

The Intelligence War against the IRA

The exposure of two senior Irish republicans as informers for British intelligence in 2005 led to a popular perception that the IRA had ‘lost’ the intelligence war and had been pressurised into peace. In this first in-depth study across the entire conflict, Thomas Leahy re-evaluates the successes and failures of Britain’s intelligence activities against the IRA, from the use of agents and informers to special forces, surveillance and electronic intelligence. Using new interview material alongside memoirs and Irish and UK archival materials, he suggests that the IRA was *not* forced into peace by British intelligence. His work sheds new light on key questions in intelligence and security studies. How does British intelligence operate against paramilitaries? Are its methods effective? When should governments ‘talk to terrorists’? Does regional variation explain the differing outcomes of intelligence conflicts? This is a major contribution to the history of the conflict and of why peace emerged in Northern Ireland.

Thomas Leahy is a lecturer in British and Irish politics and contemporary history in the Politics and International Relations department at Cardiff University.

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To Sara

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
Part I The Intelligence War: August 1969 to July 1972	
1 British Political, Military and Intelligence Strategy towards the IRA: August 1969 to July 1972	17
2 The Intelligence War: August 1969 to July 1972	29
3 The IRA’s Ceasefire: 26 June to 9 July 1972	49
Part II On the Verge of Defeat? The Intelligence War: July 1972 to December 1975	
4 British Political, Military and Intelligence Strategy towards the IRA: July 1972 to December 1975	63
5 The Intelligence War: July 1972 to December 1975	81
6 ‘Everything Is Compromisable after the British Declaration of Intent’: The IRA Returns to Ceasefire, December 1974 to December 1975	108
Part III The Struggle to Contain the IRA: January 1976 to April 1998	
7 British Political, Military and Intelligence Strategy towards the IRA: 1976–1998	121
8 The Intelligence War against the IRA in Belfast and Derry City, January 1976 to August 1994	138
	vii

viii	Contents	
9	The Intelligence War against the IRA in Rural Areas and England and the IRA Leadership, January 1976 to August 1994	164
10	‘It’s the Primacy of Politics That’s Important’: Alternative Reasons for the IRA’s Ceasefires in August 1994 and July 1997	199
	Conclusion	236
	<i>Appendix 1 IRA ‘Intended-Target’ Killings by Year in Various Geographical Areas Where the IRA Operated, 1969–1994</i>	249
	<i>Appendix 2 Seats Won by Sinn Féin and the SDLP in District Council Elections between 1985 and 1997</i>	253
	<i>Appendix 3 Other Alleged Agents and Informers Killed by the IRA</i>	255
	Notes	256
	Bibliography	311
	Index	327

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Abbreviations

14 Intelligence Company	Undercover surveillance unit for the British Army
CLF	Commander of Land Forces (British Army)
DCI	Director and Coordinator of Intelligence Northern Ireland
E4A	Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch section conducting surveillance operations
E4B/HMSU	Headquarters Mobile Support Unit, a Royal Ulster Constabulary special support unit
FRU	Force Research Unit
GHQ	IRA General Headquarters Staff
GOC	General Officer Commanding (British Army)
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
MI5	Military Intelligence Section Five, the UK’s internal intelligence agency
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service, the UK’s external intelligence agency
MILO	Military Intelligence Liaison Officer
MRF	Military Reaction Force
OIRA	Official Irish Republican Army, a Marxist rival to the Provisional IRA
Old IRA	The original Irish Republican Army

xii List of Abbreviations

Provisional IRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary, the former police force for Northern Ireland
RUCR	Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve
SAS	Special Air Service
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
RUC Special Branch	Royal Ulster Constabulary Special Branch
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment. Incorporated into the Royal Irish Rangers regiment (RIR) in the 1990s