

# The British Army's Effectiveness in the Irish Campaign 1919-1921 and the Lessons for Modern Counterinsurgency Operations, with Special Reference to C3I Aspects

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## ABSTRACT

The Irish War of Independence 1919-1921, variously known as the Anglo-Irish War, The Tan War or The Troubles, was in many ways a prototype of many later counter-insurgency conflicts. The governing power failed to realise the strength of the Sinn Fein movement in undermining and then replacing key institutions, was unable to suppress the IRA by its military and police efforts, and carried out some security policies that gave ammunition to the insurgent's propaganda efforts. Many commentators have attributed these weaknesses to an incoherent command and control infrastructure, at the centre of which was an intelligence system that was not fit for purpose. This essay examines original data from the campaign to suggest that although slow to start, military intelligence towards the end of the campaign put severe pressure on the insurgents, although its counter-intelligence and security efforts left a lot to be desired.

## INTRODUCTION

Exactly 90 years ago, the political situation in Ireland that had remained tense since the Easter Uprising in 1916, took a dramatic turn in the direction of revolution. The Sinn Fein group of MPs, which had won a landslide victory at the post-war UK elections – eclipsing forever the Irish Parliamentary Party and their policy of Home Rule – announced a unilateral declaration of independence. Henceforth, there would be an Irish Republic, based around the 1916 Proclamation, with a new parliament in Dublin to be known as Dail Eireann. Ominously, one of the earliest statements from what was, in British eyes, an illegal assembly with no constitutional authority, was that the Irish intended to drive the British from Ireland by force. On the same day that Dail Eireann met for the first time while many of the MPs

were in prison in Britain, a consignment of gelignite was hijacked in Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary and the two Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) police officers guarding it were shot and killed. Historians conventionally define this event as the opening shots of the Irish War of Independence.<sup>1</sup>

The 30 months between these killings in January 1919 and the truce in July 1921 also represent a counter-insurgency campaign by the British military and political establishment.<sup>2</sup> This campaign would become extremely influential for insurgent groups throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as it demonstrated how an ill-trained, ill-equipped but well-motivated movement can combine political and military approaches in an economical and successful way, even against a much larger and technologically powerful enemy. It is also useful and instructive for analysts studying today's counter-insurgency campaigns, as it is reasonably well-documented, was fought around modern concepts of guerrilla warfare, including religiously-inspired propaganda and martyrdom operations, and showed the effectiveness or otherwise of a range of security policies and insurgent responses.<sup>3</sup>

## BACKGROUND

The period between 1913 and 1923 transformed the political map of Ireland and its relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom and may be its most revolutionary decade ever.<sup>4</sup> Four major periods of unrest may be identified. The first was the Home Rule Crisis, which created a volunteer resistance organisation in the North of Ireland based around the Unionist majority. Home Rule had been agreed between the political establishments in Ireland and Britain as providing the basis for a solution to the perennial problems of the governance of Ireland, which had periodically erupted into violence over centuries. Even though Home Rule, as the concept evolved over the period 1900-1912, only offered a form of devolved assembly similar to that enjoyed in Wales today, it was unacceptable to the Northern Unionists. Fearing dominance in a Roman Catholic state and the loss of their Protestant heritage, along with other economic and social issues, a large body which became the Ulster Volunteer Force armed itself and stood ready to fight Home Rule. The Unionists had powerful friends in the British state and in 1914, the British Army based at The Curragh indicated that if ordered to move against the UVF, they would disobey orders. The implications of a separate political settlement for the Northern Irish continue to be the source of tension and violence in Ireland today.

As a response to the creation of the Ulster Volunteers, Irishmen in the South formed the Irish National Volunteers who would fight for Home Rule. Their attempts to acquire weapons were more actively resisted by the security forces, principally the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) which had responsibility for law and order, including political crime throughout the country. (The army garrison in Ireland was there to train for overseas operations, not to deal with internal security.) The Irish Volunteer movement split over the issue of support for

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Cottrell, *The Anglo-Irish War: The Troubles of 1913-1922* (Oxford: Osprey, 2006), 45-47.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Townshend, *The British Campaign in Ireland 1919-1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). This is an indispensable account of the campaign.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the role of religion in the events from 1916-1921 see John Newsinger, 'I Bring not Peace but a Sword', *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, No. 3 (1978): 609-628.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Garvin, 'The Anatomy of a Nationalist Revolution: Ireland, 1858-1928,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, No. 3 (1986): 468-501.

Britain in the First World War, the outbreak of which had caused the Home Rule legislation to be suspended until the end of hostilities. Although the stalling of Home Rule reduced tensions in Ulster, in the South it had the opposite effect. The Irish Volunteers formed an alliance with the militant tendency known as the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which demanded independence not merely devolution. A plot was hatched and in 1916 over the Easter holiday, armed men from the Volunteers, the IRB and the Irish Citizens Army (which had emerged from the labour movement) staged an armed insurrection, in the course of which the concept of an Irish Republic came to the fore.<sup>5</sup> In the week of violence that followed, over 500 people were killed before the British declared martial law and used overwhelming military force, including naval gunfire support, to force the rebels to surrender. Most of the fighting took place in and around Dublin, but the rebels' tactics of taking key buildings and fighting a defence from the barricades represented tactics that were out of date and they may not have expected the British to use artillery to destroy these historic buildings, including the General Post Office.

