

The Irish Civil War: a Case Study in Counterinsurgency Theory.

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This paper, written during the centenary of the Irish Civil War, explores some of the key theoretical aspects of counterinsurgency within the context of what was ultimately a successful campaign and explains how this campaign continues to provide lessons for the contemporary battlespace. It examines how the challenges that were faced by the Provisional Government and the National Army were overcome, which saw the military forces of the new state conduct joint and combined operations across both conventional and guerrilla warfare styles that successfully defeated the anti-Treaty forces.

This paper focusses on the themes of intelligence led operations and modern counterinsurgency theory to ascertain the effectiveness of the response of the National Army and consider if there are lessons to be learned in the modern context. In order to progress the discussion on the Civil War, there is an examination of intelligence led operations, which highlights the ethical issues caused by crossing the line of acceptable norms, such as a breakdown in military discipline and the use of torture to glean information.

The findings of this paper highlight a number of pertinent matters such as the need for a comprehensive and joint military and government approach to counterinsurgency, as well as the need for the military to continue to be able to conduct joint and combined operations across the spectrum of warfare. This is made clear from the operations conducted in the urban environment during the Civil War, which are all the more applicable when it is noted that the world's urban population is on the increase. The key lessons from operations conducted in the rural areas is that the need to provide security and normality to the population is paramount. Throughout all of these operations, intelligence led operations remain crucial, with a focus on structures rather than the temptation to resort to less than ethical methods.

When he wrote about insurgencies in the twentieth century, Jeremy Black (2016) described how the rejection of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty led to a new insurgency struggle, in which the forces of the new Irish state were successful. A centenary on from the Irish Civil War, this paper will explore how the new state managed the challenges of an insurgency, and how this success sits within a modern counterinsurgency theoretical framework. When combined with the literature and analysis available on counterinsurgency campaigns, as noted by Morillo



(2013, p.87), this paper will help place the Irish Civil War within the canon of literature of what may be considered a successful campaign.

In order to ensure that the analysis remains relevant to modern warfare and allows for contemporary lessons to be learned, an up to date definition of insurgency and counterinsurgency must be applied. The challenges of defining such actions “is no easy task” as “new terms are created or revived in an attempt to capture the realities of the most recent manifestations of violence” (Kiras, 2011, p.229). The 2007 US military counterinsurgency field manual supplements the complex nature of counterinsurgency highlighted in the previous observation by noting that the US military:

Did not even have a common understanding of the problems inherent in any counterinsurgency campaign, as it had not studied such battles, digested their lessons, and debated ways to achieve success in counterinsurgency campaigns. (US Army, 2007, p.xv)

The British Army field manual that was used at the outbreak of the Global War on Terror stated that an insurgency is defined “as the actions of a minority group within a state who are intent on forcing political change” by various means, including military pressure (BA, 2001, pp.A-1-1). This manual goes on to define counterinsurgency as “those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civil actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency” (BA, 2001, p.A-2). For the Irish Defence Forces (DF), the publication that refers to counterinsurgency is the Land Component Handbook, which is used to provide guidance to commanders and staff in the planning and conduct of operations across the “spectrum of conflict” (2016a, p.ix). However, it is interesting to note that the definitions of insurgency and counterinsurgency are exact copies of the definitions written in the British Army manual. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, these are the definitions that will be used.

Historiography

The actions that took place during The Civil War itself will be analysed utilising both overall histories and accounts on specific actions. In relation to the former, both Hopkinson’s ‘Green Against Green. The Irish Civil War’ (1988) and Neeson’s ‘The Civil War’ (1989), provide excellent histories of the war in its entirety. A supplement to the historical accounts is Ferriter’s ‘Between Two Hells’ (2021) which provides an examination of the military conflict, and a discussion on the social impact and legacy of the war. Specific actions such as Doyle’s ‘The Summer Campaign in Kerry’ (2010) and Borgonovo’s ‘The Battle for Cork’ (2011), are included as examples of the war in differing environments. The former takes place mainly in the rural environment, most normally associated with guerrilla warfare, and the latter account examines the urban war and its unique challenges. The military leadership of the National Army during the period was initially the responsibility of Michael Collins, and then Richard Mulcahy from August 1922. Although there are a vast array of publications on Collins, such as Dwyer’s ‘Michael Collins and The Civil War’ (2012), it was Mulcahy’s leadership which had a greater impact as seen in biographies by O’Caoimh (2019) and Valiulis (1992), as he was Commander in Chief when some of the more controversial actions took place.

Theoretical texts on how best to conduct a counterinsurgency campaign will include Galula’s ‘Counterinsurgency Warfare’ (1964) and Trinquier’s ‘Modern Warfare’ (1964). Galula discussed the impact of the use of force on insurgents and the challenges faced by the counterinsurgent, including an eight step plan that includes destroying insurgent forces and

protecting the population (1964, p.66). Trinquier, on the other hand, while noting the importance of gaining the support of the population, balanced this with advocating extreme measures, including torture to gain actionable intelligence (1964, p.19). That both torture and executions were employed by the National Army during the Civil War is a factor that will be discussed in the overall context of what was ultimately a successful campaign. Extreme and robust tactics like these are controversial and pose difficult ethical problems, which remain questionable even one hundred years on from the conflict, as illustrated by modern commentary such as Ferriter's analysis piece titled 'Kerry Recovered From The Civil War But Never Forgot' (*Irish Times*, 2023). The French discovered from their Algerian campaign that military success does not always translate into political success and may indeed hamper a desired outcome (Horne, 1977, p.546). However, the influence of Galula and Trinquier loomed large over recent campaigns, including a re-examining of American military counterinsurgent strategy as described by Fred Kaplan in 'The Insurgents' (2013).

Research Lacunae

This paper provides a study of the Irish Civil War that is overlooked in many publications on Irish history. These works tend to only briefly discuss the Civil War, such as in Moody and Martin's 'The Course of Irish History' (2011) or focus on key events such as the outbreak of conflict or the death of Collins, as in Foster's 'The Oxford History of Ireland' (1989). It is not just the overall histories that fail to discuss the Civil War in detail, but this observation also applies to military histories of Ireland or the Irish soldier. Bartlett and Jeffrey's otherwise excellent 'A Military History of Ireland' (1996) allowed only a few lines on the Civil War, with the same for Bredin's 'A History of the Irish Soldier' (1987). Even works that discuss civil wars tend to focus on Ireland post 1969, such as in Walter's 'How Civil Wars Start And How To Stop Them' (2022). It appears seldom that the Civil War is included as a case study in any counterinsurgency campaign, as most focus is placed on The War of Independence or the Northern Ireland 'Troubles'.

Indeed the DF have also ignored the Civil War as an important case study from its own history. DF professional military publications state that its "doctrine has developed from a study of military history, from experience on operations on home and overseas, and lessons learned" (2015, pp.1-2). Yet, within Leadership Doctrine (2016b), and the key land component doctrinal publication 'DFDM 1, The Land Component', the historical discussions and tuition examples do not refer to the Civil War, arguably a major oversight considering the foundation of the Irish State and the DF (2016c). This means that the opportunity for further exploration of the conflict from formative experience has not been exploited in sufficient depth as also seen with the DF published series of handbooks in the 1980's, which though detailed, only really focussed on the structure of the army during the Civil War period (DF, 1982; DF 1988). Applying Howard's (1983) advice on the study of military history, the Civil War has been studied in width and context through general histories and accounts of specific engagements, but this paper will provide a depth, from the perspective of counterinsurgency warfare.

Discussion

This paper will focus on the military aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign through the themes of intelligence led operations and modern counterinsurgency theory to ascertain the effectiveness of the response of the National Army and consider if there are lessons to be learned in the modern context. The discussion on intelligence led operations will include the

implications of unethical actions and their importance and impact on counterinsurgency operations. When analysed as a whole, this paper will offer a case study for the DF on counterinsurgency through its own experience and provide research on the utility of studying the Civil War as a case study on counterinsurgency theory. This will add to existing studies by placing the Civil War in context with counterinsurgency theory and showing that the actions, as they took place then, continue to provide material for examination and debate by highlighting complicated operational challenges and controversial reactions. It will show that as a case study, any lessons to be learned must not be applied without proper context and understanding, as highlighted in any comparisons to civil wars that took place at around the same period.

Though the deaths during the Civil War, at around 1,600, are comparatively small when compared to the likes of Finland, context remains all important in this study (Kinsella, 2023, p.53). Whelehan observes that there were approximately 36,000 death in Finland “a country in comparable size to Ireland”, during the winter of 1918, which equated to 1 percent of their population. He further notes that “contrasting body counts is, however, a small aspect of comparative history which can reveal insights into why certain forms of violence flared up and then faded” (Whelehan, 2014, p.637). When writing about the War of Independence, Townshend states that “ideas and attitudes are as relevant as legal definitions and statistical indices’ and that ‘the domestic context is obviously crucial to understanding the war” (Ferriter, 2015, p.245). This observation can equally apply to the Civil War and lest there be any doubt as to this importance, a headline from the Irish Examiner to commemorate the Civil War noted that “Years fail to cover over the senseless waste of young lives” (Clifford, 2023).

