

# The Role of Sectarianism in the Provisional IRA Campaign, 1969-1997

## Introduction

Historians and social scientists alike have debated the character of the Northern Ireland ‘troubles’, since they began in 1969.<sup>1</sup> Despite the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, many issues remain unresolved in Northern Ireland; contention surrounds almost every aspect of the troubles, none more so than the IRA campaign.<sup>2</sup> This paper will contribute towards the debate regarding whether or not the operation waged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) was ‘sectarian’ by nature; a dispute which was sparked off by Robert White’s 1997 paper, and has subsequently been contested by scholars including Henry Patterson, Steve Bruce and James Dingley.<sup>3</sup> The accusation under scrutiny is therefore whether the PIRA selected their targets based on their religious preference and, hence, were carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing rather than the politically motivated armed struggle they claimed.

Between 1969 and 1997 the PIRA were responsible for the deaths of 1740 individuals.<sup>4</sup> 798 of these belonged to the Protestant community.<sup>5</sup> But how fair would it be to label these fatalities and the PIRA campaign more generally as sectarian? A survey of the literature reveals how the complex meta-narrative of the troubles can obfuscate this particular debate.<sup>6</sup> There is even contention regarding the exact definition of ‘sectarian’ and whether religious, cultural, and political identities in Northern Ireland are inherently interwoven. At one extreme Dingley argues that ‘Unionism’ equates to both Protestantism and a British identity, hence, he argues all non-Catholic casualties caused by the PIRA were sectarian killings, or even a form of ‘ethnic-cleansing’.<sup>7</sup> At the other extreme, White argues that the PIRA campaign was not sectarian because the organisation pursued a political agenda (to remove British occupation and control of Ireland, and reunify Northern Ireland with the Republic) by waging a war of liberation that was, for the most part, blind to religious divisions.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, this paper will argue that both extremes provide a reductionist assessment of the PIRA campaign.

By combining the findings of an original statistical analysis of the PIRA campaign with an assessment of qualitative primary source material, this paper will put forward an alternative argument that encapsulates the complexity of the question. It will be argued that the PIRA *aimed* only to kill individuals whom they deemed to be in some measure actively contributing to persisting British control in Ireland, and the prevention of a reunion with the Republic; and did so in a fashion that was, for the most part, blind to religious diversity.<sup>9</sup> Crucially, the assertion that the PIRA targeted Protestant civilians will be rebutted. It will also be argued, however, that the PIRA were either unable or unwilling to recognise the gap between the actual impact of their ‘armed struggle’ and the intentions that lay behind it. In this sense the PIRA failed to recognise the extent to which neglecting the principles of *Jus ad Bellum*, namely proportionality, effectiveness and discrimination, can erode any scope for promoting a campaign of political violence as ‘just’ guerrilla warfare, or in some measure legitimate.<sup>10</sup>

The consequence of which has been that elements of the campaign have been ignored, misunderstood or misrepresented to give a crude and simplistic account of the character of the organisation and its campaign.

## Methodology

This paper will fill what has been identified by White as a gap in scholarly understanding of the troubles: statistical data and analysis which provides insight into the actual intentions behind the PIRA campaign.<sup>11</sup> The necessary raw data for this research has been generated by conducting a survey of the monumental book *Lost Lives*, an in-depth account of every life lost as a result of the troubles.<sup>12</sup> Whilst, it must be conceded that the likelihood is that *Lost Lives*, like any scholarly endeavour, will contain some minor inaccuracies and errors, the work is widely respected and without doubt of a standard from which useful insight can be gleaned;<sup>13</sup> especially when cross referenced with alternative sources to corroborate the findings.<sup>14</sup>

The conclusions drawn from this data will be contrasted with a critical analysis of qualitative primary source material including the memoirs of former PIRA members, and the statements of Sean O'Callaghan, a former member of the PIRA, turned informer, who agreed to be interviewed for this paper. By doing so this paper will firstly establish general patterns in the PIRA campaign; secondly discuss any anomalies that appear in the analysis; thirdly account for the controversies, wider context, and localised provocations which led to deviations from the PIRA's usual practice; and finally, provide informed conclusions regarding the intentions, impact and legacy of the PIRA.

The desirability of generating an original quantitative analysis of PIRA violence was identified by the limits of the existing statistical analysis of the Northern Ireland troubles. Tables of data and charts found in works such as *Northern Ireland's Troubles: The Human Cost* or *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland*, for instance, assess how many deaths each political organisation was responsible for, or compare the number of casualties sustained by the Protestant and Catholic communities.<sup>15</sup> Such data, and the conclusions drawn from it, however, fail to reveal any measure of the actual intentions of the perpetrators, the wider context behind each life lost, and frame the violence as meaningless rather than strategic.<sup>16</sup> Above all, it is currently impossible to assess whether the individuals killed were actually the intended targets or to gain any insight into the context in which the deaths occurred. O'Leary and McGarry even weigh up the 'success' of each organisation involved in the troubles by making what they confess to be a 'crude assumption' of who each organisation intended to target.<sup>17</sup> By, as they say, 'assuming' that the PIRA wanted to kill Protestants, security forces and prison officers, O'Leary and McGarry inadvertently also assume that the PIRA did not intend to carry out internal policing measures such as killing suspected informants, and discount entirely any scope for anomalies such as accidental suicides or collateral damage. Thus O'Leary and McGarry have only succeeded in obscuring further our understanding of the intentions of the participants in the Northern Ireland conflict.<sup>18</sup>

The raw data established for this research, by contrast, categorises a range of factors that provide insight into the context surrounding the homicides and the intentions of the organisations involved. For each troubles-related fatality information was gleaned from the accounts in *Lost Lives*, and organised into the following categories: the religion of the individual killed; their organisational affiliation (if any); who they were killed by; the status of the death, for example homicide or self-inflicted; whether responsibility for the fatality was claimed; whether there was any obvious element of retaliation motivating in the killing (generally claimed by the perpetrator retrospectively); if the individual was the intended target, and if not, who was; the method by which the individual was killed; and whether the killing was pre-planned, or spur of the moment.<sup>19</sup> On the rare occasion that *Lost Lives* did not provide the information required, undetermined results were entered, such as ‘unknown’ or ‘other’.

