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BAGGAGE

> When a soldier gets off the ferry from England, Belfast looks the same as any other large city, he may breathe a sigh of relief. . .. It really looks quite like England except that the people's accents are different, but then they vary all over England. He smiles as he thinks of somebody from Kent trying to understand a Geordie. But then he starts to realise that all is not the same as his home in England. You wouldn't find barbed wire barricades outside Woolworth's, would you?[1]
>
> Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, 1972

After August 1969 the ferries kept coming with their camouflaged passengers for thirty years. The ideas brought by soldiers influenced their conduct as the conflict expanded, as did the plans made in the years and months when a military deployment came to seem more likely.[2] Historians of Ireland and writers on the British Army agree colonialism played a decisive part in the Troubles. The consensus holds that the colonial legacy loomed large in the army's tactical repertoire on arrival in Northern Ireland. There are two problems here: soldiers did not carry their intellectual baggage unthinkingly from the colonies into Northern Ireland. And what might be considered colonial tactics were notably absent between August 1969 and May 1970. The colonial imprint on the conflict cannot be entirely rejected. The whole period up to 1998, when power-sharing came about, might even be described as a decolonisation process.[3] Military thought prior to 1969 disavowed that the army could behave in a colonial fashion in the United Kingdom. Once the army was on active operations, this belief contributed to a defensiveness about the army's intentions. Ideas about the army's benign purpose reduced the space for critical questioning about how soldiers treated civilians.

Debates within the army must be set alongside political developments in Northern Ireland at the same time. The rapid pace of change in the late 1960s is an essential context for appreciating how soldiers experienced events, and for remembering that 'history is made by people who do not

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know what is going to happen next'.[4] Sectarian tensions had reached dangerous levels by 1968. Violence along the lines of previous decades could be predicted. But the disorder's transformation in 1970–1 into a rebellion against the state, contiguous with ongoing communal violence, was far from inevitable. For strategists, higher national priorities prevailed over concerns for what might happen in Northern Ireland. Involvement in politics there was seen as dangerous for the army, yet senior officers recognised their duty to assist the civil authorities in an emergency. Soldiers found it difficult to reconcile their views of Northern Ireland as basically British, and therefore deserving help, with a sense that politics functioned there in an alien fashion. Senior officers worried about the implications for Irishmen in the British Army if they got stuck in a civil war, in case enmity spread within the army itself. Troops finally marched into Derry city on 14 August 1969, then Belfast the next day, too late to prevent eight people being killed.[5] These events destroyed the legitimacy of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) in Catholic areas, and created a perceived need for community defence by the IRA from future Protestant invasion. By their hesitancy, strategists contributed to a problem to beset the British Army for decades to come.

THINKING ABOUT REBELLION AT THE EMPIRE'S END

The British Army's colonial heritage is obvious and irrefutable.[6] For some the army was: 'a colonial army, experienced in colonial campaigns. It was therefore inclined to treat the situation as a colonial one.'[7] The prior experience of senior officers is a case in point. General Sir Ian Freeland (General Officer Commanding (GOC), 1969–71) served in Cyprus; his successor from 1971 to 1973, General Sir Harry Tuzo, commanded a brigade in Borneo. Brigadier Frank Kitson, who commanded 39th Brigade in Belfast, 1970–2, fought in Kenya and Malaya.[8] The robotic application of colonial methods is seen as a marker of the army's failure as a 'learning institution', a weak spot diagnosed in twenty-first-century wars too.[9] Blinkered repetition apparently stemmed from an innate anti-intellectualism.[10] In fact the army was more curious than is normally assumed.

Military embodiments of colonialism in the 1960s cannot be separated from the deeper, contested relationships between Britain and Ireland. For some writers any policy pursued by the British government other than withdrawal constituted colonialism.[11] Colonialism can be read into the modern Troubles in various guises: in an unbroken chain from the

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sixteenth-century plantations to the present day, as partially defeated by the Irish Republic's emergence in 1921, as present still in softer, cultural forms, or kept alive by Ulster unionists who defy a British wish to disengage. In the 1960s Irish republicans reanimated colonial rhetoric in the mould of Third World anti-imperialism to forge international solidarity and justify their resistance to the state.[12]

Military theorising about how to respond to rebellion, most often discussed in terms of counter-insurgency, originated from colonial soldier–scholars such as Hubert Lyautey, Joseph Gallieni and Charles Callwell.[13] In this sense, all counter-insurgency is colonial. Military doctrine and education preserved lessons from the colonies. Doctrine manuals stressed the need to use the minimum force necessary, to gain the support of the population, and to build an efficient intelligence machine. Senior commanders wrote after-action reports for the conflicts in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Egypt, Cyprus and Oman.[14] The doctrine released just as the army deployed to Northern Ireland, *Counter Revolutionary Operations*, is criticised for being tainted by Aden, for ignoring lessons from Aden due to a fixation on Malaya and for excessively concentrating on rural settings.[15] Elements from earlier doctrine survived: securing popular backing for the government, civil–military co-ordination, minimum force and sound intelligence, for example.[16] *Counter Revolutionary Operations* illustrated common tactical problems with images from Aden.[17]

A fuller picture of military thought can be painted by looking to the teaching at the Staff College at Camberley, the 'Brain of the Army'.[18] Camberley educated those officers selected for future promotion to high command. The curriculum for 1966 contained a lecture on internal security, an instructional film, a presentation on psychological operations, plus a discussion period.[19] The 1967 course added films about Borneo and Aden. Colonial policemen gave talks.[20] In 1969 renowned expert Robert Thompson spoke on revolutionary warfare, before Lieutenant-General Walter Walker lectured on his direction of the Borneo campaign.[21] Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency* and Julian Paget's *Counter Insurgency Campaigning* were key readings which drew on British colonial experience.[22]

Military and imperial history often elevate national perspectives at the expense of international connections.[23] An internationalised professional military culture emerged in the nineteenth century. The concept of the concentration camp, for example, was widely disseminated, so that camps appeared between 1896 and 1907 in Cuba, South Africa and the Philippines.[24] In the 1950s Western armed forces were influenced by the French debate over the Indochina war as inferior forces defeated a modern

army, aided by popular support.[25] Counter-revolutionary warfare theory denied rebellions stemmed from genuine grievances, emphasising instead indoctrination by external actors. After the Second World War Britain, France and the United States collaborated to suppress rebellions. French, Vietnamese, American and Philippine troops trained at British facilities in Malaya. By the mid 1960s Western militaries shared a similar approach to counter-insurgency.[26] *Quelling Insurgency*, a doctrine publication from 1965, went into depth about the wars in Algeria, Vietnam and Cuba.[27] 1969's *Counter Revolutionary Operations* opened with a section on Vietnam.[28] The doctrine stated:

> the outbreak of insurrection, however deep the groundswell of disaffection, is never spontaneous. . .. Any insurrection therefore must have its roots in conspiracy, by definition the work initially of a close knit gang and it is at this conspiratorial stage of development that it is most easily checked, either by measures of political concession or by counter subversive action.[29]

Here doctrine conflated disorder with insurrection, encouraging officers to find an existential threat to society. Any terrorist attacks – whether sabotage or assassination – could signify intensifying local violence, 'or could be part of the first phase of revolutionary war'.[30] By deciding violent incidents constituted an insurgency, the army therefore judged a violent reaction to be justified. This was not a uniquely British conclusion. However, as the intelligence assessments about the IRA from 1966 to 1969 described below prove, officials disregarded doctrine's more alarmist tendencies in refraining from seeing a revolutionary threat where none existed.

