The Dynamic of Irwin’s Forgotten Army: A Strategic Understanding of the British Army’s Role in Northern Ireland after 1998

CHRISTOPHER BASS AND M.L.R. SMITH

Following the Belfast Agreement of 1998 it is often assumed that the British Army has largely fulfilled its role in Northern Ireland. The prospectus is for a slow reduction in troop levels commensurate with a return to normality. Even though over 13,000 soldiers remain stationed in the province, the army’s commitment excites little public interest or analysis. However, by constructing a strategic framework this study intends to render explicit the army’s continuing rationale and utility. The analysis reveals that far from being of diminishing importance after 1998, the British Army is still a vital player in the political dynamics of Northern Ireland.

Introduction: Remembering Irwin’s Forgotten Army

For the past 35 years, the British Army’s ‘biggest operational commitment’ has been within the United Kingdom, in the province of Northern Ireland. In July 1972, the number of deployed personnel peaked at 30,300. Between 1971 and 1997 a total of 498 British Army personnel lost their lives while serving in the province. Six years on from the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement, and with no return to full-scale hostilities, it is the received, though unwritten, wisdom in army circles that ‘the Northern Ireland theatre is being closed down.’ This is military-speak for disengagement. From this it may be inferred that the army has largely fulfilled the role that led to its original deployment to the province in August 1969 under the provisions for Military Aid to the Civil Power in order to arrest the deteriorating security situation. With its primary mission now accomplished, the army’s numbers, it might be assumed, can be wound down and re-deployed to other, more pressing theatres elsewhere or otherwise used to secure a ‘peace dividend’ from the reduction in the financial commitment to maintain security in the province.

The Belfast Agreement or, as it sometimes more colloquially known, the Good Friday Agreement, signed in April 1998, was designed to resolve the issues which had given rise to the years of violence. The participants in the Good Friday Agreement affirmed their ‘total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences’ and their
‘opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose’. This, it would seem, has removed the principal rationale for the army to remain as a long-term security presence. We know, of course, that violence and terror did not immediately disappear following the Agreement and that the path towards political stability since 1998 has been far from smooth. From 1998 to June 2003, for instance, 118 deaths and 6,899 injuries were recorded in security related incidents.

Although violence has, quite clearly, by no means ceased, it would not be inaccurate to claim that since 1998 a semblance of political stability has begun to take shape in Northern Ireland. While the sources of communal antagonism still persist, arguably in undiminished form, the disposition to use violence in order to prosecute armed campaigns based around those antagonisms has receded from the years before the Agreement. Few expect Northern Ireland’s continued political progress to be anything other than painfully slow but the phase of protracted military conflict appears – for the time being at least – to be over.

It might be deduced, then, that there is not much worth saying about the twilight years of the army’s involvement in Northern Ireland. If the army has completed its mission and is slowly playing out the final days of its formal security commitment, witnessed through the gradual reduction in the numbers based in the province, what is there really left to study? But the point is that the British Army did not just suddenly ‘up and leave’ in 1998 because of the deal. At the current moment there remain more than 13,000 regular army personnel stationed in Northern Ireland. This is, for instance, still a more significant military commitment than the ongoing operation in Iraq. However, this fact excites little public interest, and elicits slight academic and journalistic comment. It was this level of disinterest that led the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC), Lieutenant-General Alistair S. H. Irwin, to make the observation that ‘a lot of people refer to this operation at the moment as “Irwin’s forgotten army”’. He qualified this with the ‘good reason’ that this is because ‘we are not of course main players, we’re simply creating a condition in which the main players can act’.

It is true, as General Irwin implied, that the army is not a strategic actor. It is not driven by self-induced political goals but operates in a context set by government. It is an operational actor: a policy tool. Still, it might be asked why the army’s role has received so little systematic analysis? There are a number of works that have dealt with the British Army’s role in Northern Ireland in general terms. Desmond Hamill’s Pig in the Middle, David Barzilay’s four volumes of The British Army in Ulster and Michael Dewar’s The British Army in Northern Ireland all provide extensive (though now not very up-to-date) histories. However, one is left wondering about the underlying nature of army activities. Why is the army still there? What function does it perform? What is the political thinking behind its continued use?
This study sets out to answer these questions. It will examine the continuing deployment of the British Army in Northern Ireland in an attempt to identify its specific rationale and utility. The analysis will seek to achieve this by outlining a theoretical framework that aims to arrive at a strategic understanding of the British Army in Northern Ireland, from 1998 to the time of writing (February 2004). The intention of this framework is to provide both a clear focus for the discussion of the political context in which the army functions and the analytical tools to make explicit the army's role. In doing so, this analysis intends to demonstrate the continued centrality of the army's purpose in Northern Ireland.

Before embarking on this endeavour, an important caveat must be made. The army's stated mission in Northern Ireland is 'to support the police in the defeat of terrorism and maintenance of public order in order to assist Her Majesty’s Government’s objective of returning to normality.'

Police primacy has existed since the mid-1970s, the army reverting to a support role after initially leading the security effort. To that end, the army’s role is not a campaign in the traditional sense of, say, the Gulf War in 1991, the Falklands in 1982 or Iraq in 2003. There are no strategic goals because, as General Irwin declared, 'we are dealing with a domestic crisis and it’s the police which has to impose law and order and our job is to make sure the police can go about their business'. Thus, to reiterate, the army has no strategy per se.

Nevertheless, it is proposed that by developing a framework based on the principles of strategic theory we can attain a clear understanding of the army’s role that discloses its utility in achieving the wider policy goals set by the British government. This means having to identify a posture that is not necessarily officially published or publicly stated by either the government or the army itself. The 'essence of the strategic approach is simply to trace the line of thinking of a particular political entity in order to comprehend how it proposes to achieve its objectives.' Ultimately, then, rather than seeing the army as a static support mechanism, we can unveil the military as a fundamentally dynamic actor which is integrated into the very core of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Towards a strategic Framework

There have been many definitions of the word 'strategy'. It derives from the Greek word *strategos*, meaning the art of the general. The concept is, thereby, closely linked to ideas of planning and fighting wars. Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War*, the most renown work that theorises upon the phenomenon of war, defines ‘strategy’ as ‘the use of the engagement for the purpose of war.’

In Northern Ireland we can discern immediately that the British Army has never been engaged in a war of the kind it fought in the Napoleonic era,
and from which Clausewitz drew his main stimulation to write. Thus, while he captured the essential ‘means-ends’ relationship, by the twentieth century such a definition was, Lawrence Freedman asserts, ‘blatantly inadequate . . . [because it] failed to allow for the great variety in the methods of employing military forces and the choice of targets. Furthermore, the link with war itself was too direct.’20 The reason for the inadequacy of the Clausewitzian definition is not, of course, because Clausewitz was an inadequate thinker. It is because he was attempting to philosophise about war, not theorise about strategy. In explaining the essence of war Clausewitz was simply trying to determine the role of strategy in war.