This essay deals with the period from 1919 that became known as the Irish War of Independence, but it is more likely that Easter 1916 was the real beginning of this insurgency. The British response to Easter was heavy-handed, with 16 executions of the Easter leaders, including shooting men in wheelchairs despite the obvious propaganda value to the Republicans. This was followed by internment of nearly 2000 others who had been involved, including Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins, without separating the dangerous revolutionaries from the rank and file. When these people were released over the winter of 1916-17, they were galvanised to carry on the struggle. British threats to introduce conscription in 1918 to help with the losses on the Western Front in France were another thoughtless provocation. The most significant development from 1916 to 1919 however was not the militancy of the Irish Volunteers but the emergence of Sinn Fein as the basis for a political banner around which an independence movement could coalesce. The British did create a Convention in 1917 to allow the parties in Ireland to discuss their problems, but this was a failure due to boycotts and the intransigence of the Unionists. The British were slow to recognise the growing power of Sinn Fein and when the violence started in 1919 and later after it exploded into full-scale guerrilla warfare in 1920, they failed to understand or exploit the divisions between Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers, who started to call themselves the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during 1919. The notion of a unified popular nationwide uprising, combining political and military elements, was a fiction.<sup>6</sup> The failure to understand this was one of the significant failings of Intelligence in the period. As the British administration in Dublin Castle lost control of the situation to the burgeoning Sinn Fein movement, the lack of available military forces caused the creation of a new type of police force that would seek to deal with the IRA by increasingly brutal means.<sup>7</sup> After early successes against the IRA in 1920, the violence accelerated and by July of 1921, both sides had realised that a military victory was probably out of the question.

The last part of this revolutionary decade followed the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 that granted Ireland Dominion Status that was the same arrangement by which Canada

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Foy and Brian Barton, *The Easter Rising* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Townshend, 'The Irish Republican Army and the Development of Guerrilla Warfare 1916-1921,' *The English Historical Review* 94, No. 371 (1979): 318-345.

<sup>7</sup> John Ainsworth, 'British Security Policy in Ireland 1920-1921,' *The Australian Journal of Irish Studies* 1 (2001): 176-190.

was governed under the Commonwealth.<sup>8</sup> It was more than Home Rule but less than an Irish Republic, leading some commentators to declare the 'Anglo-Irish War' a draw. But it was not the end of the violence. In the North, the Unionists now seized on the opportunity to withdraw from this Irish Free State and ironically as the party most opposed to Home Rule, they were the only part of Ireland ever to experience it. Their new police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, including controversially the Special Constabulary formed from the UVF, defeated the Northern IRA in a short but bloody campaign that at times resembled an inter-ethnic civil war of the kind seen in the former Yugoslavia.<sup>9</sup> In the South, those Republicans who believed they had been cheated out of the Irish Republic eventually took up arms against the Free State Government and thus began a Civil War that ended in 1923 with surrender of the IRA units.<sup>10</sup> This war was in many ways even more vicious than during the last years under British Rule and cost the lives of many leading Irishmen, including Michael Collins. Pro and anti-treaties groups would form in the aftermath and are the basis of the Irish Republic's two main parties today. The remaining pro-Republican rump of the IRA would not go away and would eventually metamorphose, after numerous splits and divisions, into today's republican movement with Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA. Thus the traumatic events from the early 1920's still cast a giant shadow over Irish politics north and south of the border today.

### BRITISH OBJECTIVES 1919-1921

Since this is an essay about C3I, it is necessary to start at the top with the political objectives. Home Rule would be introduced after the cessation of hostilities that was officially the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, but a majority of Irish MPs had been elected the previous December on the basis of the Sinn Fein policy of independence. The voting system was then, as now, based upon a majority of MPs from one party over the others, which meant that it was possible to win the election without an overall majority of votes cast. Such was the case in the 1918 elections.<sup>11</sup> But this presented Britain with a political dilemma: the Sinn Fein party was democratically elected, but all its policies (setting up of courts, an alternative police and fund raising in Ireland) were unconstitutional and illegal. Nine months would elapse before in September 1919, the British acted to suppress these bodies. But by that time, the IRA campaign against the police was in full swing and large parts of the south of the country had no effective police presence. Thus there was a gap between the desired policy and the ability for law-enforcement to enforce it, although it was still not clear whether the policy was still Home Rule or something else.

The head of the administration in Ireland was the Lord Lieutenant, an antiquated position filled by Field Marshall Sir John French, who had been replaced by Sir Douglas Haig in France during the Great War. French and the CIGS Sir Henry Wilson continually goaded politicians in London and Dublin to take stronger measures. But Lloyd George refused to accept the situation was a war, for public relations reasons primarily, but this did make some sense because against whom was a war to be fought? A democratically elected, if errant,

<sup>8</sup> Lord Longford (Frank Pakenham), *Peace by Ordeal* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972). Although originally published in 1935, this remains the best account of the negotiations for the Anglo-Irish Treaty.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Boyd, *Holy War in Belfast* (Belfast: Pretani, 1987), 181-195.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Hopkinson, *Green Against Green: The Irish Civil War* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Bew, 'Moderate Nationalism and the Irish Revolution 1916-1923', *The Historical Journal* 42, No. 3 (1999): 729-749.

assembly? The British did not intend to conquer Ireland, so war was not the appropriate concept, but how then to restore law and order and give Home Rule a chance with a police force that could not deal with the scale of the threat?

The loss of effectiveness of the police over 1919 was dramatic and by the end of the year, two decisions had been taken. The first was to use the military to support the civil power, something that could have been done in 1918 when the campaign against the police started. The second was to recruit additional manpower in the form of the Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division. Figure 1 shows the growth in police numbers from July 1920 to July 1921. The Dublin Metropolitan Police, which was largely unmolested by the IRA, stayed fairly flat. However the RIC increased by over 40%.