Abandoning certain colonial-era techniques, such as intelligence organisation, would have seemed perverse. Ideas on riot control held their currency too. Teaching notes advised troops were best deployed as a deterrent 'before trouble starts', and giving crowds time and space to disperse.[31] *Counter Revolutionary Operations* related the appropriate degree of force to the political climate. Soldiers were to adhere to the minimum force principle 'most conscientiously' when confronted with civil disturbances not amounting to rebellion. When facing 'violent threats with serious political undertones', commanders were allowed 'some latitude'. Armed rebellion justified soldiers using violence to 'show firmness of purpose to dissident elements'. Soldiers could only fire on rioters if they were armed and 'in a position to inflict grievous injury'.[32]

Besides searching for inspiration from other militaries, British thinkers pondered the changing global order. European colonialism was

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transformed between 1945 and 1967: 'a world hospitable to empires became more hostile to them'.[33] Scholars are divided on when changes in the human rights regime began to impinge upon military operations. One position holds that repression provoked a backlash once Northern Ireland operations started.[34] Another interpretation depicts the Aden insurgency (1962–7) as the turning-point, with media coverage accorded a major part in heightening public awareness about rights violations.[35] Archival studies show human rights intruded earlier on.[36] Liberation movements in Indochina and Algeria were adept at mobilising international support through the United Nations General Assembly.[37] International Committee of the Red Cross monitors in Kenya criticised cruelty in detention camps, though they failed to expose the systematic torture taking place.[38] From April 1955 British forces fighting the EOKA movement on Cyprus came under criticism in the courts on the island, in the United Nations and in diplomatic exchanges with Greece.[39] However, officials in Cyprus, Aden and Northern Ireland practised 'cooperative manipulation', appearing to cooperate with critics while continuing with brutal methods in secret.[40] Staff College teaching notes from 1967 reflected on the recent controversy surrounding interrogation:

> Some students may argue that the means justifies the end, and where the end involves human lives the means can be severe. In other words, torture = information = destruction of terrorists = saving innocent lives. However by denying the individual the basic human rights of justice and a free trial, we destroy the very principles which we are fighting to uphold or restore. It is interesting to see how the efforts of Amnesty International in Aden have resulted in an almost total abandonment of interrogation as a means of acquiring information.[41]

During one training exercise Directing Staff (DS) claimed collective punishments like curfews, fines and evictions 'punish simple people who have acted wrongly under threat of torture or death'. Officers were advised to avoid them as they alienated people, resulting in a diminished flow of intelligence. Brutal interrogation, rough searching and stealing from the population were counterproductive, though 'We have been guilty of all on occasions in the past.'[42] Writing in a leading military journal, Major Peter de la Billière argued Aden set a precedent for future wars, where the National Liberation Front's skilful propaganda condemned British repression before a global audience.[43]

The army's ability to approach the colonial past with a certain analytical acuity must be recognised if the decisions taken in Northern Ireland are to

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be accurately contextualised. Rather than importing old ideas wholesale, some elements in counter-insurgency were judged to have enduring value, and others repudiated as politically intolerable. Having considered these questions the army fell into a complacency trap, dismissing external critics who often invoked colonial comparisons when castigating the army. How could such allegations be valid? After all, officers had diligently weighed up what should stay and what should go. The ideas that remained were validated by counterparts in the United States, France and elsewhere sharing them. This certainly does not imply that the army overturned cultural assumptions about race. Only in December 1968 did the MOD abolish a 3 per cent limit on the enlistment of black people into the army and a total ban on black soldiers in the Foot Guards, Household Cavalry, Highland and Lowland regiments, the military police, the military prison service, the Army Education Corps, the Physical Training Corps and the Intelligence Corps.[44] In December 2019 the Service Complaints Ombudsman found: 'incidents of racism are occurring with increasing and depressing frequency'.[45] Addressing Britain's colonial military legacy in tactical terms alone has clear limitations.

THE GROWING RUPTURE IN NORTHERN IRISH POLITICS

As the British Army came to terms, more or less, with the need to adjust after empire, politics in Northern Ireland saw a number of crucial developments. The Unionist Party had been in power continuously since the statelet's formation in 1921 without a Catholic ever occupying ministerial office.[46] Catholics were persistently ignored in policy-making, despite constituting 34.9 per cent of the population in the 1961 census.[47] Captain Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland Prime Minister from March 1963 until May 1969, believed in the need for change. Educated in England, working in London and Australia and wartime service in the Irish Guards may have informed his liberal outlook. O'Neill sought to develop a political culture where Catholics accepted the constitution.[48] Assimilating the minority into the mainstream promised to remove the border as a central issue in Northern Irish politics: this was to be achieved by improved socio-economic conditions.[49] Elements within unionist politics accepted his ambitions in a context where the United Kingdom's expanding welfare state, matched with a modernising ethos, emphasised the benefits that the union bestowed on all citizens.[50] O'Neill appealed to those who believed in an 'Ulster British ideology'. His supporters identified primarily with Great Britain and wanted a liberal, democratic Northern Ireland.[51] To observers

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in Britain this all appeared rather tame, if worthy. In Northern Ireland such notions smacked of bold radicalism.

The hope that economic progress might neutralise political grievances proved to be naïve. Instead, incremental reforms opened up an acrimonious debate about whether they should happen at all, and if so, how quickly. But at the beginning the focus on economics got results. Public expenditure per head rose from 88 per cent of the English level in 1959–60 to 118 per cent in 1969–70, due to O'Neill lobbying the Treasury in London. Between 1958 and 1970 the Northern Ireland economy grew on average 4.9 per cent each year, compared to 3.6 per cent in the United Kingdom as a whole. A political thaw complemented these achievements. Sectarian tensions eased during the 'Orange–Green' talks between nationalist and Orange Order leaders in 1962–3.[52] In 1965 the Nationalist Party accepted the role of Official Opposition in the Northern Ireland House of Commons, breaking their abstentionist tradition. Catholic politicians were finally involved in formal political life.[53] Opinion polls, always worth reading cautiously, suggested in the late 1960s that only a minority of Catholics (34 per cent) were dissatisfied with the constitution. Only 14 per cent wanted a united Ireland.[54] Attitudes held before widespread violence occurred did not determine what happened later.