Note on Sources

Primary sources that were reviewed included National Army files from the Military Archives and witness statements from the Bureau of Military History (MA, 2022). These were supplemented by various autobiographies from participants such as Ernie O'Malley (1978) and modern military publications such as manuals and pamphlets on counterinsurgency.

Interviews were conducted with selected experts in the field of counterinsurgency to ascertain the context of the Civil War within their studies and publications. Dr. David Kilcullen, Dr. David Strachan-Morris and Dr. Jacqueline L. Hazelton each provided some specifically unique insights into the relationship between the Irish Civil War and current counterinsurgency theory. In relation to research lacunae on this subject, these interviewees have stated that they have not looked at the Civil War as a counterinsurgency study, tending to focus on the War of Independence instead. Finally, Dr. Eunan O'Halpin provided his expert view from a uniquely Irish scholarly perspective, which included first-hand accounts from participants.

Secondary source literature utilised focussed on general histories of the war, localised histories that provided insights on specific actions and biographies of key individuals. Duggan (1991) provided an excellent account of the actions of the National Army during The Civil War, including the organisation and structure of the forces as well as some of the key actions conducted by units. Local histories of specific actions have been published which allow greater insights into events, such as in Marnane's 'The Civil War in County Tipperary' (2021). Counterinsurgency literature included theory from authors such as Heuser (2016) and Rid and Keaney (2010), in addition to the works by the interviewees previously referenced.

Discussions on unethical activity such as torture were examined through analysis from authors such as Wisniewski and Emerick (2009). These were placed firmly in the context of the Civil War and question how the theory, as posited in the latter half of the twentieth century, on the primacy of winning the support of the population sits with the often draconian actions taken by the Provisional Government.

PART ONE. The Conventional Phase.

The National Army

The twelve months between the truce that led to negotiation with the British and the outbreak of Civil War in Dublin saw a remarkable transformation in the organisation of what was to become the National Army. By the end of the War of Independence, it was estimated that the IRA had 3,000 operational soldiers (White & O'Shea, 2003, p.55). Although actual membership was higher, this number was dictated by factors such as available weapons, discipline, British counteractions and in some cases, apathy (Townshend, 2014, pp.287-98). In essence, this was still a guerrilla army which had fought a successful insurgency campaign after learning hard lessons from conventional style warfare as experienced during the 1916 Rising. During the War of Independence, operational and tactical ability was supplemented by an understanding that a comprehensive approach was required to be successful. This included the ability to dictate the strategic communication narrative with an immensely successful propaganda department, the ability to maintain the support of the people and the ability to operate an extremely successful intelligence campaign (Connell, 2019, p.333). The support of the people during this phase of the revolutionary period included providing assistance such as safe-houses, intelligence and supplies. Support also came politically, judicially and monetary as seen by the rise of Sinn Féin with their court system and bond drives, leading to an effective counter-state (Mitchell, 2017, pp.474-5). By the summer of 1922, the IRA had split along political lines dictated by support or otherwise of the Treaty. The National Army, loyal to the Provisional Government, started a recruitment campaign that summer and eventually grew to a strength of 60,000 personnel by April 1923 (White, 2017, p.691).

The genesis for this massive expansion took place in the summer following the truce, when IRA numbers expanded to an estimated 100,000 personnel (Duggan, 1991, p.71). Although an impressive figure on paper, it must be tempered by noting that there was a distinct lack of equipment for anywhere near these numbers and the commitment of many 'truciliars' was questionable to say the least (Walsh, 2015, p.290). This period allowed for some much needed training, with some units being able to train as companies for the first time, and in certain cases it was noted that previously 'inactive' areas were also mustering units (Duggan, 1991, p.71). The army leadership was not only concerned with a potential renewal of hostilities with the British, but also with military discipline, a challenge that never disappeared. Townshend provided a detailed account of the degradation of discipline towards the latter half of 1921, caused by "excesses of one kind or another" due to the relaxation from the strain of the previous number of years fighting, and by soldiers demanding the continued adulation of the public" (2014, pp.318-9). This, in turn, led to "a reputation for bullying, insobriety and dishonesty that sapped public confidence" (Townshend, 2014, pp.320-1). While senior officers tried to curb such excesses and maintain the honour of the army, incidents were occurring with alarming regularity including murder, alcohol abuse and outright mutiny (Townshend, 2014, pp.320-1). Both the expansion of the IRA and the erosion

of discipline meant when the time that the lines were drawn pre-Civil War, IRA GHQ had lost the cohesion that was needed to avoid conflict.

By the time the terms of the Treaty were being debated, units started to take political sides and attempted to occupy areas, such as barracks handed over by the departing British, so as to gain some semblance of recognition for their side of the political debate. However, in January 1922, the Provisional Government won the Dáil vote on acceptance of the Treaty, and the support of key military leaders such as Collins, Mulcahy and O'Duffy (Boyce, 1990, p.272). As the likelihood of a return to war increased, the National Army, slowly started to resemble a standing army as time went on, no mean feat considering their first numbers were all guerrilla veterans (Curran, 1980, p.163). This was aided by the provision of arms from the British, including armoured cars and artillery, with the latter proving vital in many of the engagements which were to follow (Dorney, 2017, p.68). Additionally, the National Army benefitted from experienced ex-soldiers of the British Army, and in some cases, the American Army (Boyne, 2015, pp.85-6; Fitzpatrick, 1996, p.406). Although there were only an estimated 2,000 National Army soldiers in Dublin at the time of the attack on the Four Courts, the government's "call to arms", buttressed by steady pay, meant that by July, there were 1,000 recruits a day joining (Duggan, 1991, p.84; Ferriter, 2015, p.272). The delay in hostilities suited the Government for there was "little confidence in the competence or the reliability" of the army and that:

One of the reasons for the reluctance of the government to face up to the republican military resistance in the months leading up to the war was a realisation of the need to build up an army before any stand could be made. (Hopkinson, 2006, p.150)

Despite this expansion, which continued for the period of the war, the army took an initial retrograde step in relation to maintaining good intelligence activity. This is surprising when one considers the success displayed during the War of Independence and the knowledge of the importance of intelligence in such an environment. However, when considered as part of the overall challenges of building a new administration, it is indicative of the difficulties faced by the National Army in creating an effective force and needing to build up its intelligence system so as to conduct the type of targeted operations that are so vital to any coherent counterinsurgency strategy. That this was grasped in the early stages by Collins, and some of his trusted pre-Civil War operatives, as seen in a circular that stated that "intelligence has not for some time past been given the attention, thought and energy that is vitally necessary", before going on to stress that "there was never a time when a thoroughly efficient intelligence service was more vitally essential" (O'Halpin, 1999, pp.17-8).

The Urban Battles.

Despite the rising tensions throughout Ireland (including fears of a British attack on republican positions), it was not until the Four Courts were shelled by the National Army that outright fighting commenced (Younger, 1968, p.266). This was part of the opening phase of fighting that saw the anti-Treaty forces attempt to hold territory conventionally, especially Dublin and cities in the south (White & O'Shea, 2003, p.57). This conventional phase, provides some notable contemporary points in relation to the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. Kilcullen observed that the typical environment for irregular warfare was in the rural environment with such activity "historically been much less common in cities than in rural

districts" (2013, p.104). The reasons, as he discussed, were due to irregular forces not generally having the combat power to stand up to government forces in a direct fight. This was true in 1916, and also true in 1922. As Kilcullen further noted, this may change in the future due to the continued urbanisation of the world and the increased likelihood of irregular forces being able to hide in cities, as well as utilising the "technical skills of the urban population whose access to, and familiarity with advanced technologies greatly enhance their military potential" (2013, p.104). As shown by the outcome of the urban battles in the Civil War, such a likelihood is dependent on a number of factors, each, of course, unique to a particular situation. In the case of the fight for Dublin, for example, anti-Treaty forces failed to press their advantage of numbers prior to the outbreak of war, and failed to implement a cohesive strategy, both politically and militarily (Murphy, 2006, pp.156-8). This delay allowed the government and National Army to increase their strength and capability, especially in relation to the initial use of combined arms tactics, followed by intelligence led raids in subsequent phases.

The start of fighting seemed to surprise both sides, considering that the National Army needed British artillery, while the anti-Treaty leader Liam Lynch continued to try and compromise with the Four Courts anti-Treaty garrison (Dorney, 2017, pp.68-9). There was also a realisation that hostilities would see old comrades fighting each other rather than against the British or to support the Nationalists in the new Northern Ireland, though there was still some hope that fighting would be brief and confined to Dublin (Neeson, 1989, p.123). For the anti-Treaty side, the attack on the Four Courts garrison forced them "to think about the rationale of their action, and showed that they had no positive idea on how the campaign might proceed" (Townshend, 2014, p.408). This is reinforced by Hopkinson who pointed out that "despite all their rhetoric and occasional bombast", they had made "no adequate preparations for Civil War" (2017, p.675). This lack of planning further manifested itself in their inability to properly co-ordinate any meaningful reinforcements, as well as the important requirement of gaining legitimacy and popular support. Dorney observed that "generally the public seems to have supported the Provisional Government's forces as a means of ending the fighting and restoring order", with even anti-Treaty forces acknowledging that "the civilian population was extremely hostile to them" (2017, p.103).