### **PIRA targeting paradigm: broad conclusions**

Once the raw data was collected, it was analysed in order to identify patterns of behaviour in the PIRA campaign. Analysis revealed that the percentage of individuals killed by the PIRA in a sectarian fashion, i.e. those selected purely on the grounds that they were Protestants was 6.37 per cent.<sup>20</sup> If we discount all killings seemingly committed in direct retaliation for fatalities perpetrated by Loyalist groups or security forces, the figure is reduced to 1.76 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The contention surrounding intended and non-intended casualties will be explored in detail later, as will the impact of ‘retaliation’ to give context to these statistics. Nevertheless, it is possible even at this stage to gauge from these figures that PIRA sectarian violence was a rare aberration. To place this in context, loyalist paramilitaries exhibited a significantly higher degree of naked sectarianism in their campaigns. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), for example, can be seen to have killed 61.97 per cent of their targets for sectarian reasons, whilst the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) killed 54.98 percent.<sup>22</sup> If, statistically speaking, the PIRA did not wage a conscious war against individuals because they were Protestants, what can the data tell us about who was considered to be a legitimate target? And how does this information compare with the version of events given in other more qualitative primary sources?

When the fatalities deliberately caused by the PIRA are examined, it is possible to conclude that, broadly speaking, the organisation’s primary endeavour was waging a militant campaign which sought to overthrow British control and occupation in Northern Ireland.<sup>23</sup> The PIRA intended to achieve this by making the country ungovernable through a barrage of attacks on the businesses and individuals affiliated, however tenuously, with British rule and the division of Northern Ireland from the Republic.<sup>24</sup> These included: the army and army bases; police stations, and the police force; the prisons and prison officers; major political figures who stood for or maintained the partition of Ireland; and any individuals who actively facilitated either British occupation or the partition of Ireland in any way. These intended or ‘legitimate’ PIRA targets will hereafter, be referred to by the umbrella-term, the ‘uniformed’.

The memoirs of former PIRA members corroborate the assertion that uniformed individuals were considered to be legitimate targets for the PIRA.<sup>25</sup> Gerry Bradley, for example, explains how in 1975 he utilised his part time job as a French polisher to scout for new PIRA targets by looking at the photographs displayed in customers' homes for 'anyone [he] recognised in uniform: soldier, UDR, policeman, prison warden, judge, politician'.<sup>26</sup> Hence he considered politicians and judges to be in 'uniform' and therefore equally as legitimate a target as members of the security forces.

To what extent, however, were the PIRA 'shooting the uniform' regardless of who wore it? Is it possible to conclude, as White does, that shooting the uniformed equated to a political campaign that was blind to religious identity and, hence, not sectarian by nature?<sup>27</sup> The next section of this paper examines characteristics of PIRA intended and thus 'legitimate' targeting practices, including the forward planning and actual execution of missions, to demonstrate that whilst the PIRA, for the most part, did 'shoot the uniform' regardless of who wore it, there are many reasons why their actions have not be perceived as such.

### **The PIRA Paradigm: 'uniformed' targets**

The fact that the PIRA targeted uniformed individuals who were of the Catholic or non-Christian faith has been cited by White as evidence of non-sectarian behaviour.<sup>28</sup> Dingley, criticises this assertion to be somewhat irrelevant, given that the overwhelming majority of the security forces including the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) were Protestant.<sup>29</sup> The raw data collected for this paper, however, provides greater insight into the complexity of the matter. On the one hand, accusations of sectarianism can be countered by the revelation that the PIRA killed non-Protestant uniformed individuals in a manner that was overwhelmingly deliberate, pre-planned and with full knowledge of the religious stance of the target.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, of the 43 non-Protestant security force personnel killed by the PIRA: 41 were the intended target and 37 of them were pre-planned and, hence, were well 'researched' homicides.<sup>31</sup> The testimony of former PIRA members found in their memoirs supports this assertion. For example, Sean O'Callaghan details at length how he stalked Catholic RUC man Peter Flanagan, a target assigned to him by the PIRA council, to determine a suitable time and place to assassinate him, and practice the escape route.<sup>32</sup> This evidence suggests that Dingley is too hasty in his dismissal of the significance of the PIRA having targeted non-Protestant security force personnel.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, if the PIRA campaign was entirely sectarian in nature, such killings would not have occurred.

On the other hand, however, it must be conceded that evidence can be found which brings into question the authority of White's claim that such homicides attest the non-sectarian nature of the PIRA.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, when asked in interview for this paper whether killing a Catholic member of the security forces was in any way different to killing a Protestant, Sean O'Callaghan answered: 'The truth is that yes, yes I think it was different .... because Catholics and Nationalists joining the police force was seen as more of a betrayal, so there was more satisfaction killing him'.<sup>35</sup> This view is consistent with O'Callaghan's earlier account of Flanagan's death in his memoir where he notes that 'Republicans in that part of

the world would always have a soft spot in their hearts for those who murdered Peter Flanagan', because, 'Flanagan was an abominable man who sold his soul to the devil'.<sup>36</sup> The notion that Catholic members of the security forces had 'betrayed' the Nationalist cause, and the increased satisfaction recorded to have been felt following their assassination reveals White's argument to be somewhat undeveloped. This being said, the fact that these killings were pre-planned and carried out in full knowledge of the religious status of the target, at the very least complicates Dingley's assertion that the RUC and UDR were targeted with the blanket-goal of killing Protestants.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in this instance, both White and Dingley's arguments appear inconclusive when the full complexity of the situation is taken into account.

An in-depth examination of the PIRA's campaign against uniformed individuals over the entire duration of the conflict, however, provides far more conclusive evidence that the organisation was systematically indifferent to civilian suffering; 'shooting the uniform' regardless of who wore it, or whether the uniformed role was in any way the primary occupation of the target. This is because uniformed individuals were killed in a manner that was almost unanimously pre-planned, researched and hence, deliberate.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the data shows that the PIRA killed just over 87 percent of their uniformed targets in a pre-planned fashion, a further 9.87 percent in an 'opportunistic' but deliberate manner, and less than 3 percent by mistake, or as collateral damage.<sup>39</sup> When compared to the (un-uniformed) civilians killed by PIRA these figures are significant; only 43 out of the 641 civilians killed were pre-planned homicides that entailed the murder of an intended target, when the motivation was not retaliation.<sup>40</sup>

The full record of each homicide in *Lost Lives*, and the records in the memoirs of former members of the PIRA testify to the forward planning and deliberate manner in which uniformed individuals were targeted by the PIRA.<sup>41</sup> To mention but a few instances: Steven Megrath, a Protestant UDR man was stated by the PIRA to have been 'under surveillance for some time' before he was shot in 1987; Wilfred Wethers, a Protestant member of the RUCR was killed as he arrived home by PIRA members who had been waiting in a field for him to return in 1990; and Stanley Adams, a part time UDR man was killed by the PIRA in 1976 after having been lured to his death, when his assassins posted a dummy letter to an address known to be on his round in his other role as a part time postman, where they then lay in wait for him for hours before shooting him through the letter box on his arrival.<sup>42</sup>