Liberal unionist reforms coalesced with demands from the nascent civil rights movement, born in May 1963 at the formation of the Homeless Citizens' League in Dungannon.[55] Further campaigning organisations followed: most notably the Campaign for Social Justice in 1964, and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967. NICRA set out six core demands: one man one vote in local elections; a halt to gerrymandering of electoral wards to create false unionist majorities; banning discrimination in government jobs; stopping discrimination in housing allocation; repealing the Special Powers Act; and for the B Specials police reserve to be abolished. People joining the movement often found inspiration in civil rights activism in the United States. Dissatisfaction with housing attracted particular concern. Although house building was substantial after the Second World War, the new stock was allocated on a sectarian basis.[56] Discontent with political repression formed another major grievance. Stormont used the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act to exclude Catholics from political life. Initially designed to reimpose order after partition, justification for employing the Act shifted by the 1930s to silencing those who advocated union with the south. Regulations were issued banning meetings, processions, flying the tricolour, wearing the Easter Lily, circulating newspapers and singing republican songs.[57] The Act remained

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in force until 1973, seriously diminishing O'Neill's credibility as a reformer with civil rights advocates.

The extent of disadvantage faced by Catholics has always been contested. NICRA's lack of interest in discrimination by nationalist-dominated councils certainly undermined its credibility with Protestants.[58] A property qualification for voting in local elections affected everyone, with 28 per cent of Catholics and 18.5 per cent of Protestants disenfranchised in Belfast.[59] However, Catholics were disadvantaged to a greater degree than Protestants. According to one calculation, Catholics were underrepresented by 12.1 per cent across the Province. The gerrymander was most famous in Derry, where despite there being 14,429 Catholic to 8,781 Protestant voters, the latter controlled the council.[60] Catholics fared less well in employment: they were more likely to work in lower-status jobs, and suffered twice as much from unemployment.[61] By 1968 disillusionment with constitutional routes to solving these iniquities was setting in. Radicals in the civil rights movement wanted assertive action: street demonstrations would gain attention in Britain and abroad, forcing Stormont to buckle under external pressure. Some moderates then began to adopt more confrontational tactics for fear of losing influence in the movement.[62] In June 1968 Austin Currie, a Stormont Member of Parliament (MP), started squatting a house in Caledon in County Tyrone to protest against the property being allocated by the council to a single Protestant woman over Catholic families with children. On 24 August NICRA mounted its first civil rights march, from Coalisland to Dungannon.[63]

Conservative unionists disbelieved the claims made by civil rights activists. In an opinion survey in 1968, 74 per cent of Protestants denied that discrimination against Catholics existed.[64] Any acknowledged difficulties faced by Catholics were blamed on character deficiencies, such as poor self-discipline.[65] A conflict within unionism, between secular modernisers and religious traditionalists, pre-dated the clashes brought about by civil rights.[66] Ulster loyalist ideology, probably the most widely supported set of beliefs amongst Protestants, viewed itself in an existential struggle with evil forces, embodied in the Catholic church and Irish nationalists. Any concessions to those seeking to modify Protestant dominance would lead to loyalist defeat and destruction. Constant vigilance against opponents, including enemies within like liberal unionists, required a firm stance.[67] Fundamentalist Protestant denominations, such as the Free Presbyterian Church led by the Reverend Ian Paisley, claimed unique insight into God's will. Catholicism represented everything wrong in the world. Rome's hand was detected behind republicanism and its puppets in the civil rights

movement.[68] Prime Minister O'Neill lacked strong enough support to defeat these ideas.[69] According to his harsher critics, he did not bother to sell reform as an imperative to his own party.[70]

The UVF, originally formed in 1912 to fight Home Rule, was reinvented in 1966 amidst concerns about O'Neill's reforms.[71] On 27 May 1966 the UVF went looking for known republican Leo Martin. Failing to find him, they shot John Scullion, a labourer who was singing republican songs. He died from his wounds. The next month four Catholic barmen were shot leaving a pub in Belfast.[72] O'Neill banned the UVF in June. RUC intelligence assessed the threat to law and order from extreme Protestants to be 'equal or even greater' to that posed by republicans.[73] Although the UVF invoked Paisley's rhetoric, he publicly denounced those who turned to force. Paisley himself was imprisoned for refusing to be bound over to keep the peace after participating in an illegal protest. The attendant publicity only increased Protestant support for his opposition to reconciliation with Catholics.[74] O'Neill's intention to improve living conditions for Catholics annoyed poor Protestants, who felt ignored.[75] Meanwhile, civil rights marches through predominantly Protestant areas were viewed as deliberately provocative.[76]

The Northern Ireland cabinet was divided between those who believed the civil rights movement imperilled the state, and those who thought that concessions should be made.[77] Minister of Home Affairs William Craig argued republican involvement in NICRA meant they were a front for the IRA.[78] Republicans certainly attended NICRA's first meeting and constituted part of its membership, but did not control the group.[79] Under Cathal Goulding's tenure as Chief of Staff the IRA was heavily informed by Marxist ideology, seeking to forge a class alliance with unionist workers. Described as 'light-hearted and gregarious', Goulding's standing derived in part from his family's long association to republicanism. His grandfather belonged to the 'Invincibles' group responsible for killing Lord Cavendish, the British chief secretary in Dublin in 1882.[80] Yet many in the republican movement were sceptical about Marxism. Keeping military activity on the boil kept traditionalists happy.[81] The Irish police discovered twelve IRA training camps in 1965 and eleven in 1966. In November 1965 the RUC warned that the IRA was planning an offensive, and five men were arrested near the senior British Army commander's house for plotting to kidnap him. However, police reports in July 1967 and January 1968 discounted an IRA offensive. A November 1968 assessment portrayed the civil rights movement as distinct from the IRA, posing no threat to the constitution.[82]

Volatile situations arose when politics moved increasingly to the streets. Protests by civil rights campaigners drew loyalist counter-demonstrations.

