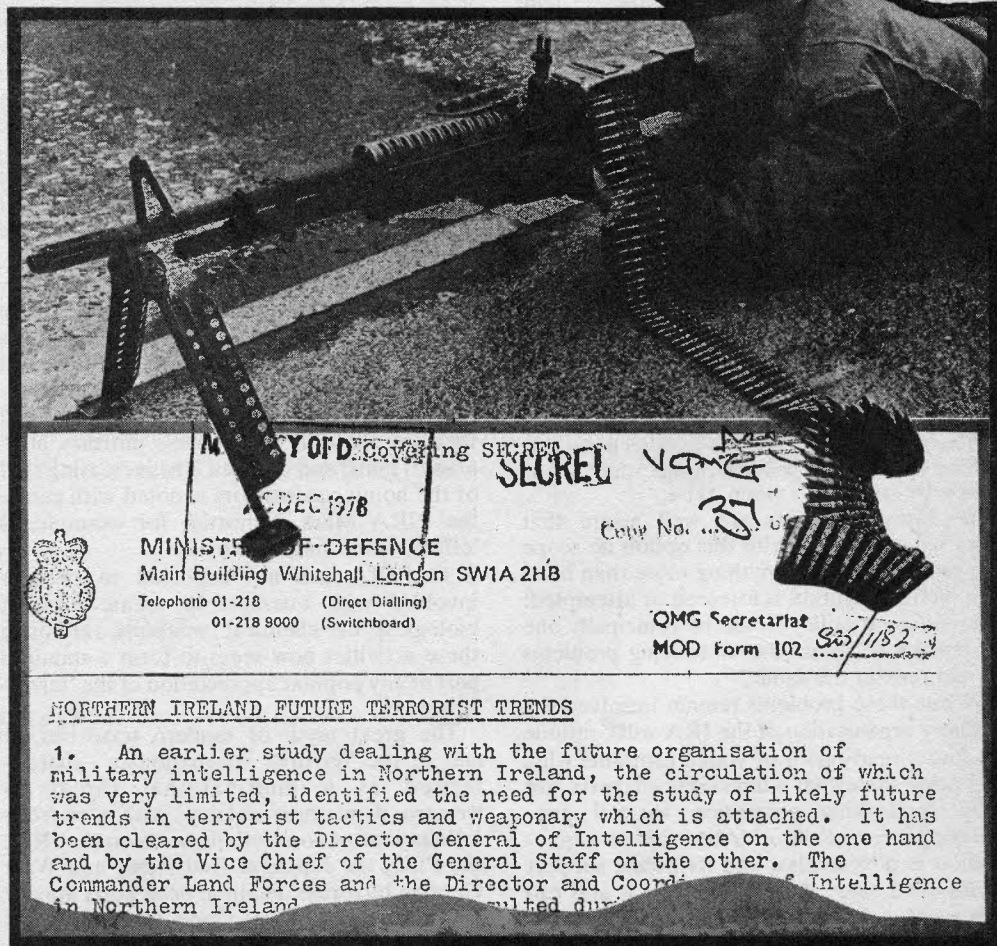


The army's secret opinion

'THE CAMPAIGN of violence is likely to continue while the British remain in Northern Ireland'. There is 'no prospect in the next five years of any political change' which would remove the *raison d'être* of the Provisional IRA. With these conclusions the secret military intelligence appreciation of *Northern Ireland, Future Terrorist Trends* wraps up and buries a thousand speeches of politicians who have promised that the army will wipe out the gunmen.

Northern Ireland, Future Terrorist Trends is a study prepared by the most senior army officer on the Defence Intelligence Staff, Brigadier J. M. Glover. The report was written early last November, and subsequently fell into the hands of the IRA. Since then the report has received some publicity in Irish Republican circles but has been ignored by the British media. It was circulated to army commands in December after clearance and approval at the highest level. Glover himself, now promoted to Major General, recently became Commander of Land Forces in Northern Ireland — a clear indication that his report must broadly represent the view of Northern Ireland held inside the Ministry of Defence. Nevertheless, many in authority did not see the paper — not because of its secret classification but because it belongs to the army spheres of preparation and action and was not intended for policymakers and politicians. The distribution shows that not one copy was sent to Ministers, either in the Northern Ireland Office or the Defence Ministry.