Strategy itself has no explicit connection with war. Conceptually, strategy is ‘all about the use of available resources to gain any objective.’21 It is the ‘endeavour to relate means to ends as efficiently as possible.’22 We often associate the notion of strategy with warfare because it is in war that the extremities of the means-ends relationship are most starkly revealed (in life and death, in victory and defeat) and are therefore easier to identify and study. But strategy is, inherently, a multilayered idea. Even its military manifestation strategy does not necessarily imply the functional application of war-fighting power. Strategy is about more than just war and military campaigns as is perhaps traditionally understood. For this reason, this study adopts the definition employed by Basil Liddell-Hart who argued that the military dimension of strategy encompasses ‘the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the ends of policy.’23 By not referring explicitly to ‘war’ this definition acknowledges that military power can be used in peacetime and releases it from pre-conceived notions of war, such as the ‘battle’, (although for clarity, the term ‘war’ is used generically in discerning the framework).

Other critics of Clausewitz, like Martin van Creveld, accuse him of failing to recognise that conflict has moved beyond state-based warfare.24 However, as Jan Willem Honig retorts, whilst Clausewitz’s conception of the trinity of the government, military and the people as drivers of military effort was based upon the state, ‘it is easily adaptable to forms of warring social organisations that do not form states . . . any community has its leaders, fighters and common people.’25 This allows us to conceptually recognise the role of non-state paramilitaries in any politico-strategic milieu.

Our definitions relate to the idea that war serves a higher purpose, that it is a means towards an end. This requires further elucidation. We have accepted that military means may be employed to achieve a political end. Therefore, military means are conceptually subordinate to the political end. If the military means represents the with what and the political ends the why, strategy represents the how, that is, how you use the means to achieve the ends. As the political level comprises both ends and means, to help us understand strategy
– to understand the how with greater clarity – we must also break down strategy into means and ends. This is because while there are aims of war, there are also aims (and means) in war: what you want to do to the enemy as opposed to what you achieve by doing so. The following schematic in Figure 1 may be devised to illustrate:

According to Clausewitz, in its extreme theoretical expression, war is a duel, and taken to its logical conclusion represents a single, instantaneous blow to wipe out the enemy. This is the only way to be sure of achieving success in war by rendering the enemy incapable of any further resistance: stopping short of this hypothetical absolute would allow the enemy to retaliate. Thus, in theory, the object in war must always be to destroy the enemy’s means of resistance (his fighting forces and will to continue), achieved by strategic means such as the decisive battle. In practice, wars do not always correspond to this tidy theoretical calculation, as Clausewitz well knew. In reality both the strategic means and the political ends will be limited from the theoretical absolute by any number of factors (finite resources being the most obvious).26

The key limiting factor that is of interest to us here is politics. Strategy is always subordinate to politics. The strategic ends must be in keeping with the political ends. Therefore, if the political ends possess a clearly circumscribed objective the strategic ends are likely to be proportionate to that objective in order to retain the political efficacy of war. To illustrate with an extreme example, one would be unlikely to use nuclear weapons to resolve a minor border dispute. As Clausewitz maintained, ‘The political object . . . will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires.’27 War must not lose its functionality. This is, perhaps, especially relevant for any combatant engaged in an asymmetrical conflict with non-state paramilitary opponents because the stakes are not necessarily going to be particularly high. Hence, relating this understanding to the Northern Ireland
context, the strategic implications are clear, namely, that governmental
responses to the crisis have been, and will continue to be, limited and
proportional because basic issues of state-survival are not threatened.

Returning to Clausewitz’s paradigm, within this theoretical duel there may
be a tendency for either side to escalate. According to Herman Kahn, there is
likely to be a ‘competition in risk-taking and a matching of local resources’
between two sides in a conflict. The expectation inherent in any attempt to
escalate, Kahn theorised, is that ‘either side could win by increasing its efforts
in some way, provided the other side did not negate the increase by increasing
its own efforts.’28 One must bear in mind that in asymmetrical conflict the
ability for one side – usually a non-state actor – to increase its efforts, in terms
of its capability, are often severely attenuated vis-à-vis its manifestly stronger
opponent. The more powerful combatant may then attempt to stop the other
from escalating through containment measures rather than something more
absolute.

Part of the reasoning for favouring Liddell-Hart’s definition of strategy in
this study is that, as Freedman explains, it preserves the ‘connection with
military means and in this differs from other contending definitions for
twentieth-century strategy.’29 There is a line of argument, suggested by
commentators such as Paul Kennedy, that there are different levels at which
strategy can be understood that encompass the non-military dimensions of a
conflict,30 such as the political, economic and legislative, and incorporating
them into the broad definition of ‘Grand Strategy’. For instance, Edward Mead
Earle defines strategy as ‘the art of controlling and utilising the resources of a
nation . . . including its armed forces to the end that its vital interests shall be
effectively promoted and secured’.31 Freedman advises against the
temptations of interpreting strategy in this manner, warning that:

... if we have to focus on all methods prevailing in any given conflict,
the study of strategy ceases to be distinct from the study of diplomacy,
or international relations in general, and the sense that we are dealing
with functional and purposive violence is lost.32

For its part British Military Doctrine recognises four levels of conflict:
grand strategic, military strategic, operational and tactical. Grand Strategy is
‘the application of national resources to achieve policy objectives [and] will
invariably include diplomatic and economic resources’. Military Strategy is
‘the application of military resources to achieve the military aspects of grand
strategic objectives’.33 A dilemma thus arises: from all the literature and
interviews conducted for this study, the general consensus is that the
attainment of security in Northern Ireland involves multiple national resources
and political means. Ian Kerr, Head of the Security Policy and Operations
Unit in the Northern Ireland Office, states that security policy requires
the ‘fulfilment of the broader political and socio-economic agenda, removing the causes of the conflict.’ So, for example, the economic regeneration of areas like West Belfast helps improve living standards in Catholic communities and this aids security because it reduces tension and subsequent violence resulting from social inequality.

Nevertheless, we must maintain a clear focus. While the wider picture and context must be remembered, the primary concentration of this analysis is on the functionality of military strategy to achieve the military aspects of policy objectives. It is this dimension that will be elucidated below.