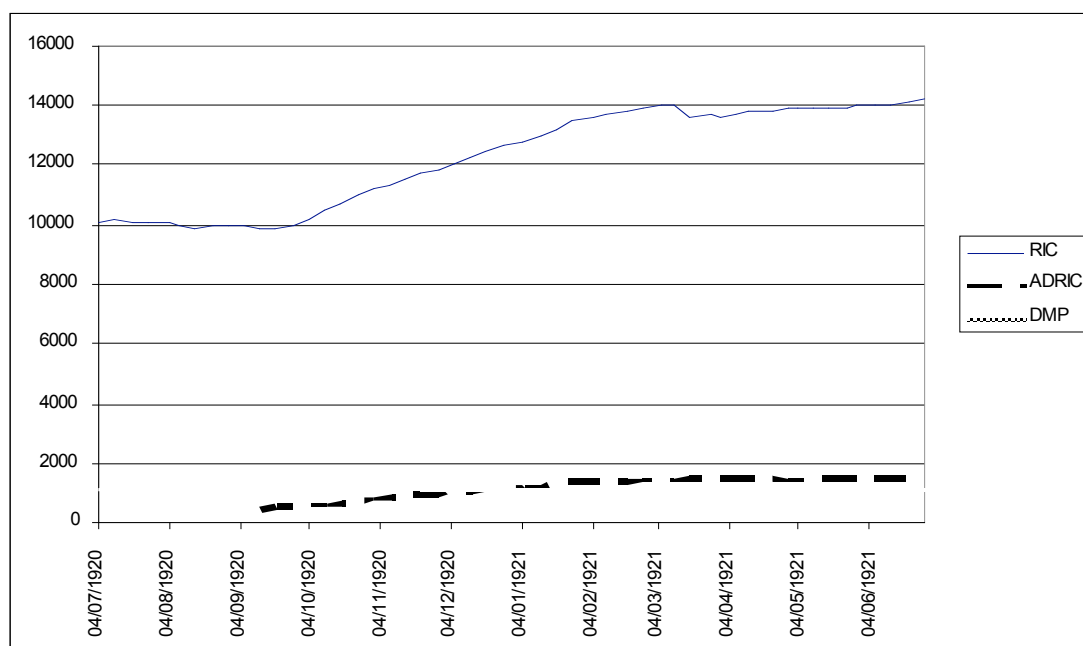


Figure 1: Police Numbers July 1920- July 1921.

Unfortunately, the ability of the police to deal with crime actually fell over the same period. Figure 2 shows a range of crimes over the same period and in every case, the numbers either stayed fairly constant or increased.<sup>12</sup> The extra investment in police was clearly not turned into improved effectiveness.

The decision to introduce the army under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) powers was taken in January 1920, but the lack of clarity over policy continued. The army were clearly not deployed to ‘destroy the enemy within boundaries’, but what was their objective and who was in command? The Dublin Castle administration controlled the police, but the army still came under the War Office in London. The police gendarmerie had separate C3 arrangements and did not follow military discipline, nor operate within the rule of law when it began carrying out unofficial reprisals. Confusion arose in early 1920 after the army’s powers of arrest were withdrawn in May and after large-scale releases of prisoners, on the back of pressure from hunger strikes. This affected military morale and again provoked the senior officers such as Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson into scathing contempt for the

<sup>12</sup> Data in Figures 1 and 2 from Townshend *Campaign*, 211-214.

politicians who he termed 'frocks'. Eventually the new legislation known as the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act (ROIA) gave back to the military in August 1920 the powers that had been taken away, but time had been lost and the IRA campaign had grown bolder. Incredibly however in 1920, army numbers actually reduced, partly because of overstretch but also because of fears of unrest in Great Britain.<sup>13</sup> Army strengths were misleading. Ireland occupies an area of around 30,000 square miles: by contrast, Helmand Province in Afghanistan is about 23,000 square miles. In Ireland, the British Army deployed 51 battalions which sounds impressive, but these were 'hollowed out' and frequently comprising new recruits, not battle-hardened troops from the Western Front. (Such units were deployed overseas on 'real wars'). A battalion in Ireland would be lucky to have 500 men available for operations, but might find itself having to cover an area of 500 square miles. The number of army losses throughout the war was small: 260 killed, against 360 RIC, 550 IRA and 200 civilians. Nevertheless, the losses were high when the force ratios are considered (between 8:1 and 10:1 in favour of the army). The problem, not uncommon in counterinsurgency operations, was a lack of force density, not force level.

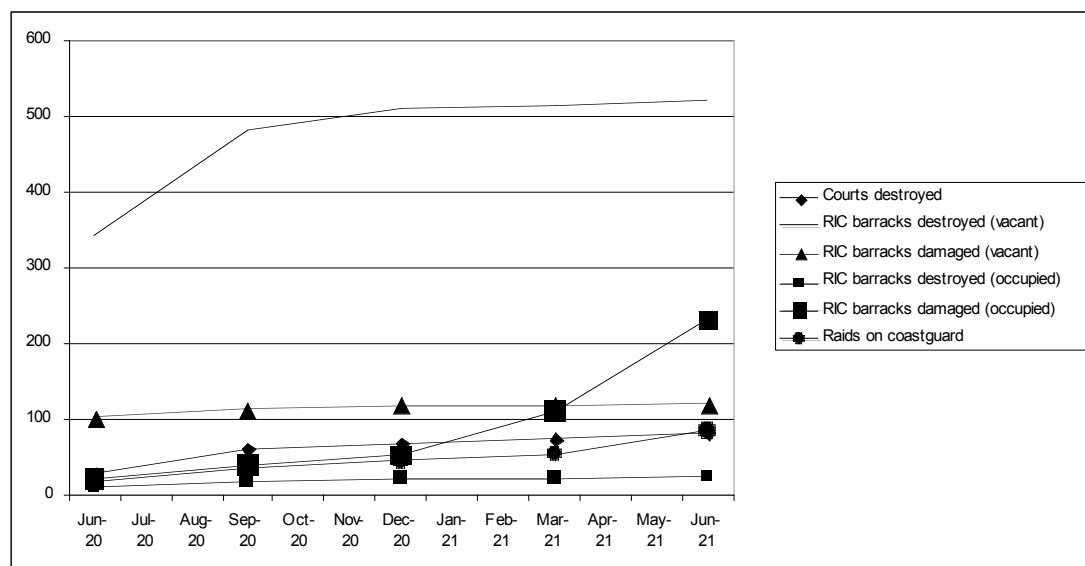


Figure 2: Crime Statistics July 1920- July 1921.

Eventually, Crown Force levels – including the quasi-military Black and Tans and Auxiliary Division RIC – were increased and martial law was declared in the county of Munster. Nowhere was the confusion greater than on the issue of martial law. This has very rarely been used in the UK as its legal basis is not certain. The British establishment has a 'love hate' relationship with the concept, but by 1919 and more so in 1920, the pressure to introduce it from the senior military staff in London and Dublin was strong.<sup>14</sup> Introduction of martial law in Munster had very little effect on the IRA campaign, which rose to the challenge and became more energetic. The inconvenience to local people was considerable. But the biggest problem was the legal basis. Although it should have meant the suspension of all courts except those run by the army, this was not the case and police units which should have come under direct military control, a necessary step, still had a large degree of

<sup>13</sup> Keith Jeffery, 'The British Army and Internal Security 1919-1939,' *The Historical Journal* 24, No. 2 (1981): 377-397.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Townshend, 'Military Force and Civil Authority in the United Kingdom 1914-1921.' *The Journal of British Studies* 28, No. 3 (1989): 262-292.

autonomy. Even more remarkably, after the truce it was determined by Britain's Chief Justice the Master of The Rolls that the imposition of Martial Law was itself illegal.

