loyalist perspective. He argues that in spite of the various commemorations



surrounding the Rising that in fact the Irish Civil War was of greater importance. Within his interview, he also reflects on other centenaries of greater relevance to the loyalist community; namely the Battle of the Somme and the formation of the UVF.<sup>26</sup>

As with any interview, the words of Morrison and Hutchinson only represent their own views and experiences. These interviews represent their modern-day interpretation of the 2016 centenary, the Troubles and the subsequent peace process. In order to gain a more thorough understanding of the issues discussed, researchers need to engage with a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. Each interview is preceded by a brief paragraph, describing the context in which each interview took place. It is vital, that when anyone is interpreting any interview that a consideration for the context is at the forefront of their mind. The interview is only ever a snapshot in time. The context, whether it is local, national, international or personal, can have a significant effect on what the interviewee says. It may lead them to place greater emphasis on some issues than they usually would, and in contrast may also cause them to ignore other themes they would have otherwise discussed.

## **Conclusion**

This collection of original articles and interviews provides a detailed analysis of some of the key aspects of the past one hundred years of Irish republicanism. By analysing the past, there are significant lessons to be learned for the future. It is clear that even though the peace process has been a success, the constant threat of Northern Ireland related terrorism remains. The advocates of violence see themselves as the heirs to Pearse, Connolly and Larkin. In their eyes they are Ireland's children ready 'to sacrifice themselves for the common good.'<sup>27</sup> Their strategies and tactics reflect this. Their actions and statements are continuously borrowing from the past to justify the present. In order to counter this modern-day threat we must therefore endeavour to understand what has come before.

The centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising has resulted in an island-wide introspection and reflection. Academics, politicians and citizens from all walks of life have considered the journey that Ireland has been on, from the battles of 1916 right through to the modern-day peace. It is important now that we are in the midst of the centenary that this historical analysis transforms into a discussion of Ireland's future. In this

discussion it must be appreciated that it is by acknowledging and understanding our past, that we can protect ourselves from the same mistakes again in the future. Our role as scholars of violence is to provide our insight, which can contribute to this debate. By compiling the research presented in this edition, we have aimed to make our contribution to this debate. However, this contribution does not begin and end with historical centenaries. The endeavour to gain an understanding of both violence and peace is one that continues long after the centenaries and commemorations are finished.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Proclamation of the Irish Republic*, April 24, 1916. Accessed December 12, 2015 <http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/1.intro.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> This is officially known as *Operation Harvest*

<sup>3</sup> This year marks the first armed action of the Continuity IRA

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Silke, "Research on Terrorism." *Terrorism Informatics*. (New York: Springer, 2008) 27-50.

<sup>5</sup> Neil Ferguson, Mark Burgess and Ian Hollywood. "Crossing the Rubicon: Deciding to Become a Paramilitary in Northern Ireland." *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 2(1), 2008, 130-137.

<sup>6</sup> John F. Morrison. *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organizational Splits*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Paul Gill and John Horgan. "Who Were the Volunteers? The Shifting Sociological and Operational Profile of 1240 Provisional Irish Republican Army Members." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 25(3), 2013, 435-456

<sup>8</sup> Carlo Kopp. "Technology of Improvised Explosive Devices." *Defence Today*, 4649, 2008

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Peake and Orla Lynch, "Victims of Irish Republican Paramilitary Violence-The Case of "The Disappeared."" *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Silke, "Ferocious Times: The IRA, the RIC, and Britain's Failure in 1919-1921." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>11</sup> John F. Morrison and John Horgan, "Reloading the Armalite: Victims and Targets of Violent Dissident Irish Republicanism 2007-2015." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>12</sup> Kacper Rekawek, "'The Last of the Mohicans?' The IRA's "Operation Harvest" in an International Context." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>13</sup> Sophie Whiting, "Mainstream Revolutionaries: Sinn Féin as a 'Normal' Political party?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>14</sup> Rogelio Alonso, "Terrorist Skin, Peace-Party Mask: The Political Communication Strategy of Sinn Féin and the PIRA." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>15</sup> John F. Morrison "Fighting Talk: The Statements of the 'IRA/New IRA.'" *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>16</sup> James W. McAuley and Neil Ferguson "'Us' and 'Them': Ulster Loyalist Perspectives on the IRA and Irish Republicanism." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

---

<sup>17</sup> Rory Finegan, "Shadowboxing in the Dark: Intelligence and Counterterrorism in Northern Ireland." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>18</sup> Paul Gill, James Piazza and John Horgan, "Counterterrorism Killings and Provisional IRA Bombings, 1970-1998." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>19</sup> Victor Asal, Paul Gill, R. Karl Rethemeyer, and John Horgan. "Killing Range Explaining Lethality Variance within a Terrorist Organization." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, 3, pp401-427 (2015)

<sup>20</sup> Marc Sageman, "The Stagnation in Terrorism Research." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26(4), 2014, 565-580.

<sup>21</sup> Annual conference of a political party in Ireland

<sup>22</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal and the Search for Peace*. (New York, Palgrave, 2002) 282

<sup>23</sup> John and Danny Morrison are not related.

<sup>24</sup> John F. Morrison, "Interview with Danny Morrison." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>25</sup> Sam McBride, "My Murder of Two Catholics Helped Prevent United Ireland- PUP Leader Billy Hutchinson." *News Letter*, March 19, 2014. Accessed December 1, 2015 <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/my-murder-of-two-catholics-helped-prevent-united-ireland-pup-leader-billy-hutchinson-1-5945099>

<sup>26</sup> Neil Ferguson. "Interview with Billy Hutchinson." *Terrorism and Political Violence*

<sup>27</sup> *The Proclamation of the Irish Republic* (see note 1 above)