The response of the government and the National Army was mixed, which may have inadvertently prolonged the overall conflict. One example, which perhaps typified some of the reluctance to commit to war, saw senior anti-Treaty prisoners released in order to confer with their colleagues in the south of the country, while the National Army blasted positions in Dublin city centre (Neeson, 1989, p.139). The fighting included close quarter action as both sides vied to hold or seize positions, with casualties, including civilian deaths, mounting (Dorney, 2017, pp.100-1). Despite the challenges previously discussed, the National Army won a decisive victory, including preventing counterattacks from the south. The disarray, even at this stage, displayed by the anti-Treaty forces can be seen from internal reports describing the plan to reinforce Dublin as a "fiasco", being highly critical of commanders and with forces showing such a lack of vigour to prosecute the war that "everybody thinks the war is over" (O'Malley & Dolan, 2007, p.47). Such apathy increased the momentum on behalf of the National Army, and also satisfied the British as to the determination of the Provisional Government. General Macready noted that "as improvised and rough and ready as it was, its troops got the job done and secured the capital" (Dorney, 2017, p.104). This in turn led to

increased arms and supplies coming from the British, which was a logistical supply line that could never be matched by the anti-Treaty forces.

Winning The Cities.

After the anti-Treaty forces were defeated in Dublin, they attempted to hold territory in the south of Ireland, which included the port cities of Waterford, Cork and Limerick. The latter proved to be one of the more key battle grounds as it offered a focal point for anti-Treaty western and southern units to hold the line in north Munster and to allow for an advance to Galway (Ferriter, 2021, p.49). Indeed, the situation saw three forces occupying various areas in the city: the British Army (who were still awaiting evacuation), the National Army and anti-Treaty forces. Once the National Army reinforced their positions after Lynch authorised an ill-advised truce in the city, the defeat of anti-Treaty forces after heavy street fighting led to “one of the major turning points in the war” as it opened the way into the anti-Treaty strongholds in Munster (Duggan, 1991, p.87). The fighting in Limerick continued for nine days and saw some methods, such as tunnelling through houses rather than be exposed to sniper fire, that are still common place today (O'Ruairc, 2010, p.90). Additionally, the National Army utilised armoured cars and artillery to reduce anti-Treaty positions. Although anti-Treaty forces attempted to distract the National Army by launching various supporting attacks in Clare, it was clear that Limerick was the key terrain for this region, recognised as such by National Army commanders who stated that “whoever held Limerick, held the south and west” (Younger, 1968, p.370). During this battle, the National Army proved adept at conducting combined arms operations utilising artillery, armoured cars and infantry, as well as showing a greater ability to reinforce their positions and take the offensive (O'Ruairc, 2010, p.118).

The ability of the National Army to call on greater assets, especially those that allowed for an indirect approach on anti-Treaty strongholds, was proven with the seizure of Cork city. In Cork, although a noted republican stronghold, the majority of people were supportive of the Treaty due to what can only be described as war weariness after their experiences during previous three years, made worse by anti-Treaty forces activities, such as taxation, which only served to enrage the people. Even by this stage of the war, the National Army displayed both imagination and a grasp of joint operations. This included the use of ships to land soldiers behind anti-Treaty lines, and aircraft for observation and harassment (Borgonovo, 2011, p.117). The National Army had already successfully conducted maritime landings in Mayo and Kerry, however it was optimistically felt that the seizing Cork could end the war (Borgonovo, 2011, p.76). The ability of the National Army to concentrate greater forces, and utilise maritime assets to land a combined arms force, ensured that anti-Treaty defenders were quickly dislocated. Unlike the battle for Limerick, the battle to take Cork took place mainly in the environs, much to the relief of its citizens who welcomed the National Army soldiers (Borgonovo, 2011, pp.120-1).

The Urban Challenge.

It has been noted in the introduction to this paper that the accounts and histories of the Civil War tended to focus on general areas such as events or participant biographies. This is seen by works on the battles in the urban environment during the Civil War, with detailed descriptions of activities, but a dearth of theoretical supports as to the causes and reasoning behind such actions in a counterinsurgency campaign. For example, Dorney (2017) discussed

National Army evolution in Dublin after the initial battle, pointing out that the main effort was led by army intelligence and the newly formed Criminal Investigation Department (CID), who led raids on suspected anti-Treaty locations (Dorney, 2017, pp.166-76). However, although there is no overarching counterinsurgency strategy referenced, an analysis of the General Orders (MA/CW/OPS/01/01/02, 1922) issued by National Army showed that they were cognisant of the need to act lawfully and gain intelligence to drive further operations, displaying what can be described as an intuitive grasp of sound counterinsurgency principles.

Gentile criticised the notion that “a wildly popular COIN refrain within the ranks of the American military and defence experts is that in counterinsurgency an army can’t kill its way to victory” (2013, p.3). This observation that the notion of counterinsurgency being based primarily on ‘hearts and minds’ or non-kinetic activity highlights a key challenge within the application of the theory. However, the manual to which Gentile referred, while noting the importance of understanding the culture and environment, states that “clearly, killing or capturing insurgents will be necessary” (US Army, 2007, p.40). This is reinforced by a US military urban operations manual which stated that in an insurgency environment “forces may need to conduct offensive and defensive operations to defend themselves or destroy urban threats seeking to prevent the decisive stability or civil support mission” (US Army, 2006, pp.9-1). This was clearly the case for the National Army as they fought close quarter actions, utilising combined arms to reduce anti-Treaty positions. The amount of force used is also keeping with counterinsurgency techniques, as noted in the Counterinsurgency Field Manual which stated that “there may be times when an overwhelming effort is necessary to destroy or intimidate an opponent and reassure the populace. Extremist counterinsurgent combatants often have to be killed” (US Army, 2007, p.45). This is tempered by the advice that counterinsurgents must use the appropriate level of force and to avoid collateral damage (US Army, 2007, p.45). Though the National Army deployed artillery in cities, this was mainly used to reduce anti-Treaty strongpoints, rather than indiscriminate shelling (Borgonovo, 2011, pp.118-9). Dorney observed that in Dublin, it was reported that “civilians have suffered as much as combatants, largely owing to their overweening curiosity, which caused them to congregate in masses as close to the fighting as they were permitted” (2017, p.93). Rather than been laid down in any main plan, the leadership was well aware that the support of the populace was vital, as noted by Collins in early August (Hopkinson, 2017, pp.683-4).

The anti-Treaty forces were also aware of their need to keep the populace on their side, with a note from the anti-Treaty Adjutant General observing the importance of troop discipline when dealing with civilians (O'Malley & Dolan, 2007, pp.235-6). In reality, anti-Treaty operations continued to exasperate a war weary population, which had already signalled their political support for the Treaty in the recent general election (Walsh, 2015, p.350). To delay any loss of territory and to attempt to launch counterattacks, they found themselves reverting to cutting National Army lines of communications and destroying infrastructure. This was described by Duggan as the “mindless destruction of public and private property” which adversely effected the civil population through loss of employment or restrictions on freedom of movement (1991, p.93). The anti-Treaty side, by their actions, further isolated themselves from the important support of the people, while the National Army were the instrument through which the Government sought to restore order.

It is accepted by historians that once the anti-Treaty forces were defeated in open fighting in the cities and towns, the war entered a guerrilla phase, where anti-Treaty forces reverted back to a more accustomed style (Ferriter, 2021, p.55). This also coincided with a

strengthening the Government's overall position and new leadership in the army after the death of Collins. This meant that "the war became more bitter" and it appeared far more likely "that harsher and more ruthless tactics would be used" (Hopkinson, 2017, p.685). Though the main effort now took place in the countryside, there still continued to be raids and attacks in the urban areas, as seen in the archival diary of the Dublin Brigade (MA, 1923). The experienced soldiers of the opening battle in Dublin were redeployed and the city was left in care of mainly inexperienced troops (Dorney, 2017, p.168). Indeed, in Munster, anti-Treaty raids highlighted some of the poor training and organisation that still bedevilled the National Army, with some garrisons surrendering en masse (Dorney, 2017, p.232).

To counter these challenges, the army reorganised its structure, including its intelligence branch, with a focus on GHQ taking greater control over activities. Though not always a success across the entire country, by 1923, there was a far more effective intelligence led security apparatus charged with counterinsurgency in Dublin, led by CID and the army (Dorney, 2017, p.242). By early 1923, these groups were mounting up to 30 raids a day in Dublin, with varying degrees of success as a lack of co-ordination led to high risks of fratricide and often, only a return of four arrests compared to the number of raids (Dorney, 2017, p.243). Such issues continued to plague these operations, as recounted by Stanley McChrystal, who provided an excellent account of the challenges of organising effective raids in the urban environment as part of a counterinsurgency strategy. The target process he described, known as the 'F3EAD cycle' (Find, Fix, Finish, Exploit, Analyse and Disseminate), ensured that:

A target was first identified and located (Find), then kept under continuous surveillance to ensure it hadn't moved (Fix), while a raid force moved to capture or kill the targets (Finish). Material of intelligence value was deliberately secured and mined, while detainees were interrogated to find follow on targets (Exploit); the information this exploitation yielded was then studied to better know our enemy and identify opportunities to further attack its network (Analyse) (McChrystal, 2014, p. 153).