## IRA TACTICS

The IRA's approach was described in their own journal *An t-Oglach*:

'We will strike in our own way, in our own time. If we cannot, by force of arms, drive the enemy out of our country at the present moment, we can help to make his position impossible and his military activities futile'.

Exactly when and who formed this strategy is unclear, but it is likely to have begun in a distillery in North Wales in late 1916, which had been converted into a temporary internment camp for those who participated in the Easter Rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Michael Collins and Richard Mulcahy (IRA Chief of Staff) were certainly instrumental, but others such as Cathal Brugha, Bulmer Hobson and Eoin MacNeill had also concluded that Britain was far too strong for direct conflict.<sup>16</sup> By 1918, the Volunteer movement had spread across the country, although it still used British military concepts of brigades, battalions and companies. The problem was however that they lacked sufficient weapons and ammunition to provide a credible military response. Thus the first steps were the raids on unguarded RIC barracks, which contained weapons. These raids gave volunteers their first taste of action and would embolden later attacks on manned police bases, with the use of explosives in improvised mines. IRA units whose officers were Great War veterans, ironically from the British Armed Forces, would inevitably develop the basic military skills more quickly than others. Similarly, those which already possessed weapons and had not been caught up in Easter 1916, were and would remain the most active throughout the war.

From attacking manned police stations, the obvious next step was attacking police directly. Despite the fact that the police were all Irishmen, they were derided as instruments of British occupation, a campaign that had begun in 1918. Following Soloheadbeg, the targeting of the police accelerated, although it could take many forms. Sinn Fein began a boycott of the police and their families in April 1919. The need to deny information to the authorities meant that the political crimes officers, from G Branch in the DMP and the Special Crimes sergeants in the RIC, were high-value targets. In some notable cases, individuals already sympathised with the Sinn Fein aims and would turn a blind eye to IRA actions or in some cases pass information. Where this cooperation did not take place, assassination was a real possibility and between January 1919 and October 1920, over 100 RIC men were killed. In parallel, the British were forced to withdraw from many areas where the police stations could not be protected, and the remaining stations became larger and more fortified.

Throughout 1919, the military campaign evolved but by the end of the year when British army units became drawn into the conflict, the IRA was forced to expand their actions. Attacks on government institutions followed the suppression of the Dail in September 1919.

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<sup>15</sup> Lyn Ebenezer, *Fron-Goch and the Birth of the IRA* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2006), 106-122.

<sup>16</sup> M L R Smith, *Fighting for Ireland? : The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London: Routledge, 1997), 30-55.

Railways and mails were raided, roads blocked to prevent British mobility, acts of terrorism were carried out against British officials or those thought to have informed, and even a campaign in mainland Britain were carried out.<sup>17</sup> But it would be the development of the flying columns in late 1920 and the active service units (ASU) in early 1921 which provided the most effective strike forces, particularly in rural areas. Initially, volunteers lived at home but after the arrests, many were forced to go on the run. The ASUs and flying columns, the latter moving on foot or bicycle within the brigade or battalion area, allowed units to train in ambush tactics in terrain which was difficult for them to be spotted. RAF surveillance flights appeared to be quite ineffective at this role.<sup>18</sup> The British copied the mobile concept, partly because their motorized columns were noisy and easily reported by IRA agents.

The IRA aimed at putting the maximum pressure on the British without engaging in direct opposition. One way to do this was the hunger strike, a method that had been used in Ireland even in pre-Christian times.<sup>19</sup> During the period 1913-23, there were over 50 separate hunger strikes, with over 1000 people on hunger strike up to 1922 and then a massive increase to 8000 during the Irish Civil War. As described earlier, hunger strikes often won concessions, more so if the hunger striker was a woman. Significantly, although recognising this as suicide, Roman Catholic authorities failed to give a clear message on the morality of hunger strikes. The hunger strike was a particularly effective weapon and was the martyrdom operation of the day.<sup>20</sup> The long-term effects, and the apparent moral advantage that hunger strikers appeared to have in some sections of Irish society, have created a certain cult surrounding it.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most significant tactics by the Republicans was the use of propaganda. British reprisals like the 'Sack of Balbriggan', the 'Sack of Fermoy' and especially the 'Burning of Cork' (the last causing £20 million of damage) were simply manna from heaven for the propagandists.<sup>22</sup> There were two forms of propaganda. The first was the *Irish Bulletin*, a weekly blog with lists of British 'atrocities,' with virtually no reference to 'outrages' carried out by the IRA. *The Irish Bulletin* was produced by Anglo-Irish staff such as Erskine Childers, using language that would hit home to foreign journalists, particularly in the USA. *The Bulletin* also used religious motifs, portraying the war as a moral struggle. The principal journalist who compiled *The Bulletin*, Frank Gallagher, injected catholic themes of sacred duty and purity.<sup>23</sup> It was a powerful message and by comparison the British propaganda effort, when it was eventually set up late in 1920, was amateurish and easily portrayed as venal when the truth of the reprisals, after official denials, emerged. British executions, such as that of Kevin Barry, also created martyrs for the cause.<sup>24</sup> The second part of Republican propaganda was the cultivation of particular journalists and causes. *The Times*, *Manchester*

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<sup>17</sup> For the campaign in Britain see Peter Hart, *The IRA at War 1916-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 141-177.

<sup>18</sup> Townshend *Campaign*, 171.

<sup>19</sup> George Sweeney, 'Self-Immolation in Ireland: Hungerstrikes and Political Confrontation,' *Anthropology Today* 9, No. 5 (1993): 10-14.