To place this in context, Loyalist paramilitaries, by comparison, can be seen to have acted in a far more opportunistic manner, often killing the first Catholic they came upon. For example, it was admitted in court that Stephen McCann had been targeted at random by his killers members of the Shankill Butcher gang (a particularly violent offshoot of the UVF), in 1976 after they had 'decided to go out and get a Taig'.<sup>43</sup> This process of randomly selecting victims in a crude sectarian fashion actually characterised the majority of UVF operations. Indeed, out of the 539 individuals killed by the UVF, 393 were Catholic civilians,<sup>44</sup> and a further 16 were Protestant civilians mistaken for Catholics.<sup>45</sup> Sean O'Callaghan stated in the interview that the loyalist campaign was, however, not without logic: 'they killed Catholics that everyone would know were innocent. Right. Simply to frighten a whole community'.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, 'sectarian' proves to be an equally reductionist way of assessing loyalist campaigns, such as that of the UVF, for it portrays their civilian-centric efforts to coerce the

Catholic population into dropping their (assumed) support for PIRA, as random, meaningless and illogical.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence in support of the assertion that the PIRA only intended to kill uniformed individuals, is that opportunities to kill civilians were frequently not taken. Indeed, almost without exception, the PIRA killed their intended target, and passed up the opportunity to kill any witnesses or other civilians in their path, even if they were known to be of Protestant faith. For example: in 1977 the PIRA locked all workers in the Coalisland cement fabrication factory in a room whilst they waited for their target, part-time UDR man David Graham, to arrive at work before shooting him alone and leaving; in 1992 James Douglas, a Protestant RUC officer was shot in a bar in front of his family, friends, and many other customers, none of whom were injured; and in 1989 part-time UDR man Thomas Hardy was shot in front of several other employees at Granville Meats abattoir, his other place of work, including one man who was stood just 3 feet away, yet, not even he was injured by the PIRA.<sup>47</sup> Sean O'Callaghan confirmed in interview that this was because there were strict instructions to kill only the target.<sup>48</sup>

The memoir of Eamon Collins, another former PIRA member who, like O'Callaghan, later became an informer against the PIRA, bolsters this point by recording that the PIRA would never directly set out to kill the family members of uniformed targets because they 'sought to avoid any operations which had *obviously* sectarian overtones'.<sup>49</sup> There are copious other examples in which the PIRA targeted a uniformed individual, yet caused no physical harm to others who were present.<sup>50</sup> Such instances bear testament to the clear opportunities that were not taken by the PIRA to cause harm to civilians, many of whom were from Protestant backgrounds, even to protect the identity of the sometimes unmasked PIRA assassins.<sup>51</sup> Had the PIRA wanted to carry out the same kind of campaign as the Loyalist militant groups, and target random civilians purely because of their religious affiliation, these instances surely would have been excellent opportunities to do so. This is an especially significant point when considering that civilians who were in close proximity to the execution of selected PIRA targets could have potentially been claimed to have been killed by accident, in self-defence, or because of mistaken identity.

Thus far, it has been established that the PIRA's intended target discrimination policy generally consisted of 'killing the uniform' regardless of who wore it, and aspiring only to harm targeted individuals. The next section of this paper will consider what room, if any, is left for the opposing view by examining the controversy surrounding the killing of off-duty security forces, individuals with tenuous links to the security forces, and civilians more generally.



## Arguments against the ‘killing the uniform’ theory

The fact that the PIRA killed uniformed individuals when they were off-duty has been cited as evidence that their ‘armed struggle’ was fundamentally sectarian.<sup>52</sup> What is often forgotten in this debate, however, is the fact that the security forces can equally be accused of targeting ‘off-duty’ paramilitaries, for example, when killing individuals suspected of posing a future risk to civilians, in circumstances where they posed no immediate threat, for example the 1982 ‘shoot-to-kill’ assassinations in South Armagh.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the PIRA did kill many uniformed individuals at a time when they were off duty.<sup>54</sup> However, as Sean O’Callaghan explained in interview, this did not in any way mean that the target has been selected for reasons connected to their off-duty capacity.<sup>55</sup> Nor did the tactic equate to sectarianism. Instead it was simply a matter of logistics or ‘convenience’.<sup>56</sup>

O’Callaghan’s testament can be corroborated by recognising that the uniformed individuals who were killed off-duty and, hence, out-of-uniform, were executed almost unanimously without physical harm coming to any of the civilians surrounding them.<sup>57</sup> For example Peter Flanagan of the RUC was the only customer killed in the local public house he visited daily, and UDR man Denis Wilson was the only person killed by the PIRA when they burst into his family home, brushed past several members of his family, and shot him in his sitting room.<sup>58</sup> This would suggest that the PIRA aspired to ‘kill the uniform’ regardless of who wore it, or in this case, regardless of whether or not the individual was actually wearing it at the time. For, had these individuals been selected because of their religious or their cultural identities, then surely others would have stood to have been hurt in the process.

Former PIRA member Tommy McKearney similarly discounts the significance of targeting security forces when they are off duty.<sup>59</sup> Instead, McKearney explains that it was the tactical motivation that was paramount to PIRA target discrimination policy in this scenario.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, McKearney asserts that the RUC Reserve Forces and UDR were primarily targeted because their local knowledge of residents and ability to distinguish between regional accents ensured they were especially efficient at thwarting the PIRA’s efforts: ‘The Provisional IRA would have been incredibly naïve, not to say extraordinarily stupid, had it failed to recognise the threat these forces posed. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Provisional IRA responded by proactively targeting UDR members and RUC Reservists, whether in or out of uniform. The Provisional IRA was determined not to repeat the errors of past campaigns (in particular, that of Operation Harvest) and allow themselves to be defeated by a local militia.’<sup>61</sup> Hence, the desirability of removing the obstacle the PIRA faced in the form of the RUCR and UDR superseded any notion that targeting these individuals out-of-uniform could be seen to represent alternative motivations.