The information was then disseminated so as to conduct further operations. Indeed, it was further pointed out that the critical strength of the F3EAD process was the "fusion of operations and intelligence" (Faint & Harris, 2012).

In this phase of the war, the National Army and CID were seen to have also utilised a rudimentary cycle to execute their operations like that described by McChrystal. That they were eventually successful is noted by Dorney wrote that "cumulatively, however, whatever their limitations, by weight of numbers and arrests, by the spring of 1923, the pro-Treaty forces were winning the war" (Dorney, 2017, p.243). However, these activities are not without controversy, especially when considered with the modern values of a government organisation. CID was noted to be particularly harsh in their methods, with Ferriter observing that "its shadow hung over grisly brutalities" and that it "used violence during interrogations and executed republican suspects and prisoners" (2021, p.103).

Anti-Treaty Failure or National Army Success?

Although Dublin remained crucial for both sides, the anti-Treaty forces were never able to properly co-ordinate both their forces and any support they had, such as from Cumman na-

mBan (Ferriter, 2021, pp.23-4). Furthermore, they were not able to offer any alternative to the populations in any of the key cities (Neeson, 1989, p.217), though it is important to highlight that this refers to military support, rather than political. The latter proved far more complex, as any attempt to “discern a clear social logic behind the political cleavage” remained ambiguous and frustrating (Foster, 2017, p.665). Indeed, after the fall of both Limerick and Cork to the National Army, the ambivalence of the vast majority was indicated more by a desire to get on with their lives or to try and profit, in some cases through looting (O'Ruairc, 2010, pp.134-5).

The lack of ambition and planning by the anti-Treaty forces allowed the National Army to grow in size and strength. Hopkinson was critical of the anti-Treaty effort, when he stated that “whatever advantages the republican side had at the beginning of the conflict, however was quickly dissipated by the failure to act in a disciplined and coherent way” (2017, p.676). This also meant that efforts to hold the cities outside of Dublin were not sufficiently planned or supported, with the attempts in Dublin an abject display of a failure to learn past lessons, such as from the 1916 Rising (Hopkinson, 2017, p.675). These criticisms should not detract from the successful National Army effort, especially considering the magnitude of their task of creating a new force in a time of conflict. The determination of the Government to restore order, meant that the National Army was able “ultimately, to apply sufficient combat power to force the anti-Treaty IRA to lay down its arms” (White, 2017, p.697). Thereafter, the actions of the National Army followed that of a classic counterinsurgency campaign which revolved around raids, securing vital installations and intelligence led operations to actively target the insurgents. The security offered by the National Army allowed the civilian population to continue with their lives and put a halt to the real threat of social and economic breakdown (Crowley, et al., 2017, pp.668-9).

PART TWO. The Guerrilla Phase.

The Rural Insurgency.

By the end of August 1922, the anti-Treaty forces were left with no feasible military option but to resort to guerrilla tactics if they intended to stay in the field (Cottrell, 2008, p.56). This change of tactics meant that:

Such anti-Treaty successes as occurred were local and the result of guerrilla tactics, seldom of central planning. But guerrilla tactics, which had startling success against the foreign army of occupation, were useless against a domestic army, supported by the public and local troops. (Neeson, 1989, p.242)

This lack of a cohesive strategy underlined the precarious position that the anti-Treaty forces found themselves in, as seen by some anti-Treaty supporters who were advocating an end to hostilities as they realised the continued futility of fighting on (Younger, 1968, pp.471-2). Coupled with this lack of cohesion, the need for legitimacy and support from the general population became a major factor for both sides in their ability to fight the war. Within the context of the guerrilla war phase, Strachan-Morris advised that care must be taken when defining what ‘support’ from the population means, and more importantly, to note how such ‘support’ is measured (2022). In the context of the Civil War, the collapse in popular support for the anti-Treaty forces was highlighted by the changed circumstances in attitudes since the outbreak of the war. Porch wrote that in the War of Independence, the British found that “the

bulk of the population was in a state of open rebellion or was in sympathy with such rebellion” (2013, p.119). However, once The Civil War commenced, the anti-Treaty side were never able to garner the momentum, or offer any attractive alternatives, to rebuild that level of support. The Government and the National Army, despite using reprisals as punishments, not only managed to break the will of the anti-Treaty forces but also, at the same time, maintain support from the population, which will be explored in greater depth in this part. However, it is pertinent to note at this stage that:

While the legal executions – 77 of 81 – were shocking, we should not forget that all the evidence suggests that the public were deeply hostile to the anti-Treatyites, not so much on ideological grounds, but because of the way they behaved and the destruction which they wrought. (O’Halpin, 2023)

National Army Response to The Guerrilla Campaign.

Importantly, National Army strength continued to grow as government forces now dominated the main urban areas in the country, albeit, some anti-Treaty activity such as raids, commensurate with guerrilla tactics, continued to take place. Overall, the security situation had improved to such an extent that the Dáil sat in September (Neeson, 1989, p.260). The army were still experiencing challenges made more demanding by the death of their Commander in Chief, General Collins, who was killed in action in August. Collins was replaced by the experienced Mulcahy, who though both Minister for Defence and Commander in Chief, was the subject of some resistance from National Army generals due to his attempts to improve organisation and standards, itself indicative of ongoing internal issues (O’Caoimh, 2019, pp.130-1). This change in military leadership also coincided with political change brought on by the death of Arthur Griffith, just prior to the death of Collins. The impact on the attitude to prosecuting the war by the new political and military leadership is best described by Townshend who wrote that:

Under this second Provisional Government regime, counterinsurgency policy became distinctly tougher. Mulcahy was somewhat less sentimental about old comrades than Collins had been. Cosgrave and O’Higgins were prepared to brand republican fighters as unlawful combatants, in effect criminals. They were unworried by the prospect of using martial law despite its grim political echoes. (2014, pp.436-7)

Although Mulcahy called on the army to remain disciplined after the shock of the death of Collins, he did not shy away from prosecuting the war as he saw fit (Younger, 1968, p.439). Mulcahy realised that “as in the war he himself had directed against the British, the republicans did not have to win. All they had to do was sufficiently disrupt the life of the country so that the government could not function” (Valiulis, 1992, pp.173-4).

To offset this challenge, the government needed to re-establish some semblance of normality in the country. When discussing the link between an effective counterinsurgency campaign and the need to restore order and governance, Schadow wrote that “the tougher job of restoring basic government services and administrative structures at the local and national levels” must be tackled by using all available “instruments of national power to sustain the emerging government and reduce the likelihood of another crisis emerging” (2010, p.173). In this case, the Government emphasised both military and judicial action to effect a violent response so as to defeat the anti-Treaty insurgency. Hazelton provided the

examples of Greece and El Salvador where, within a counterinsurgency framework, a national government utilised force against civilians as part of their efforts to stay in power (2021, p.24). Though this was not the case in the Irish Civil War, the Irish counterinsurgency effort does align with her observation that “the military campaign is one of attrition; it is not necessary to kill all the insurgents, or their political and military leaders. It is necessary to break their will to fight by showing them that they cannot attain their goals” (Hazelton, 2021, p.149).

National Army Challenges.

From a military point of view, the ability to beat the anti-Treaty forces would now require greater discipline and better training to be able to deal with the frustration of ambushes and attacks on lines of communications, as they were beginning to prove somewhat successful (Hopkinson, 1988, p.173). The National Army had, prior to the defeat of anti-Treaty forces in the urban areas, tried to come up with a coherent plan to offset guerrilla warfare, but despite some large scale sweeps of rural areas where anti-Treaty forces operated, they simply did not have the training or equipment to be effective against guerrillas at this stage of the war. Hopkinson summarised the situation and the subsequent results for this inadequacy by noting that “had it been a more effective force, it might well have decisively moved against the remnants of the republican units before guerrilla resistance had intensified and become more effective” (1988, p.173). Despite Mulcahy’s plea to his soldiers, the result of ineffectiveness, when placed in the context of a guerrilla war, began to lead to a steady erosion of overall discipline. Ferriter noted that though the “whole question of soldierly discipline” was discussed, the issue of “properly structured and disciplined leadership” was avoided (2021, pp.63-4).