A march in Derry on 5 October 1968 brought worldwide television coverage when the police batoned protesters, marking a turn to a more violent phase. Radical activists sought to challenge unionist power in the city, from the outset assembling the marchers in the Protestant Waterside district. Activist Eamonn McCann wanted to provoke the RUC in order to unveil the state's repressive character. The police drove the marchers from the city centre and into the Bogside, in what appeared to be an assault on the Catholic area, triggering a counter-attack from local people set on defending their community.[83] Minister for Home Affairs William Craig's decision to ban the march had only served to cause resentment and increase the numbers of those who participated. Police behaviour on the day was later described by Lord Cameron's official inquiry as involving 'unnecessary and ill controlled force' against demonstrators, only a minority of whom were disorderly.[84] In all, 11 policemen and 77 civilians sustained injuries.[85]

Dramatic events such as these undermined attempts by liberal unionists to address discontent. By the end of 1968 concessions had been made at London's insistence. Derry's council was replaced by a Development Commission, an ombudsman was appointed to investigate complaints about public bodies, housing was to be allocated more fairly, and multiple votes for business owners were abolished. Crucially, though, rigged local elections lived on. These measures split the civil rights movement. They convinced moderates of the government's good intentions, but were insufficient to pacify the more ambitious.[86] The People's Democracy, formed at Queen's University Belfast, argued for pressure on Stormont to be ramped up. The group arranged a march in early January 1969 from Belfast to Derry, defying Terence O'Neill's plea for a temporary hiatus, which NICRA agreed to.[87] The marchers met demonstrations by loyalists at frequent intervals. At Burntollet a loyalist mob viciously attacked them as the police looked on. The mob included off-duty members of the B Specials police reserve. There was later rioting in Derry, where the police assaulted innocent bystanders.[88] Greater numbers of Protestants wondered whether conciliation with a seemingly unreasonable minority was wise, and Catholics asked if peaceful protests were getting them anywhere.[89]

ACCEPTED PERCEPTIONS OF IRELAND

Those in the MOD's Main Building spent much of the late 1960s absorbed in a major defence review. Defence Secretary Denis Healey announced on 22 February 1966 cuts to equipment programmes, including the CVA-01 aircraft carrier, plus a permanent departure from Aden.[90] Over the next two

years, driven by a weak economy and military overstretch, the government pursued further retrenchment, leading to the decision in January 1968 to withdraw all forces from east of Suez. Healey planned to cut the army from 211,000 enlisted personnel in 1968 to 173,000 in 1973.[91] When the troops left Aden in November 1967, the ambitious officer might have been advised to switch his attention from rebellions to tanks. The directive for forces based in Northern Ireland listed their prime duty as preparing to reinforce an overseas garrison. Readiness for internal security was given as the second priority – a remote contingency not to interfere with training for war.[92]

The MOD was no different from the British political firmament as a whole. Between 1921 and 1968 the House of Commons spent on average two hours discussing Northern Ireland annually.[93] Before the 1964 general election Harold Wilson promised his future administration would support civil rights. The election gave him a slim majority, empowering the unionists to frustrate his legislative programme.[94] Compelled to pay attention to Northern Ireland, but to avoid antagonising the Unionist Party, Labour hoped economic and social modernisation would promote harmony. (See Illustration 1.1.) MP Paul Rose, who founded the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster in 1965, struggled to overcome ignorance about Northern Ireland in the House.[95] When Home Secretary Frank Soskice visited Ulster in April 1965, the Northern Ireland Labour Party warned him O'Neill's reforms were superficial gestures.[96] A fact-finding mission by the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster in April 1967 reported widespread discrimination

Illustration 1.1 Captain Terence O'Neill and Harold Wilson at 10 Downing Street, 5 November 1968.
(Courtesy of Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.)

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against Catholics. Wilson's Cabinet ignored both calls to action.[97] The pressure in the Commons for intervention had diminished since the 1966 general election gave Labour a 100-seat majority. Though sympathetic, Labour leaders thought civil rights activists exaggerated their case.[98]

When they thought about Northern Ireland at all, soldiers liked to dwell on the Province's bucolic charms, a leitmotif in recollections of service there. Cecil Blacker went to Lisburn in 1962 to command 39th Infantry Brigade. A horse fanatic, he enjoyed participating in riding events north and south of the border.[99] Another officer at the headquarters relished the 'pleasantly relaxed' atmosphere, taking up hockey, tennis and dinghy sailing on Loch Neagh.[100] Arriving at Palace Barracks for a two-year tour in June 1968, 2nd Queen's Regiment reflected: 'it is hard to imagine that we can do anything else but thoroughly enjoy our stay here'.[101] Later, in July 1970, 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers found replenishment in the Antrim countryside 'an agreeable change from the streets of Belfast'.[102] Even during their difficult 1971 tour in Derry, 2nd Royal Green Jackets appreciated the 'exceptionally comfortable' Shackleton Barracks. As a residential battalion, many families came with the soldiers – the schools in Ballykelly and Limavady were deemed far better than those attended by army children in Germany.[103] Officers wrote these accounts. A sergeant arriving in Omagh with the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards in September 1966 recalled the unit's wives' horror: 'they had never seen married quarters like them. We didn't have fridges or anything.'[104]

Stephen Robson, based at Ballykinler from October 1968, went on rural patrols to prevent anticipated IRA sabotage on the electricity network. The battalion played darts and football against local teams, without noticing any animosity. Sectarian tensions were invisible to him.[105] Charles Millman, an officer with experience in Berlin, Kenya, Borneo and the MOD, and a Staff College education, observed the July marching season in Belfast in 1965. Yet 'the real depth of this divide did not truly reach me – then or throughout the year I was at Lisburn'.[106] Military testimonies refrain from mentioning Northern Ireland's constitutional status prior to the army's active deployment in 1969; the topic probably did not seem relevant. Sentiments expressed in the early years may have reflected deeper beliefs. Jim Parker, in Belfast from mid August 1969, placed Belfast in the same league as Manchester, Dundee and Liverpool.[107] Brigadier James Cowan went to command 8th Brigade in Derry in January 1970: 'one was operating in the United Kingdom. We were at home; these were allegedly our people, and I think it made a difference to the way people approached their jobs.'[108] Another officer, in Northern Ireland from April to August 1971, shared Cowan's qualified sense of affinity: 'you

were dealing with, ostensibly, your own people'.[109] A National Defence College thesis from 1973, by an MOD civil servant, concluded a more ruthless campaign against the IRA was impossible because 'the people who are involved are themselves British'.[110]

Having tackled rioting on Belfast's Shankill Road in October 1969, the Parachute Regiment saw the city 'as British as Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds or Hull', yet beset by an 'inborn bigotry' simply 'beyond the comprehension of anyone who is not Irish'.[111] Most benignly, though patronisingly nonetheless, soldiers could view the Province's divisions as sadly unresolvable.[112] In this respect military attitudes mirrored those found in wider British society.[113] Some struggled to believe their presence might be part of the problem. As late as October 1970, Paul Garman, a subaltern during 2nd Royal Anglian's tour in Belfast, admitted it took 'a little while to sink in' that some people refused to identify as British, and 'hated you intensely'.[114] Others approached the Northern Irish with distaste. The second in command of 1st Light Infantry, the resident battalion at Abercorn Barracks in Ballykinler from August 1968 until April 1970, suggested:

> to the average British soldier, they were no different to the Chinese in Hong Kong, or the Arabs in Aden, or the Malays in Singapore. They were wogs, they were not British people. British people didn't behave like that, and they couldn't relate this lot, who were manning barricades and throwing petrol bombs and so on, they couldn't relate, they were not the same as people in our street at home.[115]