Whilst the killing of off-duty security force personnel appears to have stemmed from practical or politically aspirations, it is easy to imagine why such actions have not been

received this way, particularly by the friends, colleagues and relatives of those targeted. Indeed, whilst the PIRA took steps to avoid causing physical harm to those who surrounded their targets, this does not exclude them from psychological harm. What is more, in the intimate communities of particularly the smaller Northern Irish Towns, it was likely that family members or neighbours knew or could at least suspect who had been responsible for the assassination of their loved ones; leading to a sense that the killing had been ‘personal’ rather than political. This notion could then be compounded by the belief that victims had been targeted on the basis of their religious persuasion, because of the way in which the PIRA campaign had played out in their local communities.<sup>62</sup> Fay, Morrissey and Smyth’s regional study, for instance, shows that local experiences of the troubles could vary dramatically, particularly in the countryside.<sup>63</sup> By examining the overall deaths caused in the troubles by region, for example, this research has revealed that in South Armagh/Newry there were 125 deaths, 78 of which were local residents killed by Republicans, whereas only 11 were local residents killed by Loyalists.<sup>64</sup> In West Belfast, by comparison, there were 520 total fatalities, 40 of which were local residents killed by Republicans, and 38 of which were locals killed by Loyalists. It would be unsurprising, therefore, if residents in South Armagh or Newry were more likely to view the Republican campaign as religiously motivated ethnic-cleansing, as opposed to a politically motivated guerrilla war.<sup>65</sup> Hence, in areas where the Protestant population was the minority, the death of multiple UDR or RUC personnel at the hands of the PIRA could feel as though it really was the Protestant population, rather than the uniformed which were coming under fire.<sup>66</sup>

What this means is that whether or not the PIRA campaign *was* sectarian in nature, it could have been perceived as such. Hence, their campaign could have had a significantly different impact to that which was intended. Over time the PIRA do seem to have become aware of the significance of the impact of their actions, and adapted their agenda accordingly. When it became apparent that killing off-duty security force personnel had an adverse impact on perceptions of the organisation, for example, the PIRA phased out the practice.<sup>67</sup>

The killing of individuals whose connections to the uniformed services was tenuous has also called into question the legitimacy of the PIRA’s claim to be a politically motivated organisation.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, when individuals were killed for having loose connections to the security forces, rather than for being directly employed by them, for example, as policemen or soldiers, the PIRA’s motivation was questioned.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the PIRA were accused of sectarianism when they killed court judges, politicians, or people who worked in a non-uniformed role for a uniformed organisation. Examples of such killings include the following. In 1974 Martin McBirney was shot dead for being a magistrate and former barrister who presided over loyalist cases.<sup>70</sup> Frederick Anthony was killed by a car bomb attached to his vehicle because he was a cleaner at an RUC station.<sup>71</sup> And John Gibson was shot in 1993 for being the director of the Henry Brothers Building company which supplied building materials to the security forces.<sup>72</sup> 99 individuals in total can be seen to have been killed for their indirect or ‘tenuous’ links to the uniformed services, which is a not insignificant figure.<sup>73</sup>

Scrutinising the full context of such homicides, however, calls into question the relevance of equating these killings to sectarianism. Firstly, 15 of the 99 individuals killed were Catholics.<sup>74</sup> Rory Conaghan, for example, was a Catholic judge killed by the PIRA the same



day as the aforementioned Protestant judge Martin McBirney for, as the PIRA stated, ‘collaborating with the British war machine’.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Catholic Adrian McGovern was killed just a month before the previously mentioned Protestant John Gibson in 1993, because he, too, supplied building services to the security forces.<sup>76</sup> The fact that the PIRA treated Catholics who were tenuously linked to the security services in exactly the same way as they did Protestants, refutes the claim that the PIRA was acting in a sectarian fashion in this instance, for neither cultural, religious, nor ethnic identity came into the equation.

Examining the contexts for the killings of individuals who were tenuously linked to the uniformed professions further rebuffs the claim that the PIRA were sectarian in their motivation. Indeed, these targets appear to have overwhelmingly been planned in advance, and officially claimed by the PIRA subsequently. Out of the 99 individuals killed for their tenuous connections to the security forces, 96 were pre-planned operations,<sup>77</sup> and just 3 were opportunistic killings.<sup>78</sup> What is more, 92 of the 99 killed were officially claimed by the PIRA, including all three of the individuals killed ‘opportunistically’.<sup>79</sup> The 7 unclaimed homicides include 5 individuals killed in a shooting at an Orange hall by dissident members of the PIRA who apparently did not have the consent of the PIRA council for the attack, and the homicides of former UDR and RUC officers, whose retirements could perhaps have been unknown to the PIRA.<sup>80</sup> This information indicates that, even if the public, the press and the British and Irish governments took a different view, the PIRA believed these individuals to have been legitimate targets.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, what other explanation is there for the fact that the operations were forward-planned, conducted in a manner that ensured that only targeted individuals were killed, and were followed by declarations of responsibility? This being said, by failing to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, the PIRA undermined their claim to be an army and waging a political campaign. It was thus easier for the government to delegitimise them as terrorists, and hence, this form of targeting can still be seen as strategically mistaken.

The most contentious argument against the theory that the PIRA only sought to kill uniformed individuals, however, is that civilians lost their lives in what the PIRA would consider to be ‘collateral damage’.<sup>82</sup> The PIRA sought to cause actual material damage to businesses, transport and infrastructure, particularly in the former years of the troubles.<sup>83</sup> They also sought to demonstrate their capacity for inflicting damage on the governments of Britain and Ireland by forcing them to defend the safety of civilians. For instance, the PIRA planted bombs in public spaces in conjunction with bomb warnings in order that the security services could prevent their detonation, or clear civilians from the vicinity.<sup>84</sup> This tactic, when employed successfully, caused only material damage, or very limited casualties’. The bomb placed at Canary Wharf in London in 1994 to demonstrate the PIRA’s frustration at the lack of political progress made towards a peace settlement in spite of their ceasefire, for example, caused extensive economic damage yet only two civilian casualties, and has even been quoted by Michael Gross as an example of ‘just’ guerrilla warfare.<sup>85</sup>

The PIRA bombing campaign more generally, however, did result in many civilian fatalities. The PIRA claimed that these were unintentional ‘collateral damage’, and often issued public apologies for this.<sup>86</sup> Unconvinced by such apologies Bruce asserts that the PIRA bombing

campaign was sectarian because, in his view, its intention was to kill civilians by issuing bomb warnings that were deliberately misleading, vague and generally insincere.<sup>87</sup> Conversely, Patterson suggests that the bombing campaign was ‘wilfully blind’ to the risk of civilian casualties.<sup>88</sup> Examining the context in which this so-called ‘collateral damage’ was caused reveals the evidence to support Patterson’s view.