Within the army there was a recognition that training and discipline must improve as operating an effective counterinsurgency campaign required better standards throughout every level of command. When discussing the opening of the guerrilla phase of the Civil War, Hopkinson pointed out that “even a well disciplined and trained army would have faced major problems”, which underscores the enormity of the task that now presented itself (1988, p.173). Commanders began to take measures to counter internal military challenges such as seen with the Officer Commanding 3rd Southern Command, who moved personnel to ensure that slackness was dealt with efficiently and set up a training depot to provide courses in “column work, patrol duties and rounding up operations” (Duggan, 1991, p.99). At headquarters level, measures were taken to formalise training with efforts made to liaise with the Swiss Army and seek advice from the British on setting up schools of instruction for Officers and NCOs (Hodson, 2016, p.20). By October 1922, an Officer Training Corps was set up to provide officers for the formal battalions that were to be established under the planned new army structure (Hodson, 2016, p.21). As this was all taking place in the middle of a war, tactical training was limited to commanding units of around 100 personnel, but considering the types of actions that took place, this in itself proved useful.

Anti-Treaty Efforts.

In tandem with the actions of the Government and National Army enforcing their legitimacy, the anti-Treaty side also recognised that in order for them to gain legitimacy, it was necessary to show that they were the heirs of the First Dáil. The anti-Treaty side did not have the political power or support at this stage to offer the people an acceptable alternative. Initially, their forces continued with guerrilla warfare throughout the country with varying levels of success

due to previous experience against the British and the added advantage of operating in their own localities. In the west of the country, the “IRA seemed well equipped and dominated, for example, north and west Mayo in November 1922” with substantial manpower, weapons and ammunition (Ferriter, 2021, p.65). In Tipperary, where all the urban areas were in the hands of the National Army, anti-Treaty forces continued to operate from the mountains and carry out attacks on the National Army, shoot suspected spies, destroy lines of communications and burn estate houses (Marnane, 2021, p.285).

However, it was in Kerry where anti-Treaty forces were able to most effectively co-ordinate their operations. Despite being outmanoeuvred by National Army seaborne landings to their rear, anti-Treaty forces continued operations to give themselves every advantage possible, which for the “remainder of the war in Kerry was typified by a guerrilla warfare based largely in the countryside”, and which the army “struggled to control and suppress” (O’Shea, 2022, p.38). One area that was a noted success was the effort to make the railway lines unusable for the National Army, forcing them to use roads where they could be ambushed more effectively. This campaign included tearing up lines, attacks on the rolling stock and intimidation of railway employees. Indeed, Doyle noted that when “viewed from a purely military perspective the republican campaign on the Great Southern and Western front was a great success” (Doyle, 2010, p.68). Nevertheless, their efforts, led by the increasingly marginalised DeValera, were described as having an “air of unreality” (Townshend, 2014, p.441).

The response of the National Army saw a variety of measures from the judicial to the operational in order to defeat the insurgency. Most Civil War analysis tends to focus on the former, which will be discussed later in this part, but this is to ignore the purely military efforts undertaken. The National Army launched specific military actions to ensure that they maintained momentum and not to allow anti-Treaty forces regain an initiative. This included tactical activities such as targeted raids, patrols and cordon and search activities, all aimed at seeking to engage with anti-Treaty columns and to deny them secure areas of operation (MA/CW/OPS/08/03, 1923). These operations were carried out to such an extent that by early 1923 the overall anti-Treaty position was described as “hopeless” (Neeson, 1989, p.286). The activities in Tipperary provide a good example of the kind of warfare that was being engaged in, with accounts of National Army road convoys of varying sizes being ambushed by anti-Treaty columns, with differing degrees of success (Marnane, 2021). Overall, the ability of the National Army to reinforce their units from the many bases they had in Tipperary tipped the balance against the anti-Treaty forces. Marnane provided one account where over 100 anti-Treaty forces attacked a National Army convoy near Clonmel, but were soundly defeated by the timely arrival of reinforcements, which included armoured cars and machine guns from nearby towns (2021, p.307). This is, in effect, a rudimentary application of the counterinsurgency “inkblot” approach that has often been utilised as a tactic to control an area (Strachan-Morris, 2020). In this case, the National Army held the bases in the urban areas, allowing them to the ability to conduct operations to dominate the local area or engage with anti-Treaty forces.

Despite these successes, anti-Treaty forces continued to cause casualties amongst National Army personnel, some of the worst being caused by ‘mines’ and local counteroffensives. Harrington provided an eye-witness account of difficulties that were experienced by the National Army in the Kerry region, noting that even experienced troops were often forced to withdraw from a “countryside made for guerrilla warfare” (Harrington,

1992, pp.138-9). These casualties and attacks meant that the war was considered more “bitter” in Kerry than in any other country leading a frustrated National Army to take “extreme measures” including unofficial reprisal executions (Crowley, et al., 2018, p.716). This scenario fits with Kalyvas’s paper on the logic of violence in an irregular war in that “the acute feeling of vulnerability that combatants experience” can provide a causal link to what he describes as “barbarism” (2006, p.69).

Robust Response.

The scene for the extreme measures, both official and unofficial, that was set by the attitude of the military and political leadership to the counterinsurgency campaign is discussed in the US military counterinsurgency manual which noted that “leaders at every level establish an ethical tone and climate that guards against the moral complacency and frustrations that build up on protracted COIN operations” (US Army, 2007, p.240). Both the Government and the National Army leadership pressed for robust measures to deal with the insurgency as there was a feeling that taking prisoners was not a sufficient deterrent, and that the longer the war went on, the more detrimental it would be to the survival of the new state (Enright, 2019, pp.27-31). The toxic situation in Kerry provided a clear manifestation of the hardening of attitudes towards anti-Treaty forces, as seen by the sanctions authorised by the Government in response. Duggan argued that the measures introduced by the Government were in response to “individual killings” and “widespread seizure and wanton destruction of property by the anti-Treaty side” (1991, p.99). This, with the noted problems and challenges that were being caused by some ill-disciplined National Army units, presented the government with a serious matter to resolve. From the command perspective, Mulcahy tried a two-pronged approach. He continued to send out peace feelers through a number of sources, including appealing direct to Aiken and the use religious emissaries. Secondly, he tried to introduce more robust measures like martial law, and in September “he asked the Cabinet for the introduction of emergency powers of arrest, detention and capital punishment” (O’Caoimh, 2019, p.133). These measures included offences such as attacks on the National Army, possession of warlike materials and “looting, arson, destruction, seizure, unlawful possession or removal or damage to any public or private property” (O’Caoimh, 2019, p.133).

The tougher stance was further seen when an additional proposal to set up military courts with the power to inflict the death sentence was accepted (Neeson, 1989, p.272). The resolution passed by the Dáil gave the National Army powers to set up military courts and pass the death sentence so as to ensure that there was now “machinery of justice to deal with the Irregulars” (Enright, 2019, pp.30-1). Neeson noted that these measures would “arrange matters so that such killings would not be regarded as murder and would be given a legal cloak” (1989, p.273). More importantly, he observed that “the establishment of the courts immediately deprived the anti-Treaty troops of a primary right of warfare and was a major psychological weapon against them” (Neeson, 1989, p.273). Despite accusations in parliament that they were setting up a military dictatorship, Cosgrave answered that there was “no other way in which ordered conditions can be restored in this country” (Townshend, 2014, p.437). The first executions of anti-Treaty prisoners took place in November, closely followed by the execution of Childers. The controversy surrounding executions deepened due to the nature of the way they were being carried out, with some men executed after been incarcerated for a long period prior to the emergency powers coming into effect. Although the legal manner of the executions was challenged in the Dáil, especially by the Labour Party,

who “continued to consistently and courageously challenge the government throughout the era” (Ferriter, 2021, p.91), a small amnesty window for anti-Treaty forces that was provided, did not produce the desired cessation of hostilities.

In response to the Government’s actions, the anti-Treaty side issued a directive that targeted government members by proclaiming that:

Every member of your body who voted for this resolution by which you pretend to make legal the murder of soldiers, is equally guilty...unless your army recognises the rules of warfare...we shall adopt very drastic measures. (Townshend, 2014, p.442)

The spiral of violence begun by the executions and the reprisal order, led to the death of pro-Treaty TD, Sean Hales. In return, as a clear reprisal, the government summarily executed four prisoners, “who had been in prison since the attack on the Four Courts and therefore before the Public Safety Act had been introduced” (Ferriter, 2021, p.92). This trend intensified, with more executions followed by attacks on the homes of government and army personnel, thus increasing the level of violence and desire for retribution.

Winning and Losing.

The moral complacency and frustrations that were previously highlighted became more commonplace in 1923. The anti-Treaty side did their best to maintain some semblance of legitimacy in the eyes of the nation, but their situation became more precarious as the war wore on. An example that underlines this is the “crucial actions perpetrated by civilians” in Kerry that “had a huge bearing in determining” the campaign there for the benefit of the National Army (Doyle, 2010, pp.140-1). The first incident alluded to was the disarming of mines in Fenit Harbour which allowed National Army troops to conduct an amphibious landing, and the second was the assistance given to a National Army relief column in Killorglin. Both actions meant that the National Army maintained a large presence in the anti-Treaty stronghold of Kerry. Very quickly, anti-Treaty forces found their numbers were getting depleted through attrition, with 12,000 in prison by April 1923 (Cottrell, 2008, p.59). Unlike the war against the British, they did not have the support networks to conduct a guerrilla war. This not only included the loss of the support of the population, who were vital in relation to the provision of logistical support and safe havens, but also in their own increasing hostility and intimidation towards civilians due to their “assertion of the correctness of physical force” in seeking a republic (Fitzgerald, 2021, p.33). Where once the republican movement had shown themselves to have been masters at gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the population through the establishment of local government and legal supports during the War of Independence, this was not the case in the Civil War (Connell, 2019, p.167). Anti-Treaty forces were reduced to the level of brigands by the activities and campaign of the Government and the National Army. This was noted by Boyd who wrote that the anti-Treaty forces “procured by force and threats, and they have been driven to conscript men to work for them” while the National Army “increasingly appear in the light of the saviour and the only defence of unarmed law abiding citizens against bandits” (1922).