Attitudes throughout the army towards Northern Irish people hardened as the violence intensified.[116] However, traces of sympathy never entirely disappeared. At some stage in the early 1970s the MOD began compiling a narrative of events, to inform battalions preparing to go on tour. The Irish in general were apparently obsessed with distant historical events (presumably in a manner more deleterious than the tradition-saturated regimental cultures within the British Army). Over the years to come, according to the ministry's narrative, the 'nature of the Irish' came to shock British soldiers in two ways:

> firstly, the irrational and subjective approach to events by the Irish. A brutal murder would be a saintly act if committed for the 'right' side, and a shot in self-defence by a soldier at an IRA sniper would as certainly be a 'brutal murder'. It was not so much that the Irish had a total disregard for the truth as that it was regarded solely as an alternative method of communication; and perjury as a necessary technique. The second aspect was the appalling capacity for hate, and lust for violence, which the British Army found within Northern Ireland.[117]

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Before and after August 1969 the army and the MOD were torn between contempt for the Irish and a strong sense of obligation to them. In 1970 the Army Staff College syllabus covered military aid to the civil power within the United Kingdom for the first time. The whole subject occupied one afternoon, including film extracts showing riots in London and Northern Ireland. Instructing staff were clearly told that Northern Ireland 'is a very special case with special factors which do not apply in this country'. Yet lessons from experience there might be applied in England in the future.[118] The ambiguity about Northern Ireland's filial connections was tangible. These sentiments appeared in government policy discussions prior to August 1969 – and not only within the armed forces.

The MOD started taking a closer interest in Northern Ireland in 1966 when intelligence predicted an IRA offensive to mark the 1916 Easter Rising.[119] Any relevant knowledge from the IRA's 1956–62 border campaign failed to register.[120] The Chiefs of Staff have been criticised for recommending that intelligence-gathering be left to the police rather than MI5.[121] In fact, the decision emanated from MI5. The Security Service effectively pressed for the police to retain primacy, as 'IRA activities constituted a "law and order" problem and were not a security one'.[122] The organisation responsible for tackling subversion within the United Kingdom refused to do its job in Northern Ireland. By giving so much power to the RUC, a police force known to have little interest in addressing loyalism, MI5 made it difficult for the government to understand the danger from loyalism. Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Baker, the Vice Chief of the General Staff (VCGS), visited Northern Ireland in late March. His intelligence briefing from the RUC expected the IRA to be planning a long-term campaign. Baker found these conclusions to be 'formed on a basis of reliable information'.[123] The most likely time for trouble was expected to be 16–17 April, so the army despatched an extra battalion between 15 and 20 April, under the cover of a training exercise.[124] Not much happened over Easter 1966. In November the MOD decided to downgrade the Northern Ireland command to just District status.[125]

After the disastrous events in Derry on 5 October 1968, Denis Healey told the home secretary that soldiers lacked training in riot control in the United Kingdom, and he did not wish them to acquire it.[126] The GOC Northern Ireland, Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Harris, thought major violence in Derry and Belfast simultaneously was likely to force the police to ask for assistance. Harris expected military involvement to make matters worse.[127] The MOD instructed Harris to await orders before committing troops.[128] Prime Minister Wilson sought clarification about the legal

position.[129] The Treasury solicitor doubted whether British law on the army's role applied in Northern Ireland, whereas Home Office lawyers were certain it did.[130] General Baker, now Chief of the General Staff (CGS), believed the army was obliged to assist the civil authorities.[131] Nevertheless, his Director of Military Operations (DMO), Major-General Read, visited Northern Ireland in December to underline the army's reluctance to get involved. Harris agreed to avoid using troops until absolutely essential and made sure all troops were trained in internal security tactics. The RUC Deputy Inspector General 'could not see the Army being called upon until the guns were out'.[132] The CDS, Marshal of the Royal Air Force (RAF) Sir Charles Elworthy, argued the *Manual of Military Law* expressed the common-law 'duty of every person to come to the assistance of the civil authorities to maintain law and order if called upon to do so'. The MOD's insistence on granting permission beforehand had no basis in law. Elworthy informed Healey:

> It is probably the most unpopular and thankless duty a serviceman has and commanders would certainly be most loath to undertake this duty unless it was absolutely essential. However, they are also conscious of the most unpleasant consequences, political and social, as well as the loss of life which could ensue if there were a delay in taking action when the situation demanded it.[133]

The attorney general backed up Elworthy. So the GOC was now to refer to the ministry 'if humanly possible'.[134] Healey railed against the common-law obligation, rather prioritising 'the requirements of political prudence which necessitate prior consultation between Ministers before troops are committed'.[135] According to Cecil Blacker, who served in the MOD in the late 1960s, Healey had a tendency to bully the service chiefs.[136] Though Elworthy only took a third in his Cambridge law degree, he was sure enough of his ground to insist that 'it remains illegal under the Common Law for a military commander to refuse to assist on his own responsibility and irrespective of what "instructions" he may be given by MOD'.[137] His view reflected an emerging consensus in Whitehall.[138] It has been argued that the army disliked the legal requirement to respond to the civil power's call for help, so ignored it.[139] However, on 4 January 1969 the minister for home affairs asked the GOC to put a company of troops on standby in response to intelligence about an impending IRA attack. Northern Ireland Command agreed without informing the MOD.[140] In the event nothing happened. But the principle of officers in Northern Ireland taking action without prior reference to London had been firmly established as legally necessary.

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Debates about the Heath government's policy from June 1970 have missed this crucial factor. Military officers did not simply respond to events because Labour or Conservative administrations adopted radically different security policies. They did so because the common law empowered them to take the initiative, and as violence became worse the alternative, waiting for a reply from London, would have been extremely dangerous.

Whitehall now began seriously thinking about intervention. The Home Office and MI5 could not imagine troops having to be used in the United Kingdom.[141] Recognising the deficit in soldiers' knowledge about assisting police operations, the army began writing new doctrine.[142] The MOD thought for the first time about the large numbers from Ireland, north and south, serving in the armed forces. Involving them in anything more than minor, short-term support to Stormont risked 'very considerable repercussions'.[143] The precise danger here remains obscure, as the military intelligence and Security Service records on political activity or affiliations within the army are beyond public examination. However, various other sources suggest that fears over soldiers becoming politicised had realistic foundations. If not igniting a civil war within the army, strife in Ireland might at least cause serious disciplinary problems. Irish regiments had not been stationed in Northern Ireland, with short exceptions for training or ceremonial purposes, since 1933. In July 1972 the CGS called for the policy to be upheld to protect Irish regiments from 'tensions and bitterness'. If sent on operations, soldiers might end up confronting friends or neighbours. Their families might be intimidated by militants. Individual military policemen from Ireland were no longer deployed, after experience showed them 'to be insufficiently impartial'.[144]