<sup>20</sup> George Sweeney, 'Irish Hunger Strikes and the Cult of Self-Sacrifice,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, No. 3 (1993): 421-437.

<sup>21</sup> D J O'Neill, 'The Cult of Self-Sacrifice: The Irish Experience', *Eire-Ireland* 24, No. 4 (1981): 83-105.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Frederick Seedorf, 'The Lloyd George Government and the Strickland Report on the Burning of Cork 1920.' *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 4, No. 2 (1972): 59-66.

<sup>23</sup> Graham Walker, 'The Irish Dr Goebbels: Frank Gallagher and Irish Republican Propaganda,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 27, No. 1 (1992): 149-165.

<sup>24</sup> John Ainsworth, 'Kevin Barry, the Incident at Monk's Bakery and the Making of an Irish Republican Legend,' *Journal of the Historical Association* 87, No. 287 (2002): 372-387.



*Guardian*, and *Daily News* frequently brought stories from Ireland that focused on British atrocities and lacked a sense of balance in failing to report IRA atrocities.<sup>25</sup> Propagandising in the United States by de Valera helped with the flow of funds and in some cases weapons, as well as creating constraints upon the British government's freedom of action. Significantly, it was an American reporter, Carl Ackerman, who mediated between the two sides in the run up to the truce.

By early 1921 however, the combination of arms raids, internment and war-weariness meant that in most areas outside of Dublin and some parts of the South West, units were unable to provide much resistance. The IRA recognised this in their encouragement to carry out 'small jobs', although military style ambushes could still be carried out. The Kilmichael ambush carried out by the flying column of West Cork Brigade in November 1920 was the single largest attack of the war and cost the lives of 17 auxiliaries, who had failed to vary their route.<sup>26</sup> The small jobs, that could include terrorist murders using revolvers (which were relatively easy to import into the country) meant that resistance could still be dragged out. This was ultimately the IRA's objective. As J Bowyer Bell put it: 'the IRA tactics had not beaten the British, nor won the war, they had only prevented defeat – yet this in itself was triumph.'<sup>27</sup>

## THE INTELLIGENCE WAR

The UK's leading historian of intelligence, Christopher Andrew, entitled the chapter in his history of British Intelligence concerning this period: 'The Irish Debacle'.<sup>28</sup> This harsh assessment does include the 1916 Easter period when it appears that one part of British Intelligence appeared to know in advance of the rebellion, but deliberately did not share this with Dublin. Since the publication of Andrew's book however, access to intelligence records has led some academics to conclude that British intelligence, while badly co-ordinated and inefficient, was more effective than has been credited. Against this is the image of Michael Collins and his agents and assassins running rings around British intelligence. How can the effectiveness of an intelligence organisation be shown and which side won the intelligence war?

The police intelligence organisations have been described. An attempt to re-organise them under a Chief of Intelligence was only partially successful. The person given the job, Colonel Ormond Winter, had no experience in intelligence.<sup>29</sup> For him, intelligence meant secret service, i.e. plain-clothes army officers attempting to penetrate the IRA. Unfortunately, leaks in Winter's organisation meant that disasters such as the Bloody Sunday attack in November 1920 when 14 officers were killed by Collins' 'Squad' could happen.<sup>30</sup> It must be remembered that the system of vetting used today was not in place in Ireland. Winter's biggest contribution was a centralised document archive and the production of meta-data to

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Walsh, *The News from Ireland* (London: I B Tauris, 2008), 105-125, 179-190.

<sup>26</sup> Ewan Butler, *Barry's Flying Column* (London: Leo Cooper, 1971), 62-71.

<sup>27</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army* (London: Sphere, 1972), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service* (London: Sceptre, 1992), 355-372.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland 1920-21: The Final Reports* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 61-104.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Dolan, 'Killing and Bloody Sunday November 1920,' *The Historical Journal* 49, No. 3 (2006): 789-810.

allow the intelligence to be summarised and disseminated, a relatively modern concept. Unfortunately in the pre-computing era, the meta-data were lengthy epitomes produced manually, but the procedures for dealing with captured documents were clumsy and long delays could ensue before the intelligence was shared. The biggest problem for Winter was that with the exception of Dublin, he did not control military intelligence. This reflected the poor command and control between the two parts of the security forces. The GOC, General Macready, was given the opportunity of control of both the police and the army, but turned it down. Thereafter, the police (including the Black and Tans), the Auxiliary Division and the army often operated independently, with limited intelligence co-operation until the final months of the campaign.

Military intelligence had an inauspicious beginning. The wartime Intelligence Corps had been disbanded and the need for properly trained personnel was not recognised.<sup>31</sup> It was not until November 1919 and the re-organisation of the army into divisions that intelligence began to be seen as essential to the campaign, but even then the numbers were small. At the height of the campaign in 1920, a battalion would have two intelligence staff, a brigade would have four and the division would have six staff, these numbers including clerks. The sources of intelligence were very much reduced compared to the technologically advanced units during the Great War.<sup>32</sup> In Ireland, commanders had to rely mainly on human intelligence from sources or captured documents, and reconnaissance if they happened to be in the right place at the right time. While there are some references to telegraph and telephone tapping, signals intelligence appears to have played little part in the campaign. Aerial reconnaissance and photography had an even smaller contribution.