**Political Ends**

**Peace**

The first and overarching political aim has to be peace. Max Weber tells us that the state should possess the sole legitimate monopoly of violence: within a given territory it has supreme authority to make and enforce laws. This is the basis of the contract between the individual and the state. In return for liberty, the state promises to provide security to the individual. The state’s promise to safeguard its citizens is one of the key tenets of statehood. Hedley Bull calls it a particular pattern of behaviour with the emphasis on the end of ensuring that life is secure against violence and not subject to constant challenges. It is important to note, of course, that the pursuit of peace may mean different things to different people. Hitler or Stalin would no doubt have identified ‘peace’ as a condition that could only occur when ‘challenges’ like the Jews and the kulaks respectively had been dealt with in barbarously genocidal terms. The interpretation of peace in this analysis conforms to more benign and, we trust, more civilised understandings as outlined below.

Northern Ireland is still not a peaceful society or free from threats to the individual, but it is still subject to ‘constant challenge’. There remains the dual conflict of British-republican and loyalist-republican interests, along with a host of other inter-communal tensions, and one needs only to review the continuing levels of violence over the past six years to realise this. Thus, the fundamental aim of the British government, as the sovereign state authority, is to ‘secure lasting peace . . . in which the rights and identities of all traditions . . . are fully respected . . . and in which a safe, stable, just, open and tolerant society can thrive and prosper.’ This is a traditional understanding of peace and is adopted as our definition. Even so, while they may share the above values, many Irish nationalists and republicans would no doubt understand true peace only when Northern Ireland becomes part of a united Ireland.

However, while clearly identifiable conceptually, the political aim of peace lacks tangibility. We need to identify a solid objective to which a national resource, i.e. military means via the armed forces, may be applied.
Historical examples show how political objectives range from so-called total to limited goals. At one extreme, the United Kingdom during World War II had the total political objective of ensuring national survival against the threat of the Axis powers. At the other end, the political aims of the European monarchical regimes in the eighteenth century were much more limited in scope. Until the French Revolutionary epoch, the political ends of war invariably took the form of upholding notions of honour and reputation, patrimony and identity in a dynastic setting. These political objectives were all subservient to, and aimed to achieve, the overall goal of peace. These goals were, though, located in their own unique historical and geographical contexts, which serviced somewhat different ends than those that many of us would today conceive as legitimate goals in war.

In Northern Ireland, as indicated, the distinctive historical characteristics of the conflict have been classically represented as the divergence between the ‘bullet’ and the ‘ballot’ as ways of achieving political ends. Irish nationalists have historically had the objective of separating Northern Ireland from the UK and forging unity with the South. A variety of non-violent and parliamentary means have been employed over the years in an attempt to achieve this objective. As we know, some republicans have been prepared to use physical force, aiming to ‘drive the British army into the sea.’ Likewise, some elements associated with unionism/loyalism have used violence to defend the union with Britain. Whereas Sinn Féin, as the political arm of the IRA and now the main political expression of nationalism in Northern Ireland, would once have fully endorsed the armed struggle as the principal method of attaining republican goals, the party now embraces certain elements of the democratic process to advance the movement’s interests. This change in emphasis arose as a result of the ‘military stalemate’ and the realisation that republicans would never prevail in armed struggle. As a result, political negotiation has gradually become the prime method of business in Northern Ireland even though there are still those who continue to adhere to the violent alternative.

The British objectives – those subservient to peace – in Northern Ireland are very limited, but crucially they address the divergence in means. The overall thrust of current security policy, of which the army remains a fundamental pillar, is to further manage the transition of the political atmosphere away from the emphasis on violent means to prosecute political objectives towards more peaceful means of political expression. From the general principle that the overall political aim is to secure a favourable peace we can identify more specific policy objectives.

**Power-sharing Governance**

Although Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom’s sovereign territory, the British government has declared that it has no ‘strategic’ interest
in the province. The reference to ‘strategic’ interest refers to the idea that there is no desire to hold on to the province for any other reason than this remains the wish of the majority of its population, in contrast to, say, the rationale for the retention of military bases in Cyprus, which can be seen as a crucial gateway to the Middle East. This was stated unequivocally by the then Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke in 1990, who declared that there was ‘no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland ... Britain’s purpose ... is not to occupy, oppress or exploit but to ensure democratic debate and free democratic choice’. The government has continually reiterated that democratic means must prevail. In May 1997 British Prime Minister Tony Blair endorsed explicitly the principle of consent: ‘None of us in this hall today ... is likely to see Northern Ireland as anything but part of the UK ... That is the reality, because the consent principle is almost universally accepted.’ While, as Peter Taylor suggests, Blair ‘had no wish to preside over the break-up of the United Kingdom’, as a general policy he did believe in devolution for the UK’s constituent parts, hence the emergence of the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament. It is in this context that he believed the ‘solution to the Northern Ireland problem lay’ in the shape of a compromise. This would embrace both nationalists and unionists by establishing a power-sharing system of governance, something that had in fact been a critical aim of British government policy since the early 1970s.

The Good Friday Agreement is the vehicle through which this policy has been driven and it has two main characteristics that aim to produce a constitutional settlement. Based on the principles of ‘consent’ and ‘no strategic interest’, it sets out a plan for devolved government in Northern Ireland in which all sections of the community can participate. Although the Troubles consist of a ‘web of problems’, the core issue – historically and currently – is about governance. The Agreement sought to provide an inclusive framework that afforded the opportunity for a complete rejection of violence as a means to an end. The key areas of social and economic policy would be managed by a cross-party elected assembly and a Northern Ireland Executive while relationship mechanisms between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain would also be put into place. Here we can identify a further objective of British policy, which is to retain overall responsibility for constitutional and security issues.

Crucially, the goals of British policy under this category are augmented by what Michael von Tangen Page has labelled ‘confidence-building measures’. These seek to address and compromise upon areas, other than governance, which have traditionally been sources of tension, such as equal opportunities, policing, the administration of justice, decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, and normalisation of security arrangements. The attainment of
peace relies on the constitutional settlement working and this in turn relies on the will of the participants to want to make it work. As such, ideological concessions were made by both sides, the IRA/Sinn Féin accepting the principle of consent and the unionists accepting Sinn Féin in government. However, as Tony Blair said, ‘even now, this will not work unless in your will and in your mind you make it work’. Political will can only be secured properly if both sides feel that satisfactory progress is being made with regard to their respective political goals and agendas. A power-sharing system of governance, which includes fulfilment of the confidence-building measures, embracing those who wish to pursue democratic means, is therefore a primary political objective.