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NORTHERN IRELAND FUTURE TERRORIST TRENDS

1. An earlier study dealing with the future organisation of military intelligence in Northern Ireland, the circulation of which was very limited, identified the need for the study of likely future trends in terrorist tactics and weaponry which is attached. It has been cleared by the Director General of Intelligence on the one hand and by the Vice Chief of the General Staff on the other. The Commander Land Forces and the Director and Coordinator of Intelligence in Northern Ireland consulted during the study.

The single most notable conclusion is that there is no sign of any end of the war. Brigadier Glover confined his study to a forecast of the next five years and excluded consideration of IRA activities on the UK mainland or the loyalist paramilitary groups. His report is intensely cynical about the chances of restoring peace. The intelligence specialists have not substantially altered their view since the previous study which noted:

The Provisional IRA (PIRA) has the dedication and the sinews of war to raise violence intermittently to at least the level of early 1978, certainly for the foreseeable future. Even if 'peace' is restored, the motivation for politically inspired violence will remain. Arms will be readily available and there will be many who are able and willing to use them. Any peace will be superficial and brittle. A new campaign may well erupt in the years ahead.

The paper rejects any future political development – save the continuation of direct rule from Westminster – as offering any hope of a diminution in the scale of violence. There are five options – the continuation of direct rule; the addition of a new constituent assembly within the direct rule framework; the unlikely restoration of the Stormont or other parliament; and a move towards independence which might take firmer root. But the fifth option was more exciting.

A new party based on socialist policies transcending sectarian barriers may emerge. But similar attempts since 1922 have always ended in failure. In Ireland the appeal of sectarianism and nationalistic sentiment has always been stronger than that of left wing ideology. The continuing polarisation of the population on sectarian lines only emphasises the improbability of such an initiative.

Despite a muted reference to 'independence', the sixth option – British withdrawal – is not mentioned. It remains a subversive heresy within the army. Of the five listed options the army has its favourite – continued direct rule. The other policies would give more support to the Provisionals through nurturing fears in the Catholic community of a re-established Protestant ascendancy. But even this offers no guarantee of a more peaceful future.

Only . . . continued direct rule offers any real prospect of political calm and hence a waning support for the terrorist during the next five years. Under any other scenario Republican fears of a Protestant ascendancy being re-established would enable PIRA to pose as the defenders of the minority interest. Even if the present system of government is maintained the current muted support for the forces of law and order will remain delicately balanced and susceptible to any controversial government decision or Security Forces action. We can see no prospect in the next five years of any political change which would remove the PIRA's *raison d'être*.

The Army's analysts are well aware that they have provided with this option no scope for politicians to do anything more than bluster. No real solution is foreseen or attempted: 'Government policy would be principally one of containment and the underlying problems would remain the same.'

While these problems remain unsolved the military organisation of the IRA will continue to find a ready pool of young aspirants who, the army somewhat whimsically suggests, are 'eagerly seeking promotion to full gun-carrying terrorist status'. Although the organisation is now smaller and its public support diminished since the early 1970s, it still can tap a rich vein of recruits. The report admits that the Provisionals are essentially a working

class organisation, based in the ghetto areas of the city and in the poorer rural areas. Middle class members and graduates exist, even though they have to forfeit their normal life style. The Army thinks that some of these potential middle class recruits are deterred by the Provisional's 'muddled political thinking'.

The report suggests that only middle class members can provide 'the intelligent astute and experienced terrorists who provide the backbone of the organisation'. But it does make clear that PIRA has adequate resources to continue providing explosives and bombs for its needs, including small workshops and laboratories. The terrorists' abilities, their professionalism, and their expertise are all on the increase, the army believe. Indeed, substitute 'soldier' for 'terrorist' in the study and the report might almost be a careful appreciative analysis of an allied army.

THIS COMES out most clearly in the army's protrait of the rank and file terrorist:

Our evidence of the calibre of rank and file terrorists does not support the view that they are merely mindless hooligans drawn from the unemployed and unemployable. PIRA now trains and uses its members with some care. The Active Service Units (ASUs) are for the most part manned by terrorists tempered by up to ten years of operational experience.