As the army went onto the streets in August 1969, Headquarters Northern Ireland (HQNI) itself relied upon several officers from Irish regiments serving in key staff positions. The assistant adjutant and quarter-master-general, Lieutenant-Colonel P. J. C. Trousdell, and his deputy, Major A. J. French, both came from the Royal Irish Rangers. General Freeland's aide-de-camp, Captain P. A. H. Dawson, and senior staff officer Lieutenant-Colonel K. Neely came from the same regiment.[145] Only from spring 1974 were there no staff officers at HQNI from Irish regiments.[146] Most papers created by the headquarters are still retained by the MOD, so assessing whether these officers displayed particular types of attitudes is impossible. However, people in Northern Ireland did attempt to manipulate national identities within the army. Within a week of 1st Queen's Regiment entering Derry, Corporal Rundle was implored to follow his Irish roots and defect to the Bogsiders – with his gun and ammunition.[147] Terence Hubble, in Belfast with the Black Watch during June and July 1970, remembered the difficult

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position facing an Irish sergeant-major in the battalion, whose father and other relations took part in marches that summer.[148] By 1974 a National Defence College study noted the IRA's repeated attempts to incite Irishmen in the army to desert to Sweden, to 'accidentally' lose their weapons and ammunition at arranged places, and to deliberately fire wide in gun-battles. When soldiers ignored these entreaties the IRA turned to threatening their families, or worse. As a result Irish soldiers were banned from spending their leave at home in Ireland.[149]

Despite the official silence on politicisation in the armed forces, a few traces survive which suggest a hidden history yet to be fully revealed. Even before August 1969 battalions were aware of the potential for dissension within their ranks, though perhaps prone to treat the matter lightly: 2nd Queen's Regiment's Corporal Mahon, from 'South of the Border', was mocked for empathising with the civil rights protesters, and his alleged tendency to break into renditions of 'We shall overcome'.[150] During 3rd Light Infantry's 1971 tour in Belfast a Catholic soldier from Northern Ireland in the battalion was discovered to be 'pro-IRA'. The battalion sent him back to barracks in Minden, West Germany. Several fights broke out between soldiers 'who had tendencies to the IRA or to the loyalists'.[151] In the same period the Guards Independent Parachute Company returned a southern Irish sergeant to England. Months earlier an officer whose parents owned property in Ireland was kept off operations in case the IRA burned the property down.[152] While based in Celle, West Germany from May 1970 to September 1974, 1st Royal Green Jackets went to Belfast on three occasions. In early 1972 Kenneth Ambrose was promoted to command a platoon:

> The reason I got that job was because at the time the Officer Commanding 6 Platoon was not able to resolve his conscience as far as the British Army's operations in Northern Ireland, that's the real reason why . . . he felt that, if push came to shove, he was on the verge of becoming a conscientious objector, actually. He was very political. He had been to university for a number of years and I think he'd probably let that, the attitudes which came out of university came with him into the Army, which of course should never have happened.[153]

PLANNING FOR THE WORST

Early catastrophic thinking about Northern Ireland lingered in the strategic imagination for years to come. The fear of organised Protestant resistance to London was of particular importance, a fear based not on an intelligence

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failure, as some scholars have contended, but on a direct threat from the Northern Ireland government itself. By January 1969 Sir Philip Allen, Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) at the Home Office, thought the future held possibilities ranging from serious rioting to suspension of Stormont and rule by the governor. He opposed direct rule from London as impracticable.[154] Major-General Read cautioned that in a full-scale British intervention the Northern Ireland authorities might refuse to stand aside. Soldiers could find themselves fighting loyalist organisations, the B Specials or even the wider population.[155] The MOD and the Home Office conducted a detailed joint assessment. They imagined five scenarios.[156] The first envisaged sporadic or minor disturbances by civil rights activists or counter-demonstrators, with little need for army back-up. Any military involvement was expected to come after approval from London and to last for a short time. Under scenario two, serious but isolated rioting took place. Public buildings and police stations might be attacked. The violence was likely to be spontaneous, and the police would need help to restore order. As in scenario one, the GOC would liaise with London and deploy for as short a period as possible. Scenario three posited widespread riots, simultaneously in at least half a dozen places, with firearms being used. Troops may have to protect military bases and vulnerable points (such as essential services and police stations), and confront rioters. The military's actions would probably provoke further violence. Political intervention by the British government was inevitable. The police would remain loyal, though they might be less effective, and the B Specials could join in the rioting. The IRA was 'without doubt' going to incite violence, possibly attacking police stations and military bases. Public support for the security forces was expected to be buoyant.

Scenario four predicted a 'Breakdown of law and order'. The scenario involved intercommunal violence, with guns, property destruction, looting, disruption to essential services, and attacks by the IRA and loyalists. The army would have to restore law and order and maintain essential services, and possibly close the border with the Republic, in the worst case to repel an incursion by Irish government forces. Military courts and preventative detention might be needed. Of the B Specials, 'very considerable numbers ... would actively be supporting the extremists and militants of their community, violence aimed primarily at the other community, and secondly at HMG [Her Majesty's Government] and even at her forces'. The IRA would attack Protestants and government forces. An extra army division would be required to handle the disorder. Scenario five imagined the British forcibly taking control when Stormont refused to hand over power.

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Therefore the army's first task would be to depose the Northern Ireland regime, before handling the law-and-order situation. The B Specials were expected to overwhelmingly back an illegal government, and some regular police and civil servants would resign. The IRA was likely to fight both the British government and the Northern Ireland authorities, and try to provoke civil war. Loyalist militants would support the illegal government. Most of the population would side with their co-religionists. Even in this most catastrophic outcome, the review tellingly expected 'the bulk of the populace' to 'secretly hope HMG successfully establishes law and order'.[157] Officials dreaded provoking civil war, yet harboured suspicions that the Northern Irish, deep down, really wanted British leadership.

Sending these scenarios to the prime minister, Denis Healey insisted 'military intervention might well exacerbate the difficulties that it was designed to resolve'. His staff only intended to write plans for scenarios one to three; scenarios four and five were too alarming to contemplate.[158] Healey later suggested these scenarios might necessitate two whole army divisions being sent – a vast commitment.[159] When ministers discussed intervention they wondered whether ejecting Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom might be preferable.[160] Home Office civil servants argued withdrawal was bound to be construed as the government having 'betrayed the minority and run away from our proper responsibilities'.[161] The cabinet secretary claimed independence was not in the United Kingdom's interest, for political, economic and military reasons. Withdrawal would produce an illiberal regime, or one unable to impose order, leading to domestic and international calls for the United Kingdom to intervene.[162] The prime minister, home secretary, chancellor, foreign secretary and defence secretary all individually believed a united Ireland to be the only viable long-term solution.[163] But collectively in the Cabinet Northern Ireland Committee they agreed to send troops if lives were endangered, and that independence or an associated status for Northern Ireland were impossible. Only direct rule from London was a practicable alternative to governance by Stormont.[164] Despite regular discussion in government over withdrawal, the basic position decided upon in April 1969 remained in force for decades: a British presence was necessary to prevent civil war.