The Containment of Ongoing Conflict

There are two caveats to be entered regarding the overarching goal of peace to be established through the mechanism of a workable power-sharing arrangement. The first is a general point that whilst the Agreement is aimed over the long term to resolve the major causes of political and sectarian strife, plainly this is not going to be achieved quickly. As Tony Blair stated when the Agreement was signed: ‘this isn’t the end. Today we have just a sense of the prize that is before us.’ Indeed, the Executive has been suspended four times since 1998. If the conflict will not be settled overnight, then clearly the sectarian street gang activity, paramilitary bombings and killings will not simply disappear. For example, when the IRA declared its second cessation of hostilities in July 1997, violence did not stop. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Bureau calculated that between the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and summer 1999, there were 61 IRA and 71 loyalist punishment shootings, and 152 IRA and 172 loyalist punishment beatings. As well as taking time, the settlement is likely to work at different rates depending on the area of Northern Ireland. For instance, South Armagh is still an area where the IRA maintains a strong relative power base. Therefore, in the meantime, there needs to be a policy which accounts for and addresses the ongoing remnants of the Troubles.

Second, and more specifically, while we have dealt with those actors who are committed – rhetorically at least – to peace and finding non-violent solutions, we must also acknowledge that there will be those who are either neutral towards this position and will not seek to facilitate such an end, or, crucially, those who will proactively operate to undermine the objectives of the settlement. The prime examples of actors belonging to this group are the dissident republican organisations, the ‘Real’ IRA (RIRA) and ‘Continuity’ IRA (CIRA). RIRA broke away from the IRA in 1997 as a direct result of Sinn Féin’s policy of moving republicanism into the political mainstream and it resolved to continue the struggle against the British.
Consequently, there need to be measures that address these twin issues that pose a challenge to the implementation of the Agreement. Both issues are addressed by classifying a second specific policy objective, namely, the containment of ongoing conflict. Under this category, security policy intends to deal with the problems arising from groups not involved in settlement negotiations. These include dissident paramilitary groups, sectarian gangs and other elements that may be identified as ‘anti-Agreement’ parties that might be working to disrupt the Agreement for the duration it takes for the settlement to become effective in removing the principal drivers of the conflict. This objective can be construed only as a short- to medium-term ‘filler’ to aid the transition to a peaceful society in the sense that British policy holds that a power-sharing settlement will provide the long-term solution. It is for this reason that the word ‘containment’ is used, rather than the more conclusive ‘elimination’, for example. Containment is not the ultimate political objective in securing peace – to restate, it is clearly the belief of the British government that only a power-sharing settlement can ultimately do that – rather it is an ongoing measure that will cease when it is no longer required.

However, the two specific policy ends identified here must be conceptually coupled in order to appreciate how the fundamental aim of peace is to be achieved: in the context of the period in question, post-1998, one without the other would not accurately portray the reality of the situation and so would hinder our strategic understanding. Thus, it is important to emphasise again that there are many resources that will be employed to achieve the political ends. For example, as a confidence-building measure, police reform has been one of the main demands of nationalists many of whom perceived the Royal Ulster Constabulary as an instrument of repression and inequality, which was, according to Sinn Féin’s Alex Maskey, ‘totally unacceptable to the entire nationalist people.’ Hence, as a result of the commission chaired by Chris Patten, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) came into being in 2000. Nevertheless, our absolute focus is to make explicit the army’s role in achieving the political ends outlined. And this can be seen most clearly by analysing the notion of ‘strategic ends’ in the following section.

**Strategic Ends**

Strategic ends – the aims in war – also reside on a scale of limitation. Through illustrative historical examples we could suggest that the goal of forcing the withdrawal of the Iraqi armed forces from Kuwait in 1991, so regaining territorial control in order to achieve the political end of Kuwaiti liberation, represented a relatively limited strategic end. The destruction of an enemy’s entire means of resistance would constitute a larger strategic aim. In the Napoleonic era this entailed destroying the enemy armed forces, but in World
War II the ‘enemy’ was extended to the industrial-economic complex on the home front, which by implication included much of the non-combatant civilian populace.

In understanding how the British Army is used in pursuit of current political objectives in Northern Ireland, an anecdote recalled by Ian Kerr of a conversation he had with an army commander exemplifies the unique situation in which the army finds itself. ‘On a good day,’ the commander declared, ‘the army is part of the problem, on a bad day it is part of the solution’. That is, on a quiet, peaceful day the army’s presence contributes to the tension because it is a visible manifestation of the conflict, but on a violent day it helps prevent escalation of that tension, precisely because the army is on hand to deal with turbulent situations. As a consequence, the strategic ends work somewhat paradoxically to both resolve the ‘problem’ (part of the solution) but also maintain the ‘contribution’ the army makes (part of the problem).

There are three components of the strategic ends that may be said to comprise British policy. The first is an explicit stipulation of the Agreement and is concerned with securing nationalist will to support the peace process and the structures of power sharing. The second component is more implicit but derives from various official statements made over the previous five years that seek to secure unionist will to support the Agreement. These two ends are coupled and relate more to the first political aim of a power-sharing settlement. The third component derives from the need to reinforce the first two and is concerned with neutralising peripheral threats that might destabilise the security environment and thereby jeopardise political dialogue. These three strategic ends will be further explicated below.

Normalisation of Security Arrangements

In essence, the first strategic end, which can be said to be aimed primarily at securing the consent of the nationalist community, is the normalisation of security arrangements in the province. That is, the reduction of the overt presence of the security forces. The Good Friday Agreement states:

... the development of a peaceful environment ... can and should mean a normalisation of security arrangements ... The British Government will make progress towards the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements ... [including] i) the reduction of the numbers and role of the Armed Forces ... to levels compatible with a normal society; ii) the removal of security installations; iii) the removal of emergency powers.

