

This is a personal viewpoint, written without the benefit of access to recent information on the state of the provisionals present capacity. While this is a defect that cannot be overlooked I come with the benefit of sixteen years personal experience of that organization; a large portion of it at a relatively senior level. I know most of the present leadership quite well and keep myself up to date with republican publications, speeches etc.

There appear to be people, who should know better, that believe that the IRA's operational capacity has seriously declined in recent years. I am firmly of the opinion that is a complete nonsense. There is not a shred of real evidence to support such an assumption. In fact in the light of recent events, which were clearly foreseeable, it is a highly dangerous nonsense.

The IRA has approximately four hundred well trained, disciplined and self motivated operators; some with the benefit of up to twenty years hard experience. It has almost unlimited access to huge amounts of fertilizer based explosives and adequate primers and detonators. I estimate that it has access to between six thousand and eight thousand working guns and reasonable amounts of ammunition. Enough to maintain a major campaign or insurrection; at least until aid arrives. I am convinced, on my own knowledge, that this is the minimum threat which the provisional IRA represents at the present time.

In the heightened tribal atmosphere induced by the ill conceived @peace process@ that threat has been magnified in an unquantifiable way. @Relief committees@ have been set up in large and small nationalist areas. This of course heightens fear, unites the nationalist community and greatly extends and strengthens the influence of the IRA. Around the @hard core@ of the provisionals are grouped entire nationalist communities; adequate cannon fodder. The situation is finely balanced; too finely balanced for any complacency.

I doubt if many people in Northern Ireland now regard the party talks at Stormont as anything but a sideshow. The provisionals and the extreme loyalists will, in all probability, dictate what is to happen next. The truth of the matter is that in Northern Ireland we have two communities who fall somewhere between distrust of the other community to hating each other's guts. Over a twelve month period the local Orange Lodge and the Garvaghy residents could not agree to sit in the same room for one second to discuss the route of a local parade. With that knowledge how does anyone seriously believe that Willie Mc Crea and Martin Mc Guinness are going to sit peacefully in Stormont discussing the constitutional future of Northern Ireland. If the British/Irish governments truly desire civil war in Ireland then that is precisely the way to go about it. In the present circumstances there is neither the will, the leadership or the leverage present



to persuade the communities to enter into discussion that might reasonably be expected to end in compromise. It is a dangerous game which will only succeed in making a bad situation worse.

In the meantime the provisionals will probably content themselves with bombs in England but the @doomsday@ plans are being studied right now. Despite the recent success against the IRA in London they retain the capacity to carry out a ferocious campaign in England. While the security and political situation remains the same in the Irish Republic that will always be the case. There is almost no likelihood that it will change in the heightened anti Brit hysteria now sweeping large sections of nationalist opinion.

The small tight inner core of the provisional leadership have known each other for many years. They have grown together in a hard school. They differ from almost every other terrorist organisation in that their senior leadership and structures have remained intact. The same people who began the @peace process@ were the same people who sanctioned human bombs even as they told John Hume and the British and Irish governments that they were @interested in exploring avenues for peace@. That is not rhetoric. Human bombs had been discussed for many years and were seen as a strategic departure. The army council had to sanction those operations. That means Adams and McGuinness. All of this might be self evident but it is worth repeating in the light of some of the nonsense which both governments have been engaged with in recent years. I spent many years trying to persuade people that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were as siamese twins. The @dove@ and the @hawk@ playing a smooth double act. I was assured that others knew better; McGuinness was a militarist, Adams a politician. Knowing both men, having been present at many meetings with them, I knew how close they really were. Only an idiot could believe that there were fundamental differences between them.

Now it is Gerry Kelly or Brian Keenan or some other flavour of the month who is the new @hawk@. Most of it is just wishful thinking. Some tactical differences, personality clashes, distrust of Adams in some quarters, but nothing approaching a split on broad strategy as yet. One dictum governs the thinking of the provisional leadership: @there is one principle above all other principles and that is the principle of winning@. These guys mean to win and any tactic or any strategy which helps them to get there is okay with them.

A year or so ago I read an article in the Belfast Telegraph. Written by a recently retired senior army officer who had spent many years in Northern Ireland, it left me utterly frustrated. In it he told how the @top twenty@ terrorists from his last tour of duty were either dead or in jail. The top twenty terrorists? In the same paper there was an article written by none other than Gerry Adams, much the most senior terrorist of



them all. Adams has succeeded in giving the terrorists options, both in the political and propaganda field, without which they would have been in serious trouble years ago.