An argument in favour of the PIRA claim that their bombing campaign was not designed to cause harm to civilians is that on many occasions their bombs exploded prematurely and, hence, caused unintentional damage, or even the suicide of the PIRA bomb-planter. PIRA member James McDade, for example, inadvertently committed suicide in November 1974.<sup>89</sup> In his memoir *Bombs Have No Pity*, Lieut.-Colonel George Styles, a British Army officer and a bomb disposal expert in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, explains that such occurrences are owing to the fact that amateur bomb-makers produce bombs which have somewhat unpredictable detonation times.<sup>90</sup> As such, civilians were sometimes killed when bombs were placed in different locations to what had originally been planned when it was recognised by the PIRA bomb-planter that a premature-detonation was going to be imminent, or as PIRA plans changed but internal communications had broken down.<sup>91</sup> In such instances, the bomb warnings which had already been delivered appeared incorrect or misleading because the security services were either misinformed or confused by further contradictory updates on the new location of the bomb.

The infamous Birmingham pub bombings in November 1974 is an example of this scenario, and is concluded by Styles as having been ‘yet another example of IRA inefficiency’.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Styles asserts that the PIRA had ‘decided to give adequate warnings but when the Belfast flight [that carried the body of the aforementioned PIRA James McDade: the landing of which the bombings were intended to symbolically coincide with] was delayed their communications network wasn’t geared to cope with the new development.’<sup>93</sup> Styles is confident, however, that the confusion surrounding the bombs and bomb-warnings at the Birmingham pubs which lead to the killing of many civilians was due entirely to the inefficiency of the PIRA, and was not intentional.<sup>94</sup> Whilst it would be prudent to remember that this is Styles’ opinion and not, therefore, concrete evidence one way or another; his opinion is particularly insightful in this case, not only because of his hands-on experience of fighting against the PIRA, but because he is essentially a critic of the organisation with no reason to defend their actions or intentions.<sup>95</sup>

Clearly this is a sensitive and subjective matter, but one that perhaps can be clarified a little further by the opinion of Sean O’Callaghan, who, like Lieut.-Colonel George Styles, has no reason to protect the PIRA given that he acted as an informer against them.<sup>96</sup> O’Callaghan stated quite clearly that PIRA bombs ‘actually weren’t intended to kill or harm civilians’.<sup>97</sup> To the contrary, they were intended to damage ‘just commercial targets’.<sup>98</sup> When questioned about whether there was any reaction to the civilian casualties he stated that there were instances of PIRA members receiving counselling from priests, ‘to try to come to terms with the things that had happened’.<sup>99</sup>

What emerges from this investigation is that, according to PIRA sources, and those close to the organisation, civilians were not the intended targets of the PIRA's bombing campaign. 'Collateral Damage' was caused due to the volatile nature of the home-made bombs and confused bomb warnings. This being said, it is an inescapable reality that the PIRA must have been, as Patterson states, at the very least 'wilfully blind' to the potential risk of civilian casualties, or 'collateral damage'.<sup>100</sup> Especially, after the first few bombing mistakes had been made. What is more, by allowing the constraints of fighting asymmetrical warfare dictate the way in which the PIRA conducted their armed struggle; they failed to wage their bombing campaign in a manner that was discriminate, proportionate and effective.<sup>101</sup> As McKearney retrospectively recounts: 'Neither leadership nor the rank-and-file can be faulted for failing to achieve what was politically or physically impossible. Nevertheless, there were strategic failures as well as considerable achievements. Due to the rapid and unplanned formation of the organisation, there was a sometimes eclectic adoption of strategy and tactics, especially at the outset.'<sup>102</sup> The consequence of which is that the PIRA bomb campaign projected an image and has been subsequently remembered as one of civilian-based targets, arguably, tarnishing the campaign as a whole as being devoid of any strategic logic.

What, if anything, can an assessment of the outcome of the PIRA bombing campaign tell us of the nature of their campaign? Light can be shed on this matter by firstly considering the fact that Catholic individuals also lost their lives as PIRA 'collateral damage'. Indeed, of the 169 civilians killed as PIRA 'collateral damage',<sup>103</sup> 60 were Catholic.<sup>104</sup> This is a significant proportion which indicates that the risk posed to civilians was not particularly biased towards Protestant individuals. Secondly, occasions on which 'collateral damage' was caused by the PIRA can be seen to have reduced over time, indicating that they were actively trying to avoid it. Out of the 169 unintended civilian deaths, 107 of them took place before 1980 - hence, more than 60% of the 'errors' or 'collateral damage' casualties occurred in the first 10 years of the campaign.<sup>105</sup> This tells us that the killing of civilians with bombs, like the killing of off duty security services personnel, was something that the PIRA were consciously trying to minimise because they realised that it was unpopular, made the campaign look sectarian and did little for the cause. Hence, if the PIRA can be accused of being wilfully blind to the risk of collateral damage (both to civilian life and to the PIRA's image), it is fair to say that they became increasingly aware of and sensitive to it over time.<sup>106</sup>

There were of course some instances in the PIRA campaign which stand out as anomalies or deviations from the pattern, including forms of PIRA 'policing', instances of sectarian retaliation, and the occasional killing of innocent civilians who were in the vicinity at the time of the death of a 'legitimate' target. These instances will now be examined to give a rounded picture of the entire PIRA campaign.

### Deviations from the PIRA pattern

One way in which civilian lives were taken by the PIRA, which could appear sectarian, was through acts of ‘policing’. The PIRA did not recognise the state of Northern Ireland, or the forces that were designed to defend and protect it, such as the RUC.<sup>107</sup> The PIRA thus conducted its own forms of social ‘policing’ in Northern Ireland during the troubles.<sup>108</sup> Killing civilians for the purpose of policing was certainly a deviation from the standard paradigm of the PIRA as it contributed little or nothing towards the achievement of their aforementioned political goals. It is crucial to acknowledge that such policing occurred because failure to do so gives a false impression of the overall number of ‘innocent civilians’ killed by the PIRA, and the motivations behind these actions. PIRA policing involved punishing individuals with knee-capping’s, ‘tarring and feathering’, beatings or executions for what the PIRA saw as anti-social behaviour.<sup>109</sup> This could be anything from having relations with members of the security forces, to exhibiting violent behaviour in the community. There were occasions when such punishments led to manslaughter,<sup>110</sup> but, at other times, the PIRA deliberately killed individuals if their anti-social behaviour was deemed to be particularly heinous. Specifically, 71 individuals were killed for their alleged anti-social behaviour, including child abuse, drug-selling or for allegedly informing on the PIRA.<sup>111</sup> A notable example was John Collet, killed in 1992 for abusing ‘a large number of children’.<sup>112</sup> The 71 civilians killed as part of the PIRA ‘policing’ agenda represent 11% of the overall 641 civilians killed by the PIRA. This is not an insignificant figure, and should not be ignored when analysing PIRA behaviour. Moreover, ‘policing’ homicides were different to victims of ‘collateral damage’. The former were deliberate, the latter unintended.