The reduction of the military presence has certain altruistic connotations. As the GOC commented, ‘My feelings about the army having to be deployed in Northern Ireland [are ones of] tremendous sadness because it’s the United
Kingdom and it shouldn’t be happening.’56 The unionist politician Billy Armstrong added: ‘security in Northern Ireland, I maintain, should be with the people of Northern Ireland and their own police force’.57

Evidently, though, the principal aim of this stipulation in the Agreement is to secure republican and nationalist backing because it is essentially directed at the demilitarisation of the conflict. Through its willingness to embrace the notion of a power-sharing arrangement for Northern Ireland Sinn Féin has demonstrated that it is committed in some respects to the democratic process, and may indeed be willing to conceive a wholly non-violent solution to the problem, even staunch unionists like Billy Armstrong are ready to concede this possibility.58 Even so, despite the concessions made to nationalist sentiment under the terms of the Agreement, these have not altered or moderated the fundamental republican goal of a united Ireland. As the alleged IRA chief of staff Brian Keenan affirmed in 2001, ‘the revolution can never be over until we have British imperialism where it belongs – in the dustbin of history’.59 The British Army has been the IRA’s declared enemy as the ‘oppressive forces of occupation’ and in order to accept the principle of consent and the Agreement itself, Sinn Féin and the IRA have demanded that ‘all the guns’ are ‘taken out of Irish politics’.60 Any gestures they make must be matched by British ‘demilitarisation’. As one IRA statement read:

The full implementation, on a progressive and irreversible basis ... especially [by] the British government, of what they have agreed [i.e. normalisation] will provide a political context ... in which Irish Republicans and Unionists can, as equals pursue our respective political objectives peacefully.61

Thus, the first identifiable strategic end to which British policy is committed and for which the army is intended to play its part, is to actually reduce the exposition of military power in order to secure republican endorsement. Strategic theory tells us that military power does not have to be physically employed to be functional. Therefore, the ‘carrot’ of reducing the army’s role and visibility in the province as and when conditions require is a very effective way of utilising military power in the pursuit of the political goal of a power-sharing settlement. This is a necessary component of the strategic ends, particularly for its symbolic meaning to the republicans as an indication of British will to de-escalate the conflict.

Termination of the IRA as a Paramilitary Force

On its own, the attempt to normalise security arrangements is insufficient. While it is a key demand of the republicans, this measure will, of course, not satisfy the unionists or indeed the British government. To secure their backing, unionists need to see something in return and, as such, we need to
look at the notion of ‘decommissioning’ as a confidence-building measure. The key clause in the Agreement reads: ‘All participants accordingly reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations.’ From the outset, Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble insisted on ‘guns before government’, demanding that the IRA must start decommissioning before Sinn Féin could enter into any power-sharing arrangement. Certainly, the British government saw a clear obligation on the part of the paramilitaries to decommission since their political representatives – Sinn Féin, the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) – had all signed up to the Agreement and its clauses. However, the issue was fudged. At no time did the IRA agree to actually hand over its weapons, and the loyalist paramilitaries – the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) – made it clear that they would only start to decommission once the IRA began. One may be tempted to say that the decommissioning of IRA weapons was thus the second strategic goal of the British government because, as Colin McInnes says, the issue ‘concerns not only weapons responsible for death and destruction but also political trust’, But the second strategic end does, in fact, go beyond just decommissioning.

The arms issue has rumbled on and not been resolved. The IRA has consistently stated that it would not be handing over its weapons, although over the past four years, beginning in October 2001, the IRA has moved to put quantities of arms ‘permanently beyond use’. However, the reason for the fourth and latest suspension of the power-sharing Executive was not just because of the impasse over decommissioning but because of allegations of IRA intelligence-gathering in the Northern Ireland Assembly’s secretariat during October 2002. This followed the arrest of three suspected IRA men accused of training the anti-US guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), and also suspected IRA involvement in a break-in at Castlereagh police station. Unionists say they do not know if republicans are pursuing a dual strategy of taking part in constitutional politics whilst retaining the capacity for violence.

The net result is that, if these allegations are true, then it is increasingly difficult to believe the IRA’s claim of genuine intentions of peace. It is now not just an impasse over decommissioning but seemingly a pro-active continuation of their struggle. David Trimble labelled it as ‘political conspiracy on a massive scale.’ He said that there was ‘an unambiguous finger pointing towards the IRA and the republicans in de-stabilising unionist confidence’. As such the unionists have raised the stakes and led calls for the formal disbandment of the IRA.

A review of recent statements from the British government makes apparent that it too now expects more than just decommissioning. In a television
interview in February 2003, current Northern Ireland Secretary Paul Murphy stated:

the key issue is the end of paramilitary activity . . . they [the IRA] have to 

cease activity fully, totally and permanently . . . we would like to see the 

end of procurement of weapons, so-called punishment beatings, the end 

of activity . . . We want the IRA to be inactive.74

In the course of the interview Murphy was asked directly: ‘Would they 

[the IRA] have to say publicly they had disbanded?’ To this, Murphy replied 

‘I don’t know’.75 But, Murphy continually repeated the word ‘cease’ or 

‘cessation’ and this means something much more conclusive than 

‘decommissioning’. Elsewhere, Tony Blair has said ‘the fork in the road has 

finally come . . . we cannot carry on with the IRA half in, half out of this 

process . . . Remove the threat of violence and the peace process is on an 

unstoppable path.’76 This suggests that, if the threat must be removed to 

achieve peace, then those groups posing a threat should also be removed.

Therefore, we must discern if the IRA really does pose a continuing threat, 

and we can do this via a simple equation: CAPABILITY × INTENT = 

THREAT. Here, capability refers to the capacity to carry out the threat. Intent 

refers to the will to carry out the threat. This means that the existence of just 

one or the other of these facets does not qualify as a threat, both are needed to 

constitute a hazard. In the case of the IRA, they are officially on ceasefire but 

their genuine intentions are in doubt. In terms of their capability, (Acting) 

Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Maggie Hunter, Police Service of Northern 

Ireland, argues they ‘still have major [her emphasis] capabilities and the 

infrastructure.’77 Ian Kerr agrees with this and suggests that the IRA remains 

‘by far and away the best armed [paramilitary group] in Northern Ireland and 

possibly even Western Europe’.78.

Threat does not inhere in just the capability but with the IRA’s intentions in 

doubt, it would be logical to deduce that the second strategic end of the British 

government is not just decommissioning of weapons but an overall 

termination of the IRA as a paramilitary force. This may well have always 

been the strategic end but on the basis of the evidence of the past five years, 

and despite the IRA ceasefire and the inclusion of republicans in negotiations, 

it is reasonable to assume that the British government wishes to see an end to 

the IRA. Even Sinn Féin’s Gerry Adams said recently that disbandment of the 

IRA would be a ‘laudable and necessary objective’, though this is subject to 

the usual republican caveats about removing the ‘causes’ of the conflict.79

Thus, we have discerned two strategic ends: i) reduction in the British 

military presence (‘normalisation’ in the settlement), which should help 

secure the will of the republicans and, ii) termination of the IRA (stemming 

from ‘decommissioning’ in the settlement), which will secure the will of
the unionists. These two ends are both essential requirements. Nonetheless, whilst the reduction of troop numbers on its own is a necessary but not sufficient condition, the termination of the IRA would contribute even more to the removal of the threat to peace. Arguably, then, it has precedence in any hierarchy of security priorities but both measures are required because it is possible that the termination of the IRA without a reduction in troop numbers could create a vacuum into which a number of rejectionist splinter groups could fall. In this respect, it is possible to argue that the IRA is a known entity with a measurable base of support, via Sinn Féin, which provides a certain amount of stability.