The concept of a pan nationalist front was first mentioned publicly by Adams in nineteen eighty six. I was not surprised by that. It had been on the cards since eighty three. The real purpose of such a front and the peace process which flowed from it: @to force nationalist leaders to face up to their responsibilities or stand aside@. That is a direct quote from Adams. Anyone who witnessed the events of recent days, senior SDLP figures sharing platforms with republicans, angry rhetoric from Irish politicians, cannot doubt the capacity for destabilisation, within constitutional nationalism, which that strategy has. The peace strategy was primarily directed at Irish nationalism. Adams and company, hard streetwise northern nationalists, know the sectarian geography of Northern Ireland only too well. Form a nationalist consensus or front and the @prods@, sensing sellout, react. Simple but guaranteed to work. The first to call a ceasefire held the reins. Loyalist bombs in Dublin are inevitable.

The provisional IRA wages a political war. When Adams talks about there being no military victory possible for either side he leaves a lot unsaid. In the final analysis the political victory is the complete victory. For some peculiar reason people interpret what Adams says to mean that he is interested in political compromise. Nothing could be further from the truth. Unfortunately even as that becomes evident in the months ahead events will have moved too far for it to matter very much.

Further street disorder is almost unavoidable but there are a lot more guns and know how about now than in the seventies and eighties. There is also, irrespective of what John Major says, an awful lot more hatred. Twenty five years has simply deepened hatreds and there is nothing approaching a solution in sight. When loyalists bomb Dublin it may force Dublin to back off. It will certainly induce near hysteria in most southerners who understand little and care less about Northern Ireland. But sectarian violence in Northern Ireland on a serious scale does awaken old nationalist and religious feelings alive and well under the surface. It is simply impossible to know what may happen next, but the opportunity for the provisional IRA to create civil disturbance, on a massive scale, has never been greater.

It is necessary in dangerous periods not to lose sight of basic fundamentals. Only a Dublin government can destroy the IRA's military capacity. A long term solution is only possible by isolating extremists and bringing moderates together. And the problem and solution to Northern Ireland is primarily internal. Somehow Dublin must disengage from Hume/Adams. Both governments **must** increase, in a very visible way, the security presence on the ground. To give reassurance to law abiding people. The British government must also it make it



obvious that no one will be allowed to turn the Apprentice Boys parade into serious civil disorder. Easier said than done but the government did get themselves into this mess by pursuing a half baked @peace process@. Somehow a workable solution is going to have to be found before the parade takes place and that will take maximum government pressure on both sides. I hold out little hope of a positive outcome. Even if the provisionals decide to be @reasonable@ about the parade that portrays them as the good guys; strengthening their leverage within constitutional nationalism, while unionists are again portrayed as intransigent. Constantly the pressure builds while the government pursues its present policy of trying to appease nationalists in order to bring the militant republicans in to the democratic world. It was always going to fail, has failed and will end in disaster if pursued any further.

The present provisional leadership are unlike any previous republican leadership. They are more determined, more pragmatic and more ruthless than anything that has gone before. Irish nationalists thought that they understood what the peace process was all about. Sections of the leadership had recognized the futility of violence. They were prepared for compromise, the IRA would split leaving a small bunch of diehards who would be quickly wrapped up. That is the way it has been in the past. The leadership of the provisionals are different; they have read the history books also. They have survived for twenty five years and they are harder and tougher than any previous republican leadership. They know, as sure as night follows day, that while Dublin pursues a nationalist agenda and London waffles incoherently unionist resistance is inevitable. In that context and at this stage of the @long war@ a tactical IRA ceasefire presented little difficulty for the leadership. The peace process was war by political means. To keep the provisionals on board and peaceful, nationalists had to breast feed their agenda on a regular basis.

The type of street disturbances of recent days are of far more use to the IRA than straightforward terrorist activity which the security forces and law abiding people could contain and cope with. The @peace process@ was the key which allowed the IRA create the present awful situation. If people are stupid or stubborn enough to pursue it any further everything will deteriorate rapidly. There is no way forward. It is a question at present of holding the line. Perhaps the real fear of loyalist bombs in Dublin might concentrate minds. Bombs there will be. There is no doubt about that.

The majority of people in Northern Ireland want the union to be maintained. They must be strongly reassured on that point in a way which consolidates the position of moderates in the unionist community.