Anti-Treaty tactics of burning property, robberies, intimidation and reprisal attacks only served to highlight their lack of a cohesive and centralised plan for winning the war. Walsh stated that these activities “made daily life impossible, but the republicans seemed too

obtuse to notice” and that some people now suggested that they “were as reckless and unpredictable as the Black and Tans” (2015, p.381). The level of violence visited on the Protestant population by anti-Treaty forces remains the subject of much debate as to whether it was plain sectarianism or if it was actually a concerted campaign of ethnic cleansing. Regardless of the motives, it must be noted that there may have been up to 100 Protestants killed by anti-Treaty forces during the Civil War period (Bielenberg, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2013). Additionally, the burning of estate houses remains controversial as a large amount of these properties were associated with the ex-ruling class, the majority of whom were Protestant, and may have contributed to increased depopulation (Clarke, 2017, pp.732-5). Furthermore, houses of Provisional Government and National Army commanders were also targeted, with some being the object of kidnap for ransom.

It is indicative of how much support that the anti-Treaty forces had lost, and a measure of how badly they misunderstood the character of the war, in that their lack of democratic legitimacy meant that National Army reprisals and official executions did not raise the ire of the population as it did after 1916 (Cottrell, 2008, p.81). Although there was a serious concern about the lack of discipline within the National Army, “they rarely attacked or intimidated civilians” (Fitzgerald, 2021, p.221). Even after the worst excesses in Kerry, including the murder of at least seventeen anti-Treaty prisoners in “mine massacres”, the momentum for support continued to ebb for the anti-Treaty side as the disruption caused by their looting and destruction was indiscriminating in its effect (Enright, 2019, p.118; O’Shea, 2022, p.170). The ability of the National Army to muster larger numbers to secure urban areas and dominate rural areas meant that, in Kerry, their forces had increased to over 2,500 soldiers, far outnumbering any remaining active anti-Treaty forces (Doyle, 2010, p.134). In other areas such as Tipperary, the large numbers of National Army soldiers made any sustained activity by anti-Treaty forces near impossible (Marnane, 2021).

The increased strength of the National Army and the fragility of the anti-Treaty forces was proven by the death of the anti-Treaty Commander in Chief, General Liam Lynch, in April 1923, which proved a catalyst for progressing the end of war. By May 1923, all anti-Treaty efforts to negotiate an end to the war were rejected by the government and Aiken, as Lynch’s successor, ordered his forces to cease fire and “dump arms” (Hopkinson, 1988, p.257). As in most counterinsurgency campaigns there was not a formal end to hostilities, and there remained a need for the National Army to continue their security tasks into 1924, albeit at a lesser tempo than what had gone before. Overall, Townshend summarised that the government and army’s “repressive action was more violent than the British had been. From a republican perspective, this should have condemned it to the same fate as the British regime, but it did not” (2014, p.450). That it did not ensures that the Irish Civil War provides an excellent case study that underlines the complexity and ambiguity of all counterinsurgency campaigns.

PART THREE. Lessons for Counterinsurgency.

Measuring Success.

After the death of Lynch, O’Malley, wrote that although their casualties were light, “we didn’t know how to fight and we didn’t know how to surrender either” (1978, p.227). This observation best sums up both the situation that the anti-Treaty forces were faced with and

the problems caused by not having any coherent strategy. When discussing the actions of the National Army and Government that brought the war to this stage, both Strachan-Morris (2022) and Hazelton (2022) noted that there is a clear need to define what constitutes 'success' in this situation. Strachan-Morris wrote that "the dependence on the government's aims as a means to determine success makes victory a difficult concept to define in a counterinsurgency context" (2020, p.36). For the National Army and the Government, success can be measured by the defeat of the organised insurgency and the restoration of law and order throughout the state. The military, though guilty of many transgressions and errors, not only had a far clearer strategic goal, but the ways and means to achieve it. With numbers exceeding 55,000 personnel, and with greater experience and organisation than they had at the start of the war, they were able to pursue anti-Treaty personnel with vigour. Kiras wrote that "countering irregular warfare has little to do with fighting more effectively against insurgents" but that it is more to do with forces creating "the conditions for security and stability from the bottom up" while assisting the government to govern credibly (2011, p.267). In this, the National Army were remarkably successful. As noted, the anti-Treaty forces were unable to achieve any major strategic result that would turn the war in their favour. Taber, when describing the failure of the Hukbalahap insurrection in the Philippines observed that:

Their tactics in the field, mainly evasive, failed to produce the kind of results that could be exploited in terms of propaganda for major political effect; and once deprived of political leadership they seem to have lapsed into an existence hardly to be distinguished from banditry. (2002, p.138)

This observation could equally apply to the anti-Treaty forces by the summer of 1923.

However, as counterinsurgency is fluid and notable for taking place over a long timeframe, the relatively quick military defeat of the anti-Treaty forces needed to be consolidated so as to ensure that order was maintained to allow for governing the country. This consolidation continued for a number of years after the 'dump-arms' order, as effective insurgency was over, instead replaced by sporadic murders and other such crimes, which were aimed at, and dealt mainly by, the police (Marnane, 1992, pp.10-2). Indeed the 'dump-arms' order may have unintentionally contributed to this, for "the fact that the war ended in a suspension rather than cessation of hostilities ensured the continued use of coercion throughout the decade" including a series of "increasingly draconian public safety acts" up to 1931 (McGarry, 2014, pp.650-1). The massive challenge of trying to "provide the state with popular legitimacy" (Keogh, 2005, pp.18-9) fell to the Cosgrave government for the remainder of the decade, where tensions remained and the spectre of violence was never far from the scene as highlighted by the abortive army mutiny in 1924 and strife in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the period after the 'dump-arms' order saw the first post-Civil War general elections take place which proved surprising for the amount of anti-Treaty TD's returned. O'Halpin (2023) noted that "it is clear that the government had no wish to purge Ireland of the rebels", and the subsequent events as shown by the democratic process that took place after the Civil War supports this assertion.

Though the Civil War provides a case study for conducting a successful counterinsurgency campaign, it must be read in conjunction with an understanding of the situation at the time. From a western warfare perspective, most counterinsurgency doctrine is expeditionary based, with outside forces assisting a host nation government. This has led to many problems and challenges including not understanding the culture, being considered

invaders and confused strategies caused by differing political requirements. Such doctrine must be considered with success rates of 20 percent for expeditionary counterinsurgency operations, while a force like the National Army operating at home have success rates of around 80 percent (Kilcullen, 2022). Kilcullen advised that this success rate further increases if there is a willingness to negotiate around grievances (2022). In Ireland, the impact of the latter was not only observed through the democratic process, but also through the use of good behaviour pledges for prisoners, and post-Civil War employment in many areas (O’Halpin, 2023).

Policy of Violence

In late 1923, while reflecting on his own experiences during the Irish War of Independence, Montgomery wrote that “my own view is that to win a war of this sort you must be ruthless”, before observing that the solution is to give the Irish:

Some form of self-government, and let them squash the rebellion themselves, they are the only people who could really stamp it out....and as far as one can tell they seem to be having a fair amount of success. (Sheehan, 2005, pp.151-2)

This is an interesting observation, for Montgomery wrote from a contemporary point of view and this statement is prescient in relation to the events that transpired. Linked to the need for the ruthlessness mentioned, is the requirement that the “security forces have some degree of legitimacy” and are capable of maintaining an ability to secure the local population (Boot, 2013, pp.112-3). However, these measures in themselves were not sufficient to ensure the defeat of the anti-Treaty forces, for there was the danger of the government losing support for its actions. Hazelton described the good governance approach that is often associated with counterinsurgency strategy as being “based on the belief that the government must provide political, economic, and social reforms that meet the needs of the population; reduce the number and kinds of grievances fuelling the insurgency” and use force with “great care to avoid civilian harm” (2017, p.83). She further argued that this was flawed approach and that success in counterinsurgency is far more rooted in compellence. This includes both the accommodation of elites to strengthen the government and military while weakening the insurgency, and secondly:

The use of brute force to control civilians, cutting the flow of resources to the insurgency to weaken it indirectly and using force directly against insurgents. (Hazelton, 2021, pp.14-5)

The Irish Civil War falls between these approaches in that the government did not address the key insurgent political grievances and also only directed the full coercive power of the military against the insurgent forces. Taber wrote that a counterinsurgency force must prove that an insurgent force “cannot and will not succeed”, which will require its “destruction, wherever it exists” (2002, p.12). He goes on to state that the “military campaign must be sweeping, continuous and cumulative in its effects” (Taber, 2002, p.13). Additionally, Kilcullen posited that there is a “relationship between the loss of public support and perception of harsh, unjust or inconsistent punishment” (2022). The National Army ensured that the former was implemented, while the Government managed the latter, but neither were conducted in isolation thus highlighting the need to maintain a united and comprehensive approach. Though there were extra-judicial executions and murders committed by the military, both the

National Army and Government had enough support from elites and the population to maintain momentum and bring about the defeat of the anti-Treaty forces. Overall, what these observations underline is that violent means can be utilised successfully once they are both discriminate and serve to erode the capability of the insurgent force, thus bringing stability to the population at large. The National Army and government security forces were generally successful in this by their use of intelligence led operations, which is noted to be a key factor in conducting counterinsurgency operations.