Termination of other Sources of Destabilisation

We now come to the third component of the strategic ends. The first two on their own are probably enough to secure the backing of the main actors for a power-sharing settlement. But they are not enough to secure the second political aim of the prevention of ongoing conflict because they do not deal with other parties that may affect the overall direction of the peace process. Hence, the third strategic end is to terminate other sources of destabilisation. The IRA is still a factor in the post-Good Friday Agreement violence and like the first two strategic ends, which are coupled to secure the power-sharing agreement, the second and third strategic ends have to be coupled to execute the policy of the containment of civil conflict.

The other sources of instability vary. The main threat is posed by RIRA, which was responsible for the Omagh bombing on 15 August 1998 that killed 29 people and injured over 300 others. This was the worst single atrocity in 30 years of violence, occurring after the signing of the Agreement. The RIRA was also responsible for the bomb outside BBC Television Centre in London, in March 2001. Ian Kerr claims that the ‘Real IRA’ constitutes:

...the largest and most significant dissidents and the greatest single threat to the peace process...it took with it a lot of its [the IRA’s] most seasoned terrorists and engineering expertise and is now in a position to build and deploy routinely the, for example, Mark 15 mortar.80

Kerr also went on to note that the other main potential source of instability emanating from the republican spectrum, the ‘Continuity’ IRA, has a ‘credibility problem in terrorist circles’ because it ‘hasn’t been responsible for any deaths’, and ‘its political leadership is held in some disdain [by the rest of the dissident republican movement]’.81

Kerr’s assessment of the loyalist paramilitaries is somewhat different. The UDA in reality, he says, consists of five to six warlords and their entourages ‘who have banded together in the name of loyalism, in response to republican terror’ but have ‘largely lost the plot’ and gone back to being ‘largely criminal’.
Their armaments do make them ‘quite dangerous as they descend into a mafia-type culture’.82 The UDA announced a cease-fire on 22 February 2003, according to a loyalist spokesman, in order to help loyalists ‘face the challenges of political change’.83 The UVF is ‘more controlled, less volatile’ and ‘showing increasing disaffection with the peace process’, but ‘in recent times it has tended to be involved in feuds with other factions within loyalism rather than attacking the other side’.84 Loyalist paramilitaries, in terms of capability and intent, are not such a threat to the actual peace process but more to overall peace in society, and so constitutes another source of instability.

ACC Hunter identifies public order as one of the key sources of instability in Northern Ireland, labelling sectarian gangs as a ‘major feature in the public order situation, especially in the Belfast region: people just can’t live beside another person from the other community’.85 She also distinguishes organised crime and punishment gangs, linked to paramilitaries, as very significant. She explains that contrary to claims that these groups are ‘only filling the absence of an effective police service’, in reality ‘it’s all about control in those areas where paramilitary gangs on both sides want to keep a grip in the areas which they live and control’. Money issues in the form of racketeering also feature.86 Much of the loyalist threat has mutated into the organised criminal domain, part of the ‘legacy of terrorism’,87 and as such will be dealt with by the police and other agencies (like HM Customs and Excise). In 2000 the Organised Crime Task Force was set up to do just this, as a ‘manifestation of the Government’s determination to help Northern Ireland make the transition to normal society’.88 However, the army’s official statement, Normalisation–The Army’s Vision of its Future in Northern Ireland states unequivocally that ‘the army’s role will cease when the police no longer require routine military support to maintain law and order’.89 The police are still not at a stage where they no longer require army support. As the ACC says, ‘over the last 18 months I couldn’t have policed Belfast without the army . . . and I suppose that extends to the medium term because I don’t see that this tension going on at the minute disappearing overnight’.90 Hence the third strategic end in the exercise of military power in the province is to prevent other sources of conflict and destabilisation and to terminate other terrorist groups. Our final task is to identify the strategic means.

Strategic Means

Strategic means refers to the specific actions to attain the goals of strategy, or more prosaically, the goals of ‘the war’. In military terms strategic means can encompass a range of techniques to compel the enemy to submit to one’s will. The possible list of categories is too long to enumerate individually, but historical examples might include the use of force-on-force battles to destroy enemy forces.
in the Napoleonic era, or the use of aerial bombardment in the Gulf War to paralyse Saddam Hussein’s decision-making centres in the Gulf War of 1990/91 and the Iraq War of 2003 in order to inhibit the command and control of Iraqi forces. There are many other gradations, but the techniques of military power that constitute the strategic means in Northern Ireland are iterated below.

Bargaining

The first strategic end, that of normalisation, in part consists of literally reducing the role, numbers and installations of the army. As the army is not involved in a campaign this is not to be seen as a defeat or a retreat but a reduction in Military Aid to the Civil Power to levels commensurate with the conditions of normal, peaceful society that pertain in other areas of the United Kingdom. There will always continue to be elements of the army garrisoned in the province just like any other region on the mainland. Plus, as the ACC pointed out, ‘we will still require the army for a technical role, in bomb disposal for example’91 (and this does not presuppose a connection with local paramilitary activity because bombs could come from foreign terrorists or, say, animal rights activists).

Nevertheless, one of the issues arising from this reduction is the anxiety that the British government will reduce the military presence at the expense of security. Certainly Billy Armstrong feels that:

Yes, I think that that is what they are doing too quick, they are appeasing terrorists by taking their security forces away before they should . . . it’s just the same if you have a dam, and area is going to be flooded, you get rid of the water before you take down the dam.92

Such sentiments it may be argued are based on a false dichotomy, however. The security equation is not conceptually this simple because of its link with the second strategic end relating to the IRA’s termination. Normalisation should not be understood merely as a one-way measure: a case of simply going ahead and reducing the role of the army because republicans say that is a prerequisite for them to accept any settlement. Rather, it is dependent on the IRA reciprocating in kind by decommissioning, as a requirement of the Belfast Agreement. For instance, the army dismantled some of its fortifications, such as the Newtownhamilton supersangar watchtower in South Armagh, just two days after the IRA’s first act of decommissioning in October 2001.93 But, over the past five years, one has not seen a steady and continual reduction in the army’s presence. This is because, as von Tangen Page points out, in the period since the initial IRA ceasefire in 1994 the number of the armed forces serving ‘has fluctuated depending on the level of the security threat’.94 So, for example, army numbers are increased during the marching season, traditionally a time of high tension. Consequently, pressure is exerted on
the paramilitaries to ‘reciprocate’, because a direct link is established between
the level of army activity and that of the paramilitaries themselves.