The MOD wished to stay in Northern Ireland for slightly different reasons. The navy's facilities could comfortably be removed, apart from the valuable aircraft yard at Sydenham and an armament depot in Antrim. For the army, recruitment in Ireland was bound to be adversely affected. More seriously, a withdrawal was likely to encourage the IRA to go on the offensive. Shutting RAF facilities risked weakening the United Kingdom's

radar, air traffic control, air defence, maritime strike and reconnaissance capabilities.[165] Overall, each of the COS believed withdrawal was 'unrealistic', due to the 'serious repercussions on our military operational capability and credibility'. It would be deeply embarrassing for Britain.[166] These considerations affected Healey's scepticism about intervention. Reporting to the cabinet, he now argued 'we cannot wash our hands of Northern Ireland's affairs ... our responsibility for the integrity of the Province as part of the United Kingdom includes some responsibility for law and order'. Healey deplored withdrawal as a 'cumbersome and embarrassing operation'. Britain would be perceived at home and abroad to have shirked her responsibilities – an 'incalculably damaging' charge.[167]

Rioting broke out in Derry on Saturday 19 April 1969 after the police banned a civil rights procession for fear that loyalists might shoot at it. Intense fighting took place between the police and rioters in the Bogside: 181 policemen and 79 civilians were injured. Later that night, bombs exploded at an electricity pylon in County Armagh and a reservoir in County Down. Water supplies to Belfast were reduced, so the army gave some technical assistance.[168] The army also agreed to guard other vulnerable points, such as water and electricity facilities, against sabotage, from 21 April;[169] 104 RAF personnel arrived as well to guard air force installations.[170] A mains water pipeline was damaged in another bombing on 24 April. London agreed to Terence O'Neill's request for more guards, sending 1st Prince of Wales' Own Regiment and a Royal Engineers troop.[171] However, a much more consequential appeal was denied. The rioting and sabotage prompted the Northern Ireland government to consider a huge shift in their position on reform. O'Neill's cabinet secretary asked the Home Office if London would deploy troops in exchange for universal suffrage in local elections. London replied: 'It is not possible for Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to give any secret pledges of military assistance.'[172] This key civil rights demand only came into force in November 1969 – too late to halt the political violence. The British government had missed an unprecedented opportunity to defuse the conflict, being so fixated on keeping the army out.

For the Unionist Party the bombings symbolised O'Neill's weakness. He resigned on 28 April, having lost the party's confidence. His replacement as prime minister was Major James Chichester-Clark. A well-placed civil servant described him thus: 'In gentler times his good nature and honest hard work would probably have seen him through a successful political career. He was not on the intellectual wing of the party.'[173] While the police blamed the IRA for the attacks, the MOD held Protestant extremists responsible, which

proved to be correct.[174] More sabotage followed, including at the guarded electrical installation in Tandragee. The assailants escaped after a chase by police tracker dogs.[175] Despite the change in leadership Stormont continued to call for more military support. On 7 May they asked for soldiers to protect Belfast harbour and television transmitters.[176] The MOD refused because there was no evidence of a threat.[177] When the CGS made a trip to Northern Ireland in mid May he urged the new prime minister not to call troops onto the streets.[178] At a meeting on 21 May at 10 Downing Street, Chichester-Clark was pressed to release the army from guarding vulnerable points. Wilson and Callaghan threatened constitutional implications if the army came to support Stormont.[179]

The threats worked. By 6 June the army only retained responsibility for fifteen vulnerable points.[180] The chief of staff at HQNI, Brigadier Dyball, lobbied Stormont to end the guard duties altogether. There was 'no intelligence to indicate that anything is likely to happen'. By the start of July the police agreed to take over most remaining guard duties.[181] As a further buffer the MOD proposed giving the police CS gas, to 'provide an additional rung in the escalatory ladder short of opening fire or calling in the military'.[182] The Cabinet Northern Ireland Committee gave approval a week later.[183] Lieutenant-General Sir Ian Freeland assumed command of HQNI on 9 July. Awarded the Distinguished Service Order in Normandy, he came with political experience as deputy chief of the general staff in the MOD. Within his headquarters, fellow officers came to know him as '"Smiling Death", because if they do not meet up to his professional excellence, they are given the "chop"'.[184] Soldiers remained prepared if truly needed. After serious rioting on the weekend of 12 July, a company of 2nd Queen's Regiment moved to Derry as a precaution.[185]

On 1 August London rejected a request from Stormont for helicopters to transport the police and assist them in surveillance missions.[186] After Chichester-Clark's cabinet verged on calling for military support to control rioting on 3 August, Callaghan asked them to do everything in their power to avoid doing so, threatening direct rule if the troops were called out.[187] In response, Harold Black, the secretary to the Northern Ireland cabinet, went to meet Callaghan's officials on 5 August. He said direct rule was bound to provoke 'a frightening reaction by the Protestant community which could make anything that had happened up until now seem like child's play'. A provisional unionist government might attempt to exercise control and 'wholesale sectarian strife would break out'.[188] The Northern Ireland government understood very well London's trepidations and effectively threatened organised insurrection against the crown to stay in power.

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This pivotal moment – where London backed down – raises the question of how far an intelligence deficit on unionist and loyalist politics contributed to the British government's decision-making. Eunan O'Halpin argues that the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), responsible for providing the cabinet with integrated assessments, paid limited attention to Northern Ireland until 1970, thus distorting policy. Though conceding that much intelligence paperwork is still kept secret, he criticises the JIC for ignoring loyalist threats.[189] However, the discussion above shows that fears about loyalist rebellion in response to a British intervention loomed large in official thinking about the future. It is extremely unlikely, given all the interdepartmental planning taking place in 1969, that no intelligence assessment on loyalism was conducted at all. O'Halpin correctly suggests loyalist terrorism was a central element in Whitehall thinking, neglected in many studies. But his wider reasoning on the early Troubles applies here too: British problems derived from political judgements rather than flawed intelligence.[190] Northern Ireland's most senior civil servant blackmailed the Home Office with a Stormont-sponsored uprising. Subtle intelligence analyses based on secret sources were hardly necessary.