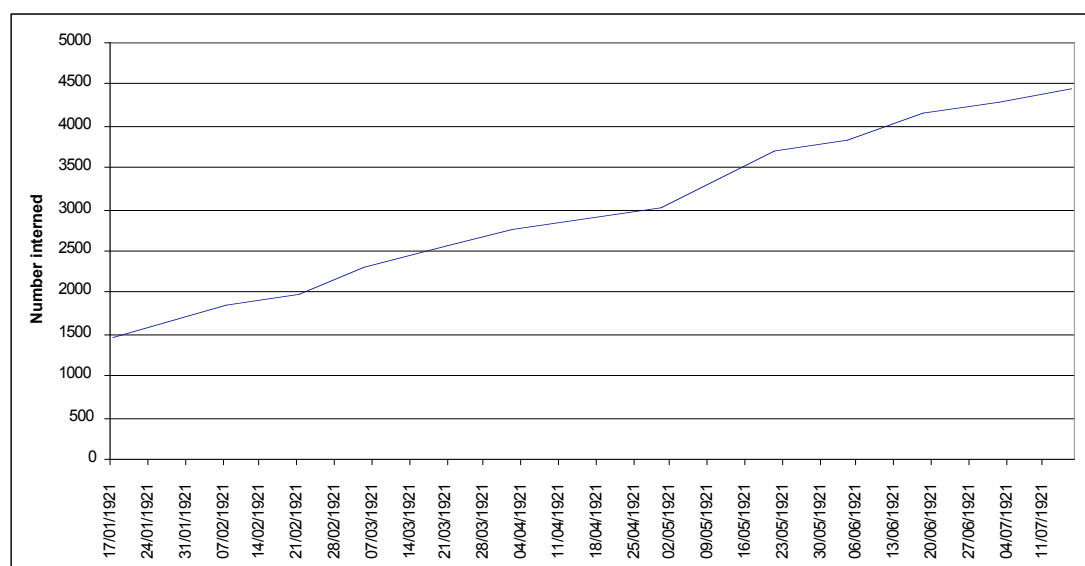


Figure 3: IRA internees in 1921 Cumulative Statistics.

The immediate objectives of intelligence were to recover arms and arrest or kill volunteers engaged in operations, although powers of arrest for the military varied throughout the campaign due to the uncertainties over security policy. Regarding internment of captured IRA personnel, Figure 3 shows that throughout the final months of the campaign,

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Clayton, *Forearmed: A History of the Intelligence Corps* (London: Brassey's, 1993), 55-61.

<sup>32</sup> Hart, *British Intelligence in Ireland 1920-21*, 45-59.

the British steadily made progress.<sup>33</sup> Similar graphs are not appropriate for the IRA who lacked the facilities to hold prisoners in any numbers. Figure 3 only indicates the totals, but the ranks of volunteers captured is also of interest. Figure 4 shows that as expected, the majority (55%) of internees were ordinary volunteers and that the most senior officers, the brigade commanders, amounted to only 0.5% of those captured. However, this 0.5% represented 19 out of the 40+ brigades that made up the IRA. It is reasonable to assert that intelligence was leading to a steady pressure through captures of staff at all levels.

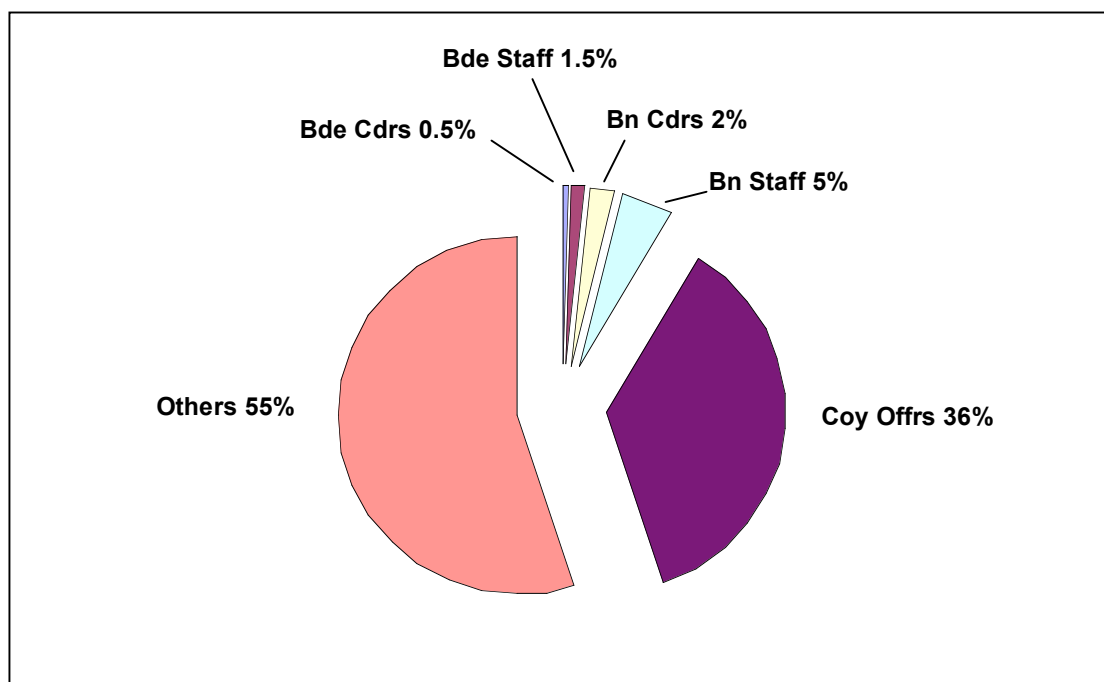


Figure 4: Ranks of IRA internees in 1921

Data for weapons seizures are not readily available for the country, but data from Dublin District have been recorded. Dublin was key for the IRA not only for the propaganda aspects in the world's media, but it often provided weapons for the other brigades who were running short. During the period June 1920 to July 1921, the IRA units in and around Dublin lost over 400 handguns, 200 rifles and shotguns, 1000 hand grenades and over 30,000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>34</sup> Captures of senior IRA staff in Dublin and raids on many of the underground Sinn Fein ministries, including the offices of Collins and Mulcahy, meant that intelligence had turned the tables on the Dublin IRA which had been one of the active areas.

The data presented thus far describe the immediate objectives of intelligence, but the main objective was to support the operational staff in their attempts to reduce the violence to a point either where they could force a surrender, or more likely a negotiation. Most fighting took place in the 6<sup>th</sup> division area in the province of Munster. Table 1 shows the figures for the numbers of serious crimes carried out by IRA units during 1920 in the 6<sup>th</sup> Div area.<sup>35</sup> The murders of civilians follows no particular pattern and was fairly constant throughout the period. Attacks on Crown Forces show a large increase between May and July and a falling off after that time. This peak is partly explainable by the prisoner releases after April, who

<sup>33</sup> Data from Townshend *Campaign*, 223.

<sup>34</sup> William Sheehan, *Fighting for Dublin* (Cork: Collins Press, 2007): 128-129.