Recent talks to restore the power-sharing assembly have alluded to this
linkage. For example, a Sunday Times report stated:

The Prime Minister is poised to unveil a historic deal with the IRA that
would effectively put the paramilitary organisation out of business. The
settlement would promise troop reductions and other reforms in return
for an end to IRA activity and the visible decommissioning of its arsenal
of weapons [authors’ emphasis].95

Here, one should note, the explicit principle of reciprocation and a suggested
end state. Thus, rather than just a matter of a continual reduction, the first
category of the strategic means that we can identify is that of bargaining,
namely, the exertion of political pressure in order to achieve both
normalisation and an end to the IRA. To help conceptualise this, we can
turn to the strategic theorising of Thomas Schelling.

Schelling says that we must not ‘deny that there are common as well as
conflicting interests among the participants’. As a result, conflicts are usually
bargaining situations where ‘the ability of one participant to gain his ends is
dependent to an important degree on the choices or decisions that the other
participant will make’. Applying this understanding the British can ‘tacit[ly]
manoeuvre’ by reducing the military presence in exchange for ‘reciproc-
cation’.96 But the British can then indicate to the republicans that the costs of
not ‘reciprocating’ would outweigh the costs of doing so, in the form of
increasing the military presence. This indeed appears to be the British modus
operandi because as the GOC confirms ‘it depends on what you need to do,
[but] it’s a fundamental principle, you use what tools you’ve got’.97

Bargaining with military power will achieve the first strategic end, contribute
to the second but not the third. Therefore we need to highlight a second set of
strategic means to consolidate the termination of the IRA and to terminate other
sources of destabilisation through the exercise of military force.

The Exercise of Military Force

The clue to understand this role lies in unpacking conceptual distinctions.
‘Strategy’, Schelling continues, ‘is not concerned with the efficient
application of force but with the exploitation of potential force.’98 This
constitutes the bargaining strand. However, for ‘potential force’ we can read
‘military power’ because there is a distinction between military ‘power’ and
military ‘force’. John Garnett tells us that military ‘power’:

... emphasises a political relationship between ... adversaries rather
than a catalogue of capabilities ... the difference between the exercise of
Thus, bargaining with ‘power’ aims to persuade the IRA to ultimately disband. Even so, because this will not happen in the short term and because both the IRA and other groups present an ongoing problem in the meantime, the second set of strategic means concerns the actual exercise of military force. This is not to persuade but to procure the termination of other destabilising sources and reinforce the effort towards the termination of the IRA.

The GOC reiterated the fact that the army’s role in Northern Ireland is ‘not a campaign’ like that in the Balkans where the specific goal was to stop warring factions from fighting each other. The army is there to support the police. As such there are three elements to the army’s application of military force, to assist the police, in pursuit of the second and third strategic ends.

The first of these is attrition. According to the army, this means the ‘reduction of the terrorists’ capability through the arrest of suspects and the seizure of their weapons, ammunition and explosives’.

In terms of the dissident groups, this goes towards negating their capability that clearly helps to terminate other sources of destabilisation. As regards the IRA, if weapons are seized, as opposed to handed over in acts of decommissioning, or indeed if suspects involved in illegal activity are arrested, the spotlight and subsequent political pressure is increased on the republican side as a whole. This, as well as reducing the IRA’s capability, will either compel the IRA into a more pro-active, credible subscription of the peace process or induce their political masters to seek further moves towards IRA disbandment in order to demonstrate their commitment to peace. Either way, it contributes to the reduction and eventual termination of the IRA’s paramilitary posture.

The second element is reassurance. This is designed to protect the whole community. If an army presence allows the ordinary person to go about their day to day lives free from sectarian, criminal and paramilitary pressures this, thereby, reduces the reach of those who seek to destabilise the peace process. The net result is a shift towards the termination of sources of instability.

Reassurance is linked to the third element of deterrence, which is especially important in public-order situations. The notion of deterrence posits that the best way to dissuade an enemy from an action is through threat of reprisal, the outcome of which, for the enemy, would outweigh any gains they could hope to make through their initial action. Successful deterrence requires intent and capability. The objective of the termination of sources of destabilisation is a relatively limited goal (intent), yet there is a clear asymmetry between the army and dissident groups and sectarian gangs (capability). It thus follows that army-deterrent activity would start at a very low level (in proportion to its actual potential) and could include foot, mobile
and helicopter patrols as just a visible presence would introduce doubt and uncertainty, acting as a barrier to those seeking to destabilise the political environment. The main point here is that however much dissident groups try to increase their impact, or however serious street violence or riots seem to get, the army will always be able to escalate to the next level and, such is the asymmetry in capability, it will always prevail and the situation will be re-contained. This concept is key to the overall thrust of army activity, as we will surmise in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In summary, in order to achieve the fundamental aim of peace through a power-sharing settlement and containment of ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland we need to understand that the army is but one tool used by the British government. The strategic aims are a reduction in the military presence, the termination of the IRA and the removal of other sources of destabilisation. Bargaining with military power seeks to secure the first and partly the second strategic end, whilst the application of military force aims to complete the second and achieve the third strategic end. The army’s role and the way it can be situated within the context of British political objectives is encapsulated in Figure 2.

It might be averred that this study has produced a less than scintillating account of the army’s exploits in Northern Ireland. It is true that this

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**FIGURE 2**

A STRATEGIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF THE BRITISH ARMY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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assessment has not concerned itself with recounting specific army operations but has tried instead to theorise about the role of the army and the wider context of British security policy in order to explain and clarify its continuing importance in the post-1998 situation. Certainly, in terms of a future study agenda, there are many other facets that it might be worthwhile addressing. Interesting topics such as the difference between ‘green’ army and special forces, covert and overt operations are definitely areas for further research. For instance, ACC Hunter, the GOC and Ian Kerr all pressed the point that the military effort in Northern Ireland is very much intelligence driven. This assessment has concerned itself purely with the political and strategic levels of analysis but there are many possible subsequent levels, and future study could focus on the next level down, namely, the operational level, which is the ‘gearing between military strategic objectives and all tactical activity’. This might discuss the contrasting roles of, say, an infantry company from that of covert operations undertaken by specialised undercover units, but the accent would be on understanding how the operational means and ends were employed to secure the strategic ends, that is, how special forces and the like could take part in operations of attrition to secure the termination of the IRA and other forms of paramilitary activity.