However, the British government's failure to effectively grip the intelligence apparatus in Northern Ireland caused serious problems. At HQNI the staff officer, grade 2 for operations also looked after intelligence. He was supported by a counter-intelligence detachment under a Captain Brown. These officers liaised daily with the RUC Special Branch, who shared their information, and from December 1968 sent weekly assessments to the MOD.[191] In April 1969 a military liaison officer and a security liaison officer (the latter from MI5) were attached to Special Branch headquarters to improve co-ordination.[192] General Baker regarded Special Branch in May as being 'sadly inefficient'. Indeed, 'speculation and guesswork largely replace intelligence'.[193] Freeland complained to London about the RUC's inability to produce intelligence.[194] In late July the security liaison officer and the military intelligence liaison officer moved out from RUC headquarters following 'a modest amount of friction' due to the advisers trying to drive the police to change their ways too quickly. Sir Martin Furnivall-Jones, MI5 director-general, rather incredulously claimed intelligence continued to flow despite the row.[195]

James Chichester-Clark mixed moral indignation with threats to amplify the direct rule warning. Writing to the home secretary, he complained that press reports about 'British troops' falsely presented Northern Ireland as a foreign country: 'The British Army is our Army too. I and many other Ulstermen have been proud to serve in it.' Stormont ministers accepted

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a military deployment would be accompanied by close supervision by London. Yet he and his colleagues were 'appalled – I must not understate our reaction' – by the prospect of direct rule. Chichester-Clark claimed his administration had done everything possible to adopt the reforms advocated by Wilson.[196] He and his minister of home affairs, Robert Porter, met Callaghan on 8 August. The Northern Ireland prime minister predicted the reaction to direct rule would be 'very violent indeed'. Callaghan disagreed, labelling the assessment 'entirely unrealistic'. In his view British public opinion expected ministers in London to have control over policies which might affect soldiers. Chichester-Clark hoped Stormont could remain in existence while the UK government directly controlled law-and-order matters. In Callaghan's terms, such an arrangement meant the Northern Ireland government acting as 'agents of the United Kingdom Government over a very wide field'.[197] Defence Minister Roy Hattersley, delegated to deal with Northern Ireland by Healey, feared it would be difficult to withdraw troops once committed. Substantial resources were likely to be needed, with consequences for the country's overall defence commitments.[198] National priorities dominated thinking about a local problem.

When the annual Apprentice Boys march went past the Bogside on 12 August, intense rioting broke out, lasting all night and into the next day. The Bogside was described by Hattersley as 'under a state of siege'. Police officers used CS gas on a large scale and committed almost all their reserves.[199] On 14 August Harold Wilson broke his holiday in the Isle of Man to meet the home secretary at RAF St Mawgan in Cornwall. Callaghan reported that Chichester-Clark expected violence that night. In Callaghan's opinion, when the request came it must be met, but he wanted troops committed in a limited area, not the whole province. Wilson agreed. During the meeting, Callaghan spoke on the phone to Lord Stonham in the Home Office, who told him that Belfast had called to say the police were losing control in Derry and were likely to request military assistance soon. Wilson and Callaghan decided to send a police liaison officer and a Home Office civil servant to advise the GOC, and two police consultants to advise the Northern Ireland government.[200] This was a late stage indeed for independent information channels to the cabinet to be established.

At 4.35pm on 14 August Harold Black, the secretary to the Northern Ireland cabinet, phoned the Home Office to say the inspector general was about to formally ask the GOC for troops.[201] All B Specials police reservists had already been mobilised, and still the police were unable to control the situation. When troops deployed in Derry the atmosphere calmed, while Belfast experienced further violence, including shootings. Amongst those

killed was Hugh McCabe, a Queen's Royal Irish Hussar on leave in Belfast, shot with an RUC bullet. Later that night Roy Hattersley authorised the sending of another infantry battalion to Northern Ireland. A company of 1st Royal Regiment of Wales and two troops of 17th/21st Lancers moved to Derry.[202] At a COS meeting in London, the Acting CGS, General FitzGeorge-Balfour, recommended Northern Ireland be reinforced with a full brigade. He thought substantial forces on the ground would deter the IRA from trying to exploit the prevailing chaos. At this meeting the chiefs expected the IRA to become active soon.[203] Clearly influenced by RUC intelligence that disproportionately emphasised the republican threat, the military's senior leadership sent their troops to aid the civil power, expecting an IRA offensive. Direct threats from Northern Ireland's elected representatives to contest British interference by force did not get a mention.

CONCLUSION

The British government approached the growing trouble in Northern Ireland as a government of Great Britain, not that of the United Kingdom. Perhaps Westminster's traditional orientation towards compromise was the ultimate flaw. Sending in the troops, but too late to stop trust in the authorities being shattered; pushing reforms insufficient to satisfy civil rights campaigners but strong enough to antagonise conservative unionists; worrying about an IRA offensive but ignoring loyalist violence. Decisive action on all these fronts was notably absent. What drove thinking in this period was an overwhelming focus on other business. For most British politicians most of the time Northern Ireland simply did not register. The MOD consistently thought about wider strategic priorities, to the point where the defence secretary advocated ignoring the legal duty to aid the regime in Belfast.

Even once the cabinet collectively accepted their obligation to the people of Northern Ireland they attempted to hold off an intervention for as long as possible. In so doing they missed an opportunity to secure a major victory for the civil rights movement and thus potentially defuse the expanding protest movement that incited such an infuriated response from conservative unionists. Until early 1969 London could perhaps be forgiven for struggling to keep pace with a complex, fast-moving political scene. After the Burntollet march the battle lines appeared more starkly drawn. Acquiescing in the RUC dominating intelligence reporting even after plans concluded they could offer armed resistance to the crown in the worst-case scenario was a major

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misjudgement. Strategists needed a firmer evidence base to make decisions about the likelihood of a Protestant rebellion.

When the mass arrests, brutal interrogations, controversial shootings, curfews and internment without trial in the early 1970s are described, comparisons with earlier events in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus and Aden become almost automatic. The colonial model is seductive precisely because of its simplicity. The tactical repertoire displayed in Northern Ireland did replicate some methods witnessed in the colonies. Whether these practices would have been applied in mainland Britain is open to question. Conduct in Northern Ireland replicated methods applied in Algeria, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and other insurgencies. Those mainstays of counter-insurgency – co-ordinated civil–military command arrangements, intensive intelligence-gathering, trying to win popular support and so on – are generic military principles. They offer only limited insight into the actual conduct of war. The military mind was not put into hibernation when the troops left Aden, only to be rebooted in August 1969 with the old colonial ideas perfectly preserved, ready for application. Instead, officers took forward those principles which seemed to have validity, such as ideas about riot control. At the same time, officers were aware that many colonial techniques were now unacceptable. When they thought about Northern Ireland, soldiers often romanticised the place and the people. Hostile attitudes towards the civil population amidst rising violence existed alongside many friendships and romantic relationships. Even before August 1969 the army's leaders understood Northern Ireland's politics could divide the army in terms of identity. What was the right response to political violence in a country many took to be British? The army knew in advance that going into action in Northern Ireland risked deepening the conflict; but was legally bound to assist a civil power whose fundamental legitimacy never secured universal consensus.

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