Intelligence Led Operations

Kilcullen is clear in relation to the importance of intelligence into counterinsurgency operations when he wrote that:

In counterinsurgency, killing the enemy is easy. Finding him is often nearly impossible. Intelligence and operations are complementary. Your operations will be intelligence driven, but intelligence will come mostly from your operations. (2010, p.31)

In the most recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, this was underscored by the absolute need for counterinsurgency activities, especially raids, to be driven by intelligence (Schultz, 2016, p.37). One of the key factors for Coalition Forces was to ensure that their intelligence cycle operated smoothly and efficiently enough so as to maintain a high tempo of operations (Johnson, 2016, p.142). This was seen more so at the tactical level where executed missions continued to provide enough intelligence to drive subsequent operations. At the strategic level, this can become more complex as policy makers need intelligence to inform decisions, and the intelligence cycle can become complicated and confused due to the push and pull of intelligence requirements (Davies, et al., 2013, p.65). In the case of the Irish Civil War, as both the government and the army were focussed on the defeat of anti-Treaty forces, this simplified the matter, however certain aspects, especially around intelligence collection, were complicated by character of the war being fought.

Johnson stated that there are “three key intelligence missions: collection and analysis (the heart and soul of intelligence), along with counterintelligence and covert action (subsidiary intelligence)” (2009, p.33). The National Army, in conjunction with the CID, conducted all three to varying degrees of success and, indeed, controversy, which will be discussed later in this part. In the initial stages of the Civil War, these proved to be straightforward as the anti-Treaty forces overtly occupied urban areas in an effort to hold ground, which provided the National Army with conventional type objectives as their enemy were in plain view. However, once anti-Treaty forces began their guerrilla campaign, the National Army needed to ensure that their intelligence system provided actionable intelligence and dissemination of same. Though the army was inundated with raw intelligence, they often failed to execute operations satisfactorily due to what O’Halpin attributed to a pervasive ‘raiding’ mentality, or in some cases, crossed ethical boundaries in collection (2023).

In the case of the Irish situation, where there was a limited intelligence apparatus, an ability to glean low level intelligence from many sources is also noted to lead to effective implementation of operations (Kitson, 1971, p.131). After the War of Independence, National Army intelligence came from a number of sources as army personnel (there was no police force or dedicated intelligence agency) continued to monitor people and activities. Files in

Military Archives show that people were labelled as to their political preferences and sympathies during the truce and up to the start of the Civil War (MA, 1923). One of the key strengths of the IRA during The War of Independence was their intelligence network, which encompassed a vast net, with personnel reporting from within the British establishment such as military, police, government and post offices (Foy, 2006). This was supported by Active Service Units who conducted operations based on this intelligence, such as the 1921 Bloody Sunday attacks. This network collapsed due to the split in both the IRA and supporting elements such as Cumann na mBan. To offset the challenges now posed, the army needed to create a new apparatus, which is seen, for example, by the General Orders issued regarding the need for Intelligence Officers to be present on all raids (MA/CW/OPS/01/01/02, 1922) and updated General Staff Intelligence Instructions issued as a result of structural reorganisation and lessons learned (MA/CW/OPS/01/01/08, 1923). This was made easier by the lack of initiative shown by anti-Treaty personnel and the poor choice of military tactics they implemented, which by early 1923 rested on an ill thought out plan of trying to procure artillery and “bring the enemy to the position of bankruptcy” so as to turn the situation to their advantage (Shannon, 2023, p.235).

As the National Army gained victories, they also gained more intelligence from prisoners, captured documents, the local population and their own sources. In recognition of the need for intelligence to defeat the insurgency, in the places like Dublin, where a low intensity war continued, the army and CID used extreme measures, including targeted killings of anti-Treaty personnel, to neutralise such activity (O'Halpin, 1999, pp.11-4). In the rural battle, although intelligence was more difficult to collect, the reality was that the high tempo of National Army operations led to usable intelligence, which fed into more operations, thus continuing the cycle to their advantage. Again, this is seen in Marnane's description of activities in Tipperary and a perusal of operations reports where intelligence is gathered from National Army activities or acted on from information provided by a sympathetic population (Marnane, 2021, pp.391-406). For example, a report from Kerry Command on 28 January 1923 stated that “Paddy Cahill TD, important irregular leader and thirteen of his column” were captured in the Derrymore Mountains as a result “from intelligence received” (MA/CW/OPS/08/07, 1923).

Collecting Intelligence

The challenges of gaining timely and actionable intelligence in an insurgency is a factor that remains relevant on the modern battlefield as it did in 1922. The pressure to deliver an actionable product has meant that the ethical line of proper treatment of prisoners and basic rights has often been crossed with varying arguments made for justification (O'Mara, 2015, p.11). In the Irish Civil War, it is well documented that not only were prisoners tortured, but there were also covert actions for targeted killings of suspects, with CID being linked to 25 deaths (O'Brien, 2022, p.11). This leads to a moral conundrum that while the actions of the government and their forces crushed the insurgency, these actions included torture, execution and extra-judicial killings. Counterinsurgency theory has historically addressed these issues with one of the most famous treatises written by the French soldier, Roger Trinquier. He wrote that:

For the partisan and the irregular who oppose a regular army, the very fact that they violate the rules of warfare in fighting without a uniform (avoiding the risks

involved) deprives them of the protection of these same rules. If taken prisoner while armed, they may be shot on the spot. (Trinquier, 1964, p.16)

More controversially, he further stated that when an irregular is captured that they “cannot be treated as an ordinary criminal, nor like a prisoner taken on the battlefield” and when interrogated, this will be done with a lawyer and the prisoner must give the information requested. If this is not forthcoming, then that prisoner “must face the suffering, and perhaps the death, he has heretofore managed to avoid” (Trinquier, 1964, pp.18-9). This was a very blunt view of the use of torture to gain intelligence and one that was put into effect by the French during the Battle of Algiers, as recounted in detail by General Paul Aussaresses (2001).

In addition to these methods, there are also ethical debates on the use of spies and informers, which in some cases, have led to legacy issues regarding involvement in killings and encouragement of illegal activities. Such issues are analysed by authors such as Bellaby who noted that “the job of intelligence in many instances is to collect information that other actors wish to keep secret, resulting in a world where intelligence is, by necessity, an unsavoury business” (2014, p.1). That there was an element of this as a result of the Civil War can be deduced from the “discreet destruction of many sensitive Civil War records” by the army when DeValera and Fianna Fáil came to power in 1932 (O’Halpin, 1999, p.104). Leahy, in his assessment of the intelligence war against the IRA during the Northern Ireland ‘Troubles’ suggested that “controversial intelligence incidents” contradicted the aim of reducing and containing the IRA and indeed “created further toleration, if not support” for them, including increasing the level of violence (2020, p.8). More recently, there have been highly publicised state sanctioned “enhanced interrogation” and “renditions” conducted by the United States, as noted below. The effectiveness of these methods is questionable, but there remains an open debate on the use of such extreme measures in certain circumstances. Commentators such as Dershowitz have argued that legalising torture will in fact reduce its use and provide oversight, however most studies have shown its ineffectiveness (Wisniewski & Emerick, 2009, p.13). In the case of Algeria, it has been a common assessment that although the French may have “won” the military campaign, especially in Algiers itself, their methods became the subject of much criticism and a factor in losing the war politically, leading to their subsequent withdrawal (Horne, 1977, p.548). The controversy over the use of what was referred to as “enhanced interrogation” by the United States was the subject of a Senate Hearing on the matter in 2014. The findings of this report are quite clear, as it stated that:

The CIAs use of its enhanced interrogation techniques was not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation from detainees’ and that ‘justification for the use of its (CIAs) enhanced interrogation techniques rested on inaccurate claims of their effectiveness’. (US Senate, 2015, p.2)

The attraction of utilising these methods to gain intelligence in a wartime scenario, where there are time sensitive requirements leads to the “ticking time bomb” scenario, which is a tool used to stimulate debate on the use of torture (Wisniewski & Emerick, 2009, p.16). In relation to counterinsurgency, where intelligence is a vital factor, the temptation may all be too real, especially considering the nature of the insurgent’s tactics and label of terrorism.