The IRA knows that the talks process will



fail. They, or Hume, will see to that. They believe that both governments will eventually try to impose a solution. A framework type document including a Council of Ireland with executive powers. That will produce the loyalist backlash which the provos are convinced must be lanced before they can succeed. They expect the British government to do that job for them. Hence the reason for the real anger over Drumcree.

The situation is so finely balanced that it now lies totally within the remit of republicans as to where we go next. If, for example, another parade developed into a Drumcree type situation, one large republican no warning bomb in a protestant housing estate or suchlike, would provoke total breakdown. RSF possess the ability to do that. They are a far more dangerous outfit in the long term than the INLA. They have a good infrastructure, particularly south of the border; training and bomb making facilities, some American finance. A competent, if old leadership, and an organization of some kind in every republican area. They lack young experienced operators on the ground but a slow and steady trickle of militant young provos, particularly in rural areas, have been drifting their way in recent times.

All of this is a little rushed maybe even a little incoherent but I honestly do not believe that the situation in Northern Ireland has ever been as serious. To believe that a situation can be arrived at in Northern Ireland where everybody @wins@ is to live in cloud cuckoo land. The IRA and the basically outlaw community which is completely rooted to it; about three percent of the population, can be defeated by the combined will of both governments. The recent policies of both governments have made that much more difficult. A continuation of these policies will give the IRA civil war on a plate.

It is transparently obvious that this is the case. Before they began the peace strategy the IRA were in some difficulty. Electoral support was declining, the terrorist campaign could have continued indefinitely but was making little impact. There was little and declining support south of the border. American money was slowly drying up. Father Denis Faul got it right about the peace process: @ the provisionals were withering, they should have been left to their own devices for another three to four years. The peace process came too early@.

The provisionals used peace as a weapon to try and bludgeon everyone else into surrender. It was the best weapon they ever had. Unfortunately I fear that it has been all too successful. There may well be no way back following the events of recent weeks. The only hope is that some way may be found to reassure the basically law abiding unionist majority. If not the bubble is going to burst sooner rather than later.

The INLA are almost completely under the control of the provisionals and may be used to kill a leading orangeman



if the parade or sectarian situation deteriorates. They are a pretty ineffective force right now having just had another of their regular feuds. There is good reason to believe that they recently acquired a small amount of plastic explosive from Action Direct in France. They would have the capacity to carry out the occasional @spectacular@ but are not as dangerous in the long term as RSF. The provisionals remain by far the most serious threat at this stage. If the situation really breaks down there will just be catholic and protestant militias carrying out random attacks on isolated individuals and communities.

The talks process is trundling on in a vacuum of its own making. It is quite bizarre, both communities are like tinder boxes and Patrick Mayhew is telling people to @cheer up for goodness sake@. It has all gone seriously wrong and I am not convinced that either government understands just how dangerous the situation really is.

The capture in London is significant. This was an experienced IRA team intent on inflicting serious damage. The IRA will have to hold a major enquiry to dry and discover what went wrong. Unless they have another team from a completely sterile source they will be reluctant to do anything until that enquiry has reached a conclusion. It is of course impossible to know how long that may take. But people must remember that the only reason a major bombing campaign was averted in London is that the bombers were caught. Would the loyalist ceasefire have survived? How long before the bombers return?

This week we had Bertie Ahern, the leader of Fianna Fail, at a joint press conference with Adams. Things go from bad to worse. In a situation where political destabilisation, on the island, is proceeding rapidly the provisionals know that there is little need for constant terrorist activity. The machine is kept oiled. Tension maintained, while both governments do the rest.

The most important thing to remember is that the provo peace strategy was, most certainly, aimed at Irish nationalism and it has been a resounding success. From there the situation could only get worse. It is now too late to exclude the provos from the present talks process and expect success. They were made central to the entire process and will continue to bedevil it, included or not. Pre Drumcree I had confidently expected the provos to make an offer of a conditional ceasefire in late Sept/early Oct. It would have been aimed at soft nationalist opinion: idiots like Reynolds, who would then have called for Sinn Feins immediate inclusion in talks. Of course it would have been rejected by government but that would not bother the provos. This is a battle for the control of Irish nationalism.

All of that is probably academic right now. But if

ALD1/2/6/10/2/50

we get over the next few months and the party talks are still continuing, expect a tactical offer of a conditional ceasefire closer to Christmas. The mood here, in general, is very bad and it is hard to see how it will improve much over the next few years.

The British government, with the active support of the Irish government, should govern Northern Ireland in the interests of the people who are not yet prepared to murder or support murder. It is a declining constituency and present government policy is making it smaller day by day.