<sup>35</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> Div History, 40, 53, 68.

then went on the run and it would take the intelligence staff some months before they could be located and before the number of attacks began to be reduced. This is not the only factor however: attacks are typically more frequent in the summer than the winter. The substantial point from all the data presented is that British military intelligence did have a number of successes and to label it a debacle may be too strong.

Period (1920)	Attacks on Crown Forces	Murder/attempted murder civilians
January	17	6
February	8	4
March	25	13
April	22	3
May	19	6
June	44	3
July	60	3
August	47	8
September	40	9
October	36	9
November	29	8
December	28	6

*Table 1:* Serious crimes carried out in British 6<sup>th</sup> Divisional Area 1920.

Where Intelligence seems to have fallen short is Counter-Intelligence and Security and it is here that a comparison with the IRA Intelligence forces is useful. As the first Director of Intelligence, Collins' main effort was 'The Squad' which could carry out special tasks directly under his command, and the widespread network of human sources across the country, including key government offices.<sup>36</sup> Recent research into the Cork City IRA has shown that they had a sophisticated intelligence staff, with virtually the same sources as the British, including telephone and telegraph tapping.<sup>37</sup> The British appear to have underestimated the Irish ability to gather information, which at times included military and police codes. It was obvious to the British that their intelligence was leaking to the other side, but they were very slow in dealing with it. MI5, the specialists in counter-intelligence, had virtually no role in Ireland and were otherwise busy with threats of Bolshevism in Great Britain. A military wireless network, which would have allowed for fast and secure transmission of information, was not established until the end of 1921, by which time the war had been over for 6 months.<sup>38</sup> The IRA intelligence certainly exceeded the British Counter-Intelligence effort, but the IRA's Counter-Intelligence was less omnipotent than is popularly represented. The Bloody Sunday shootings did not just kill intelligence officers but also legal officers who were required when the army became immersed in law-enforcement. According to Peter Hart, the IRA killings of informers in Cork frequently missed the real targets.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> John F Murphy Jr, 'Michael Collins and the Craft of Intelligence,' *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 17, No. 2 (2004): 333-357.

<sup>37</sup> John Borgonovo, *Spies, Informers and the 'Anti-Sinn Fein Society* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 134-166.

<sup>38</sup> General Staff 6<sup>th</sup> Division. The Irish Rebellion in the 6<sup>th</sup> Divisional Area: From After the 1916 Rebellion to December 1921, Annex VI. Papers of General Sir Peter Strickland. IWM P363.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Hart, *The IRA and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916-1923* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 293-315.

## LESSONS FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY CAMPAIGNS

For over 50 years following the events described, the Irish War of Independence was forgotten everywhere, except in Ireland. In the period between the World Wars when Britain was formalising its counter-insurgency doctrine, Ireland was ‘airbrushed’ from official histories.<sup>40</sup> Black and Tan style policing policies (and some of the personnel) would re-appear in Palestine, a campaign that ended in 1948 with an ignominious exit even worse than Ireland.<sup>41</sup> There has been a clear failure by the British to learn lessons from Ireland.<sup>42</sup> The major studies that were carried out, e.g. divisional histories by 5 and 6 Divisions and two volumes from Army HQ in Dublin, are available through personal collections deposited in the Imperial War Museum, not the National Archives where official records are expected to be held.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the apparent lack of interest by the British military to learn lessons from Ireland, a number of commentators have attempted to summarize the principal lessons.<sup>44</sup> Apart from the obvious ones about having a unified and coherent policy, not seeking quick-fixes and not underestimating the enemy, the principal lessons that can be identified from the Irish Campaign are the following:

- The need to have a unified intelligence system, particularly between civil and military authorities.
- The need to target the most radical elements, including the use of less coercive methods against moderates.
- The avoidance of tit-for-tat violence and terror measures.
- The need to consider effects on the wider stage i.e. propaganda.
- Rapid and secure communications.
- The need to deal promptly with security breaches and to protect sources, i.e. an active counter-intelligence and security capability.

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<sup>40</sup> Charles J Gwynn, *Imperial Policing* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1939). The only reference Gwynn makes to Ireland is to the usefulness of studying books such as *With the Dublin Brigade*, but he is referring to the Dublin Brigade of the IRA, not the British Army.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Townshend, ‘In Aid of the Civil Power: Britain, Ireland and Palestine 1916-1948’ in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, edited by Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 19-36.

<sup>42</sup> This can easily be seen in Northern Ireland after the outbreak of violence in 1969. It took a further 15 years before an integrated police and army intelligence organisation was formed.

<sup>43</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Division history and the GHQ histories of Operations (Vol 1) and Intelligence (Vol 2) are in the private records of Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine. The 6<sup>th</sup> Division history is in the private records of Lieutenant-General Sir Peter Strickland.

<sup>44</sup> Colin S Gray, ‘The Anglo-Irish War 1919-21: Lessons from an Irregular Conflict’, *Comparative Strategy* 26, No. 5 (2007): 371-394. Gray gives 28 lessons. Another study which compares British effectiveness against US OOTW doctrine is Michael R Fierro, *British Counterinsurgency Operations in Ireland 1916-1921: A Case Study* (Newport RI: Naval War College, 1997).

The biggest opportunity was missed during 1917/18 when Sinn Fein were able to claim legitimacy and begin to undermine British institutions.<sup>45</sup> By the time alternative courts and tax raising bodies have formed and are seen as legitimate, an insurgency is deeply rooted and will be extremely difficult to overturn without massively coercive forces. The situation with the USA meant that even if the British had wanted to carry out the threats of full-scale martial law and the deployment of another 50,000 troops, it was politically impossible. By failing to understand the threat from Sinn Fein, the British missed the opportunity to focus on a political strategy and avoid giving the gunmen the opportunity of taking the driving seat.<sup>46</sup>