A crucial insight we can draw from this analysis is that the apparent dichotomy of normalisation and the continuing threat is false. The British are not embarking upon a carte blanche reduction of military power oblivious to other considerations. As the ACC says, there is an element of risk but ‘the government has indicated that whatever they do in terms of normalisation will be threat driven and up to now it has been’. Ian Kerr argues that a measure of optimism is certainly required and since the signing of the Agreement 3,000–4,000 troops have been sent back to the mainland and 48 bases closed. But, as Kerr emphasises, there is a natural ceiling to the process of troop reductions in any circumstances ‘where we cannot go further without impacting adversely on our capability to meet the residual threat’.

In meeting the residual threat, we dealt with the concepts of intent and capability, escalation and asymmetry. Fundamentally, in a liberal democratic polity the army cannot just go in and wipe out terrorist groups and incarcerate sympathisers and sectarian gangs, even though it possesses the capability. As one retired police Special Branch officer claims, the army and police know the whereabouts of most of the terrorist actors, both leaders and rank and file. The state could not and still cannot justify doing this because of adherence to core values of the right to trial and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty: these are the types of values which prevent the state becoming reminiscent of the worst autocracies where suspects merely vanish at the hands of the secret police.
However, this conflict is asymmetrical. For its part, the IRA could never overthrow the British state because of its vastly superior capability, which necessitated the IRA’s resort to different strategic methods. While wanting to inflict losses on the security forces and make political statements through dramatic acts of violence, the movement always had to be careful not to go so far as to legitimise any inclination, so far lacking, for the state to come after them in a much more brutally concerted fashion. Therefore, the IRA had to observe clear limits on its force, for example, it could bomb an office building on a Sunday, being careful to phone-ahead a warning. As long as ‘minimal’ force was used and a certain line not crossed, and despite the emotional and moral outcry resulting from its actions, the IRA could not be destroyed because the state could not, in the end, justify such a move. Internment without trial in the 1970s was perhaps as close as the state got to imposing an authoritarian solution. It provoked outrage and everyone lived to regret its baleful consequences in prolonging the conflict.

Currently, because of the peace process and the politicisation of both army and paramilitary actions, the use of the army must be even more restrained. But this, paradoxically, represents the best opportunity of using military power to achieve the political ends and this is why we end up with quite a complex and subtle strategic understanding. By including representatives of the republican movement in negotiations Sinn Féin and the IRA are compelled to make compromises and concessions because that is what negotiation is about. As such, the movement can be worn down and actually eroded to a much greater extent than mere military containment could achieve. The army presence remains, thereby, vitally instrumental in this process.

As we have shown, by bargaining with military power one can start to force the IRA to disarm. Moreover, by making the degree of army reductions contingent on the threat posed, a dynamic situation is created. The utility of the army therefore acts to demonstrate the willingness to accommodate republican wishes (through force reductions) while concurrent military operations continue to seek to expose the IRA and increase the political pressure on it to further erode its military potential (while also dealing with all the other threat sources discussed): every day of non-activity since the signing of the Agreement puts pressure on the political masters. Hence, the political pressure is slowly increased to induce the IRA to do more than just decommission but eventually to undertake to dissolve itself. This confirms the fundamental dynamic, whereby over the past five years the emphasis in official British rhetoric has shifted from IRA decommissioning to IRA disbandment. Arguably, the British government is probably nearer to terminating the IRA than it ever was during the most violent years of the conflict itself.

This is the real condition created by the employment of the military resource. Irwin’s army may have been forgotten but it has certainly not gone.
On the contrary, it is an integral player in the ongoing peace process in Northern Ireland.

NOTES

2. This number comprised 21,800 regular troops and 8,500 locally recruited reservists, mainly from the Ulster Defence Regiment. Source: Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), University of Ulster http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security.htm#01 (accessed 9 Jan. 2004).
9. This is most clearly evident in the number of conflict related deaths if a series of six-year periods are compared. Between 1998 (the year in which the Belfast Agreement was signed) to 30 June 2003 (the latest date for current figures) the total number of fatalities is 118. The average rate of fatalities for the period stands at 19.3 deaths per year. This compares with 324 fatalities in the previous six-year period between 1992 and 1997 (an average of 54 deaths per year) and 482 deaths (80.3 deaths per year) between 1986 and 1991. The ambiguity of the post-Belfast Agreement situation so far as the rate of violence is concerned is revealed clearly in similar comparisons of the scale of conflict related injuries and the rate of paramilitary attacks, both of which registered increases after 1998. Conflict related injuries stood at 6,899 between 1998 and 30 June 2002 (averaging 1,449 per year); 1992–97 recorded 6,308 injuries (averaging 1,051 per year); 1986–91 recorded 6,454 injuries (averaging 1,075.6 per year). Paramilitary attacks (including shootings and assaults) between 1998 and 10 August 2003 stood at 1,057 (averaging 251 per year); 1992–97 recorded 1,299 incidents (averaging 216 per year); 1988–91 recorded 646 (averaging 161.5 per year). Statistics compiled from tables contained at CAIN http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security.htm#01 (accessed 12 Jan. 2004).
15. GOC interview (note 13).
17. GOC interview (note 13).
27. Clausewitz (note 19) p.90.
32. Freedman (note 20) p.xx.
34. Ian Kerr interview, 29 Nov. 2002.
35. See also Neumann (note 12) pp.17–40.
38. Refer to data in note 9.
44. Tony Blair, speech to the Balmoral Agriculture Show, Belfast, 16 May 1997 quoted in Taylor (note 41) p.361.
45. Taylor (note 41) p.361.
46. See Public Records Office (PRO), CAB 129/162/1, 3 March 1972.
51. *Irish News* (note 50).
52. Irish News (note 50) p.72.
54. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
56. GOC interview (note 13).
58. Billy Armstrong (note 57).
69. IRA “Trained Farc Terrorists” Irish Independent (18 May 2002).
70. Rosie Cowan, ‘Republicans Held Over Raid at Castlereagh’ The Guardian (1 April 2002).
75. BBC Newsnight (note 74).
77. ACC interview, 28 Nov. 2002.
78. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
79. ACC interview (note 77).
80. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
81. Ian Kerr (note 80).
82. Ian Kerr (note 80).
84. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
85. ACC interview (note 77).
86. ACC interview (note 77).
87. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
90. ACC interview (note 77).
91. ACC interview (note 77).
94. Von Tangen Page (note 49) p.41.
97. GOC interview (note 13).
98. GOC interview (note 13).
102. *Operational Art* (note 33) Ch. 3 Ser. 0303.
103. ACC interview (note 77).
104. Ian Kerr interview (note 34).
106. Smith (note 18), pp.143–68.