It is also worth noting at this point that the PIRA carried out ‘internal’ policing. PIRA members, like civilians, were ‘punished’ or killed by the organisation if they acted in a manner that was unsatisfactory to the leadership.<sup>113</sup> This might be for allegedly informing on the organisation, or for deviating from orders to pursue a personal agenda. For instances, 11 PIRA members were killed by the organisation for allegedly being informants.<sup>114</sup>

The fact that 120 PIRA members were accidentally killed in action should also be taken into account when considering the overall fatalities resulting from the PIRA campaign.<sup>115</sup> Also noteworthy is the fact that 9 PIRA members deliberately committed suicide by hunger striking for their cause, alongside 3 members of the INLA.<sup>116</sup> All in all, the PIRA were responsible for the deaths of 145 of their own members, 8 percent of all PIRA killings. While not a huge proportion, this is, nonetheless, another example of how previous analysis of the PIRA campaign has been incomplete.

The killing of civilians who happened to be in the vicinity of a ‘legitimate’ target, through ‘wilful-blindness’ or deliberate negligence, is a deviation from the PIRA paradigm which could be raised against the thesis presented in this paper. Sometimes the PIRA showed a reckless disregard for civilian casualties, most notably through their use of car bombs.<sup>117</sup> It is inconceivable that the PIRA could have been unaware of the risks of planting a bomb in a

personal vehicle, which could be used by different drivers or could seat multiple passengers. Certainly, there were times when PIRA car bombs successfully killed uniformed targets without causing harm to any civilians,<sup>118</sup> or when civilians had ‘lucky’ escapes.<sup>119</sup> On other occasions, however, the PIRA’s cavalier attitude towards the environment in which they were planting bombs certainly resulted in civilian casualties.

There are also instances when the PIRA stepped beyond ‘wilful blindness’ into the realms of direct negligence or deliberate disregard, when it could be argued that the likelihood of civilian casualty was even higher. For example, the ‘M62’ coach bombing, which caused 3 civilian casualties on the mixed security force and family coach journey, and the PIRA bombings of pubs frequented by security forces in Guildford and Woolwich, in which civilians died in 1974.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps the most notable example of civilians dying alongside an actual target of the PIRA due to negligence took place when Lord Louis Mountbatten was killed by a bomb explosion on his personal boat in August 1979.<sup>121</sup> Three civilians in total died along with Mountbatten in the blast.<sup>122</sup> The risk to civilian life posed by this bomb particularly high in this scenario, for it was extremely unlikely that a man such as Lord Mountbatten, cousin to the Queen of England, was ever going to be on his boat without staff or company. When questioned about how the Mountbatten killing fitted into the PIRA campaign, Sean O’Callaghan confirmed that it didn’t fit at all. It was, in his opinion, an ‘exceptional operation’ that was pushed for by leaders including Brian Keenan and Ivor Bell to ‘prove their anti-imperialist credentials’ to the Soviet Bloc, Syria and the PLO.<sup>123</sup> The operation, he was told, was actually carried out because the PIRA were paid two million pounds from either the Soviet Bloc or Syria for doing it.<sup>124</sup> Whether or not we accept O’Callaghan’s statement that the Mountbatten killing was initiated externally and motivated by a fee, the fact that there were so few occasions on which civilians were deliberately killed because they were in the vicinity of a uniformed target, shows that this kind of occurrence was an exception rather than the rule. What is more, a campaign that is wilfully blind to the risks of civilian casualties, although clearly abhorrent, cannot be said to amount to sectarianism for the risk is posed with complete disregard and, hence, without specific religious bias.

Admittedly, there are a handful of other instances in which civilians were intentionally killed by the PIRA when they were in the vicinity of a legitimate uniformed target: in 1972, Emily Bullock was shot as she opened the door to her home before the PIRA entered the house and shot her UDR husband Thomas Bullock. And there were two alleged attempted murders, firstly where Thomas Passmore’s wife claims she would have been murdered had the PIRA not ran out of bullets in 1976, and secondly when PIRA gunmen allegedly fired a shot at, but missed a colleague of RUC reservist Bernard Montgomery when they killed him in 1980.<sup>125</sup> Whilst there are likely to have been more ‘attempted’ murders of this kind that have gone unrecorded in *Lost Lives*, it is apparent from the records in this book that the PIRA took action to avoid killing those other than the individuals considered to be ‘legitimate targets’ for the majority of their campaign.

Another infamous episode, which must be discussed in any assessment of the PIRA campaign, is the Kingsmill Massacre in 1976. This well-known incident involved the hijacking of a factory bus of 12 employees by the PIRA who proceeded to shoot all but one of the hostages; a man who was spared purely because he was a Catholic, whereas the others had been of Protestant faith.<sup>126</sup> This event was blatantly sectarian because the individuals were selected to live or die purely on the basis of their religion.<sup>127</sup> The Kingsmill Massacre thus stands out as a distinct deviation from the hitherto discussed PIRA paradigm. Uncharacteristically, the massacre was not claimed by the organisation, who at the time were officially observing a ceasefire.<sup>128</sup> Nor were excuses made for the sectarian fashion in which it was carried out. As Patterson explains, however, the PIRA of South Armagh at this time can be seen to have acted somewhat separately to the overall agenda of the organisation; taking the action they deemed necessary to rid the region of Loyalist sectarian violence, regardless of the organisations formal cease fire.<sup>129</sup> This is not an empty statement, for just days before the massacre; three brothers from the Reavey family were killed by the UVF, as were several others, simply because they were followers of the Catholic faith.<sup>130</sup> Sean O'Callaghan confirmed in interview that the motive for the Kingsmill Massacre was indeed retaliation. In his view, it was successful because it put an end to all the sectarian killings in the area.<sup>131</sup>

When the Kingsmill Massacre is placed in the context of the broader PIRA campaign, as O'Callaghan stated, it certainly 'sticks out'.<sup>132</sup> Considering the care that was normally taken to avoid civilian casualties, for example, when shooting off-duty uniformed individuals, or assassinating legitimate targets with total disregard for their religious identity, the Kingsmill massacre seems exceptional. Yet it would be fair to say that the massacre has not been depicted as an out-of-character or isolated instance of sectarian revenge.<sup>133</sup> Rather, Kingsmill has been oft-portrayed as representative of the PIRA campaign more generally.<sup>134</sup> In this sense, the impact and significance of this event has been determined by how it is *remembered*, rather than its original wider context.