## RESEARCHING THE IRISH CAMPAIGN

With the exception of Charles Townshend's excellent academic monograph from 1975, there have been no detailed studies into the British campaign. Most published accounts are of the IRA or senior commanders such as Michael Collins, Tom Barry and Dan Breen.<sup>47</sup> This may reflect the well-known phenomenon where history is written by the winners. As already described, Ireland is more complicated than that. During the 1990's however with the opening of archives in Britain and Ireland, interest in this campaign was revived, which coincided with a new attempt to understand Operations Other Than War (OOTW) and the role of the military in peace-keeping and other operations. Primary source material is also becoming available in book form, including in 2007 a collection of letters from British soldiers who served in Ireland. One of those was Field Marshal Montgomery, at the time a Brigade Major from the Essex Regiment. Monty's views reflected a widespread feeling of the difficulties of conducting such a campaign: "Personally, my whole attention was given to defeating the rebels and it never bothered me a bit how many houses were burnt".<sup>48</sup>

Townshend continues to produce very readable and scholarly accounts of political violence in Ireland and is the leading British academic for the campaign.<sup>49</sup> In Ireland, David Fitzpatrick and Eunan O'Halpin and in Canada, Peter Hart are also very active in this field, O'Halpin studying the intelligence organisations in some detail.<sup>50</sup> Hart has pioneered the use of statistical methods to support his conclusions. However by referring to the IRA campaign in Cork against loyalists as 'ethnic cleansing' and by suggesting that Tom Barry had ordered the shootings at Kilmichael after the British forces had surrendered, his scholarship is fiercely contested within Ireland.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Joost Augusteijn, 'Political Violence and Democracy: An Analysis of the Tensions within Irish Republican Strategy 1914-2002,' *Irish Political Studies* 18, No. 1 (1-26).

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, *Turning Points of the Irish Revolution: The British Government, Intelligence and the Cost Of Indifference* (London: Palgrave, 2007), 115-174.

<sup>47</sup> See Peter Hart, *Mick: The Real Michael Collins* (London: Pan Books, 2006); Tom Barry, *Guerilla Days in Ireland* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1981); Dan Breen, *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Dublin: Anvil Books, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> William Sheehan, *British Voices from the Irish War of Independence 1918-1921* (Cork: Collins Press, 2007), 145-152.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Chapter 7 describes the War of Independence, although the book covers the period from 1848 to 1980.

<sup>50</sup> Eunan O'Halpin, 'British Intelligence in Ireland 1914-1921' in *The Missing Dimension: Government and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Christopher Andrew and David Dilks (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 54-77.

<sup>51</sup> Meda Ryan, 'The Kilmichael Ambush 1920: Exploring the Provocative Chapters,' *History* 92, No. 306 (2007): 235-249.

Previous Cornwallis Group proceedings have described how the use of Systems Dynamics techniques are useful for the study of counterinsurgency campaigns. Edward Anderson from the University of Texas has published a number of papers on this subject, using the Irish Campaign as a case study.<sup>52</sup> Validating such a model presents challenges as the IRA campaign was highly regional, a factor that caused continual frustration to the IRA Chief of Staff in Dublin. Even within an Irish county, there could be wide variation between the commitment of units to the cause.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, Anderson's approach is an important step for the professional OR community. A commercial games company has announced it will release a manual wargame in 2009 known as 'Black and Tan.'<sup>54</sup> Thus the 'amateur' OR practitioners, perhaps those who saw the film *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* can also begin to understand some of the dynamics of this highly-influential but somewhat forgotten campaign.

## SUMMARY

The British fought a campaign whose objectives were unclear from the beginning and where policy was split between Dublin and London and made more inefficient by separate and sometimes independent command and control of the security forces. To their surprise, the army's Great War technological sophistication and combat experience was of little help in Ireland. Imperial overstretch, ironically to countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, meant that the military forces deployed to Ireland were inadequate for the task in numbers and training. The creation of paramilitary police, largely under separate command and control arrangements, to fill this gap in the security forces became disastrous when a reprisals policy, in lieu of proper policing methods, brought international opprobrium and alienated the police from the public. Any guerrilla warfare experience from the Boer War had long been forgotten. The problems of intelligence meant that force could not be targeted and the inevitable excesses fuelled the Sinn Fein propaganda machine. However, in early 1920 and then a year later, the army appeared to be on top of the situation. A fresh deployment of troops, which was threatened by the British team negotiating the Treaty in 1921, may have defeated the IRA, but by now the Sinn Fein movement was unstoppable. The opportunity to avoid war was lost 6 years earlier, with the heavy-handed response to Easter and the dilatory approach to the introduction of Home Rule.

Despite lacking arms and training, the Irish revolutionaries were not to be dealt with as easily as in previous insurrections. A disciplined movement with efficient intelligence and counter-intelligence elements, it proved itself resilient although arguably it was on its last legs in most of the country, except for a few areas such as Cork which offered stubborn resistance. The guerrilla campaign was conducted alongside a political movement with an effective propaganda arm, which was particularly influential in the United States. The Sinn Fein movement had widespread active public support and where it was not active, there was at least acquiescence that it was worth putting up with the hardships, including the British reprisals. Martyrdom, which seems to have been a desired outcome of the 1916 rebellion, continued in the form of hunger strikes that put enormous pressure on the British to grant

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<sup>52</sup> Edward G Anderson Jr, 'A Preliminary Systems Dynamics Model of Insurgency Management: The Anglo-Irish War of 1916-21 as a Case Study.' Paper presented at the 2006 International Systems Dynamics Conference, Nijmegen, Netherlands.

<sup>53</sup> Sinead Joy, *The IRA in Kerry 1916-1921* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2005), 78-93.

<sup>54</sup> [http://files.boardgamegeek.com/file/download/3oomt3hez7/B\\_T\\_WIP05\\_2008.pdf](http://files.boardgamegeek.com/file/download/3oomt3hez7/B_T_WIP05_2008.pdf)

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concessions. The eventual resolution involving partition, under terms ultimately dictated by the British, did not immediately bring peace to Ireland and even after the British left in 1922, for the next 18 months things would get a lot worse North and South of the island, before they got better. Although mature democratic parties exist today, the physical force component of Irish republicanism still has a reason to exist and the killings in March 2009 proved that Ireland can still be a dangerous place for a British soldier. The combination of archival releases and simulation techniques means that the OR community now has tools and the data to model this campaign and possibly to understand further counter insurgency within the context of societal conflict.