

This is part two of a series on Brexit and the IRA.

Audio from street clash

You're listening to audio from a street battle that broke out between police and Irish nationalists in the Creggan area of Northern Irish city of Derry last month. The glass you hear breaking—those are homemade molotov cocktails being hurled at police vans. With each hit, a wall of flames climbs—and then quickly dissipates.

This street battle was part of a larger riot that broke out on the 18th in response to police raids on houses believed to be storing weapons for militants associated with the New IRA. According to the BBC, when all was said in done, more than 50 molotov cocktails had been thrown at the police and two police vehicles had been hijacked and set on fire.

There is another video of the Creggan street battle, shot from a handheld device. The footage is of a burned-out police van. Around it, a group of onlookers mill about, and you can hear people shouting in the distance. Then, a gunshot. Seconds later, it is followed by another. Someone cheers. A child starts yelling, “run” repeatedly. Finally, a scream cuts through it all. “They shot someone—” a man begins, before being cut off by the end of the video.

That someone was journalist Lyra McKee.

We'll come back to the events of last month next week. But before we can begin discussing this crime in earnest, we need to understand the perpetrators. The New IRA is a revival of the Real IRA, which is a splinter group of the Provisional IRA, which is itself a splinter from the official IRA. Confused enough yet? That's okay. We'll start from the beginning. Or at least at the beginning of the Provisional IRA. My name is Cameron Lallana, and today, we're going to talk about Ireland.

(The Rising of the Moon plays)

1969: up until this year, the IRA had been united in north and south, all believing in the illegitimacy of both governments seated in their capitals of southern Dublin and Northern Belfast. In the mid-sixties, though, IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding began to push the organization away from a strategy of force alone. Goulding was a lifelong member of the IRA, who became interested in Marxist politics after becoming friends with a pro-Soviet spy when the two were incarcerated together. After becoming Chief of Staff, Goulding began pushing the

organization to the left, believing that they should form a non-sectarian workers' movement across the whole of Ireland. Catholics and Protestants together would push out the British and form a united, socialist country.

This direction didn't sit well with many in the IRA, especially Catholics and Conservatives. Through the decade, many walked away from the organization. The reduced capacity and reduced emphasis on military action meant that in August of 1969, when sectarian rioting broke out, the IRA was unable to protect Catholics as they had traditionally done. Four months later, the IRA Army Council decided to end their policy of abstentionism and send elected members of the IRA's political counterpart—Sinn Fein—to parliaments in Belfast, Dublin, and London.

For the northerners and traditionalists, this was the last straw. Led by Seán Mac Stíofáin, these members would break away to form the Provisional IRA. Shortly thereafter, portions of the political wing also split and formed the Provisional Sinn Fein. In contrast to the stance of what was now known as the Official IRA, the PIRA had a much deeper emphasis on violent opposition to the British. The PIRA's 1975 training manual for recruits, also known as the Green Book, describes their strategy as five-fold. Quote:

1. A War of attrition against enemy personnel which is aimed at causing as many casualties and deaths as possible so as to create a demand from their people at home for their withdrawal.
2. A bombing campaign aimed at making the enemy's financial interest in our country unprofitable while at the same time curbing long term financial investment in our country.
3. To make the Six Counties as at present and for the past several years ungovernable except by colonial military rule.
4. To sustain the war and gain support for its end by National and International propaganda and publicity campaigns.
5. By defending the war of liberation by punishing criminals, collaborators and informers.

Endquote. The Six Counties mentioned is the nationalist name for Northern Ireland.

Particularly important to note here is that the manual calls the conflict ‘a war of attrition.’ This language stands in contrast to their own in 1969, when the PIRA sought to make Northern Ireland ungovernable through high-intensity conflict. We’ll come back around to that change of tactics in just a moment. After smuggling thousands of Armalite rifles and shoulder-fired grenade launchers into the country in 1971, PIRA members carried out thousands of shootings and bombings between then and 1974.

News reel

The bomb was the IRA’s most visible tool, dangerous to both target and user in the early days. As Bowyer Bell observed in his book *The Gun in Politics*, the PIRA’s own bombs inflicted more casualties on their organization than the British army did during the high of early bombings. Data compiled by the Conflict Archive on the Internet, also known as CAIN, reports that 6,181 bombs took place between 1969 and 1974. Not all of these attacks can be attributed to the PIRA, but they were undoubtedly responsible for many of them. With help from American technicians and the Libyan government, PIRA bombmakers were quickly able to improve their craft. By the 1980s, they had developed sophisticated remote-detonated IEDs, timed bombs that could be set months in advance, and various features that would prevent their bombs from being defused.

By the mid-1970s, though, necessity brought about another shift in policy. In 1974, after a year of negotiation, the IRA and the British government announced a temporary ceasefire until the 2nd of January, 1975. Although the agreement was initially renewed, the IRA decided not to continue to ceasefire later in the same month.

This period marked the slow change in IRA strategy from a short, high-intensity war to a strategy of attrition, known to them as “The Long War.” The PIRA’s 1977 Green Book’s language reflects this change in their rhetoric. Quote: “By now it is clear that our task is not only to kill as many enemy personnel as possible but of equal importance to create support which will carry us not only through a war of liberation which could last another decade but which will support us past the 'Brits Out' stage to the ultimate aim of a Democratic Socialist Republic.” Endquote.

As mentioned briefly above, this edition of the Green Book emphasizes the need for the IRA to build popular backing. As the leadership of the IRA came to understand that the British could not be driven out by sudden and overwhelming force, they began to pivot to the strategies mentioned earlier. In order to sustain their movement, the PIRA needed support and recruits from the populace. They pursued this through propaganda and publicity campaigns, and developing parallel structures of law to punish, as mentioned before, “criminals, collaborators, and informers.”

As the Long War developed, PIRA strategy grew more cautious—as they had no idea how long the conflict might drag out, they could not not afford to lose many volunteers. Although their rhetoric called for attacks that would undermine the British commitment to remain in Ireland or to damage economic reasoning to do so, analysts argue that the PIRA actually focused on low-risk operations, wherever they saw them. In practice, this translated to plenty of bombing and shootings against military, police, and bank targets. At their most ambitions, they targeted mainland Britain and politicians. Most notable among these events is the Brighton Hotel Bombing.

In 1984, the British Conservative party was having a conference in the Grand Brighton Hotel. Among its attendees was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. (Bomb noise) In the early morning hours of October 12th, a bomb planted by an IRA volunteer went off, which toppled a five-story chimney into the building itself. Although Thatcher herself escaped injury, the explosion left 34 injured and five dead. Among them was a Conservative Member of Parliament, Sir Anthony Berry.

By the time of the 1997 Peace Agreement, the British military and Irish police forces would have lost over 900 people to PIRA attacks.

At the same time, though, the IRA was not the only paramilitary force that developed in northern Ireland. At the same time, Irish Loyalists began to develop their own militias, collectively known as the Ulster Defense Association. We’ll come back to that story the week after next.

This has been Cameron Lallana with International News. The music used in the last report was “The Rising of the Moon,” by the Clancy Brothers, and the music used in this segment was “Martian Landscape,” by Breakmaster Cylinder. We’ll be back next week.