### **Wider explanations for deviations from the PIRA paradigm**

The PIRA was an illegal guerrilla movement, operating undercover through systems of secret meetings and clandestine messages.<sup>135</sup> It was necessary for local units to be allowed a large degree of autonomy. A lack of consistency in aims and actions is to be expected from such an organisation. Hence, wider organisational explanations can be found for deviations from the PIRA paradigm, for example: changes in leadership at the top of the organisation; differences in regional leadership approaches; personal agendas behind independent actions; or the decision of individuals to exact revenge for personal losses resulting from the actions of the Loyalists paramilitaries.<sup>136</sup> At the same time, the study of aberrations and deviations from the PIRA paradigm resulting from these organisational contexts can reinforce our understanding of the paradigm itself, by confirming what was and what was not 'out of character' for the PIRA.



The strength of the central PIRA leadership could determine how tightly the PIRA agenda was controlled at any given time. Deviation from the PIRA paradigm was more likely when the central leadership wavered, transitioned or appeared in any way unstable. In around 1975, the traditional leadership of Ruairi O'Bradaigh and David O'Connail was replaced by the younger more radical leadership of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.<sup>137</sup> Memoirs such as O'Callaghan's and Bradley's hint at tensions during this transition period as the new leaders asserted their more radical and overtly violent campaign, in the face of resistance from the traditional leadership. An example of this tension was the opposition of the traditional leadership to the plans of the aspiring new leaders in 1972 to simultaneously bomb multiple towns. The plan was intended to cause huge material damage and demonstrate the strength of the PIRA and the threat it posed to the security forces. 'Bloody Friday', as it came to be known, however, resulted in the deaths of 8 civilians and 1 RUC officer as the PIRA overestimated the security forces' capacity to deal with multiple bomb warnings.

In the interview, O'Callaghan stated that the new leadership was 'impatient' and 'naive', and essentially responsible for the continuation of the war.<sup>138</sup> O'Callaghan felt that the older leadership had much more life experience and were actually considering ending the war around the mid-1970s. Some of them had experienced marital breakups, or could see the strain placed on their families when they had spent time in prison.<sup>139</sup> Whilst O'Callaghan's opinion on this matter is to some extent subjective, there is evidence to suggest that the majority of the major deviations away from the traditional PIRA agenda coincided with this period of leadership change and hence instability.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the majority of the controversial or out-of-character instances when large numbers of civilians died occurred in the 1970s. These included: the Bayardo Pub Bomb in 1975, when the PIRA killed four civilians in their effort to kill members of the UVF who frequented the pub; the shooting of Samuel Llewellyn in 1975, known as the 'good Samaritan' murder because Llewellyn had generously taken it upon himself to repair his neighbours' windows, destroyed by a PIRA car bomb, in West Belfast; and the Kingsmill Massacre of 1976.<sup>141</sup> As such, the operational objectives of the organisations, in this scenario the desire to eclipse previous leadership policy with a renewed campaign of political violence, can be seen to have contributed to PIRA operational planning, and should form part of our assessment of the nature of their campaign.

In addition to this apparent instability caused by leadership changes at the top, PIRA discipline was to some extent dependent on the character of regional and mid-level leadership.<sup>142</sup> When questioned whether there was any scope within the PIRA for individuals to carry out a personal agenda, Callaghan confirmed that this depended very much on the 'strength of local, sort of, leadership'.<sup>143</sup> O'Callaghan gave the example of Seamus Twomey, who was actually chief of staff in the PIRA from 1973. He was a 'raging alcoholic' and, according to O'Callaghan, 'it is possible that he could be persuaded, at certain times, that something was a good idea'.<sup>144</sup> The fact that there was scope for personal agendas or idiosyncrasies to creep into the PIRA campaign can explain some of the smaller scale deviations from the PIRA paradigm. In 1975, for example, four Protestant civilians were killed by two rogue PIRA shooters at Tullyvallen Orange hall near Newtownhamilton. When the PIRA apologised for the incident, they claimed it was carried out by dissident members who did not have the consent of the PIRA leadership.<sup>145</sup>

Inconsistencies in the PIRA campaign can also at times be understood to have been out-of-character reactions to particularly provocative events. The PIRA can be seen to have reacted, for example, in direct retaliation to the persistent and blatant sectarian killings carried out by Loyalist paramilitaries.<sup>146</sup> An example of this would in 1971, when the UVF killed 15 individuals with a bomb placed in the McGurk family pub in Belfast.<sup>147</sup> The PIRA supposedly planted a no-warning bomb in a furniture shop on the Shankill road, just four days later, which killed two men and two children as an act of retaliation.<sup>148</sup> If the PIRA did plant this bomb, as it is widely believed they did, it is certainly an example of them responding in an out-of-character fashion, because no bomb-warning was given, civilians were deliberately harmed, and the incident was not claimed.<sup>149</sup> The Shankill furniture bomb could equally as likely, however, have been an example of rogue PIRA members carrying out an unauthorised personal agenda. There are other unclaimed operations which, like the Shankill furniture shop bombing, could be instances of unsanctioned personal revenge attacks in retaliation for especially provocative Loyalist atrocities. For instance, just days after the UVF killed the popular Catholic Miami Show-Band, Protestant disk-jockey Norman Kerr appears to have been killed by the PIRA for no other reason than his Protestant faith.<sup>150</sup> The murder was, however, not claimed by the PIRA; a fact which has been reported as evidence of the PIRA covering up a sectarian act. Considering that the PIRA normally claimed even their most controversial killings, and apologised for any ‘unintended’ fatalities caused, this seems unlikely.<sup>151</sup> Thus, instances of unauthorised, retaliatory, and unclaimed homicides, such as the murder of Norman Kerr and the Shankill road furniture shop bomb are best understood to have been aberrations that were potentially instances of unsanctioned personal revenge.

PIRA leadership, or individual rank-and-file members may also have acted in response to provocative security force policy. Complaints that the security forces were following a ‘Shoot to Kill’ policy, using excessive levels of force or even brutality, ambushing and shooting suspected PIRA members rather than arresting them, and even colluding with the Loyalist paramilitaries, could have fuelled tensions, and inspired retaliation from the PIRA.<sup>152</sup> For instance, the no-warning Claudy pub bomb, placed by the PIRA in 1972, which claimed 9 lives including security forces and civilians.<sup>153</sup> The Claudy pub bomb, like the Shankill road furniture bomb and murder of Norman Kerr, was not claimed and, hence, is out of character. The bomb appears to have been planted in direct response to the announcement that the security forces were to deploy of Operation Motorman, made earlier in the same day.<sup>154</sup> The fact that the PIRA denied involvement in the Claudy pub bomb suggests that it was not sanctioned, and was possibly, therefore, an example of an individual or rogue agenda. For it was standard for the PIRA to claim all acts, defend them as legitimate, or to apologise for mistakes and collateral damage.