The mature terrorists, including for instance the leading bomb makers, are usually sufficiently cunning to avoid arrest. They are continually learning from mistakes and developing their expertise. We can therefore expect to see increasing professionalism and the greater exploitation of modern technology for terrorist purposes.

From a high ranking and highly-qualified officer in the British Army, the Provisional IRA could hardly have had a greater compliment. It is an attitude in complete contrast to that of Roy Mason who continually characterised the IRA as hoodlums and thugs.

Much of the report consists of careful analysis of the types of weapons and munitions available to the IRA together with their effectiveness, availability and price. They estimate that some 1700 PIRA members and activists may have available some 4000 handguns, machine guns and rifles. The army only knows of stocks of 800 such weapons but their estimate is that the IRA's 'actual holdings are probably five times larger'.

The IRA's operations are increasingly designed to be 'safe' so that the attacker has a high probability of escaping. The main types of weapons used are available in sufficient quantity, although there is a search for 'prestige' weapons which attract publicity even if they are militarily ineffective – mortars, anti-aircraft guns, and missiles. The increasing skill of the bomb constructors is noted with care – the PIRA Mark 9 mortar, for example, is 'effective and simple to make'.

The IRA are not expected to become involved with attempts to create nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, although these activities now seem to form a standard part of any popular appreciation of the 'terrorist threat'.

The great myth of modern terrorism, is that of the 'terrorist internationale', characterised as a multinational threat to western democratic society, with numerous insinuations of connections between the IRA, the PLO, the Japanese Red Army and West German terrorists. Familiar *bêtes noires* appear – Soviet gold, Colonel Gaddafi of Libya, all orchestrated by a convenient Godfather –

currently Carlos, and formerly Yasser Arafat Newspapers report terrorist summit conferences. It is all nonsense.

It is, however, profitable nonsense. Take for example, *The Weapons of Terror*, a recent money-spinner from the stable of *Sunday Telegraph* reporters Christopher Dobson and Ronald Payne, self styled as 'internationally known specialists', who blandly assert that there are 'contacts with Breton and Basque separatists, and some link with Palestinians, particularly the PFLP . . . Colonel Gaddafi has given them financial support and a small amount of arms.'

The army intelligence report is clear on these points: 'we doubt whether the PIRA receives financial aid from Libya or any other overseas government'. It also dismisses the Soviet gold story: 'There are no indications of any substantial link between the Soviet Union and either wing of the IRA, nor do we expect any links developing in the next five years'.

Although Soviet arms have reached the province, and have been intercepted *en route*, such shipments 'did not implicate the Soviet authorities.' As for the Middle East connection, although arms had been bought there and it remained a 'valuable source' of weapons, the PIRA feared 'that close association with other political ideologies would tarnish the essential Irishness of their movement.' They would be unlikely to accept any help that came with political strings attached – if for no better reason than that they are already adequately well off for arms and resources.

The only links considered of significance by the army are with the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where supporters may provide up to £120,000 a year. The rest of a guesstimated £950,000 annual PIRA budget comes mostly from thefts. The most active terrorists are believed to receive about £20 a week for their work.

THE LEAKING of this document may have left the army dismayed and the IRA delighted. But its real significance for the future of the province lies with the wider public from whom it was intended that such honest thinking should be kept away. The military head of the Defence Intelligence Staff says here that the present war in Ireland cannot be won. The IRA will continue, for the foreseeable future, to wage attrition against the British presence.

The politicians may now deny that things are quite so gloomy, or that the army intelligence specialists are right to dismiss the political options so readily. But the army have the advantage both of history and operational experience; Whitehall's tinkering around with a little bit more government or a little bit less government has never been a substitute for tackling a problem at its roots. Politicians may speak of 'overcoming' the gunmen and terrorists, but the army knows it cannot be done. The only strategy the army does not evaluate is the strategy of withdrawal – which is tantamount to military defeat – because British withdrawal has always been the first objective of the IRA. But between the lines the Intelligence Staff infer that the only peaceful future for Northern Ireland may lie in a radical change of policy. If the army has been right in their analysis of their own position then withdrawal is the only option which should now be canvassed.