In conjunction with the issues surrounding intelligence collection, the implementation or strike phase of any operation is also cause for concern. This is pertinent in relation to covert action, that may be legally questionable or, in a more modern context, relies on the use of

technology to conduct targeted killings as discussed by Cockburn, where the power to kill so efficiently can lower the threshold where even “behaviour” is enough to trigger a strike (2015, p.224). Although most modern studies refer to covert action as impacting on international affairs, such as one country targeting another country, in respect of the Irish Civil War, Dougherty’s assessment of defining success is relevant when he writes that:

Success may also depend upon when, in the bright light of history, one assesses a covert action program. Judgements in the immediate aftermath might well see the program as a marvellous achievement; but as circumstances unfold over the years or decades, the results may be reckoned differently. (2010, p.614)

At the time, these activities did have desired effects but the legacy remained. O’Malley recounts his fellow prisoners referring to the National Army as ‘Tans’ in 1924 and the stress brought by the ongoing executions (1978, p.78). The level of violence that the Civil War descended to is described by Ferriter, who gives an example of the ruthlessness of the CID in Dublin who as:

As an armed, plain clothes counterinsurgency police unit organised separately from the unarmed Civic Guard and based in Oriel House on Westland Row in Dublin, its shadow hung over grisly brutalities. During the Civil War it was responsible for the arrest of many anti-Treaty forces, used violence during interrogations and executed republican suspects and prisoners. (2021, p.103)

Outside of Dublin, the army also conducted their own interrogations in the vein as that noted by O’Malley, and in some areas, dedicated units such as the Special Infantry Corps were deployed to deal robustly with all manner of unrest, from anti-Treaty activities to agrarian unrest brought on by the lawlessness caused by the policing void (Crowley, et al., 2017, pp.668-9).

By the close of 1923, military success ensured that the Government had enough momentum to be able to direct that as far as they were concerned “the republicans (both anti-Treatyites, the militarists, and the civilians who still favoured the Sinn Fein Republican ideal) were disaffected revolutionaries and as such they continued to treat them” (Neeson, 1989, p.294). Though executions continued until May, by the end of the year, “control was maintained through censorship and special powers of arrest and internment of those thought to be a danger to the newly established order” (Enright, 2019, pp.142-5). O’Halpin summed up the results of the government’s campaign, where both military and political victories came as a “profound shock” to their anti-Treaty opponents. He writes that:

The government might well have won without recourse to all the measures used, and without the various atrocities for which its forces were responsible. But at some point or other the government had to meet force with greater force, and IRA terror with state terror. (1999, p.37)

The context of the war

The challenge for the modern counterinsurgent is to seat this type of campaign with the conduct of one today. There is no doubt that state terror was employed, and on the face of the matter, it may seem to sit with Trinquier’s theory, but even Trinquier wrote about the primacy of winning the support of the population (1964, p.6). Indeed, his fellow theorist,

Galula, posited the same when he stresses the primacy of protecting the population from the insurgent (1964, p.83). However, as previously discussed, there are many aspects to this factor, with each uniquely situated within both space and time, and which will be further emphasised in the findings of the next part of this paper. Therefore the Irish Civil War must be studied within the context of understanding the challenges faced by the people at the time. The population of the entire island, estimated at 4.3 million, had experienced the threat of a civil war in 1913, the horrors of The First World War, the Spanish Influenza epidemic, partition during the War of Independence, sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and finally, the bitter Civil War in the south (Spanish Flu is estimated to have killed up to 30,000, while First World War Irish deaths are estimated at around 47,000 (Colvin & McLoughlin, 2021; McGreevy, 2016). These unique circumstances allowed the Government to take the measures they did. The anti-Treaty forces failed to recognise that the political situation had changed and were completely unable to win over the support of the people. Their actions, which included murder, kidnap, robbery and arson, only served to prolong a war that was not wanted. Neeson best summarised the situation by quoting M.J. Costello who stated:

The people, in so far as they willed anything, willed the Treaty, but did not will Civil War. That became a private fight between two wings, and the anti-Treatyites turned it into a fight of the people against themselves by alienating the populace and arousing the enmity of the people. (1989, p.85)

Most modern counterinsurgency literature, and indeed intelligence literature, is focussed on an expeditionary force in an international dimension. This leads to the scenario where an outside agency or force can be labelled as an invader, and can experience many difficulties in creating actionable intelligence, for example, as seen in the Iraq and Afghanistan post 9/11 (Porch, 2013, p.306). This was not the case in Ireland, where the Government and the National Army were Irish and had a greater understanding of their foe, a factor often lacking by a foreign force, as well as more actionable intelligence, regardless of how rudimentary their processes. It also gave the population the focal point to express their newly won freedom. Though victorious in the battlefield, by the early 1930s, their Civil War opponents had gained the political strength to be democratically elected into power. However, the democratic process that allowed this is perhaps the proof that they were indeed fighting for the defence and survival of the new state. As Moody and Martin noted, when DeValera formed his first government in 1932, “this crucial event consolidated the achievements of Irish political democracy in the Free State, for Cosgrave handed over office to men who a decade earlier had challenged the Free State’s very existence” (2011, p.286).

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explore some lessons to be learned from the Irish Civil War as it pertains to modern counterinsurgency operations, through the themes of intelligence led operations and modern counterinsurgency theory. It has shown that this was a conflict which is rarely studied within this context despite the myriad of factors such as joint operations, intelligence led and targeted operations and a comprehensive military and government approach that have applicability for discussion in the modern world. As regards the latter, this particularly pertains to discipline and ethics.

Conventional Warfare and COIN

As discussed, the Irish Civil War has shown that there is a need for forces to be able to plan and conduct conventional operations as part of any counterinsurgency activity. This paper has further shown that the tactics put in place by the National Army, intuitively followed sound counterinsurgency strategy by securing urban areas, which provided them bases to expand, secure lines of communication and prosecute the “ink blot” type method advocated by Galula (1964, pp. 55-6) and described by Strachan-Morris (2020). Though there is merit to the argument that the dismal strategy of the anti-Treaty forces reinforced the strengths of the National Army, operations still had to be planned, fought and won in order to achieve success. That the National Army were able to do this while relatively inexperienced and weak, is a point that underpins how the determination of their leadership, and the government, to retake control of the urban areas was paramount and how these actions further dislocated anti-Treaty forces plans. The key learning point from this phase of the war, is that as the urban population of the world increases, that there will be a greater need for military forces to be able to prosecute targeted operations in large urban areas. This is something that Kilcullen has noted and described, and also falls into the category of what Krulak has described as “three block warfare” (Kilcullen, 2022). The success of the National Army in the cities, despite using combined arms operations including artillery, came from an overall discriminate use of fires, and should not be confused with massed fires on area targets that one might normally associate with urban warfare, again displaying the importance of avoiding collateral damage and civilian casualties.

The Guerrilla Phase and Counterinsurgency

The second phase of the Civil War, as discussed in Part 2, is notable for the robust measures that were implemented by the Government as a means to defeat the anti-Treaty forces. Though this period of guerrilla activity is probably a phase more familiar in relation to insurgency warfare, and one that is generally expected to continue for some time, for all intents and purposes it lasted for less than ten months. The operational activity of the National Army focussed on providing security and normality to the state and by extension, to a war weary population, by providing some basic protection against increasingly desperate anti-Treaty tactics. The operations conducted by the National Army, although met with some serious challenges in areas like Kerry, were overall successful as seen by the number of prisoners taken, the continued support received from both the population and also the government (Foster, 1988, p.513; O’Halpin, 2023). This contrasted with a rudderless anti-Treaty organisation whose chief aim was to bring about the economic destruction of the state in order to achieve their aims (Dorney, 2016). Such a policy was not only unrealistic but counterproductive when placed in the context of counterinsurgency theory. That their aims and tactics were misplaced, ensured that the policy of executions and reprisals implemented by the Government did not have an adverse effect, but rather hastened the end of the war.

Intelligence as a Theme

This paper has examined the use of intelligence as a key theme within the Civil War, examining how intelligence led operations are a crucial aspect for any successful counterinsurgency campaign. In addition, the collection of intelligence has the potential, as history has shown, to cross the lines of what is ethically acceptable. In the case of the Civil War, there is no doubt that torture was used by the National Army and CID in a bid to conduct targeted operations.

However, the reality is that torture is well noted to be counterproductive, as well as ethically reprehensible, and the same can be implied to its use in this case. As with Algeria, the intelligence created and acted on from structures and organisation that were in place were the key points in regards to success, rather than the use of torture as a means to an end. This paper has shown that there was no shortage of actionable intelligence available, however the challenge was to act so as to produce a desired effect rather than implementing only the “finish” portion of the military strike cycle (McChrystal, 2014). The Irish Civil War reinforces that in counterinsurgency, the use of intelligence drives operations that have an inherently violent aspect, however this must be focussed on a particular target in order to avoid collateral damage. These in turn ensure that the insurgent group is destroyed, while the civilian population is protected, thus underpinning a key foundation for success.

Please note that this views expressed in this article are those of the author alone and should not be taken to represent the views of the Irish Defence Forces, the Command and Staff School or any other group or organisation.

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