## Conclusion

By analysing who the PIRA killed, and who they actually intended to kill, this paper has demonstrated that the PIRA did not actively target civilians, and that their agenda was blind to religious difference. It has been argued that the PIRA sought to kill only 'uniformed' individuals in a bid to remove the British occupation of Northern Ireland and bring about a united Ireland. This assertion has been supported by evidence that the overwhelming majority of 'uniformed' individuals killed by the PIRA were done so in a manner that was pre-planned and deliberate. Also supporting this assertion is evidence that the PIRA claimed responsibility for these operations, even in circumstances that called into question their motivations. It has also been argued that civilian deaths, by contrast, were not planned or intended, and at times even actively avoided. Instead it has been argued that civilian casualties, for the most part, should be understood as mistakes, resulting from poor communications or PIRA inefficiency. But, the 'wilful blindness' PIRA exhibited regarding the risks to civilian life posed by their bombing campaign, however, did result in a high toll of civilian collateral damage, has subsequently dominated representations of the PIRA, and worked to mask the diverse nature of their campaign by portraying them having discriminated with sectarian bias. This paper has acknowledged that scope existed for deviations from the standard PIRA agenda. It has been demonstrated, however, that these instances were rare aberrations, out-of-character, and likely unauthorised operations conducted by dissident members. Finally, this paper has acknowledged oft-neglected consequences of the PIRA campaign which can mask its true character of when included in general, unqualified, statistical analysis of troubles fatalities.<sup>155</sup>

However, the accusation that PIRA target discrimination policy was sectarian is not merely down to a lack of adequate statistical data. It is important to remember that the PIRA were not waging their war in a vacuum. To the contrary, the troubles were the culmination of centuries of inter-communal friction and, hence, were understood in Protestant and Catholic communities from different perspectives (not from the dispassionate viewpoint of a statistical analysis).<sup>156</sup> In this sense, the way in which the troubles have been, and continue to be understood depends on personal perception and is therefore subjective.<sup>157</sup> Sean O'Callaghan, who has portrayed his former IRA associates in County Tyrone as driven by communal hatred, could not agree that the PIRA were purely un-sectarian. His response, however, does suggest that this was due to perception more than reality: 'The problem is, it is peoples' perception. My perception is I am shooting the uniform. The Protestant community's perception is I am killing the Protestant'.<sup>158</sup> 'The problem is the resentment and the hatred. You've got to call it sectarianism really; I mean, what else can you call it? But, ethnic rage is a good description. Maybe that is better.'<sup>159</sup> In other words, while in its agenda and actions, the PIRA was not intentionally sectarian; its activities took place in a context within which they could not fail to be viewed as such.

Incongruent understandings and memories of the troubles were, and continue to be reinforced by the mainstream media, which has tended to portray the IRA as part of an ancient tribal conflict rooted in religious hatred.<sup>160</sup> This has occurred when isolated out-of-character events such as the Kingsmill massacre have been taken out of context or accepted as having been representative of the PIRA campaign as a whole.<sup>161</sup> A major reason for this, of course, is that

violent troubles-related episodes have mostly been covered by a British media, generally hostile to the PIRA and its aims. Its narratives of these events have, therefore, regularly conflicted with those of the PIRA and have fostered ill feeling on both sides.<sup>162</sup> The portrayal of the death of Danny Lennon in 1976 is a good example of this.<sup>163</sup> Lennon died during a car chase between the PIRA and the Army in Andersonstown, West Belfast. Conflicting accounts about whether Lennon died as a result of having being shot by the Army or simply because the car he was travelling in crashed have fuelled tensions on both sides.<sup>164</sup> Evidence of Republican bitterness can be found in the Republican publication *Belfast Graves*, where it is recorded that ‘The British propaganda machine aided and abetted by a viciously anti-Republican media, went straight into action, misrepresenting the facts’.<sup>165</sup> The case of Lennon is a reminder of how divisive the troubles have been, and continue to be, and that the past can be remembered in a fashion that is very much idiosyncratic and, hence, beyond the control of those involved.

The portrayal and understanding of the PIRA as a sectarian organisation, hell-bent upon massacring civilians has not been aided by recent comparisons between it and 21<sup>st</sup> century Islamic terrorist organisations, such as Al-Qaeda.<sup>166</sup> This paper has shown that the PIRA did not, except in unsanctioned aberrations or exceptional circumstances, actively target civilians. Nor did they select their targets based on religion. By contrast, Al-Qaeda directly targeted civilians, for example, in September 2001, when over 3000 individuals died as a result of the attacks on the World Trade Centre in America. More recently, Al-Shabab from Somalia have carried out religiously motivated murders in Kenya, for instance, on 2nd April 2015, when 147 died as its gunmen stormed the Garissa University near the Somalia border in Kenya and selected and killed Christian students; and Boko Haram in Nigeria have targeted civilians of non-Muslim faiths, including Christians, and institutions offering a western-style education, most notoriously in 2014, when they abducted more than 200 girls from a school in the Chibok region of Nigeria.<sup>167</sup> These differences between the PIRA and Islamist organisations cast serious doubt upon the validity of research, which includes these disparate groups under the same broad label of ‘terrorism’. They also call into question the extent to which it is in fact possible to base advice on ‘how to respond’ to terrorism, or how to ‘talk to terrorists’ on knowledge and experience of the PIRA and Northern Ireland troubles.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, as this paper has shown, it is crucial when drawing comparisons between paramilitary organisations that the intentions and impact of each organisations campaign, and disparity between them, and the overall context is taken into account.

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- <sup>6</sup> Dingley, 'A reply', pp.109-114; White, 'An assessment', p.48
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<sup>46</sup> S. O'Callaghan, personal communication, February 27, 2005;

<sup>47</sup> See McKittrick, et. al., *Lost Lives*, References:: 1905,3344,3025

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<sup>53</sup> 'OPINIONS OF THE LORDS OF APPEAL FOR JUDGMENT IN THE CAUSE, In re McKerr (AP) (Respondent) (Northern Ireland)', 11 March 2004, Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200304/ldjudgmt/jd040311/mckerr-1.htm>, Accessed: 05/04/2016; *BBC News*, 5 April 2000, Available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern\\_ireland/702920.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/702920.stm), Accessed: 04/05/2016

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